

Telling Our Story



VERMONT
NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



Our purpose is to create a world free of oppression, where actions, beliefs and systems support all people to thrive.



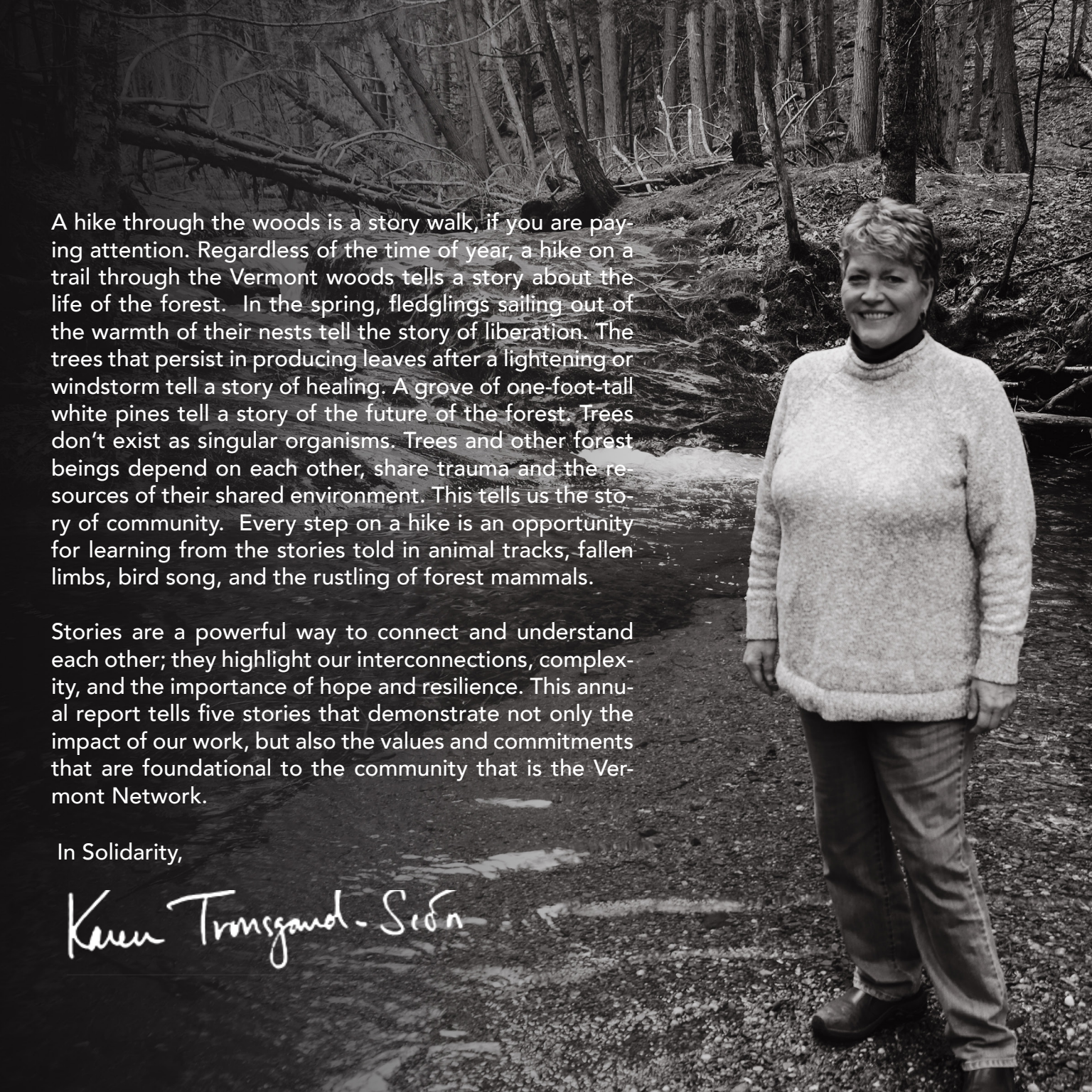
Nature photography and portraits by Kelli Prescott

