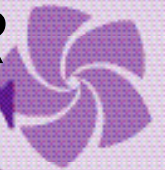




WOMEN OF COLOR VOICES



Vol. 2, Issue 1

<http://womenofcolornetwork.org>

Fall 2008

WOCN's mission is to provide and enhance leadership capacity and resources that promote activities of Women of Color advocates and activists within the United States and territories to address the elimination of violence against women and families.

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Sumayya Coleman

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We Are Survivors of Many Things



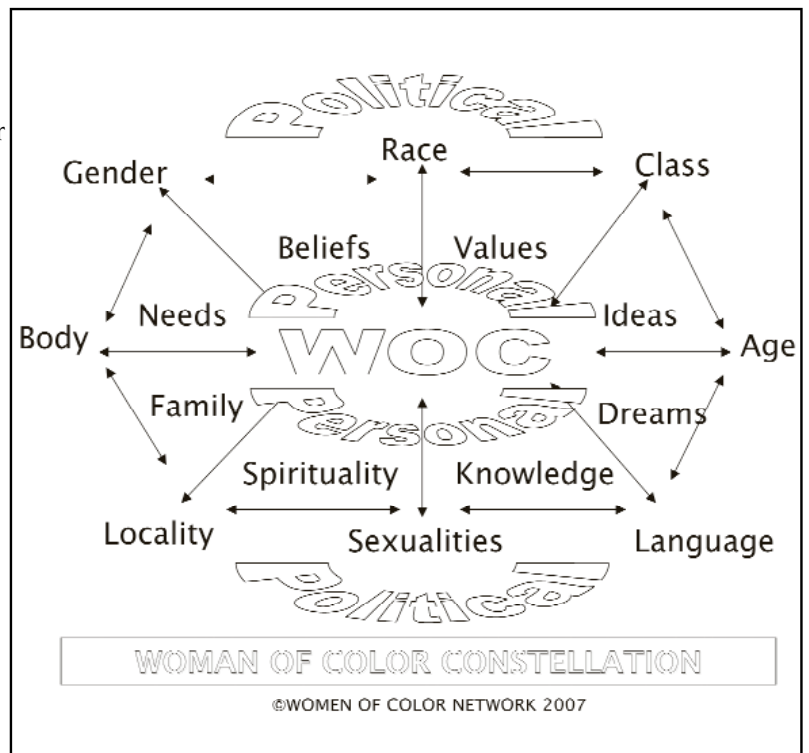
Tonya Lovelace
WOCN Project Manager

As we prepared this issue of the newsletter, we tried to think outside of the box concerning what we mean when we use the term "survivor." Typically in the violence against women movement, we use that term to describe ourselves or others as survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence or stalking. However, as we continue to talk with women of color and gather their stories across the country, we have come to understand that *we are survivors of many things*, and that we need to expand our dialogue and work in a way that both anticipates and addresses survivor-hood in a multi-layered way.

WOCN has begun to offer in our national presentations what we call the "woman of color constellation," as a way to describe just how beautiful and complex we are. Our lives, our victories, and yes, our losses are experienced within a kaleidoscope of personal and political identity, beliefs and environment. It is our intention to continue to bring to you, our ongoing supporters, a multi-dimensional display of writings and experiences within this newsletter and any other materials and resources we bring to you. Enjoy this issue!

In solidarity,

Tonya Lovelace
WOCN Project Manager





WOCN Announcements and Updates

New WOCN Staff

WOCN is happy to announce we hired Jody Rogers as our new Project Assistant. Jody comes to us from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR), where she served in several administrative roles over the previous ten years. She has done national support work with the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), was a key staff person in the planning and implementation of PCAR/NSVRC national conferences, and also worked on several events related to their People of Color Network and Women of Color Institute.



Her duties include coordinating the daily operations of the WOCN office, serving as the first point of contact for technical assistance inquiries, helping to organize national trainings, and providing support and assistance to WOCN membership, constituents, and colleagues.

Please join WOCN in welcoming Jody!

COMING SOON WOCN Resource Guide Update

Find and learn about amazing advocates, activists, and organizations in your community and across the U. S. in the WOCN Resource Guide Update. A new third edition of the Resource Guide Update will be available this fall and will also include culturally-specific programs within the U.S. and territories.

The cost of the 2007 WOCN Resource Guide will be \$20. (The guide will be free to WOCN Patron and Sterling members. Individuals and organizations that are listed in the guide are able to receive one free copy.)

If you are interested in submitting your information in the Resource Guide and have not yet done so, please fill out the attached forms and send them to the WOCN Office.

*For more information, please contact
Jody Rogers, WOCN Project Assistant at
jr@pcadv.org or call (800) 537-2238 ext. 142.*

Update on the WOCN National Survey for Advocates and Activists of Color

A year ago, WOCN undertook a major study of the experiences, treatment, and overall status of advocates, activists, and specialists of color working to end domestic violence. As a result, a survey was circulated nationwide with the following goals:

- ◆ Determine the scope of problems related to race/ethnicity within the work to end violence against women and the ultimate impact upon the implementation of services to communities of color.
- ◆ Compare the experiences of those working within or under the auspices of mainstream organizations to experiences of those working within ethnically/racially specific organizations.
- ◆ Explore examples of what is working well in programs to further round our results.

237 people participated in the survey and a report of findings will be released this fall.

WOCN Facts & Stats Sheets Collection

The WOCN Facts & Stats Sheets collection was created to be a useful resource, which provides information on statistics, unique challenges, and specific factors within different communities of color. The Facts & Stats Sheets collection includes a Domestic Violence Sheet and Sexual Violence Sheet, and has been distributed at numerous national trainings and conferences.

Additional new Facts & Stats Sheets will be available in Summer 2008: Dating Violence, Child Abuse, and Elder Abuse.

