



Uprooting the Causes of Violence So Every Last Vermonter Thrives

*Karen Tronsgard-Scott,
Executive Director*

This year marks the 30th Anniversary of the Vermont Network. It has been thirty years since the leaders of sixteen non-profits formed a separate organization and charged it with representing the voices of survivors of domestic and sexual violence on the statewide level. Together, the Network and its Member Organizations created a system for supporting survivors and for changing policies

and practices to ensure access to the criminal/legal system, find safety in a network of emergency shelters, and teach communities about domestic and sexual violence. Today, the Vermont Network and its Member Organizations ensure that over 8,000 Vermonters get the services and supports they need annually. Together, we work with state and local partners to improve our communities.

And now — thirty years into our lifecycle — we pivot forward. We

reach to our past and push it into the future — a future where we understand that some of the very systems and access points we built leave some survivors out in the cold. We pivot toward deep connections with marginalized communities and survivors, and we learn about the ways in which those communities serve survivors. We challenge the systems to which we have become wedded and the systems we built to recognize the neglect or outright harm we have perpetuated within Vermont's marginalized communities. We listen carefully to truths, work collaboratively toward reconciliation and offer reparations.

This issue of the *Network News* explores our past and the changes afoot in our world today and into the future. Chani Waterhouse conducted extensive interviews with some of the founders and early leaders of the Network and brings our genesis story into the present day. Kelli Risitano and Sarah Robinson explore our core values and the ways in which these serve our higher purpose as an organization. Kara Casey offers insights into the evolution of a gender-based analysis in our work within the LGBT community. And finally, Doreen Merrill and Auburn Watersong go deep into what it means to pivot from a focus on social services to a focus on social change in the form of policy and community change initiatives.

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- Sarah Kunz Robinson *Special Initiatives Coordinator*
- Anne Smith *Training & Tech. Assistance Coordinator*
- Keri Darling *Director of Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services (DVAS)*

Contractors

- Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner:** Joan Carson & Raenetta Liberty, *SANE Clinical Coordinators*
- DIVAS** (Discussing Intimate Violence & Accessing Support) @ the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility: Anera Foco, *DIVAS Administrative Coordinator*
Kira Krier & Kim Jordan, *DIVAS Advocacy Coordinators*
- Vermont Council on Domestic Violence:** Heather Holter, *Coordinator*
- Rural Project:** Amy Torchia, *Children's Advocacy Coordinator*

Digging Deep to Plant the Seeds of Community Change

By Auburn Watersong, Associate Director of Public Policy, and Doreen Merrill, Community Change Coordinator

We are making changes at the Network in order to realize improved outcomes for the people of Vermont. Through a renewed focus on community and social change, we move our energy and intention to uprooting the causes of violence in our state. We are making new alliances to help us understand how to help communities shift toward the goal of supporting all people to thrive. While we continue to address the effects of violence on victims and their families through changes to the criminal-legal system and the systems that support the basic needs of all Vermonters, we are shifting our focus in order to uproot the underlying causes of violence and to build a non-violent future for all.

Community change work has benefits. When we focus on community change, we reduce social isolation, improve opportunities in neighborhoods, change the

climate and policies within school and workplace settings, shift the cultural climate in which violence is encouraged or ignored and support changes in policies that disrupt inequalities.

Making positive shifts in our communities requires a multi-faceted approach rooted in overall community safety. To create this, we need to work together to prioritize healthy relationships rather than accept violence as normal or expected. We need to promote youth development rather than youth education. We must focus on relationship building by reaching out to people we disagree with to understand their viewpoints, which leads to a richer understanding of our communities. We need a proactive stance regarding policy development by creating laws and policies we want to see rather than acting reactively when incidents occur.

We tried in the anti-violence movement to end violence on our own. We relied heavily on the criminal-legal system to help us solve the issue of interpersonal violence. We know now that we need a broader approach. When we promote aspirational outcomes, we reach them. By using the unique assets people bring to systems and the broader community, we have a network to build the kind of state we want.