A hike through the woods is a story walk, if you are paying attention. Regardless of the time of year, a hike on a trail through the Vermont woods tells a story about the life of the forest. In the spring, fledglings sailing out of the warmth of their nests tell the story of liberation. The trees that persist in producing leaves after a lightening or windstorm tell a story of healing. A grove of one-foot-tall white pines tell a story of the future of the forest. Trees don't exist as singular organisms. Trees and other forest beings depend on each other, share trauma and the resources of their shared environment. This tells us the story of community. Every step on a hike is an opportunity for learning from the stories told in animal tracks, fallen limbs, bird song, and the rustling of forest mammals.

Stories are a powerful way to connect and understand each other; they highlight our interconnections, complexity, and the importance of hope and resilience. This annual report tells five stories that demonstrate not only the impact of our work, but also the values and commitments that are foundational to the community that is the Vermont Network.

In Solidarity,

Karen Tronsgaard-Sehn



A STORY OF LIBERATION

Survival and resilience

This past March, Jess' life was forever changed when she was sexually assaulted. She, like many survivors, found navigating the healthcare and justice system to be doubly traumatizing. Jess was connected with the Justice for Victims Legal Clinic at the Vermont Network. Jess describes her first call with the clinic as a turning point for her and the first time she felt a sense of hope. While Jess' court case did not end in the outcome she had hoped, the process of working with the Legal Clinic was one she looks back on as a healing one. "My attorney was there to extend a life preserver when we were delivered blow after unfair blow from the judicial system. Her understanding of trauma and how it affects the brain and human psyche was so profound. I believe this to be one of the reasons she was able to provide a dose of healing to me." A few short months later, Jess joined the Survivors Uplift VT group, adding her voice to the fight to end domestic and sexual violence in Vermont. Though she wouldn't wish her experience on anyone, Jess said that it lit a fire in her and she is determined to use her experiences to make a difference.

Survivors Uplift VT is a statewide survivor-led action group dedicated to advocacy and awareness about the impact violence has on Vermont. Participants engage in training and support to share their stories and conduct community outreach, public speaking, and legislative advocacy.

This statewide group hosts regular meetings and trainings virtually to empower, connect and engage in statewide advocacy. Find out more and register for the next meeting at:

www.vtnetwork.org/survivors-uplift-vt



"I am here to fight for accountability, to eradicate rape and domestic violence, because I can't leave the world to my two children knowing rapists are more protected than survivors. We deserve better and all of our children do, too."

– Jess V., survivor

A STORY OF HEALING

The Lullaby Project

Vermont's mid-November chill created the perfect moment for the Lullaby Project staff to join for two days with women at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility (CRCF) as part of the *Healing Together Project*. The *Healing Together Project* is a collaborative project of the Network in partnership with the DIVAS program at CRCF and the Kids-A-Part program of Lund. *Healing Together* is designed to offer opportunities for healing and connection to families who have experienced combined challenges of domestic violence, trauma, addiction, and incarceration.

Carefully guiding participants, staff from Writers for Recovery offered prompts to help them reflect on their children. Where do they come from? What do you hope for them? In their words, the women transcribed deep messages of love, reverence, family strength, and playfulness into song lyrics to express to their children and grandchildren. Musicians from Scrag Mountain Music then artfully assisted them in putting their lyrics to music. On the afternoon of the second day, a community of women who reside at the facility gathered to witness the newly hatched lullabies. Supported with keyboard, mandolin, violin and voice, moms and grandmoms sang about catching snowflakes and chasing dogs, couch snuggles and deep hugs, longing and looking forward to better times. These lullabies are gifts, recorded family heirlooms, symbols of love, connection, and healing that will be shared with kids and grandkids and sung over generations.

Our Lullaby Project initiative is a collaboration between Scrag Mountain Music Artistic Directors and musicians Mary Bonhag (soprano) and Evan Premo (double bass/composer) and writing instructors Gary Miller and Bess O'Brien from Writers for Recovery. The Lullaby Project is a program of Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute.

