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NHWI

**Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):
Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Session Report
for the Upper Valley of New Hampshire**

Women's Health Resource Center (WHRC) Lebanon, New Hampshire
Authors | Jennifer Alford-Teaster, Sarah Mattson

About the New Hampshire's Women's Initiative (NHWI):

The New Hampshire Women's Initiative (NHWI) is a new non-profit organization dedicated to continuing the legacy of success of our merging partners: the Commission on the Status of Women, the Women's Lobby and Alliance, and the Women's Policy Institute. The NHWI mission is to advance social, economic, and political opportunity and equality for women in New Hampshire.

The NHWI has a unique governance structure. Its board is supported by both a Founding Mothers' Panel, comprised of the founders of the merging partners, and a Gender Ambassadors Panel, a group of young women leaders who are interested in better understanding and re-framing the dialogue around gender equality issues in New Hampshire. This multi-generational sphere of influence will help the NHWI leverage both the rich history and accomplishment surrounding women's issues in New Hampshire and at the same time craft a new path forward for gender equality born out of contemporary thinking and needs.

About the Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):

The goal of the Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) is support the mission of the NHWI by informing its research, outreach, and advocacy with a better understanding of the gender equality issues that younger women and men identify as important to them. GAP members will work toward that goal by hosting Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Sessions in various geographic locations around the State. The Listening Sessions will be facilitated focus groups consisting of six to ten participants engaged in a formal discussion for up to ninety minutes using pre-determined questions. Results will be documented and shared with the NHWI Board. The first round of Listening Session participants will come primarily from the existing networks of GAP members and are expected to be primarily women, however the method can be adapted to reach other networks and populations, including men.

This report is the first report detailing the events of the first GAP listening session.

About the Authors:

Jennifer Alford-Teaster, MA, MPH is a board member of NHWI, a native of Durham, NH and lives in Concord. Jennifer works as a Senior Research Support Specialist at the New England Center for Emergency Preparedness (NECEP) in the Dartmouth Medical School (DMS). Jennifer's research focuses on developing medical surge plans for rural communities in the event of catastrophic emergency.

Sarah Mattson, Esq. is a board member of NHWI, a native of Center Harbor, NH, and lives in Contoocook. She works as the public policy director at New Hampshire Legal Assistance, a statewide non-profit law firm that serves low-income and elderly clients. Sarah received her undergraduate degree from Harvard College and her law degree from Harvard Law School.

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Executive Summary

Throughout the fall of 2011, the New Hampshire Women’s Initiative (NHWI) Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) is conducting geographically diverse listening sessions across the state with content centered on “Contemporary Gender Equality”: gender equality issues as they relates to young NH women and men.

The listening sessions are designed to include a small group of women from each region to discuss broadly how the women's movement has, or hasn't, changed. Based on the observation that - women in a younger age demographic often don't relate to the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s-1990s, the goal of the listening sessions is to tease out what younger women (and men) identify as important gender equality issues so the NHWI can develop programs and policies to support those areas.

The Upper Valley Gender GAP Listening Session is the first of seven initial sessions happening across the state. The other regions include: the Seacoast, North Country, Merrimack Valley, Nashua, Monadnock Region, and the Lakes Region.

The preliminary results from the Upper Valley Listening Session reveal that many of the same issues central to the second-wave feminist movement still affect women in New Hampshire today: fairness in the workplace, reducing violence against women, protecting reproductive rights and exploring issues related to equal representation in positions of power.

Where differences exist, they do so in a more subtle fashion due to the many legal protections established during the second wave of feminism that cause discrimination to go underground. The perception exists that legal protections merely give the appearance of fairness and equality, but do not protect women from more surreptitious forms of discrimination. Specifically, women are reporting that they are still faced with unequal pay, prejudice in the workplace – especially involving childbearing needs and sexual inappropriateness by superiors – these issues are complex, but very real concerns facing women in New Hampshire.

Another interesting result that emerged from the listening session involves understanding the mechanisms for engagement for young women in New Hampshire. The younger women do, in fact, report that they tend not relate to the second wave of feminism primarily because the term ‘feminism’ is viewed in a negative fashion – as aggressive females working against men to assert positions of power in society. They observe that this is part of a broader cultural misperception of feminist issues – which they reported experiencing themselves until they were invited to participate in a collegiate feminist network where they began to challenge their own understanding of gender equality issues. It appears the key to reaching women in the younger demographic is through education and outreach through their own peer networks.

