

Vermont Network NEWS

The newsletter of the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

In From The Margins: Taking Action Against Racism And Oppression

By Karen Tronsgard-Scott, Executive Director



I was recently listening to a story about female marathon runners on NPR and was taken with the story of Katherine Switzer. She entered the Boston Marathon in 1967 under the name K.V. Switzer. This was several years before women were permitted to run in Boston, and famously, a male race official tried to tackle her during the race. Her male partner was running with her and shoved the race official, thus allowing Katherine to finish the race. I'm captivated by how sure these gentlemen were...how sure the race official was of the righteousness of the status quo and how sure the partner was of Katherine's right to run with the men. In much the same way, folks working in the movement to end domestic and sexual violence from around the country are challenging the status quo when it comes to supporting the leadership of women of color and other marginalized people in our movement. We are working together to explore and challenge static structures that push people of color, LGBT folks, people with disabilities and others to the fringes of our movement. This effort is simultaneously inspiring and daunting and, like running a marathon, requires great stamina, intense self-reflection, careful listening, structural support and, sometimes, a little shoving. Good running shoes also help.

In this issue, we are focusing on efforts to address racism within our movement. Rocío Mora, our Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator, has given us the gift of an article about the national Women of Color Leadership Project and her own personal experience as a multi-faceted person working in our midst. The Vermont Network initiated an anti-racism work group several years ago and today we continue to seek ways to address institutional and individual racism in order to build an organization and movement in Vermont which addresses issues of racism

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and creates opportunities for women of color leadership. Members of the Vermont Network staff, Michele Olvera, Auburn Watersong and Rocío Mora, write about their work and experiences. Finally, Jane Ralph, the Executive Director of the Clarina Howard Nichols Center in Morrisville and a national leader of aspiring white allies, provides insights into how mainstream folks can make a difference.

I'm often asked why, in a state as homogeneous as Vermont, addressing racism is so important to me. I see

racism as foundational to the oppression and societal constructs that support domestic and sexual violence and find it to be universally present in examination of the intersections of racism, sexism, heterosexism and other oppressions. Creating space to discuss how racism impacts our movement and to take action against racism is foundational to addressing how all forms of oppression impact us individually and collectively. Because I believe that oppression is a root cause of domestic and sexual violence, I believe that addressing racism is an essential aspect of our work to end violence against women. I'm ready to shove a little and to be shoved, too. 🌱

Walk With Me

by Rocío Catalina Mora Fonseca,
Training and Technical Assistance
Coordinator

My given name is Rocío Catalina Mora Fonseca. It is probably a safe bet that there are not many people out there in this world with that name. I moved to New York City from Colombia as a young child, and I've been in Vermont for the past decade. For the past twenty or so years, most people have known me as Rosy, a name that I never really identified with, but one that I will respond to consistently though the sound of it can make me cringe.

Since arriving at the Network last June, I made the decision to go back to my given name for a multitude of reasons but mainly because I am authentic and present in the way that I live. Responding to a name that was not mine (it felt more synonymous with "hey you!" than a name) was not living wholly as myself. It's as if you lived your life with the name Josephine and suddenly everyone called you Daphne and looked at you oddly when you didn't immediately respond.

Having lived the past year with the majority of people calling me Rocío has been nothing short of euphoric. Not only do I feel like everyone sees me- the real me- but I am also now acutely aware of how much I really did not identify with Rosy at all. Hearing Rocío after so many years of Rosy is like having someone give you a friendly warm hug while gently asking you for your attention. Sounds a lot better than a grating Rosy, don't you think? Just the extra second it



takes for people to learn how to properly say my name helps me feel just a little bit less different but most importantly, visible and whole.

While I am a passport-wielding American, living in Vermont has made me acutely aware of all of my identities. I'm no longer just the girl from NYC who came to Vermont for graduate school and never left. As an immigrant lesbian Latina living in Vermont, it's hard to walk down any street and not feel like people are wondering who or what you are. As a white woman of color living in Vermont, it makes the experience that much more complex. This article is not about informing you of all the times I feel I have been wronged in this world because of my differences. It is about how wonderful it is to feel human and respected; something so basic yet what I feel is really at the base of most of the conflict between any two people or groups.

Imagine how different my day at work would be if I did not feel whole or respected on a very basic level. How can I do my best work in providing the highest standard of care, assistance and support to all at the Network and to those that use our services if I am feeling less than human? How do you expect someone to be their best when they don't feel whole because of their environment and the actions/ words of others? Until we learn to see and embrace each other's whole being, there will be people walking around feeling empty. Learning how to acknowledge and celebrate another's sense of self (and your own, for that matter) will open up the floodgates of best practice.