*I love you my babies
You should be careless and free*

*I love you my babies
You mean everything to me*

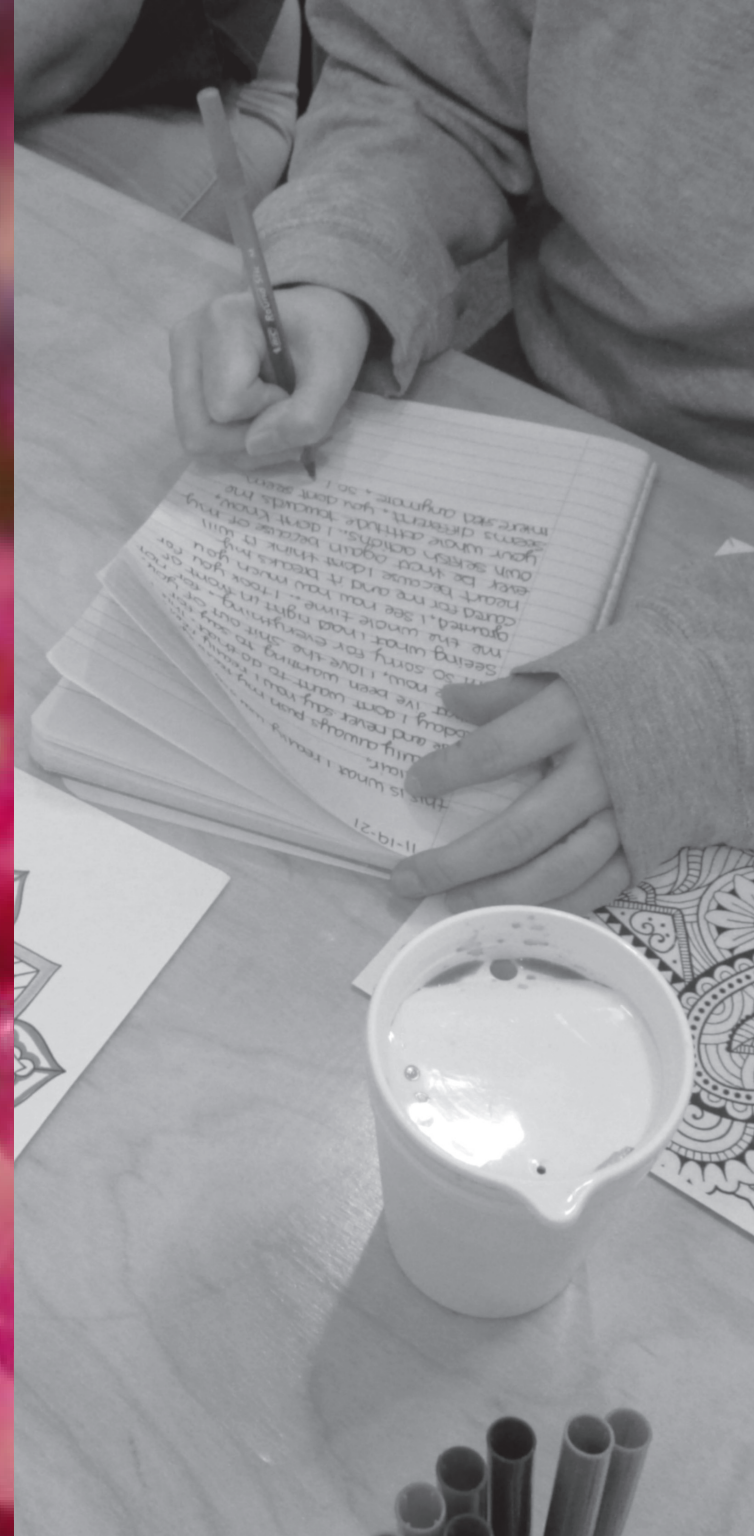
*I love you my babies
Even though when we're apart*