*To obtain the Domestic Violence and/or
Sexual Violence Facts & Stats Sheets go to
<http://womenofcolornetwork.org>.
Contact our office for further details.*



WOCN Announcements and Updates

Update on “Call To Action” Teleconference

A series of “Call To Action” teleconferences were organized by WOCN to bring grassroots and mainstream advocates together, fostering meaningful discourse for concrete approaches to addressing the endangerment of the woman of color advocate/racism/anti-oppression in the violence against women movement. The first “Call To Action” teleconference was held in June 2007, for women of color advocates and allies, and more than 100 people nationwide participated. Since then, WOCN has hosted ten teleconferences, including a “Call for National Organizations and Individuals,” which is held periodically.

In furtherance of the objectives developed as a result of the teleconferences, two national statements were developed for future dissemination: 1) the **National Call to Action Statement from Women of Color** that is representative of women of color advocates and activists; 2) the **National Ally Statement** that is representative of allies/advocates who seek to support women of color advocates on a daily basis in this movement.

To view the statements go to:

National Women of Color Statement – Call to Action Statement 2008 by Women Of Color Advocates and Activists

<http://pubs.pcadv.net/wocn/finalcalltoactionwocst.pdf>

National Ally Statement – Call to Action Statement 2008 by Those Aspiring to Be Allies to Women of Color Advocates and Activists

<http://pubs.pcadv.net/wocn/finalcalltoactionally.pdf>

WOCN also hosts a **Call To Action for Young Women of Color (YWOC) and Leadership** teleconference. The series of teleconferences focuses on issues of promoting a more inclusive movement that will empower and affirm the emerging leaders in the field of violence against women. We invite young women of color advocates to participate and discuss how we can collectively as a movement support and build the leadership of YWOC advocates.

*Please check our website
(<http://womenofcolornetwork.org>) for upcoming
teleconference dates or contact Angela Sutton, WOCN
Project Specialist at 800-537-2238, ext 137 or
as@pcadv.org.*

WOCN 2008 Leadership and Mentor Training Institute

Through a grant awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), the Women of Color Network conducted the WOCN Leadership and Mentor Training for women of color advocates on August 5-8 2008. The training was primarily for OVW grantees but WOCN built in money for community-based advocates to attend. Look for more information on this training in the next newsletter.

WOCN Membership and Scholarship Contribution Form

CALLING ALL WOC ADVOCATES: Become an official member of the Women of Color Network today and help build a national network of individuals committed to building the capacity of advocates and activists of color in the field of violence against women and families. As a member, you will receive a number of benefits including updates on critical issues in the violence against women movement, information on educational and professional development activities, and have access to the bi-annual WOCN “Women of Color Voices” newsletter. WOCN membership has three levels for interested individuals: GENERAL MEMBERS, PATRON MEMBERS, and STERLING MEMBERS.

CALLING ALL ASPIRING ALLIES: The WOCN Scholarship & Assistance Fund is available for allies, corporate partners, and the community at large to give monetarily to WOCN. This fund helps assist women of color advocates and activists seeking scholarships to attend national events, and provides emergency assistance to individual survivors with acute circumstances.

Please see the WOCN Membership and Scholarship Contribution form insert in this newsletter or go to <http://womenofcolornetwork.org> for more information.

Women of Color Voices is published bi-annually by Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, National Resource Center on Domestic Violence Women of Color Network, 6400 Flank Drive, Suite 1300, Harrisburg, PA, 17112.



Staff Voices

“On The Road”: SisterSong’s 2nd Annual National Conference

By Angela Sutton, WOCN Project Specialist

“*Safe sex is the best sex.*” – As an anti-violence and reproductive justice advocate, my work and advocacy is invariably grounded in protecting the safety of women. Statistics show that intimate partner violence impacts females of reproductive age (16-24) at high rates and has harmful sexual and reproductive health consequences. Safe sex is not only about abstinence or using a condom every time an individual engages in sexual intercourse. It should also refer to women having an ability to safely determine their contraceptive methods, request her partner wear a condom, or refuse to engage in sex without the possibility or fear her partner will batter her, rape her, or resort to birth control sabotage.

Feeling safe can provide a sense of self-confidence, and security and allows us to be open and honest with others. Being safe and in a safe space, often gives us opportunities to talk about issues that we are told should be private matters, things that happen behind closed doors, or only in those communities. In general, subjects that people have been uncomfortable discussing, like intimate partner violence and sex.

Last May, SisterSong’s 2nd National Conference “**Lets Talk About Sex!**” created a safe space to discuss candidly about sex, sexuality, and various issues germane to reproductive health, including domestic and sexual violence. I joined over 1,000 advocates, activists, and specialists from different community-based programs, national organizations, and social justice movements in Chicago for this dynamic event. For four days, I attended workshops and plenaries on a host of topics, including sex work/trafficking, immigrant rights, the imprisonment of women of color, hip-hop & feminism, and working with faith communities, all through a reproductive justice lens.

SisterSong: Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective has provided 10 years of national leadership in developing a reproductive justice framework. Reproductive justice looks at how reproductive oppression (i.e., the control and exploitation of women’s and girls’ bodies) is based on multiple personal and social factors, including race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and immigration status. SisterSong strives to bring movements together based on those intersections of factors, to organize around social justice and human rights issues that affect women’s bodies, sexuality, and reproduction.

Many of the workshops addressed violence against women and I was appreciative that there was a range of original sessions available for attendees to chose from. This gave me an opportunity to attend several sessions – “From the Birth-room

to the Bedroom: Decolonizing Women from the Imprint of Violence,” “Stop the Violence. Stop the Silence,” and “Sexual Abuse and Drug Addiction-Breathing Through the Pain to Healing,” – and engage, as well as learn new information from other domestic and sexual violence advocates.

