



**Accomplishments for Fiscal Years
2016-17 and 2017-18
and Upcoming Key Focuses
and Goals for Fiscal Years
2018-19 and 2019-20**

INTRODUCTION

The Commission on the Status of Women was established on December 23, 1975 with the charge to “take affirmative action to eliminate the practice of discrimination and prejudice because of gender in the areas of housing, education, community services, and related fields.”

Since that time, appointed Commissioners have worked tirelessly, on a voluntary basis, to keep Sonoma County’s governing body aware of the issues that impact women and girls in the County.

In continuing to fulfill that charge, the mission of the Commission on the Status of Women has evolved into its purpose being to promote equal rights and opportunities that enhance the quality of life for all women and girls, and to address issues of discrimination and prejudice that negatively affect women in Sonoma County.

In support of the mission statement above, from fiscal year 2016 to 2018 the Commission focused on affordable childcare, intimate partner violence and mental health and suicide. All three subject areas affect women and girls in the county. Additionally, the Commission also provided mentorship to youth in the form of the Junior Commissioner Project, and through collaboration, outreach, and the work of the Legislative Advisory Group, the Commission worked to support community efforts on encouraging women to seek elected and appointed office, eradicating human trafficking, preventing elder abuse and protecting the reproductive and healthcare rights of women and girls.

Knowledge Gained

From the focuses the Commission took on for the above mentioned years, the commission learned that the County lacks affordable childcare for women, and parents in general, intimate partner violence continues to exist and has been spreading in relationships between teens. Additionally, the Commission found there is a mental health stigma and a lack of knowledge in the community on what mental health is and the resources that exist.

Resources

By collaborating with community partners, the Commission acquired existing resources to better assist in understanding current efforts being made in these areas.

Connections

The Commission created community partnerships with local organizations throughout fiscal years 2016 to 2018. These organizations include: Sonoma County Family Justice Center; First Five Sonoma County; Guided to Safety; League of Women Voters; National Organization for Women; National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Sonoma County;

Soroptimist International, Santa Rosa; Verity; Women’s Global Leadership Initiative; Women’s Recovery Services (WRS); YWCA; and Sonoma County, 4Cs; and the Association of California Commissions for Women.

OVERVIEW OF FISCAL YEARS 2016-2017 AND 2017-2018

The commission focused on four areas in which commissioners felt women were being negatively affected. These areas led to the creation of four ad hoc committees that each worked on projects addressing the focus areas identified. These ad hoc committees included: affordable childcare, intimate partner violence, mental health and suicide and women’s empowerment.

Affordable Child Care

The Affordable Child Care (ACC) Ad Hoc members attended the 2017 Annual Stand for Children Day in Sacramento along with Parent Voices in May 2017. The ACC Ad Hoc tabled at several events/locations to raise awareness for the lack of affordable child care in Sonoma County including tabling at Lola’s Market, Sebastopol, and Rohnert Park. The ACC Ad Hoc also tabled at the August 2017 and 2018 Mochilada events held in Roseland to raise awareness and distribute resources.

ACC Ad Hoc members attended several Child Care Planning Council meetings and wrote letters in support of bills that would positively impact the child care situation in the county including SB 837 (Dodd) - Universal Pre-K and AB 435 which would provide several counties, including Sonoma, with better access to subsidized child care.

Upon learning the devastating toll the 2017 wildfires took in destroying 15 child care centers (and homes), displacing 444 children, ACC members reevaluated their focus (a child care resource fair) and, instead, collaborated with 4Cs to raise funds through the sale of summer tote bags they created. Proceeds were used to provide scholarships for the 2019 Early Learner’s Conference in which providers would receive training and education. From its efforts, the ACC raised over \$500 for 4Cs.

Intimate Partner Violence

The Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Ad Hoc focused its efforts on understanding where violence towards women begins and on how to prevent violence.

Through their work, the IPV Ad Hoc arranged for Commissioners to tour the Juvenile Hall and the Family Justice Center. The IPV Ad Hoc also connected with Verity to gain a better understanding of their educational role within Juvenile Hall, as well as our local schools.

The IPV Ad Hoc examined the education that is currently being provided in schools surrounding self-respect and respect for others. They looked into how we are raising our boys, to include the messages we give or do not give them regarding their value, expressing their feelings constructively, and treatment of women.

