

# A Look Through The Gender Lens

## Summary Report to the Commission on the Status of Women on the CEDAW Initiative in Santa Clara County

June 2007



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AIDS Interfaith Resources Network	Kids in Common
American Assoc. of Univ. Women	Korean American Senior Citizens League
Asian American Recovery Services	Latina Coalition of Silicon Valley
Asian Law Alliance	Low Income Self Help Center
AWWA	MACSA
Banducci Consulting	NAACP Youth Council
Bay Area Breast Cancer Network	Next Door Solutions to Domestic Violence
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California NOW	Office of the District Attorney
Californians for Justice	Older Women’s League
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Coalition for a Downtown Hospital	Advocacy Consortium
Community Diabetes Project	Santa Clara County Domestic Violence
Community Health Awareness Council	Advocacy Consortium
Community Health Partnership	Senior Adult Legal Assistance
Community Solutions	Senior Care Commission
Council on Aging in Silicon Valley	Senior Adult Legal Assistance
CREST	Senior Care Commission
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Elder Abuse Task Force	Support Network for Battered Women
Emerge California	The Ripple Effect
EMQ	United Way of Silicon Valley
Family Planning/Reproductive Health Services	Victim Witness Assistance Center
Federation of Retired Union Members	Wells Fargo
First Five	Women’s Action Network
Fresh Lifelines for Youth	Women’s Economic Agenda Project
Gardener Family Health Network	Women’s Initiative for Self Employment
Girl Scouts of SCC	Working Partnerships USA
Girls for a Change	YWCA of Silicon Valley
Global Women’s Leadership Network	

## What is CEDAW?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a treaty that has served as the legal touchstone for over two decades of work to secure women's rights globally. The Convention remains the most solid global tool in the work for true gender equality in the home, the community, and society.

It systematically addresses the need to alter the fundamental social and cultural patterns that perpetuate discrimination and it extends to all sources of discrimination, whether they stem from a person, an organization or a society itself. Women are still significantly under-represented in public life. Women still suffer from violence, sexual harassment, unequal pay and a host of other inequities.

The challenges facing women today are significant but much can be done. CEDAW provides a basic framework to address disparity and discrimination of all women and outlines the important role that governments play in helping to end this discrimination. While different issues for women and girls exist in our community, many of these issues are interrelated. In order to make gains in one area, progress may also be needed in other areas so there is a need for advocates to seek out and form new, strategic alliances in order to increase the effectiveness of their efforts.

## The CEDAW Initiative in Santa Clara County

In May of 2005, the Commission on the Status of Women informed the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors about the need for a stronger, tangible commitment to women's equality. Our elected leaders responded and passed a resolution affirming the principles of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and directing the Commission on the Status of Women to convene a CEDAW Task Force, provide community wide education about CEDAW, and explore a local CEDAW ordinance.

The Commission, in partnership with the Office of Women's Policy, recruited the initial members of the CEDAW Task Force and planning for this effort commenced. During FY 2006-2007, the CEDAW Task Force brought together community leaders to engage in dialogue about discrimination and disparity that exists for women and girls today.

The CEDAW Initiative was launched and meetings were held to develop the mission and goals of the group and determine the scope of work. An educational presentation and materials were developed. The group identified a process to collect information on discrimination and disparity of women and girls in our county through convening community strategy sessions. Nine key areas were explored: political participation and leadership, economics, health, older women, girls, violence, media, housing and education. Local experts in these areas were brought together to learn about CEDAW and to provide their observations about the effects of discrimination and disparity of women in their respective areas.

This report provides information directly from service providers and advocates about how the effects of discrimination surface in specific issue areas and the barriers which women continue to experience. Included in this report are specific actions that can be taken by communities and decision-makers with a sincere commitment to eliminating discrimination and disparity of women and girls in Santa Clara County.

## Economics

Women have a right to economic independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources. Women must be afforded equal opportunity to information and education to build capacity to manage their personal finances and make investments that will lead to self-sufficiency and secure retirement.

