



The Vermont Women's Fund

Philanthropy Inspiring Vermont Women & Girls Since 1995

A Component Fund of the Vermont Community Foundation

Spring 2008

600%

Rise in the number of women in Vermont prisons and under the jurisdiction of the Corrections Department in the past decade.

88%

Amount of women in prison who have suffered from sexual and/or physical abuse.

2000

Average number of women on parole or probation in Vermont.

14%

Women who remain in jail because they have nowhere else to go.

Working Inside Projects in Vermont Prisons

The statistics may seem staggering.

But looking behind them it's not hard to find some of the most vulnerable members of our communities—women with little education, few job skills, spotty or nonexistent employment histories; women who carry the deep wounds of trauma and the effects of drugs and alcohol they use for escape; women who often lose the struggle to keep their children clothed, fed and housed. We see women who have hit bottom.

More importantly, however, we see women in transition, now ready and eager to turn their lives around. When these women get the help and support they need at this critical juncture, they have a better chance of getting their lives back on track, rebuilding their families, and moving from despair to hope.

That's why the VWF made a special effort in 2007 to fund programs focusing on the needs of incarcerated women. We discovered that the most effective projects were those that connect the women to the outside community while in prison and those that help them construct healthy, economically sound lives once they are released. With five grants from The Vermont Women's Fund, organizations including VSA Arts of Vermont, Girl Scout Council of Vermont, and Vermont Works for Women have all created distinct projects that are making a difference for dozens of incarcerated women.

VSA Arts of Vermont has brought a transformative theater project to the women in the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Windsor. Guided by the energetic and innovative Pati Hernandez, "Telling My Story" brings together inmates and students in Dartmouth's Women and Gender studies program to write and perform a play dramatizing the inner core of their life experiences. For eight weeks, the women and the students delve deeply into their pasts and reflect on circumstances that have brought them to their current situations. They use this material to write a play including song, dance, comedy and drama.

The project delivers hope, life-skills and a wealth of self-esteem to the women inmates and erases boundaries and stereotypes for the students who share their own life stories. The program culminates in a series of lively performances that bring friends, families and community members into the prison to join other inmates in the audience. At the end of each performance, inmates and students have the chance to present their very moving and surprisingly similar individual stories to the audience.

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80%

Incarcerated women who are mothers, with most having been the primary caregiver for the children they had to leave behind.

19%

Proportion of women in Vermont prisons—surpassing the national average—most of whom were sentenced for nonviolent crimes involving fraud, bad checks, and drugs.

51%

Female inmates who will end up back in jail at least once for parole violations.



The Vermont Women's Fund is dedicated to making grants that support the advancement, self-sufficiency, and economic & social equality of Vermont women and girls.

We encourage all women to be philanthropists and use their collective financial power to help shape Vermont's future.

We are a member of the international women's funding movement, with leadership provided by a diverse group of women from across the state.

Council Members

- Brenda Bisbee, North Fayston
- Cynthia Char, Montpelier
- Lisa Falcone, Hinesburg
- Abigail D. Faulkner, E. Montpelier
- Ann Fielder, Brattleboro
- Cheryl King Fischer, Montpelier
- Lauren Geiger Moye, St. Johnsbury
- Emma Mulvaney-Stanak, Burlington
- Susan Z. Ritz, Montpelier
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- Honorable Madeleine Kunin, Burlington
- Honorable Barbara Snelling, Shelburne

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Giving Together

By Susan Ritz—Council Chair



As chair of the Vermont Women's Fund for the past two years, I have often spoken about the collective power of giving as a way for even small donors to make a big impact. When we pool our resources by giving to the VWF, we are able to reach dozens of organizations and thousands of women and girls across the state. At the same time we become members of a community of philanthropists—a dedicated group of women and men who believe strong women equal strong communities.