The ad hoc partnered with Verity for a screening of the documentary "The Mask You Live In" at the Petaluma Boulevard Theaters. Representatives from the Santa Rosa Violence Prevention Project and Verity spoke of their personal experiences and work related to violence towards women and the screening led to parents and community members requesting that Verity speak at their children's schools to provide age-appropriate discussions about safe and healthy relationships and control over one's own body. Overall, the work of the ad hoc had a great impact on local families and schools.

Mental Health and Suicide

The Mental Health and Suicide Ad Hoc (MHS) created and maintained a one-stop online resource of organizations and services for women with mental health issues, or who are caring for children with mental health issues. The ad hoc also raised awareness and worked to de-stigmatize mental illness and suicide via social media and event tabling.

The MHS Ad Hoc created a resource guide containing contact information and descriptions on the assorted organizations offering mental health and suicide prevention services. The resource guide was published on the CSW website. The ad hoc wrote letters to elected officials in Congress on matters related to mental health and suicide. For example, the MHS wrote to Congress in opposition of the Better Care Reconciliation Act which would eliminate access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment. Letters to our House of Representatives Members were submitted in support of the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2017. On the state level, MHS Ad Hoc requested Governor Brown sign into law AB 89, "Suicide prevention training".

One of the more significant accomplishments of the ad hoc was the creation of bookmarks that acknowledged the signs of depression in both adults and teens, as well as the signs of potential suicide in adults and teens. The bookmarks were printed in English and Spanish and made available to the community at meetings, events, tabling, clinics, etc.

The ad hoc also organized a screening of the locally produced documentary "Not Alone", acknowledging our current teen depression and suicide crises. This was followed by a panel discussion which included the documentary's Producer/Director, Sonoma County NAMI, North Bay 24 Hour Suicide Prevention Hotline, Petaluma Police Officer, and a teen suicide survivor. A significant number of teens, parents and educators were in attendance.

Empowering Women

The Empowering Women Ad Hoc worked to provide women and girls with information, guidance and resources to help them enter public service through volunteerism and election.

This ad hoc worked to collect information regarding all Boards, Commissions, and Committees located in cities and towns in Sonoma County and are composed of public members. The main effort was to provide women with information about the purpose of such groups and what is required for membership.

The ad hoc created a resource guide of open board positions for women to apply for.

Junior Commission Project

The Juniors have been an astonishingly bright, engaged group who created community service projects on Human Trafficking, Intimate Partner Violence, Gender Limits, Body Positivity, Mental Health and Empowering Women.

Body Positivity

The Juniors focused on eating disorders – Unhealthy relationships with food that may include fasting, constant dieting, or bingeing and purging. They believed that the body image is closely linked to self-esteem. Approximately 91% of women and girls are unhappy with their bodies and resort to dieting to achieve their ideal body shape – an ideal defined by society.

Regarding the marketing and advertising perspective, the Body Positivity group felt real life women and girls are compared to ‘idealized’ images and judged harshly by others and themselves. Stores that carry clothing for elementary school age girls are selling fitted t-shirts and shorts with 1” to 3” inseams, in dramatic contrast to boys’ shorts which generally go down to the knee or farther. Their project was a photo/essay exhibit of teenage men and women responding to the question “In what way(s) do you feel your gender is being commercialized or forced to fit the social mold of stereotypes?”

Gender Limits

The Juniors felt coding was a very important topic. The research that’s taking place in the arena of women in computer science is vital to figuring out why and how we continue to fall flat when it comes to recruiting and retaining women in tech. Our research has been paired with the hopeful findings of some fantastic organizations working diligently to get more women coding.

The great news is there seems to be a healthy amount of momentum behind this cause right now. Solid support systems are popping up all over the place, mostly in the form of women’s technology groups. But these organizations will only succeed if their missions and values are vocally supported by industry leaders, both male and female. An increasing awareness and interest in women’s tech organizations will help them thrive. To address this, the Juniors created a resource website of coding and technology events in the area, coding workshops held at Chimera Makerspace, and “Close the Gap on

Technology” tutorials – teaching residents of assisted living facilities how to connect with technology.