### What does the problem look like?

- California's median income for men in 2004 was \$42,626, while women's income was \$36,133. (American Community Survey, 2005)
- While 80% of women in Silicon Valley were employed full-time, of the 12 fastest-growing occupations, women hold 61% of low-income jobs (average pay \$22,000) and only 29% of high-income jobs (average pay \$72,000) in the region. (Community Foundation of Silicon Valley, 2001)
- In 2000, unemployment rates for U.S. women were higher than those of males in every major ethnic group. (U.S. Census, 2000)
- In Silicon Valley, for every 100 shares of stock options owned by a man, only one share is owned by a woman. (Women's Learning Partnership, 2007)
- Forty-five percent of female heads of households with children fall below the self-sufficiency standards. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2006)
- A single mother with two children needs to earn at least \$34.36 per hour just to provide basic needs such as food, shelter and childcare. (Wider Opportunities for Women, 2003)

### Local Observations

Dialogue among this group of local experts centered on women's experiences in the workplace. Equal and comparable pay issues were noted, as was the fact that women are at the lowest earning levels. The group also observed that women bear the primary responsibility for dealing with family issues and that this isn't considered in the workplace. Women must continue to take time off for doctor's appointments for children, to attend school meetings, etc. The group felt there is a need for workplace initiatives that encourage support and mentorship for women in the workplace (which must be initiated by employers). Silicon Valley culture and the workplace are male-centered and women's leadership style (which is collaborative) is often perceived as indecisive or weak (and this works against women). There is also a need to look at how local systems (including Family Court or Domestic Violence) also are not sensitive to the needs of women (e.g. women bear the responsibility for child safety in domestic violence cases even when it's the batterer who is the problem; penalties against women are often unrealistic and set women up for failure).

### Needed Action

- Need more gender sensitivity in the judiciary (e.g. women who are ex-offenders who have had their children taken away)
- Increase shelters for women to keep them safe while they get on their feet
- Need to promote workplace rights and the law (e.g. it is illegal to tell an employee not to talk about her wages)
- Need to create support and services for substance abusers in recovery as they re-enter the workforce
- Promote strategies for how to change the workplace to better support women's needs and to eliminate discrimination (including engaging women in those efforts)
- Need to improve private sector practices and initiatives to accommodate the needs of women at work and eliminate discrimination by promoting best practices for doing so
- Use juvenile justice system as a place to target girls for self-esteem building and preparing for self-sufficiency

## Political Participation and Leadership

Women have a right to equal access and opportunity to develop their capacity to effectively participate in power structures, decision-making and leadership. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social and political status is essential to transparent and accountable government and administration, as well as sustainable development in all areas of life.

### What does the problem look like?

- During the November 2006 elections, the California Congressional Delegation saw all 19 women incumbents re-elected, but no additional seats for women were gained, keeping the overall percentage of female representation at 36%. (California Elected Women's Association, 2006)
- 8 states have NEVER elected a woman to the US House of Representatives: Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, Iowa, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Dakota and Vermont. (Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling, 2006)
- Out of 435 House districts, more than 150 are unlikely to elect a woman from either party any time soon. (Breaking the Political Glass Ceiling, 2006)
- Women vote at higher rates than men since 1980. In 2000, 56.2% of registered women voters went to the polls, compared to 53.1% of men. Yet of the total number of governors of U.S. states, only 9 are women. (Center for American Women and Politics, 2006)

### Local Observations

There are a variety of ways to look at the issue of Political Participation. It was observed that as of March 2006, the U.S. ranks 69<sup>th</sup> in the world in terms of women's representation in national legislatures or parliaments out 187 countries. It was also noted that women leaders initiate legislation that benefit women – as exemplified locally by Assemblywoman Sally Lieber's bill efforts to improve conditions for incarcerated women and Assemblywoman Rebecca Cohn legislation on domestic violence. The barriers identified the habitual stereotyping of women because of dress, age, race, sexual orientation, and income level. Further, gender differences in communication styles and ideas about what constitutes leadership add to the barriers women face when they try to enter the political arena. Double standards exist where public service is also linked with funding levels of candidates and those with greater funding have greater access.

### Needed Action

- More training is needed for women to get into leadership roles
- County government must ensure diversity on committees, commissions and councils
- There must be pro-active outreach for open political positions
- Develop more collaborative efforts with young people to fill the pipelines of leadership for the future
- Need to continue educating other organizations about CEDAW and how it can unify and increase the effectiveness of individual and collective advocacy and action
- Need to build coalition to support women in office with a specific goal to increase the number of women in office (and show women as agents of change)
- Work with local, state and national decision-makers to pass CEDAW legislation

# Health

Women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical, emotional and mental health. The enjoyment of this right is vital to their life and well-being and their ability to participate in all areas of public and private life. Women must have access to safe, affordable quality healthcare, including family planning services.

