
Women's Commission for Oakland County

Progress Report

Presented to the Oakland County
Board of Commissioners General
Government Committee
Monday November 29 2010

Women's Commission for Oakland County 2010 Progress Report

Since January of 2008, the Women's Commission for Oakland County has been charged with assessing the needs and status of women in Oakland County and reporting those findings to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

Testimony collected in our first Public Forum, held in May of 2008, has driven a busy and productive year for all four subcommittees: Economic Autonomy, chaired by Cheryl Fried; Health & Wellness, chaired by Dr. Doris Taylor; Leadership, chaired by Brenda Savage; and Women against Violence, chaired by Wanda Lohmeier.

In 2010 general meetings were held monthly, which is an increase from the quarterly schedule of 2009. This change was a result of discussion at the 2010 organizational meeting where the decision was made by the executive committee to recommend to incoming Women's Commissioners that we move forward with a monthly format for the public meetings. The intent was to give Women's Commissioners an opportunity to interact on a consistent basis with the full commission to foster improved communication within the group and then move to smaller issue committees to develop events and activities inspired by 2008 public forum testimony.

Following an organizational meeting in December 2009, officers were elected on January 21, 2010: Chair; Laurie Renchik, Vice-Chair; Cheryl Fried, Vice-Chair; Joscelyn Andrews, Recording Secretary; Sandra Adams, Corresponding Secretary; Doris Taylor, and Parliamentarian; Ann Erickson Gault. The Executive Committee focused on creating a set of policies and procedures that establish uniform standards for activities and events conducted under the auspices of the Women's Commission. In 2010, by-laws were updated to reflect the enabling resolution. New for 2010 was an orientation session presented at the March 2010 meeting with assistance from Debbie Macon of the Women Officials' Network.

The Women's Commission hosted speakers in October for Domestic Awareness Month and new this year we held a social event/picnic at Waterford Oaks Park in August. We have been pleased to welcome guests who have spoken during the public comment portion of our meetings about their activities and organizations. These connections broaden awareness of the Women's Commission and our mission in the community.

Articles about Women's Commission events and activities have appeared in the *Oakland County Legal News*, *The Oakland Press* and *Detroit News*, as well as Web sites for a variety of organizations. The Executive Committee has discussed forming a speakers' bureau consisting of a few members who will be trained to speak to community groups about the group's mission and activities.

On behalf of the Women's Commission, thank you for the opportunity to serve in 2010. As you will see from our committee reports, we have had a very productive year, and we look forward to accomplishing even more in 2011.

Laurie Renchik
Chair
Women's Commission for Oakland County

Economic Autonomy Committee – Progress Report 2010

Economic Autonomy

Committee Members

Chair: Joscelyn Andrews, Kristine Zrinyi, Cheryl Fried

Members: Patricia Thomas, Christina Kuo,

Members at Large: Kristen Bros, Debbie Macon

Mission Statement

The Economic Autonomy Committee (EAC) exists to:

- Assess the needs of women in Oakland County and report these needs to the Board of Commissioners, and
- Promote women's empowerment in economic autonomy

Activities and Accomplishments of 2010

1. The EAC provided data to the County Commissioners on the growing need for free tax preparation services for low-to-moderate income women, as well as the benefits of promoting tax preparation.
 - With the assistance of many County Commissioners, the EAC identified specific areas of need in the county and provided materials to specific locations, with easy access by the target market, which provided information on where and when tax services would be provided. The Accounting Aid Society (tax service provider) reported a 26% increase in the number of women served with a 45% increase in money returned to Oakland County via tax refunds.
2. In difficult economic times, many women look to themselves for employment and financial security. The committee determined a need for a central location for women entrepreneurs to access information about developing business plans, securing funding, locating real estate, and other issues pertinent to creating a successful small business in Oakland County.
 - The Committee developed an electronic Resource Guide for Women Entrepreneurs. The Resource Guide provides on-line resources targeting entrepreneurs in general and women entrepreneurs in particular as they conceive, develop, and execute their small business plans in Oakland County. The Resource Guide is available on the Oakland County Website.