*I love you my babies
You're always in my heart*

*I love you my babies
We'll be together soon*

*I love you my babies
Howl it at the moon!*

—Lyrics by Anonymous, from the Lullaby Project



A STORY OF THE FUTURE

Intergenerational partnerships

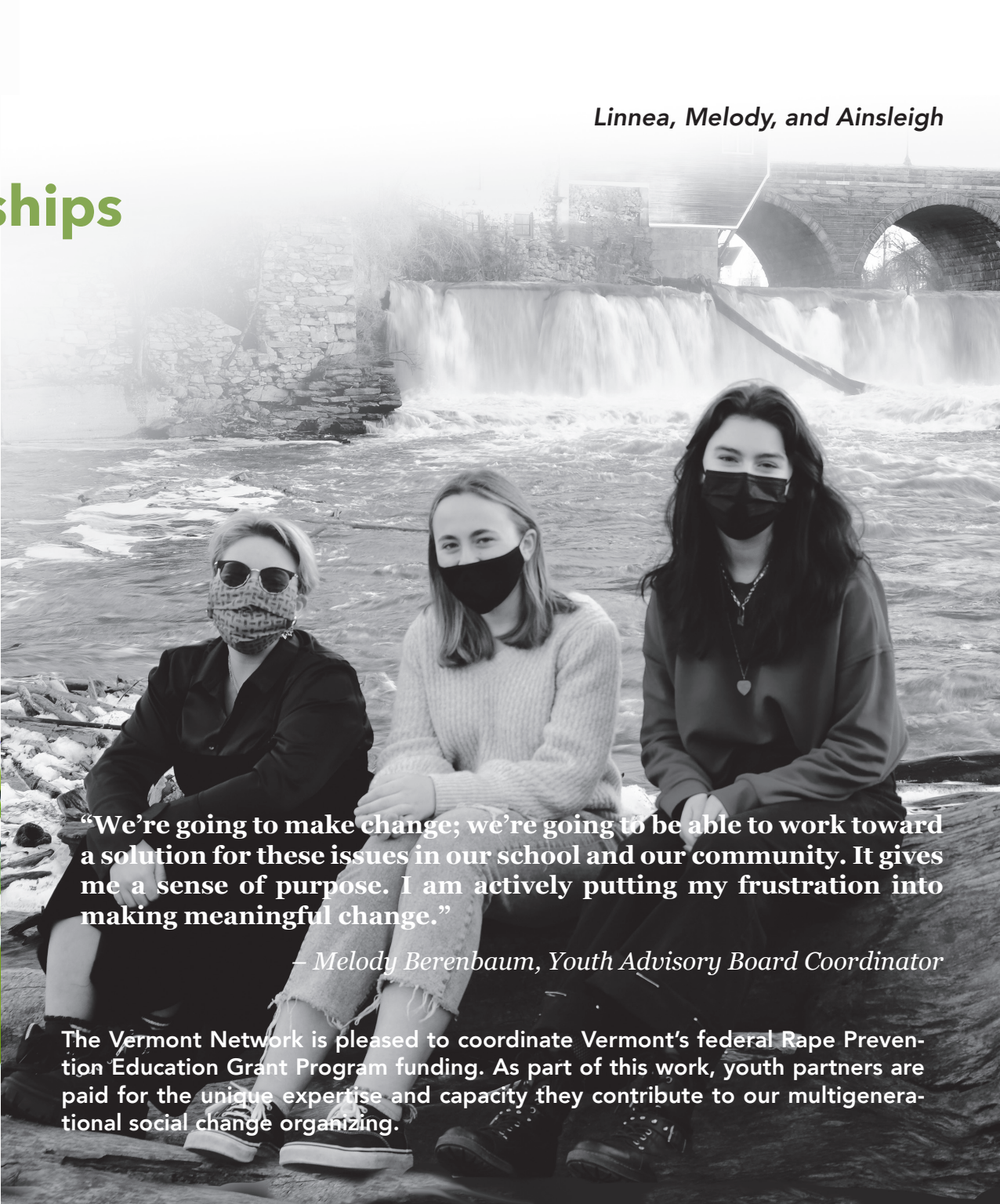
The Vermont Network supports intergenerational partnerships to build momentum for community change.