## What does the problem look like?

- In Santa Clara, there was a 70% increase in the proportion of HIV cases attributed to heterosexual exposure since 2000. (SCC Public Health Dept., 2004)
- Breast cancer is still the most common form of cancer among women in the U.S., (SCC Public Health Dept., 2004)
- After a first heart attack, women are less likely than men to receive diagnostic and therapeutic procedures and cardiac rehabilitation and more likely to die or have a second heart attack. (American Heart Association, 2002)
- 1.7 million California non-elderly women - 17% -- were uninsured in 2001 at the time of the survey. Over one-third of uninsured women lack a place where they receive regular care. (California Health Interview Survey, 2001)
- One in four women at risk of unplanned pregnancy does not use birth control in a consistent manner or do not use it at all. (Guttmacher Institute, 2007)

## Local Observations

Important issues that surfaced included insurance coverage, teen pregnancy, research, issues around wellness, and issues of access and affordability of healthy foods. Vulnerable populations such as lesbians, teens, inmates and Latinos were identified as examples of discrimination were shared. There was consensus that solutions abound by providing the community with culturally proficient, gender-responsive, credible education campaigns and accessible, affordable screenings and insurance. Economics contribute to women's health, taking more from a "social justice" point of view in terms of how a woman's current economic status affects her general health. Other impact on women's health includes the nature of work she does (stressful, rigorous, physically demanding, needing to work multiple jobs), the total wage she receives, and whether she has other means of income. There are questions about whether economic factors allow women to meet their daily nutrient needs or whether she also has time to rest and "rejuvenate" (for her mental health well being).

## Needed Action

- Many solutions centered around education: Change can come through culturally proficient, gender responsive, and credible education campaigns that address not just individual agency or institutions but environment as well (ensuring efforts are County based & systemic)
  - Reframe the approach to HIV testing process
  - Look at cervical cancer campaign/HPV testing
  - Look to universal HIV testing (and ensure it is confidential and covered by insurance)
  - Reframe the approach to testing babies & treating mothers
- Avoid patchwork approach; take environmental preventive approach to issues (ex: zoning of fast food places near schools is a county issue & a public health issue; look at NYC ban of trans-fats)
- Access to reproductive care, including specific targets to LGBT community, are needed
- Funding requirement should be tied to collecting accurate data
- Men's insurance has a responsibility to pay for birth control for female partner
- Look to Oregon's laws to include dental care for pregnant women
- Provide affordable mammography screening for women in community clinics
- Re-open school clinics to provide greater access to reproductive health services

## Older Women

Women have the right to participate fully in power structures and decision-making, regardless of their stage of life. The specific needs and circumstances of women later in life, such as interrupting their careers to assume caretaker responsibilities for an older parent or spouse or family members who become ill, must be fully considered and accommodated so that their needs and future self-sufficiency are not compromised.

### What does the problem look like?

- During 2001, Adult Protective Services in Santa Clara County received a total of 1825 reports of alleged abuse or elders and dependent adults (SCC Community Profile on Violence, 2003)
- Women age 65 and above were 61% more likely than elderly men to be in poverty. (National Organization for Women, 2003)
- In California, as in the rest of the country, women live an average of seven years longer than men. Fifty million American women will hit mid-life by the millennium. The effect of this longevity is a disproportionate number of women - which increases with age - so that, as we age, Social Security, senior housing, Medicare/medical issues, and other senior issues become increasingly "women's issues". (Congress of California Seniors, 2007)
- In 2004 the median income for senior women was \$12,080, compared to \$21,102 for men. (Women's E-News, 2007)

### Local Observations

The standard local definition of "older women" is ages 50 yrs. and older. Benefits and resources are often not accessible to older women (they don't know about them or they can't get to them). There is an overall lack of health care (many not old enough to qualify for Medi-CAL but begin experiencing health issues as they age). There is also a lack of mental health services. There are mixed opinions about current levels of service. There is a great potential for abuse as many older women become more isolated. The home health care industry needs to be more closely monitored and complaints must be investigated effectively. Many women as they get older can still work, but sometimes have to leave to care for elderly parents or sick family members. When women leave the work force for an extended period of time it is harder to get back in. They experience difficulty keeping up their skills and education. Women who can only work part-time often lack any benefits and struggle with health care and building retirement. Affordable housing and rent control are important issues for older women. Some groups of women, such as women of color and lesbian women, face greater discrimination and disparity.

