

**MARIN WOMEN'D COMMISSION
CENTRAL SAN RAFAEL TOWN HALL MEETING
April 30, 2008**

Introduction by members of the Marin Women's Commission: Ericka Erickson, Marcia McLean and Catherine Ward-Seitx

The BOS has many commissions that make recommendations to them. The MWC is your representation for women in the county. If you see an issue arise, go to an MWC meeting and express your issues and concerns. I would like to invite you to take 2 minutes with the person close to you, introduce yourself, think about the issues for women and girls and brainstorm about 103 issues that need to be addressed. Then we will introduce everyone and talk about the issues in the County.

Participants Input:

One issue affecting primarily mothers is a lack of justice in our court system, especially with issues surrounding divorces and custody, particularly if the women are reporting domestic violence. Discovered that while the problem is especially bad in Marin County, but all of California and across the whole Country. California actually has 2 sets of Family Code and also Conciliation Law. There are alternative steps and codes being used. Conciliatory code states that the BOS has the ability to appoint people to work with these families. Mandatory mediation covers up evidence of abuse and says that the mother is not being cooperative and trying to alienate the father. The custody is then switched and given to the abusive spouse. Asking the BOS to take a stand against the violence against women that is going on. Brought a resolution 2466—a resolution of the town council of the town of Fairfax calling for revision of the California family code and the federal violence against women act.

I am from out of the Country and when you're forced into the Court, if the father is abusive, you will find that the father gets a slot of support to hide the DV that is happening. Many women are sitting in this position and trying to decide if they can go seek help elsewhere. Help not readily available because you are viewed as the problem. The Court gives you the opportunity to file a restraining order or seek psychological help. These come back to haunt you because it is perceived incorrectly. As soon as you

separate from your mate, the police help you get kicked out of the house, and you're in a shelter. Then you lose authority because you don't have a place to live. It becomes a hostage situation. I came to this Country and State, quickly realized you cannot have the freedom as a single mom to return where you came from to seek help and support. If you choose to leave you lose custody of your child, often to the abusive spouse. If you are left in the County long enough, the Court will find subterfuge to take your child. It is doubly hard for women, even though I recognize that women can engage in DV.

Would like you to both explain your issue, but also to discuss any possible resolutions you might have. For example, I am from Brazil. We have police agencies staffed by just women.

I am a professional anthropologist; artist and I have physical disabilities. When you take the bus some of the places aren't safe at night and this will keep you from attending events at night, particularly if you have to pass through somewhere dangerous. Solutions seem to be costly such as if changing the routes or stationing people to watch out.

Mainly I will talk about sexual abuse. I see that not only being the problem but that every problem is a sickness as a whole for society, such as the high rate of incarceration for people of color. We must address the way that our social government structure is. There are people that are being tortured in Guantanamo, Iraq, and the government is perpetuating sexual abuse. I am a survivor of sexual abuse and DV and have seen the ramifications. 1 out of 3 women has gone through sexual abuse. 1 out of 5 men have gone through it. It happens to those closest to us and it becomes very difficult for us to take them to court. You get a different perspective of the system when you are involved, have been abused and then watch your children abused. The best solution is for the government to change. I was ostracized from a daycare center after my kids were abused. Imagine if people found out that this center had people who had suffered sexual abuse. How do we bring up the issue about anything that is happening, not necessarily to put the men in jail because they get worse in there, with even worse problems after being raped and forced to join gangs. The government, rather than be punitive, the reaction needs to be restructured. Could have therapy for kids at the daycare who have suffered sexual abuse, talk about. I wanted to punish these people who committed sexual abuse, but this is not the solution. Sometimes the closest people hurt me and my family will tell me that I am the problem.

Our society is not ready to hear we have a problem as a whole. We take it back to the government, this system sucks- let's get to the root of the problem, talk about it. But, there's no funding. Only a few therapies for our children who have been abused. Likewise for the women, even worse for the men who are released from jail. What hurts is that anyone who gets punished is a member of our family and saving face becomes an issue.

2 issues that the mother's club has been working on are the playgrounds to upgrade. Park & Rec is getting involved. There is a lot at stake as to decide per capita how many parks we can have and should be built. The second thing is the redevelopment of Northgate Mall. They are taking the play area and reducing it by more than half. Due to an oversight that happened with the developer and the City of San Rafael. We need more indoor play space for kids under 5. SRMC average age is 35. We have a lot of resources to support moms and families, speakers to educate on different issues of motherhood. A teen support system is needed. Get the BOS aware of the numerous mothers' clubs and the ability to get information spread quickly to more than 1000 households. Need local access to pre-school programs. Housing support for single moms. Need activities that will help blend cultures and generations? This would make the community richer and stronger. Lot of value for the children.

Part of the West Marin THM and the Novato THM is the need alternatives for childcare such as coops. That is one of the reasons we have a coop being recognized. We need to think differently. There are some initiatives, but they need to be expanded. Funding is an issue and we need to think out of the box, to form alternative organizations.

The childcare commission is going through a master plan right now. If you gave us your contact info, we will keep you informed of those forums and we will keep you in contact.

This is a beautiful place to be sharing all these important issues. I would like to reiterate. I have suffered PTSD. I was recently strangled and dragged across a yard after telling the father of my child that I am pregnant but because I have no marks I was unable to make a police report. Important to understand that DV happens at all levels, if you're poor or not. I'm afraid of the system. I was stuck in Novato after the last bus, no emergency transportation set up for special situations. Victimized without even a way to get home. Need resources for emergency housing.