The results of the Upper Valley GAP listening session are just a preliminary look at the issues facing women across New Hampshire. The NHWI’s research, outreach, and advocacy will be shaped by the six other listening sessions, as well as subsequent listening sessions designed to reach different populations (for example, listening sessions hosted by Founding Mothers with their networks). However, it is

important to relay that the spirit and energy in the room was palpable which highlights the relevancy of NHWI efforts through the GAP listening sessions. New Hampshire women want to be involved – they are ready, willing and excited about strengthening women’s networks and closing the gender equality gap.

Introduction and Background

The Upper Valley region of New Hampshire is a predominantly rural area which is traditionally thought to include a large portion of Grafton County and some peripheral towns in Vermont¹. Home to Dartmouth College, the Upper Valley is a unique rural setting which attracts highly trained professionals from across the region.

The U.S. Census Bureau² reveals that Grafton County is predominately white, with a median income of \$52,000. The county boasts that 90% of residents have a high school diploma with 34% of residents achieving at least a bachelor’s degree or higher (this statistic is slightly higher than the state average). This presence of the College in this region may influence the degree statistics for this area.

The population is evenly distributed between males and females with females holding 24% of business firms in the county – a number slightly lower than the state statistic.

The location for the Upper Valley GAP listening session is the Women’s Health Resource Center (WHRC). The WHRC is a center within the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center (DHMC) health network which serves to provide women in the Upper Valley critical health educational services³. The Center is located on the Lebanon Green in Lebanon, NH which makes the Center directly accessible to the community.

Methods:

Gaining insight into a community with the use of focus groups is a commonly used approach to qualitative research. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to understanding human thoughts, behaviors and motivations through thoughtful survey design, observation and inquiry.

The GAP Listening Sessions are designed like focus groups where a facilitator and note-taker work together to gain insight into participant’s thoughts and feelings about contemporary gender equality issues facing young women and men in NH.

Prior to conducting the listening sessions, each facilitator and note-taker is provided a facilitation packet that details instructions for conducting an effective focus group. This includes instructions for the specific roles of the facilitator and note-taker, the length of the session and how to draft the report after the listening session.

¹ The definition of the ‘Upper Valley’ is a regional identity without a formal definition which is subject to change based on the organization defining the region. For the purposes of this report, Grafton County is used to simplify the demographic tabulation using the US Census in order to provide a general description of the region of the Upper Valley that exists within New Hampshire.

² (US Census Bureau, 2005 - 2007)

³ (DHMC, 2011)

Location

The Upper Valley Listening Session was conducted at the Women's Health Resource Center (WHRC) in Lebanon, NH from 6:30pm – 8:30pm on October 20th, 2011. The session was hosted at the WHRC because of the direct connection to the community (it is located on the Lebanon Green in Downtown).

Participant Background

Seven female participants ranging in age from 22 – 82 joined the listening session. Three of the women are thirty years old and under, two are in their fifties, one in her sixties, and one in her eighties.

Each participant is involved with women's issues in the Upper Valley either through direct employment or through volunteer efforts. Important subject matters covered by their collective work include, but are not limited to, domestic violence, education, women's health, and advocacy.

All of the participants report living directly in the Hanover area with one living in Norwich, VT.

Upper Valley Listening Session Format

The listening session followed a traditional focus group format which included a two to three minute allotment per question, per person. Each session was designed to last two hours including introductions, participant feedback, a participant exercise, and concluding remarks.

The Upper Valley Listening Session was conducted using an agenda and script provided in the facilitation packet (Appendix A: Listening Session Script). The session began promptly at 6:30pm with introductions of the facilitator, note-taker and the participants. The participants introduced themselves by first name, occupation, age, and town of residence.

Once the introductions concluded, a series of four questions were asked of the participants (a closing exercise was used for the last question). This process began with innocuous questions as a means to develop trust and then proceeded to increase the sensitivity as the session progressed. Please see the 'Summary of Findings' section of this report for the results.

Towards the end of the session, a participation exercise was conducted as a means to extract the top issues that the participants would like to see the NHWI pursue. Each participant received 3 standard yellow Post-it notes and a black sharpie; they wrote their top three issues, one per Post-it note and then they put the Post-its up on a white board in the room. Then each person placed a red dot sticker on their top issue - which wasn't necessarily an issue that they originally wrote. Please see 'Question 4: The Post-It exercise!' for the results of this exercise.

