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NHWI

**Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):  
Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Session  
Report  
for Keene, New Hampshire**

Railroad Square Senior Housing Community Room, Keene, New Hampshire  
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## 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 one hundred twenty 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 one of several detailing the results of the GAP listening sessions being hosted across New Hampshire.

## About the Authors:

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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 Keene GAP Listening Session is one of several sessions happening across the state. The other regions include: the Seacoast, North Country, Merrimack Valley, Upper Valley, and the Lakes Region.

The results from the Keene listening session indicate that issues related to workplace equality are a top priority. This includes affecting change in the cultural norms surrounding gender roles in the office that affect the types of work that are assigned to women.

For these participants, they report growing up being taught that they are equal to their male counterparts and are encouraged by their families to pursue interests based on their academic interests not based on their gender identity. As the participants moved through the life stages of college, and now into their professional careers, they are subjected to a contrary perception of female abilities by male – and even older female colleagues - which frustrate their sense of identity. Specifically, they question their ability to determine if their reported job performance is related to their gender or their work abilities. Often, they struggle with the ability to differentiate the two.

With that said, Keene participants could draw on many experiences related to gender discrimination at work but they most often concluded with a successful corrective action that was either initiated by themselves or through the support of their female supervisors for discrete and obvious discrimination (i.e. unequal pay). For these participants, their frustration lies with having to deal with gender discrimination at all not necessarily with their ability to proactively confront it when they can recognize it beyond a reasonable doubt.

Additionally, women in this group report that their age is a 'confounding' factor for prejudice in their work environments. This group felt strongly that they are often seen as 'children' in their positions and even referred to their first professional jobs as 'big girl jobs.' This perception influences the types of work assigned to them – specifically, they report that in meetings they are asked to take notes despite having degrees in specialized fields where their expertise could be better used for high level thinking tasks.

Of particular importance to Keene participants is the distribution of female representation on community and professional boards. Keene participants feel that better representation for women in leadership is a step in the right direction for gender equality in New Hampshire.

The results of the Keene GAP listening session are just one of a series of sessions that are exploring the issues facing women across New Hampshire. The NHWI's research, outreach, and advocacy will be shaped by the 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

Keene is located in the Mondadnock region of New Hampshire within a short drive to the Vermont and Massachusetts. Home to four colleges including Keene State College, Antioch University NE, Franklin Pierce College, and NH Technical Keene is considered a classic rural New England town boasting well known festivals each year including the famous Pumpkin Festival.

According to U.S. Census Bureau<sup>1</sup>, Keene is predominately white, with a median income of \$51,375. Over 90% of the population of Keene holds a high school diploma and 34.9% maintaining a bachelor's degree or higher (this statistic is slightly higher than the state average of 32.4%). This presence of the colleges in this region may influence the degree statistics for this area.

The population is slightly higher for females at 53.1% and females hold 16.8% of business firms in the city – a number significantly lower than the state statistic of 25.8%.

The location for the Keene GAP listening session is Railroad Square Senior Housing Community Room, courtesy of the Southwestern Community Services (SCS). The SCS is a non-profit organization whose mission is to address the social determinants of poverty in order to assist individuals in the pursuit of self-sufficiency (Southwestern Community Services, 2011). The Senior Housing Community Room is located off of the Community Way near downtown Keene and adjacent to the SCS Keene office.

## 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.

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<sup>1</sup> (US Census Bureau, 2005 - 2010)

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.

## Location

The Keene Listening Session was conducted at the Senior Community Room in Keene, NH from 11:30am – 1:30pm on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. The session was hosted at the Senior Community Room because of the generous support of SCS. Lunch was provided to the participants by the facilitator as an incentive for participation due to the failed first attempt at recruitment for a listening session.

As noted above, this listening session was the second, successful attempt at scheduling a listening session in Keene. The first session was scheduled for Thursday November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2011 from 6:30pm – 8:30pm where only the facilitator, note taker and two dedicated participants showed up. These two participants knew there wouldn't be enough people to host the session, but agreed to participate in a brainstorming session in order to strategize about drawing in more participants. It was at this time that the initial group decided that a lunch session, instead of an evening session, would be more conducive to participation. This reflects a very important fact about the listening sessions –despite using the same recruitment material, ultimately flexibility in the location, date and time, as well as the use of an incentive, made the difference in participation numbers.

## Participant Background

Six female participants ranging in age from 22 – 32 joined the listening session. Five of the women were under thirty and one was in her early thirties.

Each participant is involved in human services occupations including such areas of expertise in community health, development, and emergency preparedness among others.

All of the participants report living either directly in Keene, or within a short drive to the Keene area, with half of the women reporting that they live in the same zip code.