Iesha Haywood, executive director of Women Healing and Empowering Women (WHEW) and I, presented “The Power of Sex and Choice in Violent Intimate Partner Relationships,” a workshop to discuss how advocates and activists can develop concrete ways to respect survivors of intimate partner violence right to choice through innovative safety planning techniques that address the power of intimacy. During the discussion, we also explored the impact of reproductive health policies on victims’ right to safe, affordable, and quality reproductive healthcare. The moments I found most insightful were listening to participants share stories of the complexities they faced as reproductive justice advocates in their communities while trying to assist and support survivors of intimate partner violence. I heard different people – from a doula to a state affiliate executive director of a national pro-choice organization – express the need for more intimate partner violence awareness for survivors and advocates, talk about unique cultural/ethnic challenges, and backlash from anti-choice activists.

This conference had a synergy that was fun, informative, and empowering. It gave people a chance to build cross-movement linkages and understand how our justice movements share common goals and strategies, as well as adversaries. More importantly, it deepened my conviction in the work that I do to promote anti-oppression and safety in all areas of women’s lives. I encourage you to do the same.



For more information about SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective, go to <http://www.sistersong.net/>



Survivor Voices

Making a Way Home

by HO-Thanh Nguyen, WOCN Advisor

Interview conducted by Angela Sutton, WOCN Project Specialist

In 1975, after the end of the Vietnam War, Ho-Thanh Nguyen survived fleeing Saigon to arrive in America. Now, as founder and president of the Pennsylvania Immigrant & Refugee Women's Network (PAIRWN), Ho-Thanh takes time to share her experience as a survivor and refugee, and her current work advocating and assisting newly arrived women.



SUTTON: Can you tell me a little of what your life was like before the Vietnam War (1954-1975)?

NGUYEN: Well, actually, I was born during the war. The civil war in Vietnam divided Vietnam into two parts: North and South Vietnam. The North became the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, controlled by the

communist regimes, and the South became The Republic of Vietnam. In 1975, the wartime was brutal and confusing.

I don't remember too much but I remember attending boarding school. Also, during the summer I would go to my grandmother's. I'd have to sleep in a bunker and I'd wake up in the morning and see all these dead bodies on the ground; they were of Vietnamese's soldiers from both sides.

"It was chaos and the military police tried to control the crowd by firing live bullets to the sky and at the gate to prevent people from crossing."

SUTTON: That had to be traumatic. Can you share how else the Vietnam War affected your life at that time?

NGUYEN: I did not live in the war zone. I was raised in Saigon but I remember vividly the fall of Saigon on April 29, 1975, and having to escape.

SUTTON: Can you share some of your experience of how you escaped from Vietnam?

NGUYEN: It was very difficult. The plan was that we would stay at the safe place for one night and leave in the morning of April 29th by airplane to get out of Vietnam. But the evening of April 28th, the North Vietnamese communists attacked the Saigon airport and we could not go there. My dad's friend told us we could not leave Vietnam by air, but that we needed to leave Vietnam by boat and told everyone to go to the bayside of the city. I remember about 40 to 45 people were all standing, waiting to be packed in a small light blue Ford pick-up truck that belonged to my dad's friend to go to the bay-side. Once we got there, everyone split from the group to find a better way to get out of Vietnam safely.

After we split, all of us were confused and scared. We did not know where to go. The gate to go to the harbor was closed by barbed wire and guarded by the military. It was chaos and the military police tried to control the crowd by firing live bullets into the sky and at the gate to prevent people from crossing. I did not know how to cross the gate with five younger siblings.

We were standing in front of the gate trying to think of how we would cross the line. In my right hand, I held my 12-year old brother. I picked up my little brother, who was 4-years old, put him on my back, and told my sister, who was 18-years old, to take care of my other sisters. I then stepped on the barbed wire line so that all my sisters could run through. We ran as fast as we could to the harbor and tried to get on the boat. The boat was full and so many people kept trying to get on the boat by using a narrow piece of wood to cross from the harbor wall to the boat. Again, we had to fight for our lives and safety to find ways for all of us to cross



Survivor Voices

Making a Way Home (continued)

this narrow board to the boat. We wanted to let my brothers and sisters go first, then me with my little brother still on my back. We all ran and I told my brothers and sisters not to look down at the water because I saw people and children fall into the water between the harbor wall and the boat. Every time a wave came, the boat would move to the wall and crush the people that fell in the water. I was scared and terrified. After we all got on the boat and found a small place in one of the corners of the deck, I heard someone say, “pull the wood” and they started to move out of the harbor.

SUTTON: **Once you arrived in the U.S. how did assimilating into society affect your life?**

NGUYEN: I came to the United States of America on June 1, 1975, as a refugee from war-torn Vietnam, with my five younger siblings – the youngest was 4-years old. Suddenly, at the age of 20, I was not a sister any more but a mother and father. This was the turning point in my life, but I took it in stride to take care of my younger siblings. I learned a new language, culture, and job. I worked hard to make sure my brothers and sisters had an education.

It’s like “East meets West”. Because I had to survive, my family had to assimilate quickly. I was only 20, my brothers and sisters were younger so they could assimilate faster but there was still discrimination in schools.

“I came to the United States of America on June 1, 1975, as a refugee from war-torn Vietnam, with my five younger siblings – the youngest was 4-years old. Suddenly, at the age of 20, I was not a sister any more but a mother and father.”

SUTTON: **During your most difficult time(s), including having to endure the war, then having to escape to the U.S. and assimilating, from where or whom did find your strength, support, and inspiration?**

NGUYEN: During the time I was leaving Vietnam, it was my faith and from my parents. My mother taught me how to take care of my siblings and being there to listen [to me]. I get inspiration from her.