This year, we deepened our work and commitment to intergenerational partnerships. As part of a partnership with the Vermont Department of Health, the Vermont Network made a commitment to change our approach to prevention work. In addition to expanding prevention education for youth, we wanted to get serious about collaborating and sharing power in partnership with youth activists. We partnered with two Member Organizations—WomenSafe and Mosaic—to help us pilot and grow these efforts. “We knew we needed to partner with youth and support their leadership. Our understandings of what partnership could look like—and what it might accomplish—only continue to expand,” says Linnea Johnson, Education Advocate at WomenSafe, which serves Addison County.

We have gained invaluable learning from our mentors at Outright Vermont and UP for Learning and from a growing community of activist youth who have eagerly answered the call to join us in our work. Melody Berenbaum and Ainsleigh Linnea are two such youth who are helping to lead sexual violence prevention efforts in their communities with their adult partners from WomenSafe, Annie Burmeister and Linnea Johnson. “These were the people who taught me about healthy sexuality and relationships in middle school,” explained Ainsleigh. “I wanted to be part of that.”

“In a lot of settings, youth are nurtured instead of listened to,” explained Melody. “Adults try to shape our lives and the way we perceive the world. At WomenSafe, the adults want to listen to us. Our generation has different needs than theirs did. They know they can learn from us.”

Linnea, Melody, and Ainsleigh

A black and white photograph of three young women sitting on a rocky bank in front of a waterfall. The woman on the left is wearing sunglasses and a patterned face mask. The woman in the middle is wearing a black face mask and a light-colored sweater. The woman on the right is wearing a black face mask and a dark jacket. They are all looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a large stone bridge with multiple arches spanning the waterfall.

“We’re going to make change; we’re going to be able to work toward a solution for these issues in our school and our community. It gives me a sense of purpose. I am actively putting my frustration into making meaningful change.”

– Melody Berenbaum, Youth Advisory Board Coordinator

The Vermont Network is pleased to coordinate Vermont’s federal Rape Prevention Education Grant Program funding. As part of this work, youth partners are paid for the unique expertise and capacity they contribute to our multigenerational social change organizing.

A STORY OF COMMUNITY

A healthy and resilient statewide membership

The Vermont Network invests in the community of our 15 Member Organizations.

"We could not do this work alone." And yet, recalls Kris Lukens, "when I first started doing this work . . . we were in this alone. That has changed for the better."

One of the primary roles of the Vermont Network is supporting and connecting our 15 independent non-profit Member Organizations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this work has been more important than ever. We have worked to keep advocates and leaders connected through remote learning communities.

Sonia Nova Gonzalez is the Transitional Housing Coordinator at Voices Against Violence, which serves Franklin and Grand Isle counties. The monthly remote meetings hosted by the Vermont Network with housing advocates across Vermont have offered a place to find connection and learning, and to take space to breathe. "When I have time . . . [to] take all of that in, that's a gift," explained Sonia. "I can then share with my co-workers here at work and with those we work with in the community."

The Vermont Network has also supported weekly, remote meetings with fellow directors of Vermont Network Member Organizations. These weekly gatherings have been grounding for Kris, who is the Director at Voices Against Violence. "I've learned so much from my fellow directors that has helped me think and plan. We do serious work but we also get support from connecting around things that bring us hope, or sharing a joke and laughing together. We have common struggles. I find strength in that."

For me, community means belonging. It also means caring, in good times and bad times.

– Kris Lukens, Director, Voices Against Violence

Community is the place where you feel supported to thrive and grow. I find community here at Voices and I find community every time I go to a Network meeting.

– Sonia Nova Gonzalez, Transitional Housing Coordinator, Voices Against Violence



Sonia & Kris

A STORY OF LEARNING

Strengthening our understanding

The Vermont Network provides training and leadership development for advocates, allies and activists. This year, the Network hosted 150 people representing 21 states for The Vermont Network's Virtual Conference Sessions: Living Into Liberated Spaces. Participants joined national and local survivors, leaders and activists in dialogue about complex issues facing the movement to end gender-based violence—including the meaning of accountability, the role of criminal justice reform in our movement, and innovative approaches to advocacy with survivors.