## Keene 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 Keene Listening Session was conducted using an agenda and script provided in the facilitation packet (Appendix A: Listening Session Script). The session began promptly at 11:30am 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 a number assignment to protect their privacy.

### QUESTION #1: What brought you here tonight?

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
1	Grew up with strong women, ingrained. Grad school and interning. Was mistaken for cleaning lady at hotel by a judge.	Listening and nodding
2	Was asked to fill in.	Laughing
3	Motivation from women’s studies class. You forget the burning flame and as a chair of Keene [redacted] notice that men run most boards. Women can take charge and contribute.	Listening and nodding
4	Interested in women’s issues. Looked at women issues in other countries particularly Female Gender Mutilation. Global inequality particular interest. Integrated with health. At the hospital strong leadership roles are male.	Many had similar college experiences.
5	Young professionals feel like they are treated like kids in the workplace. More of an age bias.	Listening and nodding
6	Sounded interesting and wanted to gain better understanding.	Listening and nodding



General discussion was that men have the strong leadership roles and women are the worker bees. Men are the face of organizations.

## QUESTION #2: How do you define gender equality?

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
1	<p>Confused. Pregnancy changing ideas about being a stay at home. Never thought she would feel this way. Line is getting blurred.</p> <p>No assumptions that she cooks because she has to.</p>	Nodding.
2	<p>Getting stronger as a gender. Her parents shared responsibilities. Single mom of 3 sons. Breaking the mold of typical roles. Individual strength regardless of sex.</p>	
3	<p>Women equal at face value, but underlying they are still pigeon-holed into typical care-taking roles.</p> <p>Balance that works for me. Feeling in control of life.</p> <p>Male made more money with no degree and less work experience because she didn't ask for it.</p> <p>"Should have asked."</p>	<p>Other participants responded with 'shock and awe' at the story about the male co-worker who made more money because she didn't ask for more during the interview.</p>
4	<p>Has friend who kow-tows to husband. Very dependent on husband. Very oppressed friend and finds that there should be equality at home too.</p> <p>Equal pay for equal work. Feels like they paid less.</p> <p>Smoke and mirrors with job titles.</p>	<p>This participant was frustrated by her friend who kow-tows to her husband. It seems antiquated to her and she doesn't understand if this is a partnership expectation or an expectation that arose out of her gender role.</p>
5	<p>Had a typical, stay-at-home 'Cleaver' mom. Dad worked came home late. Old-fashioned family structure. Eye-opening to see different family structure.</p>	<p>The participants discussed the balance of responsibilities at home as being part of gender equality.</p> <p>Ability to have personal choices. If treated fairly and respected doesn't care if CEO is male.</p> <p>Frustrated there is still unequal pay.</p>
6	<p>Women getting higher paid jobs and more dads staying home instead. Sister-in-Law is the only</p>	Nodding.

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	female at [redacted]..... Had to be in separate room for her medical physical. Equal representation. Thinks things are changing.	Gender Equality to this participant and others means equal representation professionally and at home.

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

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
1	On three boards and always asks to be the secretary. Boss said she should take it, and it was a compliment. She felt she was just asked because she was a young female and could read and write.	The group laughed because many have had this experience as well.
2	Tends to take too much on.  Co-worker without children less sensitive to others with children. Inequality from other females as well.	
3	See above about co-worker with no degree and less experience.	
4	Male in office who does the same thing got way better office furniture than female counterparts. Unequal distribution of resources at the office creates a feeling of unequal value.  Additionally, this participant told a story about the perception that family structure has been taken into account while considering pay raises (essentially, that if you have children you are more likely to make more money since you are perceived as needing an increase to support the family whereas if you don't have children you are less likely to make more money).	Wants to be judged on degree and experience and not because considerations regarding the support of a family.  Camaraderie around the table.
5	Gentlemen came down to her office to request help on a 'special project' and since she was a new employee she agreed to help. She ended up doing whole project, but felt like she was taken advantage of because her time wasn't perceived as valued. She pursued corrective action and was empowered by female boss's support. She said she has a passive personality but feels supported by her colleagues.	There was a discussion about this one participant's colleague being a 'common denominator' in work related issues. Common denominator laughter.  Gender and age discrimination are issues that keep getting brought up as interrelated – possibly confounding the gender equality issue.
6	No real professional workplace experience but	

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	has relationship experience. Very supportive boyfriend now. However, her ex-boyfriend was essentially a 'man child' (played video games all day and expected to be taken care of). Thinks nurturing in men is uncommon.	