Lastly, each participant was asked to fill out a participant information sheet which details their age, occupation, zip code and contact information if they would like to remain apprised of NHWI work. We are pleased to report that each participant wishes to remain informed of the NHWI efforts.

Summary of Findings:

The Summary of Findings is organized by each question asked at the listening session. Synthesis of material will occur at a later date when all of the listening sessions have been conducted. Please note that participants are identified only by their initials to protect their privacy.

QUESTION #1: What brought you here tonight?

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
1	Very little interaction with NH community outside of [college]; desire to interact with Upper Valley women outside of college and build bridge between communities	Recent graduate
2	Participated in feminist organization at [college]; desire to understand feminism outside of a college setting and build college network of activism	Recent graduate
3	Worked in women's health for entire career and made sense to be here	
4	Gender equality a major topic in professional setting; happy about opportunity to discuss outside of work	
5	Has been a feminist for her entire life (even without label); observes children identifying with feminism	This sparked a moment when everyone seemed to agree that "feminism" is a word with negative connotations
6	Extension of work; mechanism for political involvement/effecting change	
7	Vermont historian; interested in learning more about NH issues; oldest daughter has infant child and child care is a constant concern; many women first recognize gender issues when they have children	Sparked a brief discussion about pressures of trying to "do it all"

QUESTION #2: How do you define gender equality?

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
6	Equal political, social, and economic rights is an easy definition -- but it's the practical application and the nuance of race, class, rural/urban, educational status	
4	Significantly diminished violence against women is a key indicator of gender equality -- there is a question of safety in the world that is a precursor to the question of equality	
Group	HS commented that issues of reproductive choice are central as well	This sparked a significant discussion about current political debates, for

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
		<p>example “fetal personhood” statutes and opposition to birth control access, and about the history of abortion rights/birth control availability. It was pointed out that the problem continues -- for example at Dartmouth-Hitchcock you must pay for an abortion up front in cash even though you can pay for some services in installments; presidential candidates have extreme anti-abortion positions. The group seemed to agree that there is a resurgence of ideology that wants to restrict women’s access to birth control and abortion.</p>
6	<p>Paid family leave is an important issue -- US is only developed country without this benefit, which is proven to benefit macro economy</p>	
2	<p>Growing up with equal opportunity as the ordinary practice has meant that there are negative perceptions about “feminism” for example the term “feminazi” when really feminism is simply about equality, not suppression of one gender at the expense of others</p>	<p>This sparked an interesting discussion about the origins of feminism and how early radical feminism can be what younger women identify as the whole of feminism; and also how it can be difficult to identify discrimination because women have many more legal rights -- much discrimination is more subtle; HS commented that the term should perhaps be “humanism” but there was not consensus about this</p>
2	<p>Important to work on perceptions of appropriate masculinity and femininity alike</p>	<p>There was consensus about this. There was discussion about women’s higher application rates to college, better study habits, and other trends, and a question about whether that could be because women have been trained to work twice as hard to get half as far.</p>
1	<p>Responded to the conversation about feminism vs. humanism vs. womanism; she would define feminism as a battle for femininity for all people. For example, attributes characterized as “feminine,” such as crying, are taboo for men. Femininity isn’t a male or female construct and everyone should be able to access it. She also</p>	

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	commented that gender equality would be reached when all women can say that they can make their own choices based on their desires; the issue of the vastly differential impact of childbearing on women (particularly w/r/t career choices) arose.	
BREAK		People commented that having a repeat group would be a good thing!

QUESTION #3: How have you, in NH, experienced gender equality or gender inequality?

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
5	Began at [job] because husband was hired and only agreed to come if she had a job, but then hired as faculty. After six years was suddenly demoted from faculty to research assistant. She made a request to be returned to faculty status and it was approved and she was eventually promoted. This led her to understand that a person in her department must have agreed to the demotion. She was also half-time throughout her career which she thinks is often not an option now.	This led to a discussion about lack of equity in top academic jobs.
6	She introduced us to the term “pink ghetto” -- the trend that as jobs become more available to women, they also become lower-paying jobs (such as secretaries, teachers). She pointed out that women enter [job] feeling that they have not been discriminated against -- but they grow progressively more concerned about gender equality issues (and experience inequality) throughout their college years. She has experienced gender inequality in pay and promotions and doesn’t think that it’s an unusual experience.	Everyone seemed to agree that there is gender inequality in career opportunity. There was agreement that Vermont is WAY ahead of New Hampshire on child care for working women.
Closing ideas on this topic (GROUP)	Children’s schools -- structured around the idea that there is a parent at home to care take after 3 PM Workplace discrimination Loss of economic power in relationships as a result of choosing child-rearing over career Gender inequality touches all aspects of my life	There were many nods to virtually all of these observations.