Aishah Shahidah Simmons is the editor of *Love WITH Accountability: Digging Up the Roots of Child Sexual Abuse*. Aishah was a featured panelist for a conference session on the meaning of accountability in our work. Aishah shares, "As we work to co-create a world without violence, it is essential that we compassionately interrogate what accountability is. This inquiry is individual, familial, communal, organizational, and beyond. We must develop and strengthen our understanding of accountability and its importance in our work to humanely disrupt and end the scourge of sexual violence in our society . . . This is rigorous, community-saving, and healing work. That is to say: our external practices are a holistic reflection of our internal practices."

Our learning offerings seek to inspire what Aishah calls "seismic, survivor-centered changes"—and we are so proud to convene communities of learners to engage in this work together.

Additional virtual learning offerings this year included:

- Basic Advocacy Trainings to provide foundational training for the workforce
- A three-part learning series, Supporting Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse, in collaboration with the National Sexual Violence Resource Sharing Project
- Workshop for community activists on Embodiment as Accountability Practice in Social Justice Activism with Hala Khouri
- A four-session learning intensive on The Practice of Storytelling for Liberation with Tai Simpson

Aishah



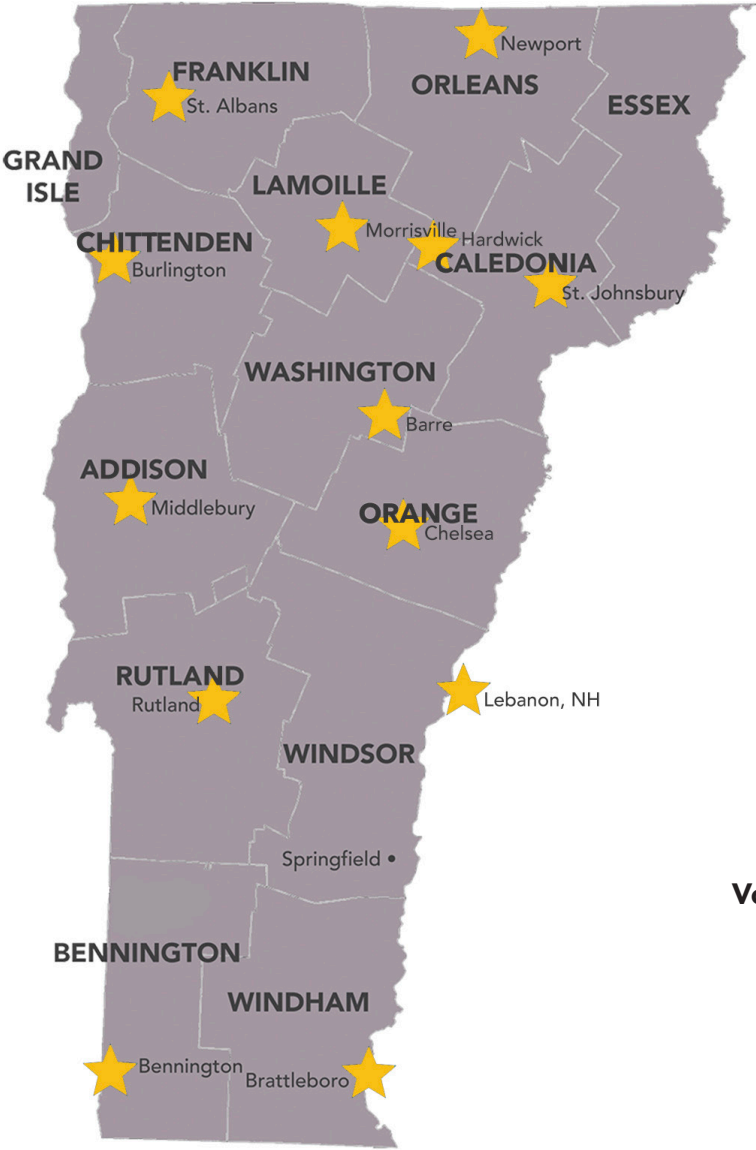
"Our individual and organizational lives must mirror the seismic, survivor-centered changes we diligently work to humanifest in our communities and society."