### Needed Action

- We need stronger enforcement of labor laws that protect older women
- Unions can play a role in protecting the needs of older female workers, especially in the high-tech industry.
- County needs to lobby specifically for federal/state funding that would provide essential services for older women
- County needs to provide more education, advocacy and outreach and better publicize its services for older women. They should make an effort to utilize existing community based agencies that can more effectively reach out to older women (not just hire more County workers)
  - County should play a role in continuing to build strong coalitions and better connect women's groups
  - County should make requirements of contractors to provide better benefits for both the full and part time workers in their companies
  - County needs to establish a one-stop center for women to access services for older women that would provide a safe, welcoming place and better ensure access
  - We need to shift public perception and see older women as assets and offer greater

# Girls

Girls have a right to participate actively, effectively and equally with boys at all levels of social, economic, political and cultural leadership. Girls must have an environment that is free from negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls and full access to educational opportunities and information for their mental, emotional and physical well-being.

## What does the problem look like?

- In Santa Clara County, the rates of child abuse involving female children were higher for sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and general neglect than for male children (SCC Community Profile on Violence, 2003)
- 125 million children worldwide have never attended school. Two-thirds of these are girls. (OxFam UK, 2002)
- 24% of Hispanic girls in the U.S. get pregnant, which is the highest pregnancy rate of any of their peers. Other statistics show this rate at 51%. (Girl Scouts of America,
- 1 in 5 high school girls has been physically or sexually abused by a dating partner (Journal of the American Medical Association, 2001).
- In the year 2000, a quarter of California's misdemeanor and 17% of its felony arrests were young women. (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2007)

## Local Observations

Overwhelmingly, girls are pressured to look and act a certain way, by family, society and in the media. This contributes to low-self esteem and sometimes results in eating disorders. Lowered self-esteem also puts girls at risk for being in unhealthy and abusive relationships. Providers see many instances of girls as young as 13 yrs. in relationships with males as old as thirty. Sometimes the family supports this because of the financial support given by the males to the family. Providers also report that many girls are victims of abuse and violence at home and there is little familial support to help them. They are often not believed or become ostracized when they speak out. Many girls run away to escape the violence. There is an overall lack of knowledge about reproductive health and how to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Many parents find it difficult to address the various needs of girls and often need help mending the relationship with their children. Many of the programs available to teens are not gender-responsive (e.g. lack of same sex support groups). Lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth often face an even greater lack of support and are often the target of harassment and violence. Youth who are in state custody (foster care and juvenile justice system) are often made to feel different and are physically isolated and overlooked. It was observed that sex work among girls is common and they often engage in this activity to help support their families.

## Needed Action

- We need programming for girls that is gender-responsive and effectively meets the unique needs of girls
- We must ensure equity in funds for programming targeting boys and girls
- We need to continue to look at Title IX enforcement for all women (but especially girls)
- Programs targeting alternative audiences (non-girls) are needed
  - Programs that target parents, give them tools to deal with the issues girls are facing, give them tools to raise their boys to have respect for girls
  - Create programs targeting boys and men that help combat sexual violence and abuse.
- We must continue looking for opportunities, programs and supports so that girls can succeed
  - Programs that give girls direct access to their options for school, reproductive health, abuse, independence and relationships.
  - Offer more one-stop programming

# Violence

Women have a right to live free from all forms of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Unequal power relations between men and women have led to domination over and discrimination against women. The harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices and acts of extremism linked to race, sex, language or religion that perpetuate the lower status accorded to women in society must be eliminated.

