Empowerment Advocacy Across the Globe:
Looking at the Big Picture

The work of advocates who support survivors of domestic and sexual violence is so intense and important that it can create a kind of nearsightedness about the position of advocates within the national and worldwide movement to end gender-based violence. We get caught up in our day-to-day existence and lose track of the values and commitments we share with advocates from across our nation and the globe. But advocates in Vermont and across the globe are connected by virtue of the work we do. In this issue of the Network News, we explore those connections and the ways in which our participation in an international movement enhances our work in Vermont and enriches our contact with survivors.

In early 2012, our movement partners at the National Network to End Domestic Violence introduced the Vermont Network to a group of advocates working in the Republic of Moldova. Moldova is a former Soviet Republic with a rich history and culture, and a country that is largely unknown to most Americans. Our US Embassy, in partnership with advocates from Chisinau, the capitol city, created a program through which advocates from all over Moldova would participate in a Learning Exchange with an American expert. These advocates were working with a remarkable Peace Corps volunteer, Lindsay McDaniel, who helped them define their needs and create a set of training outcomes which included not only basic training on survivor-centered advocacy, but also on coalition building.

I traveled to Chisinau in May through the US Embassy Speakers’ Program. Not surprisingly, there were significant similarities between Moldova and Vermont, and significant differences. Moldova is a small country, not much larger than Vermont and similar in its north/south orientation and unspoiled countryside. Like Vermonters, Moldovans feel a strong affiliation with their land and proudly describe it as having been created from a piece of heaven. Situated be-

continued on page 2

Advocacy Learning Exchange, Moldova (Karen Tronsgard-Scott is top row, fourth from right)
Domestic Violence Learning Exchange in the Republic of Moldova

continued from page 1

between Romania and the Ukraine, the Moldovan people are ethnically diverse, with the majority of Moldovans identifying as either Romanian or Russian. I found Moldovans of all ethnic backgrounds to be friendly, open, generous and incredibly warm.

During decades of Soviet occupation, the Moldovan economy was driven by Soviet desires for agricultural products including the excellent wines produced by the myriad of vineyards. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Moldovan economy fell in to a deep recession from which the country has struggled to recover. The lack of jobs drives Moldovan adults to leave their homes for Western Europe. Young Moldovan women have been the targets of sex traffickers and Moldova has become one of the primary source countries for trafficked women in Europe. Other forms of gender based violence also predominate and according to a government study, 63% of Moldovan women experienced some form of violence during their lifetime. Forty percent of Moldovan women report having suffered at least once from physical violence from a husband or partner during their lifetime, and 19% of women report having experienced sexual violence during their lifetime. The Moldovan government and the US Embassy recognize the devastating impact of gender based violence not only on individual women and children, but also on Moldovan society.

Services for victims of domestic violence in Moldova are primarily provided by government sponsored agencies that also provide a variety of other gender based services. These “Women’s Centers” operate throughout the country and are agencies under the Ministry of Social Protection and Family. My work resulted from a grant given by the US Embassy to Casa Marioarei, which is the only independent non-governmental organization in Moldova devoted solely to serving victims of domestic violence and their children. And while there is a comprehensive law in Moldova that criminalizes domestic violence, there are very few instances when it is enforced (in 2011, fewer than 400 protection orders were issued for a nation of 3.2 million people).

I found it to be interesting that Moldovans have adopted a human rights oriented definition of domestic violence: “Domestic violence violates fundamental human rights to safety and security and the rights to be free of torture and violence.” This emphasis on society creates a different context for domestic violence that our more individually-based definition: “Domestic Violence is a pattern of coercive behaviors that an individual uses to maintain power and control over their intimate partner.” Both definitions have value and Moldovan advocates and I had lively discussions about these two perspectives.

In my 19 years of working in this movement, I am in continual awe of the dedication, resilience, energy and great compassion of advocates. In Moldova, I found there to be no difference between Moldovan and American advocates. Over the course of my 14 days in Moldova, I trained 50 advocates and volunteers throughout Moldova. I found these advocates to be hungry to learn about American approaches and they were surprised and proud to hear that the approaches they are developing are intuitively like those we have developed.

One of the primary goals of my work in Moldova was to assist its fledgling national coalition. This is a group of representatives of the various Women’s Centers, NGOs serving trafficking victims and children, the Women’s Law Center, Casa Marioarei, and the Drochia Aggressor Center, Moldova’s only batterer intervention program, all of whom have come together to create a coalition designed to further policy, training and funding goals. I had the great privilege of witnessing the coalescence around their exploration...
The Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) has become widely acknowledged as one of the most dangerous places to be a woman or girl. Horrific sexual violence has become a commonplace tool of war. More than 5 million people have died in the conflict since 1998, and women and girls have borne the brunt of this violence.

“In eastern Congo, rape and sexual violence are routinely employed as weapons to subjugate villages and terrorise entire communities. From old women to young children, the soldiers do not discriminate; the stories of their brutality and torture are so horrific that they rarely reach western ears...”