#### QUESTION #4: The Post-It Exercise!

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
Top Three Issues from participants	<p>Equal pay for equal work</p> <p>Equal pay for equal work \$</p> <p>Salary equality</p> <p>Equal opportunities for work/job positions</p> <p>Workplace equality (salary)</p> <p>Raising awareness of workplace inequality in all areas, not just salary</p> <p>Respect for women + their diversity</p> <p>The subtleties of gender discrimination. Is it or isn't it?</p> <p>Do people know that they are doing it? [Facilitator note: 'it' means engaging in gender discrimination/bias]</p> <p>The subtle "roles" of a woman – mother</p> <p>Appearance + visual performance</p> <p>Age inequality and being treated fairly even though I am young?</p> <p>Gender equality: choice vs. cultural judgment/expectation [Facilitator note: this refers to choosing to engage in behavior typically thought to be "women's work" such as cleaning, cooking etc., not related to reproductive rights]</p> <p>Equal responsibilities on community committees</p>	<p><b>Red Dots:</b></p> <p>Salary Equality</p> <p>Equal Pay for Equal Work</p> <p>Equal Opportunities for work/job positions</p> <p>The subtleties of gender discrimination. Is it or isn't it? [Facilitator note: this means being able to recognize gender inequality]</p> <p>Being respected as a young female in my own department</p>

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	ex. Secretary  Relationship/partner equality	

**Closing remarks from participants:**

At the close of the session, participants are asked if there are other topics for consideration that they would like NHWI to consider in their work. Issues surrounding gender roles and appropriate behavior by male co-workers came up again – particularly, with a story that a participant shared about her company CEO calling her ‘hot’ to her colleagues. This experience made her feel inadequate in her competencies because she wondered if that was why he valued her at the company (not because of her intellectual contributions).

In that sentiment, another story was shared about a local corporation’s culture in which women were repeatedly undermined and explicitly treated unfairly. For example, when the woman would come into the office the manager would make grotesque sexual gestures at her and claimed he was being ‘funny’ and that she should have a sense of humor about it.

Ultimately, this woman left the corporation, but after she left she found out that the corporation was under review by a third party auditor because of the attrition related to this type of corporate malfeasance.

It is the opinion of the authors that the review of corporate policies by third party consultants may be the most appropriate method for securing immediate action against discriminating behavior, but it certainly doesn’t address the underlying culture that permits such behavior in the first place which can only be addressed by broader shifts in cultural norms. Addressing social norms related to gender equality through outreach and advocacy in New Hampshire is an area of development to be considered by the NHWI.

Lastly, one of the participants postulated that she wasn’t sure how best to maintain her professional identity after marriage and children. She noted that as her life stage has shifted, so have her expectations about herself and her professional career, which deeply affect her identity. Connecting young professional women with older established women in New Hampshire may be an effective means for supporting women as they move through the various stages of their professional career.

**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.

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 a college

graduate who maintains a professional career all of the women that were recruited work in a professional office setting. The results of this session might be different if the participants had disparate demographics (for example, were unemployed, had a traditional blue-collar job or were all college students with limited professional experience).

Additionally, this was the second, but successful attempt, to host a listening session in which two of the participants assisted in the recruitment process for the successful listening session. Even though these two participants were not given the questions prior to the session, they had three weeks to contemplate the issues that are of importance to them in reference to gender equality in New Hampshire. This may have served to shape their responses at the successful listening session.

## Conclusion:

The results of the New Hampshire Women's Initiative (NHWI) Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) Keene Listening Session reveal a population of strong, young women with a practical sense of gender equality as it relates to family structure, professional development and community representation.

Top concerns identified by the Keene participants include fair compensation for equal work. Specifically, this means being compensated for your abilities as a professional regardless of gender. Commonly, these women reported that they had male counterparts who were given better compensation purely because "the [female] hadn't bothered to ask." One participant even noted that her job title and/or requirements were altered as a means to avoid compensating her more due to the inequity.

In addition to the basic requirement of 'equal pay for equal work,' addressing the inappropriate gender assumptions that because you are a woman – particularly, a young woman - you are incapable of handling high-level tasks at meetings. Rather, these women report being given grunt work in collaborative efforts or being relegated to note taker at meetings because as one participant noted she is "a young female and could read and write."

Lastly, Keene participants would like to see better female representation in positions of leadership. The participants noted that at all levels of leadership – whether it be community or professional based – that there exist a dearth of women. This is an area of opportunity for the advocacy arm of the NHWI.

As noted earlier, one mechanism that can assist with the professional development of younger women is to connect younger women with more established women in New Hampshire. The participants felt that developing a network of support will be an effective method for empowering women to address issues related to workplace equality.

Participants expressed interest in continuing to work with the NHWI in order to inform the services that are provided as a result of the listening sessions. The enthusiasm for exploring contemporary gender equality issues that was exhibited at the Keene listening session can be developed to reach a broader group of individuals in the Monadnock region.

## 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**

Southwestern Community Services. (2011). *Southwestern Community Services*. Retrieved December 10, 2011, from Southwestern Community Services: <http://www.scshehelps.org/default.htm>

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