



Executive Summary: WOCN Call to Action and the Endangerment of the Woman of Color Advocate

The Women of Color Network has operated since 1997 providing leadership training, technical assistance and support to women of color advocates and activists working within and connected to the anti-violence against women movement. WOCN endeavors to broaden the boundaries of this movement, which currently is lead predominately by white women, by encouraging inclusion of the various cultures of women of color and providing access to resources and information maintained by the dominant culture.

Over the past 11 years, we have collected countless stories through national training, meetings and forums, and have received call after call from women of color who have either lost their jobs or are being pushed out of their programs. The shared experiences of these women of color, where they are, as WOCN coins, “endangered”, has lead us to try to more clearly assess the scope of this problem.

WOCN conducted a national survey in January and February 2007 with 232 women of color to get a sense of their experiences in their programs (survey data and synopsis to be released in 2009). However, another more immediate issue took precedence shortly thereafter.

On April 13, 2007, the WOCN office received several phone calls and email from members of the WOCN Advisory Group, Mentor Group and general membership asking that WOCN staff take action in response to the termination of a woman of color at a state coalition by upper management, and another woman of color, her direct supervisor, who chose to resign on the spot in a show of support. The number of calls in support of these women coupled with the severity of other concurrent workplace calls lead WOCN staff to immediately release the national correspondence entitled:

DOCUMENT: “A Call to Response: Rally to Support the Endangered Woman of Color Advocate”

That correspondence declared that the pushing of women of color out of their programs and potentially the movement as a whole has happened to “one too many” women of color. It stated that WOCN will no longer address the endangerment of the woman of color advocate in isolation - women of color and those aspiring to be allies MUST work together to uncover the problem and to seek solutions. The correspondence asked advocates to answer four questions related to what they are seeing regarding the endangerment of women of color advocates in their programs, their feelings about this issue, how they would define the problem, and any solutions that they would like to offer. The response was overwhelming and lead to the release of a 28-page document on April 20, 2008 entitled:

DOCUMENT: “Special Edition: WOCN Update #85 – National Response to the Call from WOCN: Collective Voices on the Endangered Woman of Color Advocate”

The Special Edition Update spawned a rigorous national dialogue addressing the experiences of women of color in programs and in the movement in ways that had never occurred before. WOCN then faced with the question “where do we go from here?” This very question sparked the first Call to Action teleconference implemented through the vehicle “WOCN Training Without Walls” teleconference series. The goal was to provide a national forum for women of color and allies alike to talk about women of color as a valued but endangered group within the movement, and to not only examine the problem of endangerment but to move forward with action. The initial teleconference led to a series of calls – one set of Call to Action calls with women of color only, and another set of Call to Action Calls with women of color and allies together. Out of those calls came two documents released in July 2008 entitled:

DOCUMENT: “National Women of Color Statement: Call to Action 2008 by Women of Color Advocates and Activists”

DOCUMENT: “National Ally Statement: Call to Action Statement 2008 by Those Aspiring to Be Allies to Women of Color Advocates and Activists”

The Call to Action teleconferences continue to occur several times a year with the intention to provide an organizing forum for women of color and for aspiring allies and to eventually make way for a national Call to Action conference.

ACCESSING THE CALL TO ACTION DOCUMENTS: The four documents listed above are available on the WOCN website and at the WOCN office. However, we want to ensure that these documents are utilized in productive ways to expand the boundaries of the anti-violence against women movement, to validate the experiences of women of color and to offer the strategic development of aspiring allies. Therefore, we welcome any requests for the materials via print mail, phone or email and reserve the right to determine their proper use.

The contact information is listed below:

Women of Color Network
3605 Vartan Way, Suite 101
Harrisburg, PA 17110
Phone: 800-537-2238
Email: wocn@pcadv.org