Now we will honor, with a certificate and appreciation from the MWC the great work that some women are doing in the community. One of the things that came out of community feedback, MAWS does not receive any County money. MAWS started out as a grass roots effort. We wanted to honor the women making a difference in the community. No body wanted to nominate only one women, but groups of women. That is such a beautiful thing to realize.

Honor the Marin Interfaith Chaplaincy Group. Barbara here to accept. See awards handout for more information on each group.

Honor San Rafael Mother's Club

Honor Women's Handcrafts—Coopertiva Artesanas Del Canal

Honor Voces De Cambio

I'm hearing a lot about DV, sexual assault, childcare, custody and all the problems that victims are facing in the Court system. Our agency is aware of that. We have a shelter with only 16 beds and a lot of services for women without any support from the County. We only have 2 advocates but so many people calling for help. As much as we would love to help, we cannot help everyone. Ask the BOS to support shelters and our programs

We sent a press release to the IJ. What they published is that the MWC is hosting a THM to see how they can improve their lives. It's not just about us, it's about our whole community, it's about kids, and it's about us as a community. These issues affect all of us.

I went to the West Marin event and now I'm here. One of the issues that affect the immigrant community in Marin is that there are no driver's licenses. When caught, they have to pay the tow truck, the fees and fines and their cars are taken away. This creates more DV with the stress. The County feeds from this money. We need policies that support our communities.

There is a lack of networking among agencies and advocates that are working in the community, so people can help each other with resources and help fund raise together.

Marin Grassroots: just moved to 30 San Pedro. Invite anyone to connect with them. We are working to make these things happen. We offer trainings, meetings and a website to promote networking.

I work with Asian community in Marin. Sexual harassment, abuse and DV. Verbal abuse is also very painful. The current system does not have a law to do anything about this. Had verbal abuse and the judge dismissed because he couldn't do anything about it. This system needs to be changed. Police bullying students. Mothers with children should be aware of children being picked up by others. Parents need to pay more attention about protecting their kids, such as kids getting beaten up and then being afraid to go to school.

On May 8, Marin Organizing Committee that's trying to get a shelter in San Rafael. In the Church of the San Rafael Gymnasium. Everyone come to support—Supervisors have been invited, Assembly people, housing, transportation, teens and other groups.

Immigration affects families particularly if the husband gets deported so the woman then has to take care of their families.

A lot of women that are undocumented feel pressure to marry someone who is documents in order to have kids and to be treated equally. They are married for the papers and are afraid to speak up if they are getting abused or mistreated. Started working with undocumented kids. Goal to sell 3 million human cards—i.e. A human number instead of a SSN. The money will go to scholarships and a conscious leadership institute. Betsy: going to other parts of the country. Trying to be a voice for the voiceless. Website. Onedream2009.org

I work with the environmental network and live in the Canal. An apartment complex built by HUD specifically for people with chemical sensitivities. Most of these people are women so it in part becomes a women's issue. My concern for people with this illness is that housing is particularly difficult issue because we can't tolerate paint, carpet, chemicals, formaldehyde, etc. One thing that I would ask if the MWC would consider this a part of the housing issues. Fair Housing needs to be made aware of making safe homes for these people.

Working as a coordinator on the Tenants Voice Council. Encouraging people to vote. Vote no on Prop 98 and yes on 99.

Suffered DV years ago. Picked Very difficult to get out of such a situation, and look at the bright side, get positive. If the system would just do the right thing, we would not need shelter. Family law court system is created Film is on line family court type it in on youtube. 12-minute video. It will be entered in the documentary film festival in San Francisco.

Alcohol is involved in a lot of DV. Where do you go in the middle of the night when you are faced with a DV that you need to escape? Need a temporary emergency spot to go that's open all night. There should be so many places per a certain number of people in an area. Maybe rewards program for hotels that give women emergency housing, some sort of tax break for helping a fleeing victim.

Marin Institute works on alcohol prevention.

When we were brainstorming, some of the issues that came up are the childcare issue, which is obvious. We related it to young but also adolescents and teens to have a safe place to stay after school, especially for families who are working 1 or 2 jobs and can't get home. Think of childcare for all children of all ages.

Talking about childcare for the different ages, I feel that because of the difficulty in the budget that if we can have agencies, see who has a talent for music, painting, instruments, etc. yoga, if you have some gift, give it and share it with the children.

I am working with the Vietnamese community here. Cultural differences. A lot of women in the minority group haven't been _____, sexual abuse. The culture in Asia that treats a women as a lower class, and get no respect. When they are young, they finish elementary school and then high school is the maximum and that's it. They cannot get higher education. When married, they stay home and take care of their parents. Woman is not allowed to socialize, cannot get any further education. So, when they come here, they have the same perception. They are abused, victims of DV and do not know where they can get help. How to solve this problem. The suggested theory is to have them more socialized and let them know that if they have a problem, they know where to go to a local organization or

agency. Local organizations should have meetings like this once a month so people can have a chance to speak up, as they learn there is a place they can go.

Forgot to tell you that the DVD has a one-minute clip re: undocumented youth. We can show it. Ericka invited the women to the next MWC meeting.

County sponsored non-violent communication classes might help solve the DV

Next Steps: Plan is to have another meeting on June 3rd at the Senior Center in Marin City. First is from 4-6 dealing with young women who are homeless. The second will be similar to this meeting. Will have some sort of follow-up to see what the BOS response is.