Our allies and partners at the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence recently discussed its role in promoting community change, and determined that “communities must change

in order for domestic violence to end.” If we believe this, we are part of the solution and are moving from suspicion and fear to strategic, discerning, purpose focused, and community-based solutions.

One of the ways the Network is engaging in community change work is by utilizing a human rights framework. The United Nation’s Declaration of Human Rights affirms, “The dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women...to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” (United Nations, 2016). The Network’s policy team uses this framework to center Vermont’s marginalized communities in our conversations about violence. We seek information and guidance from communities of color, the LGBTQ community and others as we look to change Vermont statutes and systems. We start by believing that people can change from using violence, power and control in their relationships. We demonstrate that belief by supporting policies which incorporate a wider breadth of possibility while remaining focused closely on safety. We are building a Vermont in which:

- Vermont statutes reflect a commitment to uphold the human rights of domestic and sexual violence victims and reflect concern for the safety and well-being of every last Vermonter.
- Vermont statutes, budgets, and practices ensure humane and restorative practices.

- Vermont laws and policies reflect an understanding that victims' rights are grounded in economic and humanitarian concerns, meeting basic needs, providing access to affordable housing and child care, and enacting a sustainable, livable wage.
- Vermont legislators understand that victims and survivors thrive when all Vermonter's live in safe and healthy communities, when future generations are secure and can reach their potential, and when every last Vermonter experiences

economic security.

- Vermont laws and policies reflect a focus on placing the voices of the marginalized at the center of the conversation.
- Vermont youth are engaged in developing a violent-free future.

We are looking forward to our community change work ahead and know that even though policy challenges remain, with the strength of our partnerships we will succeed.

Call To Action!

Please contact your local State Representative and/or Senator to let them know:

Our future generations deserve lives without violence and by ensuring that guns do not end up in the hands of the wrong people we are making our state a place for families to thrive. Please work to pass legislation that:

- ***Requires universal background checks for all firearm sales.*** 38% fewer women are murdered by partners in states that have enacted legislation requiring a background check for every handgun sale.⁶
- ***Requires the removal or surrender of firearms at the scene of a domestic violence call.*** States that have passed laws requiring abusers to surrender firearms have 9-12% lower rates of intimate partner homicide.⁷

CALL TO ACTION Firearms And Domestic Violence

"Domestic violence in America is to a significant degree a problem of gun violence. Over the past 25 years, more intimate partner homicides in the U.S. have been committed with guns than with all other weapons combined."¹

The Vermont Network knows that the lives of victims of domestic violence literally depend on our state's ability to keep firearms out of the hands of domestic abusers and others prohibited from possessing guns under federal law.

- According to the 2015 Vermont Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission's report, of the 10 domestic violence related homicides committed in 2014, 4 were committed with firearms.

Between 1994 and 2014: 57% of all domestic violence related homicides were committed with firearms. 125 homicides over that decade were domestic violence related. 71 of them were committed with firearms.²

- Women in the US are 11 times more likely to be murdered with guns than women in other high-income countries.³
- When a gun is present in a domestic violence situation, it increases the risk of homicide for women by 500 percent.⁴
- In 2011, over half of all women murdered by guns were killed by intimate partners or family members.⁵

- 1 <http://everytown.org/documents/2014/10/guns-and-violence-against-women.pdf>, p.3.
- 2 State of Vermont Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission, 2015 Report, p. 2.
- 3 <http://everytown.org/documents/2014/10/guns-and-violence-against-women.pdf>, p.32.
- 4 J.C. Campbell, S.W. Webster, J.Kozioł-McLain, et al., Risk factors for femicide within physically abusive intimate relationships: results from a multi-state case control study, 93 Amer. J. of Public Health 1089-97 (2003).
- 5 U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Supplementary Homicide Report, 2011.
- 6 <http://everytown.org/documents/2014/10/guns-and-violence-against-women.pdf>.
- 7 Office on Violence Against Women. Enforcing Domestic Violence Firearm Prohibitions. 2006.