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	<p>New Hampshire scores very badly on access to social services</p> <p>Gender inequality can be observed in social settings -- alcohol as an excuse for harassment</p> <p>Romantic interest by supervisors -- very subtle workplace harassment/discrimination</p> <p>Doesn't always make economic sense to pay for child care -- leading to reduced career advancement and opportunity</p>	

QUESTION #4: The Post-It Exercise!

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
Group - Top Three Issues	<p>Reproductive rights</p> <p>Violence against women</p> <p>Economic self-sufficiency</p> <p>Violence against women</p> <p>Maternity leave</p> <p>Abortion</p> <p>Access to women's health services (birth control, abortion)</p> <p>Parental leave</p> <p>Child care affordability/access</p> <p>Day care</p> <p>Equal pay for equal work</p> <p>Stay a pro-choice state</p> <p>Lack of benefits for mothers in the workforce</p> <p>Physical/sexual harassment</p>	<p>Red dots:</p> <p>Violence against women (3)</p> <p>Child care affordability/accessibility (2)</p> <p>Lack of benefits for mothers in the workforce (1)</p> <p>Lack of cross-generational sisterhood opportunities (2)</p> <p>Comments: lots of organizations working on reproductive rights, not as much on these other issues.</p>

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	<p>Women feeling the need to apologize for things men wouldn't think about</p> <p>Salary inequities</p> <p>Lack of cross-generational sisterhood opportunities</p>	
Continued	<p>Feeling unsafe on college campuses</p> <p>Reproductive rights</p> <p>Childcare subsidies</p> <p>Inability to recognize discrimination against them</p> <p>Salary inequities</p>	

Closing remarks from participants:

Participants were invited to participate in the Upper Valley Women's Network. People can look at www.womensnetworkoftheuppervalley.org and also the Valley News. There used to be women's networks all over NH and VT and now there are few remaining.

Limitations:

The methods designed by the GAP members to conduct the state-wide listening sessions were well thought and academically sound. While the GAP members worked hard to minimize the effects of bias on the thoughts and opinions of the participants, limitations to these methods still remain.

The wide age range and small number of participants most likely influenced the content in the listening sessions. For example, the older women tended to respond strongly to the younger women who didn't identify with second wave feminism. The younger women tended to appear apologetic and obviously didn't want to show any disrespect to the older established women. A wide age range can create an atmosphere where the younger women may fear being misunderstood or appearing ungrateful for the sacrifices of the second-wave feminists. In an effort to avoid this misunderstanding, younger women may withhold the very sentiment the NHWI is trying to understand (the contemporary gender equality issues that young women and men in NH are facing).

The timeframe for the listening sessions proved to be too short to delve too deeply into the subtleties of the participant's thoughts and opinions. This session had seven women and this number of participants seemed to fit the two hour session perfectly. Without a doubt, this group could have kept giving meaningful information had the session run longer.

Each participant either currently, or in the past, has worked directly with a women's based organization which means they are already well versed in gender related issues. This serves to influence their thoughts and opinions because it primes them to discuss issues that they are exposed to at their employment or volunteer efforts.

Lastly, each participant was selected based on a connection to the facilitator. The facilitator used their own network of professionals to find participants for the listening session. Since the facilitator is an employee of Dartmouth College, it means that the participants were more likely to be affiliated with the College, educated and not a native of New Hampshire or the area. While the College is a defining feature of the Upper Valley, it certainly doesn't represent all of the residents of the region and this may have bias the issues listed as important to Upper Valley residents.

Conclusion:

The results of the first New Hampshire Women's Initiative (NHWI) Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) Listening Session are promising. They reveal a community of women ready to engage in the meaningful work necessary to close the gender equality gap in New Hampshire. It also reveals a complex and dynamic environment in which this work will be accomplished.