## What does the problem look like?

- It is estimated that 85-95% of all domestic violence victims are female. (American Institute on Domestic Violence, 2001)
- Slightly more than 40% of California women experienced intimate partner physical domestic violence in their lifetime. (Women's Health, 2003)
- For female victims, 59% of aggravated assaults were committed by an intimate partner, other relative, friend, or acquaintance. This is different from men who are most often victimized by strangers. (SCC Community Profile on Violence, 2003)
- Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury to women. (American Institute on Domestic Violence, 2001)
- As in heterosexual relationships, LGBT domestic violence occurs in approximately 20-25% of all couples. (California Report on LGBT Domestic Violence, 2002)
- In 2006, Santa Clara County's five domestic violence agencies received a total of 33,142 hotline calls. (Domestic Violence Advocacy Consortium, 2007)

## Local Observations

There is an overall recognition of the fact that domestic violence victims are mostly women, but the subtle societal bias against women also causes it to be viewed as a "boutique issue" or somehow not as serious of a crime. There are key philosophical differences between domestic violence stakeholders which stems from conflicting mandates. Some agencies hold child safety as the highest concern. Some hold victim rights as the priority. Others hold public safety or justice as the main issue. Dialogue and collaboration about this community violence issue is often charged, given the seriousness the issue and its impact on families. There is a need to educate decision-makers, their staff and advisors about the nature of this work and its true cost to the community. Sexual assault and rape are still glamorized in the media and overall there is victim blaming happening. The group agreed that domestic violence is was one of the last things to get funded and among the first things to get cut in government services.

The needs of victims are considerable. There is often no representative for the victim in family law proceedings. Victims often shoulder the burden of providing care for their children and lack the support to do this (quality child care, transportation, health insurance, etc.) More needs to be done to provide health, substance abuse and mental health services for these victims. Also, there is a lack of support for women trying to leave a violent and abusive situation. Some victims face increased burden, such as immigrant women who are even more isolated and women whose status and financial security is dependent on the spouse. These women find it much harder to report violence when it happens. Providers also noted a trend in increased reports of victims also being arrested for domestic violence that are actually victims (referred to as "victim defendants").

## Needed Action

- County needs to increase funding for prevention, direct services, education
- Need to increase the numbers of women entering law enforcement

- Need to increase the length of time victims can stay in shelter and transitional housing services (mostly limited to 30-45 days but need more time to stabilize)
- Need easy, accessible health clinics to address issues related to isolation (easier and more practical to talk to an RN sometimes). Women are on the waiting list for health; look to models where local clinics address health issues but also build relationships and help women deal w/DV
- Funding for family care options throughout the area; Valley Med is the County facility (but transportation is an issue for women, such as women coming from S. County)
- Need better data collection on individuals seeking shelter and how many are served or turned away (and why)
- Decision-makers should explore different sources of funding for domestic violence housing and services (e.g. tax credit funding and raising fees for government services) and provide permanent affordable housing for survivors.
- Need to look at the specific housing issues for victims of domestic violence, including partial eviction for batterers and removing evictions from rental history of victims that had to flee their homes and go into shelters (victims often not aware of the eviction)

# Media

Women have a right to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication. Individuals and groups in media must work to provide a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women.

## What does the problem look like?

- Women have been the majority of college journalism majors since 1977, yet remain heavily under-represented in media (Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, 2003)
- At the major TV networks (ABC, CBS, NBC) in 2004, women correspondents reported just 25% of news stories – the same ratio as the preceding three years (Center for Media and Public Affairs, 2005)
- Bylines in the nation's top intellectual and political magazines are heavily male. In an analysis of 11 magazines published between October 2003 and May 2005, male-to-female byline ratios ranged from 13-1 at the National Review to 7-1 at Harper's and The Weekly Standard to 2-1 at the Columbia Journalism Review. (Columbia Journalism Review, July-August 2005)
- A 2007 Report from the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls shows that sexualization of girls in the media has negative effects in a variety of domains, including cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, sexuality, and attitudes and beliefs that could influence girls' well-being.

## Local observations

Women are often portrayed in extremes, including women as weak and disempowered or overly aggressive and dominating. Stories about women are often sensationalized, ranging from the emotional woman (tear-jerker) to dominating or humorous women. There is a tendency to highlight showy, glitzy stories but real-life stories of women are limited (impact made my women locally isn't considered newsworthy). There is widespread sexualization of women and girls in television shows, music videos, print ads, the internet and billboards and young girls are not exempt from this.

Morning shows overall do not have many female hosts and much of television programming targets males. While information about events and activities about and for women are sent to local media, these are frequently not picked up and media. Approximately one-third of magazine articles are written by women and those are mostly non-analytical. In 2003, the NY Time's coverage of the possible war in Iraq for one week featured 60 articles by men and only 5 by women. The few written by women were more "forward thinking" and focused on the economic impacts on the U.S., the cultural destruction of Iraq, effect on stock markets, potential numbers of women and children who would be killed, etc. Editorial boards in general have about a 1:10 ration of women to men.