When we sit together at the table in coalition, we are asked to leave our own programs back at the office. We are asked to think of the whole.

— Peggy O'Neil, ED at WISE

THEN

1974

We were in a constant dilemma whether to fix the leaky toilets, whether to go to court with someone, or... All three of us were over at the house most of the time...after our own jobs.

— **Alverta Perkins**, who helped found Women Helping Battered Women, currently Steps to End Domestic Violence.

1977

Are we being co-opted?

— **Patti Whalen**, who helped found the Women's Freedom Center, remembering debates about whether or not to accept federal funding from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to help open a shelter.



1984

We were doing the work at a time when people didn't even recognize that these things were happening. **When I went to the sheriff's department, I couldn't even say the words domestic violence. We would call each other to help a woman get into shelter, and we would talk non-stop. We were so thirsty for that connection.**

— **Judy Rex**, former Director of the Clarina Howard Nichols Center and Network Director in the early 1990s.

1985

It was clear that we absolutely needed to have a statewide organization. There was too much work to be done. **The work was so important and made such a big difference in people's lives. It was really a survival issue.**

— **Jean McCandless**, former ED of Steps to End Domestic Violence. Jean presided at the meeting where it was decided to form a new coalition, the Vermont Network Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.



Gen

Vermont Network

By Chani Waterhouse, Associate

1985-1986

I wanted us to have more clout, to make more of a changing laws and attitudes. Doing really hard work taking a toll. The Network idea snowballed quickly. **It congenial, inspiring, just amazing group of activists**

— **Dianne Maughan**, founding Director of the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. Dianne secured funding and formed a 501C3. Dianne formed a new organization in 1987 and served as its director.

1993

There was a lot of conflict. They were warning us but when it went forward, anything could happen. **risks of being co-opted. And that did happen.**

women and children wanted and needed —
— **Judy Rex**, recalling her work.

1994

Everyone understood they were there more than just their own interests. **We longer letting the government determine this was going to work for us. There commitment to equality.**

— **Bobbi Gagne**, Executive Director of the Assault Crisis Team and former Network Board, recalling the group members who worked together to establish for equitably funding member organizations in communities.



2001

People didn't always talk about things. It was a will and collective **Network had to be**
That was never a

esis

's Shared History

Executive Director of Program Support

Our impact in
work in isolation was
was a really
for women.
The VT Network Against
Violence. Dianne and others
was hired to lead the
only paid staff person.



It was that Barbara Boxer was letting us write the bill,
and then. There were lengthy conversations about the
We were looking more for the social services
and not the criminal justice focus that came out of it.
We worked with other domestic and sexual violence advocates
to help craft the first Violence Against Women Act.

to represent
we were no
to determine how
the was a real



Executive Director of the Sexual
Violence Co-Chair of the
Group of Network
to establish a formula
for organizations working
across Vermont.

Things get along. Sometimes there was violent disagreement
as a stormy time. But there was enough energy, collective
dedication. No one ever questioned whether the
group was kept strong enough to do the work.
No question.

— **Marty Levin**, former Fiscal &
Information Manager at the VT Network

*The more I've connected with
other advocates, the better I've
been able to do my job.*

— **Justina Kenyon**, Advocate at Safeline



2006-2010

We needed to build a structure to hold our
Network member programs accountable while also
maintaining our autonomy. **We worked through it
all to strengthen our commitments to those we
served and to each other.**

— **Naomi Smith**, former Executive Director of
WomenSafe and Network Board Co-Chair,
reflecting on coalition-building work to
create meaningful membership standards and
agreements, and to strengthen the
coalition board through a move to the
"Policy Governance" model.