The Women of Color Network (WOCN), part of the National Resource Center of Domestic Violence (NRC DV) which is part of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic

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Violence (PCADV), is leading a project to examine barriers and expand leadership opportunities for underrepresented groups within the movement to end violence. Vermont is one of the lucky states (Minnesota, New Jersey, and Virginia are the others) chosen for the pilot implementation of this program, and I am honored to be placed in the role as State Lead representing Vermont for this project. The project is funded by the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program (FVPSA). So what does it all mean?

It means that beginning in October 2011 there will be two academies in Vermont: an academy for women of color and an aspiring ally academy. Each academy will have up to twenty students. The Project Partners will reach out to underrepresented groups and persons from majority populations in the Pilot States and eventually five additional states to:

- Implement an 18-month Leadership Academy and an 18-month WOCN Mentor Project designed to enhance the leadership capacity of a total of 200 individuals from underrepresented groups;
- Implement an 18-month WOCN Ally Project designed

to enhance the leadership capacity of a total of 200 advocates from majority populations to support current, new and emerging leadership of members of underrepresented populations;

- Utilize a variety of outreach, training and technical assistance strategies to increase and build the capacity of boards and management of 20% of local programs within five pilot states and five additional states to enhance their institutional and supervisory capacity to support current, new and emerging leadership of members of underrepresented populations; and
- Identify readiness factors, lessons learned, promising practices and replication strategies in building the leadership capacity of individuals from underrepresented groups and disseminate a report to other FVPSA-funded programs.

With the opportunities that will be presented through the leadership project, Vermont is positioned to be a key leader in showing others how to best live in a pluralistic society regardless of how diverse (or not) your area is. Having said all of that, I invite all of you to join me on this journey. No journey is ever easy, but not having to do it alone is ideal. I've been walking down the street alone for far too long. 🌱

So What is Safety Anyway? Strategizing Safety Within the Dominant Community

by Michele Olvera, Supervising Attorney

Advocates know that what keeps one person emotionally safe or even physically safe, may not keep another person safe. One of the reasons for that difference is the cultural context in which a person lives. By considering smaller communities that may live within a different cultural context than the larger community we serve, we can prepare to serve those survivors of domestic and sexual violence that have been traditionally underserved.

We, as advocates, prepare to give the people we work with as many choices as we can and to support them in those choices. We educate ourselves and structure our services, outreach and shelters with some anticipation of the needs of people escaping violence. However, much of that preparation has been in anticipation of serving the



dominant community that surrounds us.

I would like to think generally about communities that live within the larger dominant culture community. For example, let's consider those living in a poor rural community, an immigrant community, a deaf or hard of hearing community, a cooperative farming community or a Native American community. In all of these communities, people often depend on each other to interact with the larger community. They find things within their own community that they can't find outside of it. Perhaps they find people to communicate with in their own language or translate for them. Perhaps they may have extended family they are economically intertwined with and share responsibilities with or perhaps they have extended family that live with them because those individuals can not care for themselves due to health issues or are youth without viable parental care givers. They may share values and religious beliefs with their community that are not held

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outside their community. Often, people in a particular community are intertwined with others, not necessarily their family, in a variety of different ways.

Let's take a hypothetical case. Luz is a person in a Spanish speaking community. She lives with her husband and her sister's two small children. They live in a house that once belonged to her husband's grandparents. Her sister has a cognitive disability and can't care for the children. Luz makes jewelry and sells it at her neighbor's small food market. Her neighbor, Lillian, makes jewelry also but needs Luz's jewelry to have enough to sell. Luz also cares for Lillian's child, Angela, after school while Lillian tends the store. Lillian speaks Spanish as does Luz, and trusts Luz to take good care of Angela in line with her cultural expectations including providing meals with which the child is comfortable and modeling cultural values including religious values. Luz loves her sister's children and Angela very much. They are part of her family.

Luz is a victim of domestic violence and her abuser is her husband. The primary options that are offered to her by police, social workers, and an advocate from her local program are that she can go to a shelter with the children or she can file a protection order requiring him to leave the home. She knows that asking her husband to leave the home is a temporary solution. Ultimately, the house belongs to his family. Also, it is very difficult for her to remove herself from the community as part of her safety strategy, in part because some of her skills don't translate in the larger culture, because she has a language barrier and because relationships built over years—and maybe generations—don't exist outside her community. Basic communication, financial existence, and a place to live are just a few of the reasons why it will be more difficult for her to separate herself from that community to escape the violence.