Recommendations for 2011

With the completion of the Resource Guide the EAC would like to market this resource.

- Develop and send out press release
- Reach out to State Representatives as they often receive questions of this nature.
- Obtain permission from organizations listed in guide to have link to resource guide from their website.
- Contact Women's Organizations to provide link to guide on their website. Expand on partnership with Accounting Aid Society
- Identify potential sources where volunteer tax preparers can be recruited

Health and Wellness

Committee Members

Chair: Dr. Doris Taylor

Members: Carol Corbett, Mishelle Kennedy, Janet Leslie

Mission Statement

The 2010 mission of the Health and Wellness Committee of the Women's Commission for Oakland County is to assess the existence of county programs that address the issue of self-esteem in children ages birth through five years, with the knowledge that self-esteem is built within these formative years, and that a lack of self-esteem is at the root of many of the health and wellness issues that plague Oakland County women, including drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, depression, abusive relationships, and unplanned pregnancy.

Activities and Accomplishments of 2010

1. The Health and Wellness Committee found that most existing programs in Oakland County to address the issue of self-esteem are available to families only after the families are in crisis. Programs aimed at building self-esteem in girls are available, but typically only to school-aged children. There is little available to guide parents in building self-esteem during the formative years of birth to 5, when prevention, rather than treatment, can be the goal.
2. One program, **Great Parents, Great Start** offered through Oakland Schools, does offer guidance to parents of children from birth to age 5.
 - a. Great Parents, Great Start serves the families and caretakers of the 92,000 children in Oakland County aged from birth to five years. They are funded primarily through Oakland County Intermediate School District Funds and state grants. Their primary community outreach is through playgroups they conduct at public libraries throughout the county. They typically conduct seven 6-week playgroups at a time, with ten children in each group. Therefore, of the 92,000 children they serve, at any given time they are in contact with the families and caretakers of only 70 of them. Though they do have grant funds they could use for "systems issues," they do not anticipate funding which would allow them to conduct more of these playgroups than they currently conduct.

Recommendations for 2011

The Health and Wellness Committee suggests they work with Great Parents, Great Start to help them apply electronic technology to extend the reach of the playgroup program, perhaps using the available state grant money for "systems issues." We suggest working in concert with Great Parents, Great Start to determine the most efficient way of accomplishing this, which may include:

1. Developing playgroup leadership via podcast, which can be utilized by each Oakland County Public library,
2. Creating a volunteer program in each Oakland County Public library to receive playgroup instruction from and provide program feedback to Great Parents, Great Start via e-mail,
3. Marketing the program and its mission more effectively to increase participation.

Leadership Committee – Progress Report 2010

Leadership

Committee Members:

Chair Brenda Savage, Vice-Chair Beth Matter, Secretary Janice Daniels
Members: Ann Erickson-Gault, Joni Hubred-Golden, Leslie Thompson
Volunteer Member: Erica Brehmer

Purpose:

The purpose of the Women's Commission for Oakland County as stated in the Oakland County Board of Commissioners' founding resolution is to survey the status and needs of women in our community, which is Oakland County.

Activities and Accomplishments of 2010

Leadership Committee Project: (Leadership Seminar)

- Unanimously approved by resolution of the Women's Commission, and then by the Board of Commissioner's General Government Committee to plan and host a Leadership Seminar. Said seminar was offered as an assist to improve quality of life issues.
- The Oakland County Department of Planning and Economic Development provided data regarding the percent of Oakland County residents who are economically disadvantaged from the most recent records, which are 2008, but said data was unable to reflect the still more negative impact of job loss, home loss in 2010.
- Data was collected through surveys at the conclusion of the project and may be collected six-months later, from participants who were willing to be contacted for such purposes.
- On October 18, 2010 the Leadership Seminar was successfully completed: free of charge to 37 Oakland County residents at the Executive Office Building by two Leadership professionals who contributed their services. One of the presentations was Personal Leadership – The 5 Practices of Exemplary Leadership. The other presentation was Professional Leadership – The 7 Most Valuable Traits Employers Are Looking For.
- Two participants gained employment on Friday, October 22, 2010; both credited the seminar for providing a positive outcome.
- Project came in under budget: Lunch and supplies were provided to all participants.