I get my strength from my father. He gives me courage and tells me I can do anything if I just put my mind to it.

My support comes from my husband, sisters, friends, and church. My husband guides, encourages, and supports me financially and mentally. I also get guidance from my friends who I know will lend me a shoulder and listen to me. I do talk to God and the Virgin Mary.

SUTTON: **What are your feelings or views about (being in) the U.S.?**

NGUYEN: The U.S. is my home. I’ve lived here for over half my life. But my country [Vietnam] are my roots. I have built my home and you look forward to coming home.

For 32 years I have been blessed. I came to the U.S. with no money or understanding of the language or culture. I have learned so much from this country. Now I am here to stay and contribute to my community.

SUTTON: **What kind of connections do you have with the people and community in Vietnam?**

NGUYEN: I love to network and I have a group of friends in Vietnam; we try to help and serve people in need. My goal is to give information I have learned from the U.S. to my people so they can do better for themselves. I hope I can be a good learning tool, and give my strength and passion to the people in my country because the people are in poverty and are isolated from the outside world.



Survivor Voices

Making a Way Home (continued)

SUTTON: How do you think your experience as a refugee influences the work you do with other immigrant and refugee women?

NGUYEN: Because I am a refugee and I lived in a refugee camp in the U.S., I have worked with many immigrant communities. I know how these communities look. They have a strong voice, but many immigrant and refugee women don't have their voice heard. Like my father says, "You have that strength and you stand up for yourself and others" and that's what I'm doing [now]. That's what I'm also trying to do in Vietnam right now.

It's also about immigrant women. The only difference is immigrant women have a choice to come to the U.S. But many of them still don't have a voice.

SUTTON: How do you identify as a survivor?

NGUYEN: I'm able to talk as a survivor from the war, the refugee, and experience of working with immigrant and refugee communities. I also learn from other survivors of domestic and sexual violence and knowing the U.S. is my home and having a freedom and safe place to live.

SUTTON: Ho-Thanh, you went to Vietnam for several months in the winter of 2007-2008. Can tell me about the work you did?

NGUYEN: I worked with women and children on trafficking and HIV/AIDS issues, especially in the rural areas. I know many young children who have been sold and trafficked to different countries with promises that they will be in a good home and have a better education. But when they leave their parents, they are forced into labor if they are a boy, and, if they are a girl, they will be sold into service as a prostitute, even as young as 5 or 6 years-old. I know that many women have been sold as domestic workers, laborers in manufacturing, and mail-

order brides, all with promises of a good life and job to be able to support their parents or family in their home country.

SUTTON: What are your opinions about domestic violence programs and their work with refugee and/or immigrant women? What is working well? What can be improved?

NGUYEN: I have worked in domestic violence for a longtime and doing victim work while at the YWCA really opened my eyes that domestic violence happens very often across the board. But for refugee and immigrant women, it is very taboo in their communities. We need to do outreach – let them know they have people to help and support them, that there are many options available, and they don't have to be ashamed if they decide to leave the situation.

That's what I've been doing with my work, working with advocates on how to work with refugee and immigrant women effectively. Also, there is a real need for organizations to create programs, especially shelter and legal assistance, specifically for refugee and immigrant women.

As women, I know sometimes things are hard to achieve, complete, or even try. But if you have confidence, believe in yourself, and try to do your best, you will reach the goals or things that you have set forth. With all that said: Go for it! Believe in your self, stand-up, and speak out loud!

The Pennsylvania Immigrant and Refugee Women's Network (PAIRWN) is a grassroots community service organization dedicated to the well-being of immigrant and refugee women and their families. To learn more about PAIRWN, visit <http://www.pairwn.org>.



Survivor Voices

Remembering and Honoring the Path

by Clara G. Lindstrom, WOCN Mentor

Soy la bisnieta de Francisca Solorio y Matilde Rodríguez, la nieta de Maximina Valencia y Trinidad Cosió y la hija de Dolores Villagomez de Curimeo, Michoacán, Méjico. I am the great-granddaughter of Francisca Solorio and Matilde Rodríguez, the granddaughter of Maximina Valencia and Trinidad Cosió and the daughter of Dolores Villagomez from Curimeo, Michoacán, México.



I recently asked myself, what got me to the place where I am today? In order to answer such a question I would have to tell you about my Abuelita Maximina Valencia who is my maternal grandmother. I was born in a field under the New Moon where she was my partera (midwife). Her face was the first one I saw. She lifted me up to the New Moon and named me Clara. As a

young girl, I remember her talking to me while she cooked in our modest home and I played nearby. I always felt closely connected to her, the earth, and water.

Mi Abuelita was an inspiration throughout my life. When she came for a visit de Méjico, she would smile and ask me how I was doing in school. She told me to always do my best, to learn how to read and write in English, but to never forget mis raices (my roots) and especially my primary language, Español. She often told me that “It is good to get an education but never forget those that came before us, for it is them that we follow, and we teach those that follow us.”

Now as an elder in my community, I find myself remembering her influence on my life, which molded me as I grew into a mujer (woman). Even though she is now gone, she is still my greatest mentor, I still clearly hear her wise words and advise. Perhaps, you have such a person in your life.

In September 2007, I attended the **A Call to Men of Color: Ending Violence Against Women in our Communities Conference**, in collaboration with The Women of Color Network in New Orleans, LA. On the very first evening, women of color walked up to the front of the ballroom with a written call in their hands to present to the men. Then after each reading, the woman poured water into an earthen vessel. I was asked to read my own submission, which was “My feelings are that if it had not been for our ancestors and what they endured, we would not have today’s

opportunity to be present at this conference...they created the path...we just continued what they started. I want to thank the men in my life who took the time to listen to my story without blaming me for the violence directed towards me either as a child, youth, or adult.” Afterwards, men of color came to the front with their individual slip of paper with a written response, and read it to the group, then lit a candle.