— Aishah Shahidah Simmons

Photo: Zhee Chatmon



MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS OF THE VERMONT NETWORK



AWARE Inc, Hardwick

Circle, Barre

Clarina Howard Nichols Center,
Morrisville

HOPE Works Inc., Burlington

Mosaic Vermont, Barre

NewStory Center, Rutland

PAVE, Bennington

Pride Center of Vermont,
Burlington

Safeline, Inc, Chelsea

Steps to End Domestic Violence,
Burlington

Umbrella, Inc.,
Newport & St. Johnsbury

Voices Against Violence, St. Albans

WISE, Lebanon, NH

WomenSafe, Middlebury

Women’s Freedom Center,
Brattleboro & Springfield



Board of Directors

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Mike Bensel | Christina Grier | Kristen Lukens |
| Lindsey Brillon | Linda Ingold | Peggy O’Neil |
| Natania Carter | Diane Kinney | Anna Pirie |
| Amanda Cochrane | Nicole Kubon | Vicky Sterling |
| Becky Gonyea | Avaloy Lanning | Anne Ward |

The Network’s commitment to ending violence is infused with a deep love for their communities and consistent inquiry into the ways we all contribute to and uphold systems of violence. This bold approach to change drives safer, more responsive, and better resourced communities across Vermont.

– Anne Ward, M.Ed., Board Member

OUR TEAM

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| Jessica Barquist
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DIVAS Direct Services Coordinator | Anne Smith
Director of Training & Leadership Development |
| Alex Bottinelli
Director of Resources | Tom Nececkas
Director of DIVAS Administration | Amy Torchia
Children’s Advocacy Coordinator |
| Kara Casey
Director of Economic Empowerment | Dana Paull
Finance Director | Karen Tronsgard-Scott
Executive Director |
| Anera Fočo
Director of Human Trafficking Pilot Project | Eddie Poff
Legal Clinic Staff Attorney | Kylen Veilleux
Director of DIVAS |
| Harrison Drapo
Legal Clinic Intake Attorney | Kelli Prescott
Director of Advocacy and Trauma Healing | Tracey Wagner
VT Forensic Nursing Pediatric Clinical Coordinator |
| Laura Geidel
Advocate, Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services (DVAS) | Sarah Robinson
Deputy Director | Chani Waterhouse
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| Kiona Baez Heath
VT Forensic Nursing and VT Council on Domestic Violence Co-Coordinator | Lisa Ryan
Director of Domestic Violence Response | Breanna Weaver
Legal Clinic Staff Attorney |
| Heather Holter
Legal Clinic Administrator and VT Council on Domestic Violence Co-Coordinator | | |
| Rebecca Lalanne
Director, Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services (DVAS) | | |
| Raenetta Liberty
VT Forensic Nursing Clinical Coordinator | | |
| Lizzy Lyons
Rural Youth Project Coordinator | | |