Outside of my work for the Women's Fund, I have been lucky enough to experience this shared sense of giving with a very special circle of women. For the past four years, our philanthropy group has met monthly to discuss the ways we give, why we give and whom we give to. We share information about organizations and issues that interest us and sometimes invite representatives of local nonprofits to tell us about their work. Our circle has also become a safe place for us to share our thoughts on how we handle money and how it affects our relationships with our spouses, children, parents and friends. Over time we have developed a strong bond that supports each of us in ways we had never imagined when we began to meet. We have each expanded our vision and clarified our values concerning philanthropy. We have also encouraged each other to take risks, make bigger gifts and get more involved with the organizations we care about.

Our circle is not unique. All over the country, women (and men too!) are joining together to form donor circles. Some, like ours, focus primarily on shared information and individual giving. Others, called "giving circles" go further by encouraging members to pool their monthly dues to build a substantial fund that can be dispersed by the group at the end of the year to one or more organizations. It's a great way for small donors to have a big impact on their own communities or causes. Like the VWF, these groups celebrate the collective power of giving but on a more intimate level.

The Vermont Women's Fund is looking for women who might be interested in setting up their own donor or giving circles. In Burlington, Kristen Devoe-Talluto is ready to get a group going (see below) and we hope to hear from friends in other parts of the state who want to follow her lead. Please give us a call if you think shared philanthropy is for you. We'll be happy to help you get started!

Speaking of giving, now is the time we usually send out a spring appeal. This year, however, instead of loading your mailbox up with one more request, we are enclosing an envelope with our newsletter. Many of us reserve our annual gifts for the end of the year, when most nonprofits receive over 80% of their yearly budgets. But *spring is a perfect time to support the VWF or any of your favorite organizations!* It gives us some breathing room for planning and budgeting, and it can give you more time to enjoy the very busy holiday season. It might also help you increase your gift by dividing it into a spring and an end of the year donation. As always, your partnership is what makes our work for Vermont women and girls possible. Thank you! ♦

If you'd like to join Kristen Devoe-Talluto in forming a Burlington-area giving circle, please call her at 540-0104.

Women in Recovery—HEAR US ROAR!

By Sue Mason

Program Director, Turning Point Recovery Center of Bennington



On any given Monday at 5 pm at the Turning Point Recovery Center in Bennington, the ROAR of at least 16 women can be heard throughout the building—sometimes laughing, sometimes crying but always together in fellowship with their common goal: Recovery.

Little did we know when we developed the ROAR (Resources, Opportunity, and Recovery) project that we would exceed our goal. The initial proposal was to provide a weekly support group for women to address and discuss the unique challenges and barriers to recovery from substance abuse, eating disorders, trauma, etc. With the project being a new idea, we were unsure how it would work and if it would be successful. We quickly found a number of women interested and wanting to actively participate in the group. Our first few meetings held 6-8 women, but by the third or fourth week, we had over 20 women attending regularly!

Women report weekly how important it has been to be a part of ROAR... to feel a sense of safety, friendship, and bonding.

Though the proposed goals and objectives were important and feasible, we found that the group took on a life of its own and succeeded in strengthening women's bonds and support systems. There have been a number of women involved that have not participated fully in 12 Step programs in the past because of their former trauma issues as well as issues with other women and men. It is heartening to know many of these women are now attending those programs and are more actively engaged in their recovery. Women report weekly how important it has been to be a part of our ROAR group, to see their women friends at meetings, and to feel a sense of safety, friendship, and bonding.

One important aspect of the group has been the community meal which is provided each week. Many of these women have either lost their children to DCF custody, lost their families, their jobs and more importantly, their self-esteem. Many have poor nutrition, and some have eating disorders. To sit together and eat while sharing their feelings has had a profound therapeutic effect. Over time each woman volunteered to cook a meal for the group and this alone has given a boost to their self-

esteem and ability to be in community with other women; seeing them not as threats or enemies but allies in the struggle for recovery.

As newer group participants attend and listen to those that have been actively involved, they are learning what has worked and not worked for others in recovery. We also have women with long-term sobriety who are able to mentor and support the newer women their recovery. They even help each other by sharing guidance and feedback on social skills, presentation and personal care.

Recently a young woman who previously had sporadically attended, came to the group and cried the entire time. She could only get a few words out that "DCF has taken my two children and I don't know if I am going to get them back." It was touching to watch the other women bring her Kleenex, hug her, and bring her some homemade soup. We wonder where this young woman would be without the group.