Societal attitudes toward the bias and negative portrayal of women are troubling. A true understanding of the discrimination and bias of women in media has not been achieved, largely because there is an overall lack of awareness and because society has "normalized" such disparity.

## Needed Action

- We should seek out and utilize media organizations already mostly comprised of women
- We need community liaisons to the media (should increase the numbers of women on advisory bodies and editorial boards)
- We should continue to explore digital story telling as a way to capture and celebrate women's history and accomplishments
- Different perspective needed for global affairs, women's perspective must be included

- Need more collaboration and a hook to get media to run stories/articles
- There is a need for more female volunteers (especially to work with youth)
- Need to keep girls empowered and focused through media, bring in more girls into media programs, 6-12<sup>th</sup> graders need to see its relevant early on
- Family awareness and responsibility
- Educators must play a role in shifting media bias (at the high school and secondary levels)
- There is a need for media literacy and media advocacy workshops (community needs to know how media works and how to influence and generate positive media coverage of women)

# Education

Women have a right to access and attain the educational qualifications necessary to fulfill their role as agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society. Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women has proven to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable.

## What does the problem look like?

- Women today earn 27% of doctorates in the physical sciences and 17% in engineering. But they make up only 10% of university faculty members. (National Science Foundation, 2003)
- For every \$1 spent on women's athletics, \$3 is spent on men's programs. (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2003)
- In a national survey of over 2000 public school students, 83% of girls and 79% of boys report having ever experienced harassment. Over 1 in 4 students experienced it 'often'. (Association of American University Women, 2002)
- Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food, and yet earn only 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property. (World Development Indicators, 1997)
- Women are still the poorest of the world's poor, representing 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty. (United Nations Development Fund for Women, 1996)

## Local Observations

Disparity and discrimination of women in education has a wide range of complex issues such as the lack of enforcement for Title IX, gender biased testing for admissions, and cultural norms that discourage women and girls from achieving their educational goals. Funding for education is an equity issue but research shows that "disadvantaged" students actually need more funding so that even equal funding is not enough to close the gaps in achievement. While most teachers are females, administrators are still predominantly male and there is a need for gender training for instructors so that they understand the bias that exists within the educational institutions and classrooms.

There are often conflicting goals within higher education (completing a degree vs. vocational training). Not every woman goes to college to obtain a degree. Many attend to access vocational training and certifications that will lead to better jobs and greater self-sufficiency. Community colleges play a key role in helping women advance their training and educational skills, especially women of color, but women are challenged with issues such as transportation and quality, affordable child care. Women often shoulder the burden of familial responsibilities and must juggle caretaking, working, their children's health and education and their own ongoing training and education. These responsibilities often go unrecognized and are not accommodated by society or institutions.

Sexual discrimination is also an issue in our education system and happens among students, faculty. Some participants reported that when law enforcement is called on school campuses to investigate sexual assault or harassment, this is often done without the parents being present. It was also shared that many colleges discourage victims from reporting sexual assault because they do not want to report crime statistics which might discourage potential students and donors. In general, there is a "sweep-it-under-the-rug" culture that permeates colleges, particularly when athletes are involved.

## Needed Action

- Enforce child support (to help afford cost to women)

- Need to look at issues of poor enforcement of child support
- Many schools not enforcing Title IX and this needs to be addressed
- Women need good mentors (for personal support and advancement)
- Need encouragement and skill building early on (start with school age girls)
- Engage business support in addressing educational needs of women (global companies aren't showing enough "local" attachment...tend to seek younger employees who come from out of the area)
- Better training for teachers (focused on gender)
- County gets money for childcare but need a lot more
- County needs to actively lobby against using Prop. 98 to fund childcare
- Need to ensure better oversight of Head Start (Board of Education plays a role)
- Need to develop pre-school opportunities
- Continue supporting and funding First 5
- Need to develop culturally appropriate efforts (specific to communities) and engage the community in developing this
- Sponsor initiatives to help parents better advocate for their children in the school system (parent training, seminars, etc.)
- Set up class rooms and environments that are "friendly" to women
- Need financial literacy/survival skills for girls (as early as possible and as comprehensive as possible)
- Family planning needs to be incorporated into schools (beyond abstinence – only)
- Eliminate mixed messages to girls (what we want to women vs. what we see in the media)
- Need entrepreneurial initiatives to help women succeed in small business and micro-enterprise

# Housing

Women have the right to enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to sanitation, electricity, water, transport and communications. Women must be ensured access to affordable housing and property by, among other things, removing all obstacles to access, with special emphasis on meeting the needs of women, especially those living in poverty and female heads of household.