Further, we haven't even started to talk about the cultural challenges Luz may encounter even if she does find shelter, an interpreter and obtain money for food. For example, navigating a subway or bus map, having her grocery store not sell the food she knows how to cook and living among people with whom she has difficulty being accepted or even talking to. Even these are really just logistical or physical issues. Perhaps the biggest piece to consider in strategizing safety in the face of violence is identity and what Luz might find to be possible or imaginable given who she is.

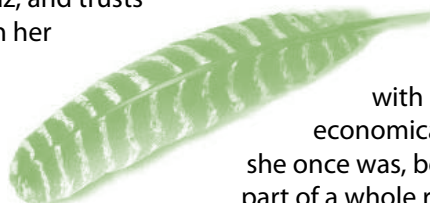
For many cultures, personal identity as defined by the

whole, of which the individual is just one part, is the key to how people see themselves. Luz's family, including her sister's children, Angela and Lillian and her role and responsibilities within that family are key to her identity. This is certainly true of many immigrant cultures but also true of some rural and religious communities. Identity as related to the whole has a place in personal identity, often before personality traits or characteristics and will often be considered before personal needs such as safety. Thus, one's identity depends on their responsibilities and connections to family and community.

Asking Luz to consider leaving to obtain safety might be akin to consider fundamentally changing who she is. Who is she if she is not caring for Angela and her sister's children that she raises as if they were her own? How could she take the children away from the community where their mother lives? Who is Luz if she is not contributing to Lillian's market with her jewelry, knowing Lillian will suffer economically without her? She could not be who she once was, because she was identified more strongly as part of a whole rather than as a whole herself. Who is Luz and who will the children be without their community? She might see it as selfish and wrong to prioritize her own needs over the needs of her family. Potentially, the more danger Luz is in, the more willing she may be to make extreme choices in an effort to survive. It also might be true that leaving is just unthinkable for Luz.

How can we think about serving Luz and preparing to assist Luz in strategizing for her safety? Simply recognizing and respecting her identity and also her physical and logistical concerns is helpful.

We can also do more. What if the program she called had ideas that included her family, friends and other community allies? Perhaps, the advocate's expectation was that Luz's circumstances included her community and her role in it. The advocate helped her think through who her allies could be and what she and her allies could do together to ensure her safety. Perhaps, the program she calls would even have ideas about using the money they would regularly spend for shelter nights as a resource for Luz to reimburse someone in her community for having Luz stay in their home and providing food and other necessities. Naturally, that program will have had to think through the kind of options they may be able to provide knowing this smaller community exists within their larger community. That program will have had to challenge themselves to see what a survivor from that community sees. However, for that survivor, being seen and heard for who they are could make a world of difference for them, their families and their communities. 🌱



Moving Toward Cultural Competency

What the Domestic and Sexual Violence Movement Has Learned from Advocacy and Activism

by Auburn Watersong,
Economic Justice Specialist



With the expansion of the Network's focus on women of color and First Nations women in the movement to end domestic and sexual violence, the time is ripe to consider what skills and experience we can put to use in our efforts to engage diversity with intention. The task of becoming "culturally competent" might seem daunting at first. But the process of shifting paradigms, changing the way we and others think and act with regard to a particular group, is not a foreign concept to those of us in the domestic and sexual violence movement. For decades, advocates and activists have been doing just that.

In her book, *Modern Racism: New Melody for the Same Old Tunes*, Valerie Batts describes the move toward cultural competency as a paradigm shifting process that responds directly to the challenges posed by modern racism. What Batts coins as "modern racism" may well be familiar to us in Vermont. This is the racism experienced by people of color and First Nations people despite the mistaken perception which says that racism has ended. In fact, according to Batts, racism has merely changed its look; much of what was once overt is now simply covert.

Below is Batts' list of the five behaviors or manifestations of modern racism. Each characteristic holds echoes of the battles that advocates and activists in the domestic and sexual violence movements have fought for decades. While victims and people of color each experience oppression in very particular ways, the characteristics of those who would marginalize either group are strikingly familiar.