As I write this, quite a few women have passed through the club on their way to meetings or errands; and the first thing I hear is, "are you going to ROAR?" or "see you later at ROAR" or "can't wait until tonight at women's ROAR." That's enough to let us know this project works, and we will be there too!

In 2007, Turning Point Recovery Center of Bennington received a \$10,000 grant from The Vermont Women's Fund for the ROAR program. For more information about this and other programs from Turning Point, please contact Sue Mason at 802.442.9700 or turningpointclub@comcast.net

VWF Events



The Boycott

Written & Performed by Kathryn Blume

Packed to the rafters with moxie and magic, *The Boycott* tells the story of the First Lady of the United States launching a nationwide sex strike to fight global warming and save the world!

Thanks to Kathryn's generosity, several performances of the show will benefit The Vermont Women's Fund:

- ∞ August 29–30, Bundy Center for the Arts, Waitsfield
- ∞ September, Twilight Theater, Lyndonville (date TBA)

For more information about *The Boycott* please visit www.theboycottplay.com. **See you at the show!**

Women Moving Millions

New Initiative Pushes Women's Philanthropy to \$1 Billion!

By Elayne Clift

The 19th century novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe claimed "women are the real architects of society." A century later anthropologist Margaret Mead said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Their words resonate for multitudes of women who give generously to support others and to foster social change.



"...women philanthropists are stepping up to fill the gap, alleviating poverty among women and focusing on social change that improves life for everyone."

Today women of high net worth are funding other women in record numbers and at unprecedented levels, according to the Women's Funding Network (WFN), a California-based umbrella organization for 125 women's funds on six continents. And, says the Network, "there's no shortage of sobering statistics that present a strong moral case for funding women." For example, worldwide, women constitute 70 percent of the absolute poor – those living on less than a dollar a day – and they comprise over 60 percent of people working in family enterprises without pay. In the U.S. in 2004, approximately 13% of women (more than 14 million) were living in poverty and 28% of households headed by single women were poor.

At the same time, women control more than 51% of personal wealth in the U.S. today and they are set to inherit trillions of dollars more as the World War II generation begins to transfer its wealth. According to the Chronicle of Philanthropy self-made women millionaires (those who earned rather than inherited their wealth) gave about 7% of their annual income in 2005, making them larger donors than their male counterparts.

While mainstream, male-dominated philanthropy still provides less than 7% of its grants to women and girls, women philanthropists are stepping up to fill the gap, alleviating poverty among women and focusing on social change that improves life for everyone.

This reality, coupled with women's growing financial clout led two sisters, Swanee Hunt and Helen LaKelly Hunt, to launch an initiative in November 2007 called "**Women Moving Millions**." Through a gift of \$10 million, the Hunt sisters catalyzed a partnership between donors and the WFN in which women giving at historically new levels will help propel the collective financial assets of women's foundations through the \$1 billion mark. This will be achieved by raising \$150 million in new gifts of a million dollars or more by April 2009.

"As women's control of wealth in the U.S. continues to rise, now is the time to raise the bar on women's philanthropy and direct greater resources to women and girls," says Helen LaKelly Hunt, founder of The Sister Fund and co-chair of Women Moving Millions.

"Over 80 percent of grants made by women's foundations flow to women and girls with low or no income," adds Christine Grumm, President and CEO of WFN. "Our work is showing that such a 'woman first' investment approach is the savviest way for donors to propel lasting community and social change."

By the year 2010 women are expected to control 60 per cent of the wealth in the U.S., an unprecedented milestone in women's empowerment. Calling Women Moving Millions a visionary partnership, the WFN says it is "inspired by this new path in philanthropy" which aims "to make the leap from giving charitably to investing strategically in women, first and foremost."

Elayne Clift, a former VWF Council member, writes about women, health, politics and social issues from Saxtons River, VT

For more information on this exciting initiative, visit www.womenmovingmillions.org



**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens
can change the world."**

Margaret Mead


It is almost impossible to tell the inmates and the students apart and it is clear that deep bonds have developed among all the participants.