2008-2009

Having a strong coalition is vital. Because the work is exhausting and bigger
than all our passions and skills, and the stakes are really high for individuals
and communities. The shifts we were able to make opened up space
for us to do powerful work together - in policy, in systems change, and
supporting our sister organizations when they have had troubles... **We
have done that beautifully.**

— **Peggy O'Neil**, Executive Director of WISE

2016

**My hope for the future is that we could be bolder and more
candid.** Intersectionality needs to be part of that. **I hope we can be
real with our personal passions, and bring those to our work.**

— **Justina Kenyon**, DV Survivor Empowerment Coordinator,
Safeline



2016

So much will be learned from all that is
happening right now with Black Lives Matter.
It will impact how people create liberation
movements, experience violence, resist violence
and create change. **For me, coalition implies
a collective of individuals in cooperation
with each other, as opposed to uniformity.
More listening to more voices. Strength in
difference.**

— **Kiona Heath**, Advocacy Service Coordinator,
H.O.P.E. Works

NOW

The Network's Core Values: Guiding Us Toward Purpose

By Kelli Risitano, Legal Projects Coordinator, and Sarah Robinson, Special Initiatives Coordinator

The Network's 30th anniversary has been a big year. Our work over the past three decades has taught us that violence is not simply something that happens between two people — our culture of violence impacts every one of us. Providing direct services for survivors is essential, but if we want to end violence we must also work to change our culture. Knowing this, we have adopted a new organizational purpose which we highlighted in our last *Network News*. Our new purpose is to build a world free of oppression where systems, actions and beliefs support all people to thrive. This new purpose broadens our work and aims to uproot the causes of violence in our culture.

In addition to changing what our work is, we have been equally focused on how we do our work. To that end, we use our organizational core values as a guide. The Network's core values are not symbolic. We work to support each other in enacting these values, knowing that our work requires perseverance and endurance over time. We want to share with you our Core Values and how they show up in our work.

Love. *Only love is powerful enough to transform ourselves and our society.*

Love is not something that most people automatically associate with domestic and sexual violence advocacy. At the Network, we believe that love is the only force strong enough to overcome violence in our world. We also believe that love is the key to preventing violence from taking root in individuals and communities. We understand love to be a powerful tool to advance social justice in the same spirit as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who spoke of the transformative power of love in envisioning a beloved community. In his words, "our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives."

The core value of love is foundational to our changing approach to domestic violence accountability. Acting with love forces us to think differently about people who use violence in their relationships and their lives. While holding survivors of violence as central to our work, we are rethinking our sole reliance on the criminal and legal system to hold perpetrators accountable and create justice. We are pursuing new, more restorative, accountability strategies that acknowledge the full ways in which people who use violence have harmed their communities, and have also been harmed themselves.

Integrity. *We walk our talk. We keep the most marginalized at the center of our work and use our strength to increase their power and voice.*

Our individual and collective integrity as an organization is essential in achieving our purpose. Integrity means that the partnerships we develop are more than relationships based on solely what we need from each other. We understand that we do our best work when we bring our full selves to advancing our purpose. This requires that we walk our talk in our work with one another and with organizational partners, respecting others in all we do. We also leverage this integrity to serve our purpose, and use our voice to provide access and share power with marginalized communities impacted by violence.

Our recent membership expansion fully displayed how we utilize our core value of integrity in our work. Our coalition contemplated membership expansion in an open and transparent way which acknowledged both the benefits of membership and also the importance of key membership standards. Our coalition engaged in these conversations with and alongside culturally specific organizations. Our coalition's decision to expand our membership to include culturally specific organizations is one

way that we can use our statewide presence and voice to center and amplify the voices on the margins of our movement.

Respect. *We uphold the dignity of all people and promote human rights, equity, and justice.*

We honor our connection to one another by recognizing and respecting everyone's inherent dignity. It is through this interconnectedness that we walk alongside our colleagues and partners in this movement – even if our work is different.

Our core value of respect is exemplified through the work of our DIVAS program in the Chittenden Correctional Facility. This program supports incarcerated women, most of whom have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. These women are the most marginalized of our communities and DIVAS promotes human rights, equity, and justice through advocacy with love and compassion. The work of the extraordinary DIVAS program staff does not end there - we have witnessed how the core value of respect has changed the approach of prison staff. Collaborations with DIVAS have encouraged staff to approach their work with incarcerated women with more love and compassion.