On the second day, I spoke on the survivor’s panel. While I waited my turn to speak, I looked out across the audience and realized that most of those staring back were beautiful women and men of color faces. In almost 60 years of advocacy, activism and mentoring, this was the first time I witnessed women and men of color coming together to talk about how to end violence against women. This warmed my heart. I am thankful that my ancestors left me a path to follow which served me well as a survivor of child abuse, as a child witnessing domestic violence and child sexual abuse, and as a sexual assault survivor. Now, I am the matriarch of my family, an elder of my community, and a leader in my work.

Although my journey has been tough at times because of systems’ barriers, like the lack of Spanish interpreters, I come from a legacy of bold women who had the courage to create their own paths. They shared their stories of struggle with me over a cup of coffee and pan dulce (sweet bread), and showed their support of my work in the anti-violence movement by their comments like, “I am glad that you are helping Latina rape survivors; it is needed in our community.”

As a Latina, a sexual assault survivor, and an elder, I believe this gives me the driving force to talk about sexual assault so that other Latina survivors know they are not alone. I plan to continue this legacy by writing cuentos (stories) like this one for others to read.

Gracias.



Advocate Voices

Tolerance Can Be Seductive

by Kenya Fairley, WOCN Mentor

Kenya Fairley reveals how young women of color advocates - either by age or by experience in the field of violence against women - can remain empowered as they fulfill their purpose in the domestic violence movement.



Over the past few years of working in the domestic violence movement, I have witnessed the demographics of victims in need swell to include more women of color and immigrant women. Although more women from these populations are seeking help and relief from abuse, services are still being

provided along traditional models and methods to meet the needs of middle class white women.

As an advocate, young women of color such as myself are confronted with similar challenges that many women of color advocates have been faced with in the movement to end violence against women and at their programs' for years. We are struggling to advocate for culturally sensitive and inclusive service provision, while facing resistance and, oftentimes, modern acts of racism from our white counterparts. So how can we encourage women of color, particularly young women of color and those who may be new to this field, to hold on strong to their voices, their hopes, and their dreams of standing in solidarity with battered and abused women?

I thought of the myriad experiences that I've had in my life, and the perspectives I've gained since committing my life to working to end violence against women, and a few things came to mind. Living with abuse, both family and dating, taught me that having my own problems at home was no excuse for personal failure. Being an adult survivor of rape showed me that memories can live in thighs and backs...deep within our eyes, and trust me, no one ever wants to be the girl in the room that something like this has happened to. Thinking of the fact that I used to get into my car everyday to drive 50 minutes to an oppressive, toxic, hostile work environment helped me

understand that in working to empower others, you must never forget to save yourself.

I want to let young women of color advocates and activists know that tolerance can be very seductive. However, for women of color working to end violence against women, we must strive to not be seduced or deluded by tolerance. As a person dedicated to empowering women, it is not my desire to be merely tolerated. The goal for young women must be to remain focused on respectful acceptance, trust, and transparency. Only through welcoming inclusion can we truly begin to create and sustain equitable treatment for survivors and advocates.

We must learn to be intentional about when and where we enter this movement, and master the power created by using our own voice. Silence at times can seem to be a refuge, a place of comfort and safety, but in this movement, reclaiming our voice and compelling others to hear us is the most powerful and radical thing we can do. In her book *Surviving the Silence*, Charlotte Pierce-Baker wrote: "The way out is to tell: Speak of the acts perpetrated upon us, speak the atrocities, speak the injustices, speak the personal violations of the soul...Someone will listen, someone will believe our stories, someone will join us." As much as we are confronted with hostility and indifference to our truths as young women of color, we must widen our circle of love by creating our own support system of mentors and like-minded women who will honor and nurture the strengths we have within.

The beauty of this work is that there are multiple ways and numerous opportunities that we can serve women who have been victimized. While working as a children's counselor in a local program, I served battered women. Volunteering as a hospital responder for survivors of rape means I also served abused and victimized women. Writing policy and training child welfare social workers on the intersection of domestic violence and child maltreatment was in service to battered women. Educating legislators on the impact



Advocate Voices

Tolerance Can Be Seductive (continued)

of violence against women in our communities was a form of serving women.

When I am at the shelter, sitting and laughing with a woman as her children play, or giving out hugs as everyone comes in from a long day, or speaking to my staff about how to enhance services to battered women and their children, I am living my dream...and it feels good! Reflect on where you are right now in this movement: Are you living your dream? What must be remembered is that we all have the power to

choose. Choice is the most powerful tool that we all have at our disposal in insurmountable abundance. Once we carefully dissect and reassemble our situation, the choices available to us become clearer. In making and accepting the life decisions that must be made, we become more powerful. Owning and managing our power is the greatest challenge faced by young WOC in this movement today.

Own Your Power in Six Easy Steps

by Kenya Fairley, WOCN Mentor

1. Take a shower, touch up your make-up, put on your best shoes, and eat a light meal – Always look and feel your best; this is something easy you can do to give yourself an immediate, continuous sense of confidence. Furthermore, you are being prepared for great things so dress for the occasion!
2. Sit alone in a room and stare at the wall – It is essential to spend at least a few moments each day to meditate, pray, and just breathe; these few moments will carry you through several moments of uncertainty, confusion, and disbelief.
3. Become a champion: Champions always rise to the occasion – You've spoken your truth, now move strongly and confidently toward it. Life is meant to be embraced. Learn as much from the glorious, joyful, admirable moments of life as you do from the humiliating, unspeakable, degrading ones.
4. Make your work impeccable – Excellence doesn't lie. Choose your words with tact and intention, then allow the irrefutable quality of your work to do the rest.
5. Expect the worst case scenario...then plan for it – If you don't have a back up plan, realize that you have NO plan. Plans don't have to be flawless or 100% ready to detonate, but you must thoroughly think about what you would do should the worst case scenario happen, then have conversations with appropriate loved ones.
6. Expand your circle of love and surround yourself with mentors – As women of color, we were never meant to survive here so everyday we live is a victory. Celebrate and rejoice in it! Love aloud and make every day worth waking up to.