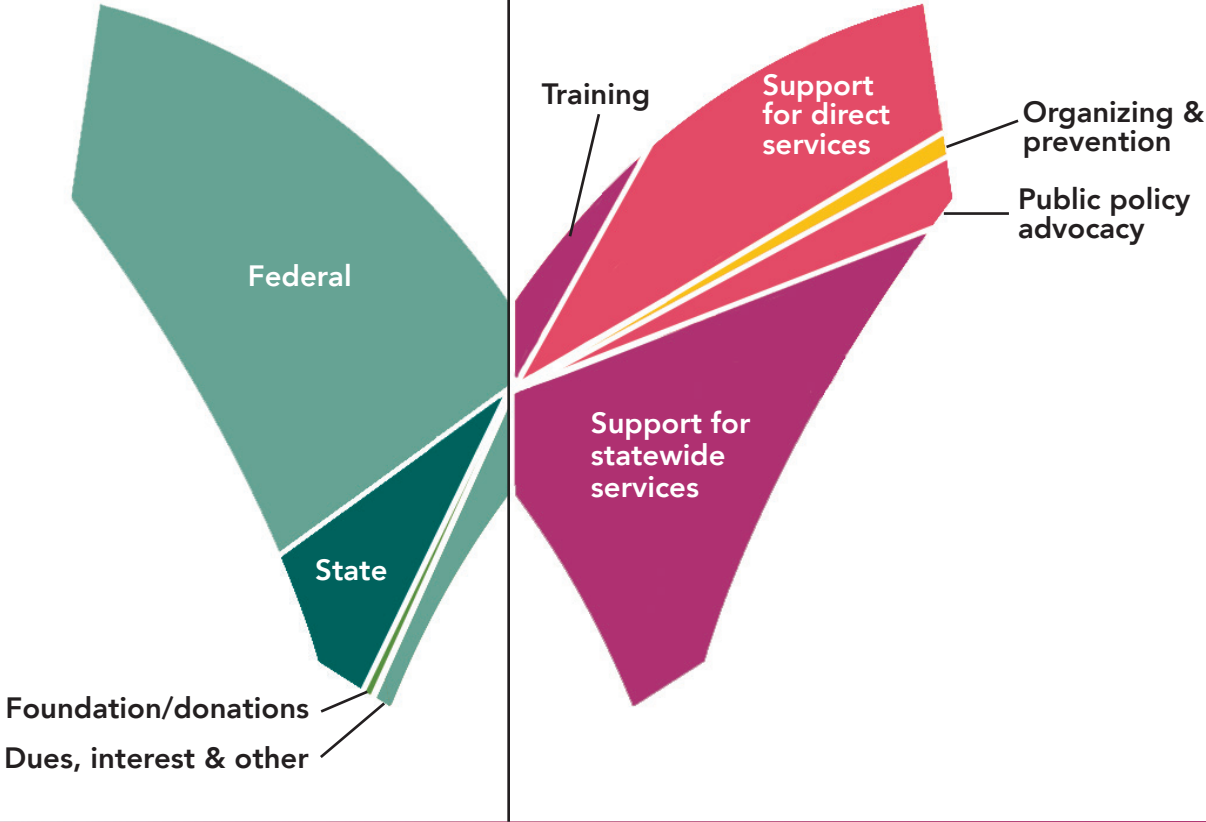
FINANCIALS

REVENUE

Federal	\$2,246,357
State	\$487,533
Foundation/donations	\$46,106
Dues, interest & other	\$129,287
TOTAL	\$2,909,283

EXPENSES

Training	\$209,645
Support for direct services	\$923,386
Organizing & prevention	\$286,537
Public policy advocacy	\$165,856
Support for statewide srvs	\$1,323,859
TOTAL	\$2,909,283



With deep appreciation to our donors and supporters!

“Be the water.” – Norma Wong, organizational strategist and teacher

At the Vermont Network, our most precious and powerful organizational asset is our team. I recently spent a few quiet moments by the Winooski River and have been thinking about the river and the story it offers us about our remarkable staff throughout the past year.

Even in times of challenge—such as a global pandemic—organizations have choices about how to navigate storms and obstacles. We can try to resist change or allow ourselves to become it. We can be a boulder in the river or be the water. Water is powerful even as it moves with ease. Water is nimble and persistent—over time, even the heaviest rocks are moved and changed by water.

Our incredible staff have done a remarkable job being like water throughout the past year. In many ways, our work to address domestic and sexual violence has been more challenging throughout the course of the pandemic. Despite this, our team has accomplished remarkable things by embracing challenges in a rapidly changing environment. Our organizational impact and reach continues to grow. Throughout it all, our staff has remained deeply connected to each other and to our mission. As we head into the next year, uncertainty is certain. However, we know that if the course of the river shifts, our team will be more prepared than ever to meet the changes ahead with intention and strength.

— Jeff





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