According to Batts, these characteristics include:

- **Dysfunctional rescuing:** This is characterized by "helping" people of color or First Nations people based on the assumption that they cannot help themselves. It is help that is patronizing and condescending, help that does not help. Domestic and sexual violence advocates are well practiced in discerning the difference between constructive and destructive advocacy. The core empowerment philosophy which says that victims have
- the ability and the right to make their own choices, tells us that advocacy at its best assumes the best in others.
- **Blaming the victim:** A characteristic familiar to advocates, this is when a disempowered and marginalized group is blamed for their own systemic oppression. One example of this includes blaming poor people of color for their economic situation. This kind of blame allows those of us in privileged positions to accept little or no responsibility for our contribution to the oppression.
- **Avoidance of contact:** In our domestic and sexual violence programs, in a state that claims only 3% of its population is people of color, this can seem all too easy to do. But avoidance is not only not engaging with people of color and First Nations people, but actually making no effort to learn about the lives of those who come from other cultures, or live in communities of color. How many of us in Vermont have ever heard: "I just don't have the opportunity to meet women of color" or "I never see people of color in my neighborhood"?
- **Denial of cultural differences:** Victim advocates might recognize this characteristic when it is described as a form of "minimizing". By denying cultural differences people of privilege downplay their significance, discounting the importance of another's experience. An example of this: when a person of privilege claims that s/he is actually "color-blind", all people of all colors are the same, and this is considered progressive, supportive and positive. In fact, this minimizes the experiences of the person of color. In the domestic and sexual violence movement, advocates and activists have spent decades naming real experiences and the affect of them, such that no abuser or bystander or system can ever deny the impact of abuse. The movement has experience in naming and claiming differences and intentionally confronting denial.
- **Denial of political significance or differences:** Modern racism is still marred by the lack of understanding or the outright denial of the political, social and economic realities of the lives of people of color. For example, one

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might claim that there is no need for affirmative action because “our organization hires people of color”. This denies both the statistical reality and the significance of policies which attempt to dismantle systemic oppression. Likewise, the domestic and sexual violence movement has fought for years to change the social and political systems that enable violence against women. Frequently, we hear that individual advocacy for victims (one-on-one support) must be combined with effective systemic advocacy (political and social change) in order to bring an end to the violence. Advocates and activists are familiar with the importance of recognizing the political and systemic significance of oppression.

Given that the domestic violence and sexual violence movement has experience working to shift paradigms, the process to become more culturally competent may not be too far a stretch. However, it will require us to recognize and unlearn our own biases. We will need to commit to intentionally engage with cultural differences. We will need to embrace the belief that “being equal does not mean being the same”. It will mean recognizing that other ways of being are as valid as one’s own. It will mean that diversity is valued both on a personal and a societal level.

Fostering a constructive response to modern racism, the ability to become truly culturally competent in our work is within our reach. The domestic and sexual violence movement in and beyond Vermont has worked for decades to shift paradigms. The traits of advocacy and activism practiced and honed by so many in the Vermont Network member programs will serve us very well as we embark together on this journey toward cultural competency. 🌱

Advice From an Aspiring White Ally

*by Jane Ralph, Executive Director
Clarina Howard Nichols Center*

“K” and her children spent 3 weeks at the Clarina Howard Nichols Shelter in the last year. This relatively short stay was, in part, a result of culturally specific needs that were not being met well in Lamoille County, VT. For this family, as well as many others, shorter stays are also related to safety of other kinds. In an exit interview “K” disclosed that the only reason she stayed more than a single night was because Maria Teixeira did her shelter intake. Maria looked like her. Maria, “K” and her children are, or will become, women of color.



Statistics on direct service are really clear — seeing an advocate, or preferably more than one staff person, who “looks like them”, greatly enhances a survivor’s sense of safety, welcome and ability to succeed. Ironically, when predominantly white-led, dominant culture programs attend well to the needs of Women of Color and First Nations women, white women are better served as well.

In a survivor-defined field operating as a movement,

such information should not surprise us: We (mostly white women) pride ourselves on this type of self-differentiated service delivery. Women are the expert of their own experience — our job is to provide advocacy to meet their stated needs — not to assume our experience (even those of us who are also survivors) best informs our advocacy, support and services.

Yet, The Women of Color Network (WOCN) has documented that not only do we not advocate and support well those fleeing sexual and domestic violence, we fail to do so for our colleagues who are First Nation and Women of Color. The prevalence and impacts of institutionalized racism in white-dominated organizations working to end domestic and sexual violence are widely known. Documented in the National Women of Color Statement: Call to Action 2008 there is broad acknowledgement that:

Women of Color “share a collective institutional memory going back decades of being underutilized, underappreciated, underpaid, and underdeveloped within organizations that espouse feminist and non-oppressive philosophies. We also share a burning frustration that there has been no true progress for women of color within the