Our core values help us advance our purpose. With love, integrity, and respect at our core we are able to move toward a world that exists free of oppression where actions, beliefs, and systems support all people to thrive.

Honoring All Identities, Supporting All Survivors

By Kara Casey, Economic Justice & Housing Specialist

In order for all people to thrive, all people must have a voice, all experiences must be heard and validated. For many survivors this requires a shift in the way that we talk about domestic and sexual violence. For survivors whose gender identities do not fit into the binary (female/male, man/woman), access to services, support and prevention can be challenging. When we take a gendered approach to sexual and domestic violence services there is often no room for gender non-conforming, intersex and trans identities. Simply put, focusing on men/boys & women/girls results in members of the transgender community being silenced. Similarly, survivors who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual etc. can feel as though their relationships and their experiences may not be accepted. It is imperative that we work to ensure survivors of all identities feel welcome to receive services.

There is importance in recognizing the overwhelming prevalence of violence against women and girls while also acknowledging that they are not the only ones effected by domestic and sexual violence. In order to create a more open and supportive environment for all survivors we must acknowledge that members of the LGBTQ community may experience domestic and sexual violence in different (as well as similar) ways. For those who have experienced transphobia and homophobia, coming forward as a survivor of domestic or sexual violence can be scary. Fear of being discriminated against can be a significant barrier to accessing services, seeking benefits or contacting law enforcement. That is why the way that we present ourselves, the language that we use, the policies that we support, and the questions that we ask can say a lot about who we are and who we want to be.

At the Vermont Network we are committed to having conversations about how to best support all survivors. This is why we are so honored to welcome the Pride Center of Vermont to our coalition. We are proud of the work that the Pride Center's Safe Space program does in support of LGBTQ and HIV positive Vermonters. This work truly recognizes that all oppressions are interconnected. It is when we truly see people, acknowledge their experiences, lift up their voices and create safe spaces for them that we help to create a world in which they can thrive.



**VERMONT
NETWORK**

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www.vtnetwork.org

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CENTER
05641

VERMONT NETWORK MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

**Addison County & the town of Rochester
WomenSafe**
Hotline: 802/ 388.4205 or toll-free
1.800.388.4205

**Bennington County
PAVE ***
Hotline: 802/442.2111

**Caledonia, Orleans, & Essex Counties
Umbrella, The Advocacy Program***
St. Johnsbury Office Hotline:
802/748.8645
Newport Office Hotline: 802/ 334.0148

**Caledonia, Washington, & Orleans
Counties (of Hardwick area)
AWARE, Inc.**
Hotline: 802/472.6463

**Chittenden County
H.O.P.E. Works**
Hotline: 802/863.1236

Steps to End Domestic Violence*
Hotline: 802/658.1996

**Franklin & Grand Isle Counties
Voices Against Violence***
Hotline: 802/524.6575

**Lamoille County
Clarina Howard Nichols Center***
Hotline: 802/888.5256

**Orange County & Northern Windsor
County
Safeline, Inc.**
Hotline: 1.800.639.7233

**Rutland County
Rutland County Women's NW and
Shelter***
Hotline: 802/775.3232

**Statewide
Pride Center of VT SafeSpace Program**
Support Line 1.866.869.7341 or
802/863.0003

**Washington County
Circle***
Hotline: 1.877.543.9498

Sexual Assault Crisis Team*
Hotline: 802/479.5577

**Windham County &
Southern Windsor County
Women's Freedom Center***
Brattleboro Off. Hotline: 802/254.6954 or
1.800.773.0689
Springfield Office Hotline: 802/885.2050

**Central Windsor County & towns of
Thetford & Fairlee
WISE***
24-Hour Crisis Line: 603/448.5525 or
1.866.348.WISE

***Indicates shelter**

Dear Beloved Community, this will be our final hard-copy of the newsletter. We hope to keep you as readers and the upcoming Spring 2017 online newsletter will be new and different. Please send your email address to: library@vtnetwork.org.