— Judith Wanga, The Observer, 27 March 2010

The statistics and stories are deeply disturbing. According to the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative (VIBI), sexual violence in a variety of forms has become part of a strategy of terror and domination. Rapes are often carried out by groups of armed militia where women and girls are tortured before, during and after the sexual assaults. The intentional transmission of HIV is used as a terror tactic to exert fear and control over the residents. Advocates in DR Congo tell stories of torture, the mutilation of women’s vaginas with weapons, and of body parts being cut off. And those women who survive often face ostracism by their families and communities.

There is very little attention being paid by the western world to this crisis of destruction and sexual violence. A number of organizations are seeking to change this fact. Among them, Eve Ensler’s V-Day organization has undertaken a Congolese Campaign that seeks to raise awareness of the crisis in eastern Congo, and to develop services to support survivors. The Burlington based VIBI is working to connect sexual assault survivors in South Kivu with desperately needed medical attention and follow-up care. VIBI founder Kyendamina Cleophace Mukeba came to Vermont as a refugee in 2005 and began the Initiative after he returned to his home, South Kivu, and witnessed the pain and ostracism that women in this region were experiencing. Even if the women or girls managed to get to the hospital for initial care for their physical wounds, they were often left to live in debilitating pain and with untreated infections. VIBI is working to change this situation. Inspired by the Dear Hillary Campaign for the Congo (a Saint Michael’s grassroots movement to which Cleophace was a co-founder), VIBI has undertaken a pilot project of a Women Center in South Kivu to address the critical need for medical care. Originally a school was to be the first project but after talking with 70 survivors of sexual violence it became clear that a medical center was most needed.

For more information about the epidemic of sexual violence in the DRC:

Peace & Justice Lecture by Lisa Shannon on Oct 23 (see page 7)

V-Day’s Congo Campaign and City of Joy - http://drc.vday.org/home.html

Vermont Ibutwa Initiative - https://www.facebook.com/ibutwa

Campaigns To End Violence Against Women — Across The Globe

1. Argentina – Campaign to end domestic violence
   a. “While poverty and lack of education are risk factors, situations of violence against women occur in all social and educational levels.”
   b. “Every three days a woman dies from domestic violence.”
   c. “Worldwide, more than 90% of victims of violence are women.”

2. Australia – Billboard campaign to break the silence on domestic violence – “Driving Your Message Home – Daddy’s Hurting Mommy.”

3. Canada – “Coach Needed — Teach Our Boys to Respect Women” – campaign directed at men to be mentors to boys while they are young.

4. Canada – “Many Voices Many Paths” – art posters designed to open dialogue with women with disabilities and Deaf women about how they identify and deal with abuse.

5. Canada – poster produced by Association of Women’s Shelters for Domestic Violence “Intimate partner violence is not always visible.”

6. Columbia – “Take Back the Tech” – Sexting Awareness campaign


8. India – “Save Our Sisters” campaign (SOS) — works to prevent the trafficking of young girls and women and provide support through literacy and life skills education.

9. Indonesia – Gender Harmony is a tool created to promote respect for human rights — a best practice in primary prevention of violence against women

10. Ireland – Campaign to educate about domestic violence — “You Can’t Beat a Woman” and “He wouldn’t hurt a flea but he put his wife in a coma.”


13. Pakistan – Campaign to educate about intimate partner sexual violence – “Speak Up Against Marital Rape.”

14. Pakistan – “Take Back the Tech” Poster campaign to raise awareness about online violence against women.

15. Philippines – University student-designed poster campaign of the Baquio city-based organization Save Our Women – “Stop the Abuse and Violence Against Our Women.”

16. South Africa – “Take Back the Tech” campaign to promote internet health & safety — it is fun and provocative, very appealing to youth.

17. South Africa – Poster calling on men to be involved in equal parenting – “Enjoy Parenting.”


20. United Kingdom – Campaign to “Disarm Domestic Violence”

21. United Kingdom – “Care or Control” Campaign highlights the more subtle controlling behaviors used by perpetrators of domestic violence.


23. Global – Bell Bajao “Ring the Bell” – begun in India in 2008 but now in many countries, breaking the cycle of violence against women with one simple action: when one hears a man abusing a woman inside a nearby home, he/she rings the doorbell — thus interrupting the violence — halting the violence by lifting one finger. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon is its first global ambassador.
Coming Together: The International Struggle to End Gender-Based Violence

by Zoe Gascon, Legal Projects Coordinator

At the end of February 2012 over 1,500 advocates, survivors and activists from all over the world gathered outside of Washington D.C. for the 2nd World Conference of Women’s Shelters. Several of us from Vermont were fortunate enough to participate in this very special event.

Violence against Women is a global issue and coming together with women from around the globe highlighted the commonalities of women’s experiences of violence. While many participants commented that “we are more alike than different,” women’s experiences of violence around the world often are very different depending on a multitude of factors including culture, politics and economics. Survivors and other activists across the globe also respond to gender-based violence in different ways and we in Vermont have much to learn from our international colleagues.

