

The Link. News of WHBW

Women Helping Battered Women

Founded in 1974 and serving Chittenden County, WHBW is the largest service provider for survivors of domestic violence in Vermont. We provide comprehensive services including: a 24-hour hotline, emergency shelter, children's services, community education, legal advocacy, economic justice services and transitional housing. We believe that all people have the right to live free of abuse – sexual, physical, emotional or financial.

DVAM Feature Event a Huge Success!

Women Helping Battered Women's staff is pleased with the success of this year's DVAM Feature Event, *A Survivor Stands beside Me*. Held on Wednesday, October 12 at the North End Studio A in Burlington, we had a wonderful turnout, experienced great energy, support and an unrivaled sense of community. Attendance was near capacity and feedback was positive.

Our keynote speaker for the evening was Cheryl Hanna, VT Law School professor and VPR commentator. We enjoyed a special musical performance by Mike B. and listened to a touching acapella song and story by survivor and WHBW supporter, Stefani Crouse.

All of the subjects of Stephen Mease's photo installation were present; some were victims/survivors, while others were their allies or supporters. As photo subjects took the stage —

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This event featured a photo installation, with photography by Stephen Mease. Images were life-size and incorporated quotes from photo subjects about their experience with domestic violence. The theme, *A Survivor Stands beside Me*, speaks to the notion that survivors come from all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and family, friends and community members are all affected by domestic violence (even if they are not explicitly the victim).



DVAM Feature Event Photo Installation at the North End Studio A Burlington, VT

A host of silent auction items with proceeds benefiting WHBW were up for bid and close to \$600 was raised.

Controversy in Topeka, Kansas regarding City Council's Decision to Decriminalize DV

A recent controversial move to decriminalize domestic violence (DV) in the city of Topeka, Kansas by city officials is causing heated reaction throughout the country. By a vote of 7 to 3, the City Council repealed the local law that makes DV a crime.

It began when Chad Taylor, the Shawnee County D.A. trans-

ferred or delegated the enforcement of DV to the city governments due to budget concerns and a need to concentrate on felony prosecution, which has increased due to gang violence in the region.

The annual cost of domestic violence in the US has been estimated at between six billion

to thirteen billion dollars ("Topeka, Kansas City Council Considers Decriminalizing Domestic Violence to Save Money," *Thinkprogress Justice*, 6 October 2011). The decision has already resulted in the turning way of 30 domestic violence cases ("Topeka, Kansas Considers Decriminalizing Domestic Violence," *Forbes Magazine*, 19 October 2011).

Critics and DV specialists claim

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Topeka, Kansas DV Decriminalization *Continued...*

that because most DV cases go unreported, decriminalization will create another obstacle for victims. Many claim that this decision is a reflection of society regressing.

Advocates of the change say that discussions about who should be responsible for paying for the prosecution of people accused of misdemeanor cases of DV is valid discourse about a grave concern, and the only way in which to alleviate the problem is to make this change.

The decision repeals the local law that makes DV a crime; DV, however, remains a

crime under state law, thus forcing Taylor to prosecute these DV cases as crimes.

DV advocates and victims are concerned as 18 people have been arrested on domestic violence charges since September 2011 and have since been released without charges because there is not an assigned agency to accept new cases.

Opponents claim fiscal hardship is no reason to leave DV victims without recourse or safety and that refusing to prosecute misdemeanors leaves the safety of the public vulnerable and victims to suffer needlessly.

The decision, and resulting lack of prosecution of DV crimes, sends the message that perpetrators are free to commit the crime of DV without consequence.

However, as stated previously, under the current arrangement, the district attorney is still responsible for prosecuting misdemeanors in the rest of the county, as well as all felony domestic violence cases. Almost half of the misdemeanors that were prosecuted last year — 423 cases — are domestic battery cases, and most of the rest are shoplifting, drugs and

assault (“Facing Cuts, a City Repeals Its Domestic Violence Law,” *New York Times*, 11 October 2011).

Becky Dickinson, a program director with the Topeka Y.W.C.A., which is the primary provider of services for victims of domestic violence in the county, said there was concern that the lack of charges for those being arrested for misdemeanor domestic violence — which could include verbal threats, pushing or slapping — would encourage retaliation.

More than anything, this decision is troubling as it is symbolic

and perpetuates the perception that DV is not a community issue, nor a crime and therefore, not reality.

and we serve all socioeconomic, cultural, gender identity and age groups.



We believe the answer is education and awareness. WHBW's education and outreach program is active within the community

“Perez spoke of her own personal struggles and transcending obstacles.”

DVAM Speakout Moderated by WHBW's Diana V. Perez, J.D.

Thursday, October 27 @ 6:30pm WHBW held a Candlelit Vigil in front of Burlington's City Hall on Church Street, followed by a Speakout in the Lake & College's Boardroom. This year, we welcomed Diana V. Perez, J.D., part-time WHBW Legal Advocate, who facilitated the Speakout ceremony, promoting inspiration,

empowerment and motivation to help participants work on areas of personal development. It was a night of experimenting with sound and storytelling to elevate the spirit. Diana facilitates a weekly support group with men and women and provides extensive knowledge and understanding in Traditional Chinese

Medicine. She provided a unique perspective on the brain, disease and the origins of anger, trauma, shock, fear, addiction and depression within the body. As well, she relates to circumstances of addiction, emotional imbalance and trauma and listens to these stories with empathy and compassion. Diana spoke of

her own personal struggles and transcending obstacles and created a comfortable, welcoming atmosphere for those who gathered.