Advocate Voices

A Call to Action for Women of Color Advocates and Allies

Below is an excerpt from the Call to Action teleconference for women of color and allies, held on October 24, 2007. These calls along with calls for women of color only are a part of the WOCN "Training Without Walls" Teleconference Series.

CALL INTRODUCTION

I am Tonya Lovelace, Project Manager of WOCN, and joining me on the call is Angela Sutton, Project Coordinator. Welcome to the CALL TO ACTION FOR WOMEN OF COLOR ADVOCATES AND ALLIES.

This call is one of many that we have now had in talking about what WOCN calls "the endangerment of the woman of color advocate." This term is meant to specifically sound an alarm concerning the treatment of women of color in their programs. Due to calls from WOCN constituents, we put out the first Call to Response asking for personal accounts of the problem and for suggested solutions. We received and continue to receive an overwhelming amount of responses, most of which were published in our *Special Edition Update* posted April 20, 2007.

This treatment is often manifested in terms of less access to information, less opportunities for training and for promotions into upper management roles, little pay or no pay for serving as a translator as a part of your daily work, and so on. It also often results in women of color being targeted, monitored, hyper-attention paid to our comings and goings, being silenced in meetings, being labeled as too outspoken or not speaking enough. In our office, we see this eventually moving towards demotion, firing or the advocate leaving on bad terms.

Our concern is that this treatment seems to be all too common among women of color advocates. We are seeing more women actually leaving the movement as a result...this along with the ongoing impact that this is having upon our physical, mental, and spiritual health is why we use the term "endangerment".

To update you on the progress of THE CALL TO ACTION FOR WOMEN OF COLOR ADVOCATES AND ACTIVISTS ONLY – Our last call was pivotal in that we defined our collective as truly a "movement" and we are unified in the notion that:

- 1) Women of color within the violence against women movement are truly endangered or at risk of being endangered both by mainstream women and men, but also by other women and men of color;

- 2) We must not be silent on the issue or have the discussion only among those of us who are endangered because silence will not protect us;
- 3) It is key for those with varying levels of privilege to be pushed to acknowledge this and to use it in ways that will not serve to block but will embrace those who are targeted;
- 4) Both paradigm shift and concrete action are the only avenues to move away from rhetoric and truly make a difference.

Also in our discussions for women of color only, the concept of what an ally is has come up on a number of occasions. In some ways, it has come up within the context of ground rules or protocol, so to speak, with regard to this open-ended national discussion that we are having within this Call to Action.

Some women of color asked the question "How do folks get to determine whether or not they are themselves an ally? Can they label themselves that or does someone have to bestow upon them the title of ally? And if someone has accepted and embraced an ally by one person or a group of individuals, does that make them an ally to all others who are targeted?" The interest grew to a level of wanting to see an ongoing dialogue about this topic, not only to hear from those who are seeking to be allies what their definitions are about being an ally, but to also hear from women of color who have a stake in how those seeking to be allies define themselves.

Finally, we heard from some women of color that they are receiving some backlash for participating in the Call to Action by white colleagues, in part because we have calls for women of color only. We find it ironic that these calls are intended to address backlash and people are getting backlash because of their participation on these calls. When speaking of ally behavior, this is NOT an example of how this is supposed to work.

DEFINITIONS

We would like to open the floor for your own commentary on what ally behavior should look like, your thinking on it, your experiences with it, and to also hear from those who have felt let down by what was supposed to be ally behavior. Let me first give a few



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definitions and language that we hope can be used as a part of this discussion.

First, we have to define power, which is at the foundation of privilege. In this context we are defining power as “the ability to make choices or to influence outcomes.”

Secondly, we have to define privilege, which is primarily “a special entitlement or immunity granted by an authority to a restricted group, either by birth or on a conditional basis.” One does not have to work for this, ask for it, or understand it, or even recognize they have it. In fact, privilege seems to work best when one has not been pushed to see their privilege. This silent collusion is one that can be used by those who are more aware of their privilege and use it as a means to maintain it. Privilege can be attached to skin color, gender, race, ethnicity, place of origin, body, sexuality, and so on.

Within this particular call today, we are largely focusing on white privilege, which crosses over place of origin, body, sexuality, and class. This particular type of privilege is related to the advantages that those who are of European descent receive on a daily basis. It shows up in employment practices, in our schools, in our grocery stores and other forms of commerce, in the media, in law enforcement, in courts, and yes, in our violence against women programs.

We are now asking you to help define what an ally is. We will begin with a member of the collective who will share some of her ideas on this topic and we will then open the floor.

Points made during the call by women of color and participants seeking to be allies:

“Use of the term ‘ally’ may be a bit premature; it may be best to use a term such as ‘white woman working towards racial equality.’ In other words, it is better to name the process one is engaged in as opposed to assigning titles which gives the impression of having already reached the role of ‘ally.’”

“White people often express ‘discomfort’ about talking about race but they need to deal with it because it won’t go away. Programs need to make time for this discussion if they are committed – it needs to be discussed on a daily basis.”

“How are you defining ‘discomfort?’”

“‘Discomfort’ is clarified in this case to mean that they experience guilt, shame, etc. – emotions that do not amount to action. White people need to move past this – people of color don’t want to sit around and hear about their discomfort, especially when they have their own daily discomfort often caused by them.”