## What does the problem look like?

- It is estimated that Silicon Valley will need over 90,000 new apartments, condominiums, and detached homes over the next 20 years to meet the future housing needs (2007 Santa Clara County Blue Ribbon Commission on Ending Homelessness and Solving the Affordable Housing Crisis)
- The fastest growing group of homeless people in the United States is composed of single women with two and three children. (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 2007)
- Approximately half of all women and children experiencing homelessness are fleeing domestic violence. (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006)

## Local Observations

It was shared that the problem of homelessness is more relevant than ever in our society. Overall, the largest numbers of “un-housed” are single men but the fastest growing segment is single women with children. Women’s issues within homelessness are still somewhat “invisible”, particularly among undocumented immigrant women. Crimes among un-housed women are under-reported (such as sexual assault) and many women keep their situation hidden for fear of losing their children. Many of these women live in cars or go from friend to friend or family member to family member in order for their children to continue to go to school uninterrupted. Their survival is often day-to-day and it is often a struggle ensuring that they and their children have food to eat. It was noted that if these women are overlooked, so are their children. Access to child care is also a challenge to these women (cost is a barrier).

Among providers who work with un-housed women, reports are that many of the women are experiencing other issues, such as violence, abusive relationships, substance abuse, health issues, and mental illness. There is an overall lack of gender understanding of this issue and the special needs of women. The federal government would like to “end chronic homelessness” (defined as individuals, male or female, living on the streets for three years) but haven’t effectively examined the specific needs of women and mothers. Local governments want to address this problem because of its impact on tourism. Participants stated that some areas have had historical challenges with homelessness which have existed for over 20 years. Significant rates of mental illness have been seen among the un-housed in these areas. Agencies who have been working on the issue for decades have an opportunity to see people who have spent a lifetime as un-housed and often pass away without having any resolution to their situation.

There was overall consensus that there is a need to educate the public (and decision-makers) about the problem of homelessness. There are signs that the understanding is growing such as the formation of a Blue Ribbon Task Force on Homeless for Santa Clara County. There is a need for improved services that reflect an understanding that this problem is not just about getting a job (40% of the un-housed population suffer from mental illness).

## Needed Action

- Need to enlighten society and shift thoughts about homelessness (its not just about getting a job...40% suffer from mental illness)
- Develop specific wrap around services (not just cookie cutter)

- Need outreach (not just storefronts) and specific targets to women
- Develop strategies to address both housing and mental health
- Need to provide training on how to be a good tenant and develop life skills, as well as more rental support systems like credits to help when people have bad or no credit histories, legislation so DV victims are not held responsible for evictions or breaking leases when leaving, etc.
- Healthcare is needed for mothers and their children
- Build more affordable housing, expanding Section 8 and shelters, access more federal funding. Need to look at Next Door's Safe Home (funding and evaluation of transitional housing for victims of domestic violence)
- Need housing for disabled

## Recommendations for the Commission on the Status of Women

### Provide Opportunities for Dialogue

Overwhelmingly, evaluations of the CEDAW presentation and community strategy sessions indicate that community leaders, women's organizations and other stakeholders do not have ample opportunity to come together to talk about the challenges and opportunities for women today. The Commission could play a key role by continuing to convene public hearings and forums focused on specific issues, as well as continue education efforts about CEDAW initiatives happening at all levels.

### Address Data Limits

In efforts to look for County data on women and girls, it was discovered that there is an overall lack of data being collected by gender. The Commission could play a role in reviewing how data is collected by County departments and agencies and make recommendations to decision-makers about what is needed.

### Continue the Work Begun by the CEDAW Task Force

The CEDAW Task Force began with the initial purpose of bringing together stakeholders, providing education and training, convening community leaders for dialogue about discrimination and disparity of women and girls, and developing recommendations for action. Having completed this purpose, the Commission on the Status of Women should invite members of the task force to attend a meeting with the full commission to present ideas and interest for on-going work and collaboration on a possible ordinance to address the issues identified.

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