VT Network Economic Justice Coordinator Auburn Watersong participated in the conference and comments, “It was inspirational to listen to and learn from activists across the globe who were framing violence against women as a human rights issue.” Many advocates from other parts of the world often behave more radically in confronting male leaders and oppression, much like our foremothers in the United States. For example, in Iceland an activist group known as “Big Sister” undertook three weeks of investigative work to enforce Iceland’s law where buyers of prostitution can be prosecuted in an effort to combat sex trafficking. The group literally called out male buyers of trafficked women by orchestrating a public shaming event where these men were lured to a certain location under the assumption that there would be women and girls that they could “buy.”

At a subsequent press conference the Big Sisters played recordings of phone conversations between buyers and the activists including one where a 48 year old “buyer” became more interested in purchasing a girl when he learned that she was only 15. The activists argue that prostitution and trafficking can’t survive in daylight and warn that Big Sister is watching. They demand enforcement of the law as well as the closing down of websites that sell girls and women. While Big Sister is an independent and anonymous group of activists the action was presented by Stigamot, a program that serves survivors of sexual violence, as one of several
The International Struggle to End Gender-Based Violence
continued from page 7

actions taken by Icelandic feminists. http://www.stigamot.is/index.php/english

A starkly different initiative but one that also reflects a human rights lens is the Association for Women’s Sanctuary and Development (AWSAD) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. This shelter for women and girls opened in 2006 with 4 beds and has grown to a 50 bed safe house with a satellite shelter in Adama. AWSAD doesn’t distinguish between victims of domestic and sexual violence, as we often do here in the United States, but instead considers the spectrum of violence against women and girls as gender-based violence which takes many forms, all of which violate basic human rights. Maria Munir Yusef, the Director of AWSAD, presented a workshop at the conference that was moving in showcasing the depth and breadth of their work with women and girls at the only organization of its kind in Ethiopia. AWSAD works to support the “rehabilitation and reintegration” of survivors by addressing physical, emotional/psychological, educational and economic needs and supporting professional development and education. Through the lens of gender-based violence as a human rights violation, survivors’ needs are viewed holistically and the violence experienced is understood to affect the person globally. http://awsad.org/

Perhaps the work showcased at the 2nd World Conference of Women’s Shelters that most precisely speaks to gender-based violence as a global problem with global solutions is the initiative “Cause of Death: Woman.” Created by Swedish activists, this project documents “women’s violent reality through the eyes of ten killed women, more than 50 survivors and the endless power of people fighting it.” The journalists visited 10 countries on four continents and the extensive website/exhibit is beautifully created and both devastatingly heartbreaking and inspiring. The viewer is invited to consider stories of victims and survivors from all over the world, global myths (“she provoked him”), hard facts and statistics and forces for change. Through this tapestry the viewer moves towards understanding the commonalities of gender-based violence as well as the complexities of the differences in how such violence manifests and is experienced. We see that violence against women is not “better” or “worse” in one country vs. another but that it is different. As activists we can learn from and be inspired by the strategies employed by activists working to end violence around the globe and better understand the positioning of our own work within this complex struggle. http://www.causeofdeathwoman.com/

Incredibly, on the final night of the conference participants were treated to THE Gloria Gaynor performing the classic empowerment song, “I Will Survive.” After several days of serious discussions, strategy sessions and powerful and moving stories of survival and remembrance of those who didn’t survive, nearly 1400 survivors, activists and advocates from over 100 different countries danced, together and as one, with reckless abandon and joy as Gloria belted out her message. We danced on chairs and tables as sisters and comrades, though only days before we were mostly strangers. Reflecting back on that night and the conference as a whole I’m reminded of both Emma Goldman’s admonition that “If I can’t dance it’s not my revolution” and Che Guevara’s truth that “the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love.”

1 According to the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Article 3: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.” Article 5: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” Further, the Convention on the Abolition of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was adopted in 1979. In 1993 the General Assembly of the UN adopted the Declaration on the Abolition of Discrimination Against Women. The Declaration states, among other things, that violence against women shall be made a criminal offense, that women who have been subjected to violence shall be entitled to support and care, and that resources shall be made available for research into violence in the home.

Lisa Shannon, founder of Run for Congo Women, was the first national grassroots activist in the United States working to raise awareness of the forgotten human crisis in Democratic Republic of Congo. Since Lisa’s lone 30-mile trail run in 2005, thousands have joined Run for Congo Women, now an international movement which has sponsored more than 1,400 war-affected Congolese women through Women for Women International. Shannon’s first book, A Thousand Sisters, targets mainstream audiences, detailing her journeys into war-affected eastern Congo.
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, Inc.
P.O. Box 307, Hardwick, VT 05843
Hotline: (802) 472.6463

Chittenden County
HOPE Works
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 (Northeast)
WISE*
38 Bank Street, Lebanon, NH 03766
Hotline: (603) 448.5525 or 1.866.348.WISE

Windsor County (Southern Parts)
Statewide Hotlines:
Domestic Violence: 1-800-228-7395
Sexual Violence: 1-800-489-7273

* Indicates Shelter

This publication is available in alternate format.