Top concerns identified by the participants include developing more workplace friendly policies for childbearing professionals – including affordable childcare; and reducing violence against women – which includes reducing sexual, physical and emotional violence in all settings. It is important to note that while these issues received the 'red dot' of priority, many of the participants struggled to choose 'just one' issue they consider important. Specifically, issues related to equal pay and reproductive rights were mentioned nearly as much as reducing violence against women or workplace friendly policies for childbearing professionals even though these issues were not listed as the 'top priority' with a red dot.

With issues related to reproductive rights, the group felt that there are many well established organizations tackling this issue. This may not be true for issues related to equal pay and some of the other issues identified. The NHWI should keep this in mind when developing programs and policies to address issues of concern for younger women in New Hampshire who, even though they may not be in the life stage where they are thinking of having children, are nonetheless entering a workforce in which they may not receive equal compensation despite equal qualifications.

To engage younger women in New Hampshire, NHWI can begin to think about ways to involve young people in New Hampshire using college networks to engage young women and men in addressing the issues outlined above. Using the energy and enthusiasm of the existing GAP listening session participants, the NHWI can begin to reach out through the academic community since each region has a college or university affiliation.

Additionally, the NHWI can think of ways to connect younger women with more established women in New Hampshire as a means to bridge the gap between generational ideas of feminism. The participants felt strongly that a women's network is a positive way to explore contemporary solutions to persistent, but subtle gender equality issues.

In the words of one participant, the first GAP listening session has given ‘just a taste’ of the gender equality issues in New Hampshire. The subsequent listening sessions will serve to expand on this understanding in order to shape the development of meaningful programs and services provided by the NHWI.

Appendix A: Listening Session Script

I. Welcome and Introductions

- Thank participants for coming
- Distribute participant information sheets (and agendas if using)
- Introduce facilitator and note taker
- Overview of New Hampshire Women’s Initiative
 - The New Hampshire Women’s Initiative is a new non-profit organization
 - A unification of:
 - The Commission on the Status of Women
 - The Women’s Lobby and Alliance
 - The Women’s Policy Institute
 - ***NHWI Mission: To advance social, economic and political opportunity and equality for women in New Hampshire.***
 - Has a Board of Directors and two advisory panels
 - Founding Mothers
 - Gender Ambassadors Panel
- Objective of Listening Sessions & GAP
 - Gender Ambassadors Panel will support the mission of the NHWI through researching and better understanding the gender equality issues that younger women and men identify as important to them.
 - Members of GAP will host a series of Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Sessions in various geographic locations around the State.
- Introduction of participants: *First name, age, town, occupation*

II. Overview of the Process

- Description of plan for Listening Session by facilitator
- How discussion will be documented during the Session
- How a report will be prepared after the Session
- Assurance of confidentiality (inform participants that any report will only identify participants by age, zip code, and industry/occupation)

I. Establishment of Ground Rules

- Ground rules encourage active and honest participation and a safe discussion environment.
- If a participant violates a ground rule, they will be politely reminded of the ground rule.
- If a participant continues to violate a ground rule, they will be asked to leave the group.

Ground Rules (The 5 A's)

Participants of this group...

- Agree to maintain confidentiality
- Agree that there are no “right or wrong” answers to the questions
- Agree to speak honestly based on our own experiences
- Agree that only one person will speak at a time
- Agree to respond to one another politely and respectfully

II. Discussion of Contemporary Gender Equality

1) What made you interested in attending today’s listening session on gender equality?

2) How do you define the term gender equality?

What does gender equality mean to you?

What does gender equality *not* mean to you?

What issues or subjects do you think about when you think of gender equality?

3) In New Hampshire, have you experienced or observed gender equality or inequality?

III. Post-it Note Exercise

What issues relating to gender equality do you think are most important for the New Hampshire Women’s Initiative to address?

(Each participant receives 3 standard yellow Post-it notes and a black sharpie; they must write their top three issues, one per Post-it note. Ask them to put the Post-its up on a white board or wall. Then each person gets one red dot. They must place

their red dot on their top issue, which doesn't have to be one of the ones they originally wrote.)

** Facilitator must collect the Post-its and return to the GAP Committee when complete*

IV. Wrap-up

- Do you have any other thoughts or ideas that you really want to share about gender equality in NH?
- Thank you to participants by facilitator
- Collect participant information sheets; distribute NHWI information sheets

V. Adjourn

Works Cited

DHMC. (2011). *Womens Health Resource Center*. Retrieved October 22, 2011, from Patient Resources: http://patients.dartmouth-hitchcock.org/womens_resource_ctr.html

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