Women against Violence Committee – Progress Report 2010

Women Against Violence

Committee Members

Commissioner Wanda Lohmeier- Chair
Commissioner Rebecca Clark – Vice Chair
Commissioner Sandy Adams – Secretary
Commissioner Cheryl Verbeke

Commissioner Sandra Hanna
Commissioner Sunsaria Baldwin
Commissioner Jeanne Towar
Zenell Brown – Member at Large

Mission Statement

The Women against Violence mission is to study violence in homes, schools and communities and promote education, investigation, and enforcement of the laws to facilitate the decrease of violence.

Activities and Accomplishments

In 2008, WAV members attended fundraisers and various group meetings, toured HAVEN facilities, met with legislative, school and political officials, and promoted an open forum with over forty speakers. In 2009 they partnered in an educational pilot project in the City of Southfield and hosted an open meeting which posed the question, *“Is the Legal System Working?”* Speakers invited were professionals and members of the public. They spoke on issues of abuse, divorce, and custody.

In 2010, an executive summary entitled *“Is the Legal System Working”* was completed containing: minutes of the June 3 open meeting with an accompanying DVD, biographies of the speakers and copies of their speeches. The committee also reviewed activities and information from the prior two years. It became clear the cycle of violence begins and continues with learned behavior in children. Children of abuse and violence have or develop deep rooted problems that follow them into adulthood. Society and the legal system are ignoring this phenomenon, therefore failing to protect victims and enabling the cycle to continue.

Recommendations for 2011

For most women, children are the foundation of their lives. The issue of domestic violence and abuse cannot be addressed without bringing children to the forefront for prevention and treatment. This year’s project was to complete a report on our findings in the area of domestic violence; its cycle, patterns, society’s attitude, and the legal system’s willingness and ability to identify and address domestic violence. The report entitled, *“Identifying and Addressing the Patterns and Cycles of Domestic Violence”* is the result of this three year study and is an assessment of the critical issues, not only to the women of Oakland County, but to all citizens.

The report includes an action plan for change – Goals for 2011 (see appendix a).

Each of us, that have the ability to contribute to the solution of a problem, has the responsibility to act!

Appendix A: Women against Violence

A Plan for Change – Goals for the Year 2011

The Women against Violence committees realized that it has an ongoing role to play. It needs to help decrease domestic violence and abuse by fostering educational and training programs for professionals accountable by continuing to partner with interested agencies like HAVEN, Mom and Dad's of Michigan, Oakland County Coordinating Council against Domestic Violence and other private and public partners.

The following are a list of goals:

- 1- Develop a "NO TOLERANCE" policy for domestic violence and abuse, regardless of sex.
- 2- Develop an annual seminar to educate the legal community on the cycles and patterns of domestic violence and abuse.
- 3- Replace the public poster project with an educational poster on the cycles and patterns of domestic violence and abuse.
- 4- Develop a seminar for the public on:
 - procedures on filing grievances with the Friend of the Court Citizen's Advisory Committee and the State Court Administration Office
 - provide for the availability of legal aid
 - present the procedures for representing one's self
 - present how to file a personal protection order
- 5- Develop an age appropriate, educational program for all students on domestic violence and abuse and a program educating teachers and counselors
- 6- Develop a system of monitoring the court's activities and accountability, then report to the Board of Commissioners on its activity.
- 7- Propose the Oakland County Board of Commissioners request that the legal system revisit their attitudes, commitment, policy and procedures, and training with a fresh, new vision at decreasing domestic violence and abuse.
- 8- Apply for a federal grant through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for the Office of Justice Programs in the United States Department of Justice for the purpose of supplying counseling for children.

The above goals are to be developed with purpose, criteria, and assessment. Each proposal will be submitted individually to the Board of Commissioners for approval and support prior to implementation.