“There is a different ‘walk around experience’ for women of color than for white women. White women need to respect this difference and know that they may never truly understand what that experience is like. They should not have to fully ‘understand’ in order to participate in discussion and action...they need to move past this notion as well.”

“It is important for some people of color to be present when those aspiring to be allies are in discussion. This provides some checks and balances as well as some accountability for genuine discussion and of not backing off of the issues.”

“There are very few women of color executive directors of state coalitions – only about 5-6 – and they also need support in their leadership and in their efforts to effect lasting change within their coalitions. Some of them are making bold steps to drastically change the composition of their staff to include more women of color and some younger women who are not given an opportunity to have a voice in this movement.”

“State coalitions and other organizations should also consider bringing in a coach to move the staff and Board in a different direction, and although this may take money, it is worth the investment of time and resources to find the money and make it happen.”

“Many white women get offended when the subject of race comes up in which they take the topic as a personal affront and respond in defensiveness. They personalize it to a point where they reject the discussion and the topic as if they have been violated by the simple mention of ‘race.’ They need to understand that the topic is bigger than them – bigger than all of us – and they need to not resist.”

“Women of color also seem to be marginalized when it comes to technology; they are often not visible in tech training and safety discussions and tutorials. How can we, particularly those who are white and are tech staff and trainers, make sure that women of color are represented in these trainings?”



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"While women of color may be on the fringe of the tech dialogue and development, many of them are simply trying to 'make it' on a daily basis and are more focused on basic needs of even having a working computer and email in their programs...and keeping the lights on. They will be involved when it becomes a priority. Right now, for many, it isn't a priority!"

"We need to just deal with the reality that many white women are simply not interested in sharing power. They have been in their roles for many years and are not willing to engage in the kind of succession planning that would potentially fill their roles with women of color once they leave. They are resistant, even after ally and cultural competency training. This is where accountability needs to be re-evaluated and enacted in a way that affects these women who have created an 'ole' white women's club' and are 'squatting' in their positions of power."

"I am still trying to understand who labeled half of the people who call themselves allies as an 'ally'? Where is this coming from?"

"Before we can look at that, we need to look at the simple fact that there are more women of color dying from domestic violence, and the numbers for African American women are particularly disturbing. When does this fact become the focus of what we address?"

"As a white woman, I am aware that we can't self identify as an ally. I was always told by women of color that my ally status 'expires every day at midnight!' We must strive to work at it on a daily basis. And just because one person of color considers me an ally does not mean I am an ally to all people of color simply. It is always earned on an individual basis."

"As another white woman in this discussion, I can also say that I have done a lot of intensive work on white privilege and serving as an ally. I had to do very deep work, and went outside of the agency to do it. White women need to do this and need to keep up the work on a continuous basis."

"There should be some sort of credentialing that comes with becoming an 'ally.'"

"There are different expectations from some programs than others. A majority of programs operate as institutions and may not be doing the work at all. They are not necessarily

doing 'movement work.' Then there are those programs that are not operating as institutions, are committed to movement work, and have higher expectations from their staff on accountability and the standards would be higher there."

"I am glad to hear the voices of white women who are participating on the call. This is a show of commitment to the issue."

"One major issue - white women need to stop shopping for the opinions among women of color. They go from person to person until they come upon the one woman of color who may agree with them and they then use it divide and to build dissension among women of color. This is a tactic used primarily by those who call themselves 'allies'; this is an abuse of the role."

Since we are using the term endangered, we should liken this to the experience of endangered species and go about implementing all of the kinds of resources, time, and energy to end the 'poaching' of women of color."

CONCLUSION

In serving as a white ally, we are in fact asking individuals to look at their daily practices and behavior to either question, challenge, or use their white privilege to make more room for the presence and approaches of those who do not have white privilege, to change the perceptions of others with white privilege, and to take action which entails sharing power and acknowledging the power of others. We are asking the same of male allies.

We hope we have helped to push further a national dialogue on ally behavior. We intend to continue with these calls with women of color and allies and to not allow the dialogue to fall by the wayside.

We ask that white allies support the efforts of the woman of color collective and to be prepared to aid in ways that are directed and determined by the leadership of women of color.

Take care and again, thank you for answering the Call to Action.



WOCN: Serving Women of Color, Supporting National Initiatives

*In each newsletter, we will keep you posted on the national events that WOCN conducts and participates in.
(WOCN-sponsored and/or contracted events in purple)*

WOCN Timeline

May 2007

- ◆ WOCN presents Workshop “Layers of Multiplicity: Our Movement for Better or For Worse” during the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence Battered and Formerly Battered Women’s Institute in Orlando, Florida.
- ◆ WOCN co-facilitates Roundtable on Underserved Populations and participates on Communities of Color panel during the Domestic Violence Resource Network Meeting and Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma.
- ◆ WOCN Presents Workshop “The Power of Sex and Choice in Intimate Partner Violent Relationships” during SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective Second National Conference and 10th Anniversary Celebration in Chicago, Illinois.

June 2007

- ◆ WOCN attends National Network to End Domestic Violence Lobby Days in Washington, DC.
- ◆ WOCN conducts first WOCN Training Without Walls: Call to Action for Women of Color and Allies, and also the Call to Action for Women of Color Advocates and Activists National Teleconferences.
- ◆ WOCN attends Communicating for Change Taskforce Meeting sponsored by National Network to End Domestic Violence in Warwick, Rhode Island (attended by Alice Lynch, WOCN Lead Advisor).

July 2007

- ◆ WOCN conducts first Call to Action for National Communities of Color Organizations National Teleconference.
- ◆ WOCN presents Luncheon Keynote “Linking the Battered Women’s Movement to Victim’s Rights: A Lesson in ‘Treatment’” during the National Organization for Victims Assistance Conference in Reno, Nevada.