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New at the Network Office

I am Zoë Gascon, the new Legal Projects Coordinator and I am thrilled to be a part of the Network office and work alongside people who have long been some of my mentors. I began my work in the movement to end violence against women as a volunteer with a shelter program while in graduate school in Wyoming. I have considered this my life's work ever since. For the last 12 years I was privileged to work at Umbrella's Advocacy Program in the Northeast Kingdom as both an advocate and the Program Coordinator. Before my



work with Umbrella I was the advocate with a special domestic violence prosecution unit in the Kingdom and have also worked as a VISTA volunteer for a domestic and sexual violence program. I grew up in the Boston area but have lived most of my adult life in Vermont. I love living in the Northeast Kingdom where I enjoy outdoor activities and simple living with my partner, two children, canine companion and my dad who lives nearby. I look forward to working with all of you to meet the legal needs of survivors! 🌱

Advice from an Aspiring White Ally

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past three decades. Many of us feel that we are in fact going backwards as we continue to experience being treated as disposable, and we collectively recognize these practices as being entrenched in our movement."

Women of color, immigrant women and women living in tribal nations experience violence at greater rates than Anglo women. The white, Anglo dominated institutions funded to address violence have failed to develop effective responses for these women. When advocates indigenous to these communities of color enter these mainstream institutions, entrenched leaders, policies and practices marginalize them. Mainstream organizations have a record of failure in retaining and promoting new leadership from communities of color. White-led institutions have failed to protect victims of violence and they have failed to support those who could lead the way.

Rightly or wrongly, I believe many of these white-led institution have been well meaning and well intentioned. Yet the result across many states, many institutions has been the same. Part of my commitment to continuing to become an aspiring ally with the WOCN is completely self serving. I do not want my leadership or that of the Clarina Howard Nichols Center to go down the road so well described in the Call to Action Statement. If I fail to do my own work, fail to be held accountable by women of color and other aspiring allies, the same thing could happen here. It could always happen here despite my best intentions.

But my engagement in anti-racism work, and especially that of the WOCN is not primarily fear based. I firmly believe

that the theme of the 2012 Call to Action Conference is true: Collective Liberation/Collective Empowerment. My true liberation and empowerment as a white queer woman is tied up in the liberation and empowerment of women and men of color and First Nations people—as well as that of white men. Unless and until we see these things as connected, we all suffer. But women of color and First Nation women will suffer disproportionately. 🌱



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**Addison County & town of Rochester
WomenSafe**

P.O. Box 67, Middlebury, VT 05753
Hotline: (802) 388.4205 or 1.800.388.4205

Bennington County

PAVE*
P.O. Box 227, Bennington, VT 05201
Hotline: (802) 442.2111

**Caledonia, Orleans & Essex Counties
The Advocacy Program at Umbrella***

1222 Main St. #301, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
Hotline: (802) 748.8645

The Advocacy Program at Umbrella

93 E. Main Street #1, Newport, VT 05855
Hotline: (802) 334.0148

**Caledonia County (Hardwick area)
AWARE**

P.O. Box 307, Hardwick, VT 05843
Hotline: (802) 472.6463

Chittenden County

Women's Rape Crisis Center
P.O. Box 92, Burlington, VT 05402
Hotline: (802) 863.1236

Women Helping Battered Women*

P.O. Box 1535, Burlington, VT 05402
Hotline: (802) 658.1996 (also TTY#)

**Franklin & Grand Isle Counties
Voices Against Violence***

P.O. Box 72, St. Albans, VT 05478
Hotline: (802) 524.6575

Lamoille County

Clarina Howard Nichols Center*
P.O. Box 517, Morrisville, VT 05661
Hotline: (802) 888.5256

**Orange & NE Windsor Counties
Safeline**

P.O. Box 368, Chelsea, VT 05038
Hotline: 1.800.639.7233

Rutland County

Rutland County Women's NW & Shelter*
P.O. Box 313, Rutland, VT 05701
Hotline: (802) 775.3232

**Washington County
Circle***

P.O. Box 652, Barre, VT 05641
Hotline: 1.877.543.9498

Sexual Assault Crisis Team*

4 Cottage Street, Barre, VT 05641
Hotline: (802) 479.5577

Windham County

Women's Freedom Center*
P.O. Box 933, Brattleboro, VT 05302
Hotline: (802) 254.6954 or 1.800.773.0689

Windsor County (NE)

WISE*
38 Bank Street, Lebanon, NH 03766
Hotline: (603) 448.5525 or 1.866.348.WISE

**Windsor County (southern parts)
New Beginnings**

23 Pleasant St., Springfield, VT 05156
Hotline: (802) 885.2050 or (802) 674.6700

Statewide Hotlines:

Domestic Violence: 1-800-228-7395
Sexual Violence: 1-800-489-7273

* Indicates Shelter