The Girl Scout Council of Vermont's project *Girl Scouts Beyond Bars* is also dedicated to enhancing and nurturing essential bonds. Stated in 2003, the program gives girls ages four to 17 and their incarcerated mothers an opportunity to share time and activities together at the Windsor facility. According to CEO Sharon Baade, when moms sign up for Girl Scouts Beyond Bars, they complete leadership training, much like the training all Girl Scout Leaders go through, which is key to the program's success. Then, every three weeks volunteers travel across Vermont to where the girls live, pick them up, and transport them to the prison. There, they spend precious time with their mothers doing Girl Scout activities before once again traveling home. Last year, a grant from The Vermont Women's Fund enabled them to add a new component to the mother/daughter program called *Inside Stories*. The girls learned interview and video techniques and produced keepsake DVDs of their moms telling their unique stories. Maintaining these mother/daughter relationships is key to helping incarcerated women get their lives and families back together after release.

"We see women in transition... ready and eager to turn their lives around... moving from despair to hope."

Employment skills are another important element for women who need to restructure and resume their lives after serving time. **Vermont Works for Women (VWW)**, formerly Northern New England Trades Women, has been working with incarcerated women for over seven years. They have offered training in trades, computer skills and job readiness. Their award-winning modular home building project in Windsor prison facility coordinated the efforts of scores of public and private organizations to train over 50 women, giving them marketable skills they could use to find jobs upon release. Not only did the women involved in this project collectively receive over 1,557 days off their sentences, saving the state \$195,00, but it also kept most of them, (almost 80% as opposed to an average 49%), from re-offending and ending up back inside.

Based on their experience, VWW leaders began to ask what exactly was the relationship between women's employment and incarceration. With a two-year Strategic Partners Initiative award from The Vermont Women's Fund, they decided to find out the answer. The resulting study is the first conducted on this issue in the nation. Based on interviews with 77 incarcerated women, it explores women's pathways to prison, their past employment histories and attitudes towards work, their plans for the future, and the interventions they believe might prevent future criminal activity and encourage self-direction and independence. The study has been published regionally and presented at a national conference. It has also helped VWW design a transitional job program for 40 incarcerated women returning to Chittenden County. These women will receive training in the "soft skills" such as communication and problem solving before moving on to supported, structured transitional jobs. With Vermont Works for Women behind them, their chances of success are now much greater. They will serve as models for many women who follow them out the prison door and back into productive lives.

The Vermont Women's Fund is proud of the success of each of these projects as well as other related projects funded in 2007. They exemplify the excellent work done on behalf of women and girls across the state by our many partner organizations. 

Support Women and Girls with your Purchase of Cabot Cheese!



A powerful alliance between **Good Deed Foundation** and the **Women's Funding Network** enables consumers to combat poverty through a range of simple actions that will generate new and sustainable resources for women's funds. As a result, Good Deed Foundation will invest two-thirds of Good Deed revenues in programs that build women's financial assets, job opportunities, skills and entrepreneurship in the US and across the globe.

The Vermont Women's Fund would like to congratulate **Cabot Creamery** on being the first company to partner with Good Deed Foundation for their "Simple Consumer Actions" co-branding initiative! Purchasing Cabot cheese and butter with the [Good Deed logo](#) will not only generate funding for Good Deed but, equally important, it will also help attract other companies to participate in co-branding and be a part of this unique and powerful opportunity. This simple consumer action has the potential to raise major revenue in support of women and girls!

To learn more about Good Deed Foundation and their partnership with Cabot Creamery, visit www.gooddeedfoundation.org/products. For information on the Women's Funding Network, of which The Vermont Women's Fund is a member, go to www.wfnet.org.





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Re-defining Reality for Vermont Women & Girls

Celebrate the Collective Power of Philanthropy!

*Please consider making a
SPRINGTIME GIFT*

*to The Vermont Women's
Fund and join the women
and men from all walks
of life working to create
a stronger, more equitable Vermont!*



Use the enclosed envelope
or visit our website to make a secure,
on-line, tax-deductible donation:
www.vermontwomensfund.org

Thank you for your support!

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