Tara Perkins, Development/Special Events,
Darrell Crawford Morris, Education/PR,
Jane Van Buren, Executive Director

Inside WHBW: New Staff, Board Members and Interns

This year, WHBW is orchestrating a great amount of positive change. Jane Van Buren, WHBW's Executive Director, has embarked on a reorganization and strategic plan, along with consultant Jim Lebreve, with the goal of assisting the organization in becoming more viable, strong and equipped to serve its clients.

Consequently, two new positions have been added: Communications and Development Director; and Legal and Economic Justice Coordinator. The Economic Justice and Legal Departments are being consolidated, and WHBW congratulates Jennie Davis in her new role as Director of Program Services.

WHBW is also happy to welcome new board member, Erica Dean, Joe Miller and Tanya Benosky (Interim Treasurer). We welcome interns:

- Abigail Wood – CYSP
- India Stein – Hotline
- Dana Allen – Shelter

- Jacquie Goodall – CYSP
- Bijoux Bahati – CYPS
- Emily DeWitt – Volunteer Services
- Giselle Regalado – Education and Outreach
- Sam Wright – Education and Outreach



DVAM Feature Event *Continued...*



Professor Cheryl Hanna, DVAM Keynote Speaker

family, South Burlington Police Chief Trevor Whipple, a group of five high-school students, a middle-school-age boy, a middle-aged woman and more—it was made clear that victims and survivors of domestic and dating abuse are always among us, and are from every gender identity, age group, cultural and educational background and socioeconomic group.

Professor Hanna provided captivating commentary on current happenings regarding domestic violence nationally and internationally. She referenced the Topeka, Kansas City Council's recent decision to decriminalize domestic violence, which has been met with public outrage. As well, Professor Hanna men-

tioned a recent, landmark decision by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that found the United States government responsible for human rights violations against a Colorado woman and her three deceased children who were victims of domestic violence.

Kesha Ram, legal advocate at WHBW and State Representative in the Vermont Legislature, who attended the Feature Event, said, "My deepest gratitude to Darrell Morris and Tara Perkins for putting the event together, and to all of the amazing speakers who reminded us how strong and beautiful the survivors who stand beside us truly are."

Catie Crossman, high-school freshman and photo subject who took the stage, perhaps had the most touching commentary. "...Cheryl Hanna left me speechless; I was so grateful to meet her. I hope to work with her soon. I am so amazed by how many people were moved by what I had to say. I want to thank everyone who came up to me and all who listened to my mother and I. Tonight, I can honestly say, was the best night of my whole life." Catie let attendees know that she intends to attend law school and become a prosecutor.

In addition to amazing speeches and performances, attendees enjoyed treats, courtesy of Chef Jim McCarthy, Breakfast Chef at Shelburne Farms. Special thanks to Minuteman Press of Vermont, Hinesburg, for their generous sponsorship.



"Tonight, I can honestly say, was the best night of my whole life."



Rapper Mike B. Performs!

Vermont's Growing Diversity; WHBW Holds Workshops

Cultural Competency Moving Forward

By, Michelle Hough

Since 1989, Vermont's population has slowly begun to reflect a more ethnically diverse population. This began to change the faces and stories of the individuals seeking our support. Our staff and volunteers face

new challenges understanding the complexities of the different cultures we now serve. The barriers to safety and independence from domestic abuse for our newest neighbors are very different from what we were accustomed to. Seeking to become more proactive in addressing this change in demographics, WHBW joined fifteen

other agencies from the Burlington Area in the "We All Belong Initiative" in September 2010.

The Initiative works to increase the cultural competency of non-profit and government agencies that serve low-income and racially/ethnically diverse groups. The Initiative is led by the City of Burlington's Community and Economic Development Office



Vermont Population Is Becoming More Diverse

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Women Helping Battered Women

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Vermont's Growing Diversity *Continued...*

committee. The need for the initiative is clear. There are over 70 different languages spoken in the Burlington public schools. Families are not able to access services, and students are not given an equal opportunity to learn and succeed due to discrimination and the lack of culturally relevant services. The goal is for the CEDO consultant team to support organizational change throughout the larger community. The package of technical assistance includes access to coaching, organizational self assessment and strategic planning tools, and participation in a peer network with other partner agencies. The participating agencies, WHBW included each formed their own internal Cultural Competency Committee (CCC). Each site also hired and trained a

one-year AmeriCorps member to help support the committees' work. Yemima Bunzigiye (our AmeriCorps member) was able to identify many specific ethnic communities and meet with their community leaders. She provided information about and access to our services to people who might not have been comfortable accessing services in the traditional way.

This month we begin our second year as part of the "We All Be-long Initiative"! WHBW will not have an AmeriCorps member this year working with our CCC and Initiative team. We, along with all participants will be utilizing strategies for change from the book Switch by Chip & Dan Heath. We are joined by nine other agencies in eight half day trainings from Octo-

ber through June. We will continue to target work priority areas identified by using the tools provided by the consultant team to create the internal change that our teams identified though last years work.

We All Belong Participating Agencies:

- Burlington School District
- City of Burlington-Human Resources
- CEDO
- ECHO Lake Aquarium and Science Center
- Fletcher Free Library
- Local Motion
- United Way of Chittenden

County

- VNA Family Room
- Women Helping Battered Women
- YWCA Vermont



Support WHBW!

To make a donation to WHBW, please mail a check (payable to WHBW) to PO Box 1535, Burlington, VT 05042 or visit www.whbw.org to make a secure credit card donation. If you would like to volunteer, please email: michelleh@whbw.org.

Thank you!