August 2007

- ◆ WOCN attends the U.S Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women Technical Assistance Providers Meeting in Washington, DC.

September 2007

- ◆ WOCN presents Workshop “Racism and Our Programs: Resisting the Endangerment of the Woman of Color Advocate” during the Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence Statewide Conference in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
- ◆ WOCN presents Workshop “Racism and Our Programs: Resisting the Endangerment of the Woman of Color Advocate” during the Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence Women of Color Caucus Retreat in Richmond, Virginia.
- ◆ WOCN attends the Healthy Marriage Initiative Roundtable in Boston, Massachusetts.
- ◆ WOCN attends Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council Advisory Meeting in Harrisburg, PA.
- ◆ WOCN collaborates with A Call to Men to offer ACTM’s 3rd Annual National Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana.

October 2007

- ◆ WOCN presents Keynote “Ending Violence Against Women: Our Movement...Past, Present and Future” and Workshop “Power and Privilege” during West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence Statewide Conference in Charleston, WV.
- ◆ WOCN attends the National Network to End Domestic Violence Gala in Washington, DC.
- ◆ WOCN presents Keynote “Ending Violence Against Women: Our Movement...Past, Present and Future” during the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence LIFT Graduation in Des Moines, Iowa.



WOCN Timeline (continued)

November 2007

- ◆ WOCN attends “Confronting Gender Violence: Advocacy and Activism in API Communities” conference hosted by the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence in San Francisco, California.
- ◆ WOCN presents “Racism and Our Programs: Resisting the Endangerment of the Woman of Color Advocate” during the National Network to End Domestic Violence Annual Roundtable in San Diego, California.

December 2007

- ◆ WOCN presents WOCN Overview and “Racism and Our Programs” for Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence Board in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
- ◆ WOCN attends the Domestic Violence Resource Network Policy Meeting in Washington, DC.

January 2008

- ◆ WOCN attends Transforming Communities Technical Assistance and Training Advisory Meeting in San Francisco, California.
- ◆ WOCN attends Technical Assistance Site Visit with Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community at Crescent House in New Orleans, Louisiana.
- ◆ WOCN attends Tour of New Orleans Hotels Forum in New Orleans, Louisiana.

March 2008

- ◆ WOCN attends Conference “From Emerging Dialogues to Social Transformation: Celebrating 10 Years of United Efforts and Looking Towards the Future” presented by The National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence (Alianza) in Atlanta, Georgia

April 2008

- ◆ WOCN presents “Introduction to Underserved Populations” to six counties across Pennsylvania in partnership with PCADV Legal Department.

May 2008

- ◆ WOCN presents Keynote “Ending Violence Against Women – Our Movement Past, Present, and Future” during the California Partnership to End Domestic Violence conference in conjunction with the Governor's Office on Emergency Services in Berkeley, California
- ◆ WOCN attends the DVRN Spring Meeting and Conference in Detroit, Michigan
- ◆ WOCN presents Workshops “Cross Section of Justice & Victim Advocacy” and “Intersection of Campus & Community” and participates on the United Negro College Fund Special Programs TV show “Keeping It Real” during the Project STOP NOW! Conference hosted by Tougaloo College on Violence Against Women in Nashville, Tennessee

June 2008

- ◆ WOCN conducts first Call To Action for Young Women of Color Advocates & Leadership Teleconference
- ◆ WOCN attends the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) Public Policy Forum and Lobby Day in Washington, DC

July 2008

- ◆ WOCN attends the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence 13th National Conference on Domestic Violence and 30th Anniversary Celebration: Building Grassroots Leadership for Social Justice in Washington, DC
- ◆ WOCN served as a panelist in workshop entitled “No Excuses”: Stop Violence Against Women during the National Organization for Women Conference in Washington, DC

August 2008

- ◆ WOCN hosted Enhancing Leadership & Impacting Communities: Leadership Institute for Advocates Serving Battered Women of Color, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women in New Orleans, Louisiana
- ◆ WOCN attends Safety Net's Technology Safety Training of Trainers v.6.0 hosted by the National Network to End Domestic Violence in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



Advisory Voices

A Message From WOCN Advisor Sumayya Coleman

My favorite African Proverb is “How can you expect a woman to climb to the top of the roof if you do not give her a ladder.” I also have a favorite painting by Kathleen Wilson of black women building a roof of a shack. The women’s strength and vibrant colors in the painting depicts my sentiments about the creativity and power of women of color and how we use our lean resources to build community networks.

I joined forces with WOCN in 1997, while struggling to develop Ujima House, Inc., a comprehensive domestic violence organization in Nashville, TN, which addressed the needs of African-American women and Latinas. The WOCN Mentor Training Program was the lifeline to help fulfill my vision and share my knowledge with others. Being connected to a nation of women of color through WOCN strengthened me and helped validate my cultural approaches to educate and organize the community to tackle domestic violence. I utilized the information and materials to actualize my goals and objectives to give women, children, and men in my community a safe comprehensive outlet, visibility, an environment for education and empowerment, and liberty to break the silence about and heal from violence in their lives.

When I began this work 19 years ago, linguistic and culturally-specific program needs and political concerns were a deferred dream. Since its inception, WOCN has introduced discussions about and approaches to dismantle institutional racism, discriminatory practices and influences as well as education and resources for women of color advocates. I support WOCN’s recent efforts to maintain strong networks to discuss racism and ally support.

As a WOCN advisor, I encourage radical, creative, tenacious, spirited women justice seekers for women and communities of color to join forces with WOCN. I know you will find a ladder; then it is up to you to use it.

Sumayya Coleman, Consultant

Share Time Wisely Consulting Services
WOCN Advisor



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