The Juniors felt that empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to building stronger economies, achieving internationally agreed upon goals for development and sustainability, and improving the quality of life for women, men, families and communities. They also addressed sleeper terms, stating that conscious and unconscious bias is apparent in our everyday language. Terms such as ‘run like a girl,’ ‘bossy,’ and ‘hysterical’ are derogatory ways to describe females and are used by men and women alike. To address this they created a short, thought-provoking film documenting teenage men and women addressing this issue. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmnfqxbSAmo>

On the matter of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, otherwise known as STEM – The Committee on STEM Education (CoSTEM), comprised of 13 agencies – including all of the mission-science agencies and the Department of Education – are facilitating a cohesive national strategy, with new and repurposed funds, to increase the impact of federal investments in five areas: 1) improving STEM instruction in preschool through 12th grade; 2) increasing and sustaining public and youth engagement with STEM; 3) improving the STEM experience for undergraduate students; 4) better serving groups historically underrepresented in STEM fields; and 5) designing graduate education for tomorrow's STEM workforce. Related to this, the Juniors worked on the project “I Am Limitless,” an all day workshop/forum for sixth graders featuring speakers from non-traditional female careers to share why their career is not seen as a traditional female occupation, to provide inspiration and encouragement, and to also share how they overcame struggles to achieve their career goals.

Human Trafficking

According to some estimates, approximately 80% of trafficking involves sexual exploitation, and 19% involves labor exploitation. In Sonoma County, since 2011, over 160 human trafficking and prostitution cases have been filed by the District Attorney's Office. Following a presentation by Junior Commissioners to high school art classes, students created multiple mediums of artwork that reflected what this modern-day form of slavery meant to them, and the feelings the topic elicited. The traveling art exhibit was viewed by hundreds of people.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is domestic violence perpetrated by one spouse or partner in an intimate relationship against the other. The Juniors worked on classroom presentations on the devastation of IPV, how to spot victims, and how to find help. Posters with signs and resources were created for school classrooms. They also Created a montage of thought provoking images displayed in a Copperfields window and made numerous awareness presentations, including a committee created video, at high schools in Sonoma County.

Legislative Advisory Group

The Legislative Advisory Group (LAG) focuses on researching local, statewide, and national legislation that is relevant to the mission of CSW. Members of the group write letters in support or in opposition of proposed state and federal legislation. Additionally, the group serves as a resource guide for CSW ad hocs to use in order to become knowledgeable on local policies, recent statutes, and introduced bills. The group was able to write 11 letters in support of and in opposition to proposed legislation on all levels of government and the group was able to review over 148 California laws impacting women and girls.

LOOKING AHEAD

The Commission held a strategic planning session late October 2018 to determine the goals and focuses for the near future. During the meeting, the Commission concluded our efforts will be limited to three key areas during 2018 - 2020:

1. Empowering women to enter public service through volunteerism and election
2. Voices of Sonoma County Women Project where live listening sessions will be conducted throughout the county as well as online and paper surveys documenting the primary issues women are experiencing locally
3. Promoting the efforts and work of the Commission through a more intense marketing plan

Empowering Women

The Empowerment Ad Hoc will be focused on encouraging women to recognize their own skills, strengths, and stories by amplifying women's voices, ambitions, and worth through education and opportunities.

The ad hoc will be providing women and girls with information, guidance and resources to assist them in entering public service through volunteerism and election. As the ad hoc's mission is on empowerment through knowledge and awareness, the ad hoc members believe an area of significance in gaining knowledge is in incarceration of women. Ad hoc members will be reaching out to groups working with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and will study local and national best practices in order to propose changes in the current process of providing resources to incarcerated women.

Voices of Sonoma County Women

The purpose of the Women's Voices ad hoc is to gain a better understanding of the concerns of Sonoma County women by providing them with forums (Listening Sessions) where they may gather to express their personal concerns and share their ideas. A survey, administered on-line and in hard copy, will also be utilized to gather women's concerns. Results from the Listening Sessions and the surveys will be compiled and shared with the Board of Supervisors, National Association of Commissions for Women (NACW) and the Association of California Commissions for Women (ACCW).

CSW Marketing

The Commission felt it was important to establish a marketing ad hoc that would promote the existence, efforts, accomplishments, and importance of the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women (and related women's issues and events).

In pursuit of this goal, this ad hoc will be introducing consistent processes/activities to strengthen CSW's name recognition—among community members and government officials alike.

The ad hoc would work to support the Commission's overall mission and specific priorities by creating informative publications/presentations, enhancing social & media relations, and developing a strategic communications plan to increase CSW's community engagement and recognition.

Junior Commission

The Commission is still working on its legislative efforts and also has new goals for the Junior Commission. The Juniors will be focusing on Relationship Violence, Healthy Mind and Body, and Empowering Women. They will be creating their own project and conducting their own research while also collaborating with the adult Commission as appropriate.

Legislative Advisory Group

The LAG will continue to research upcoming legislation and advise the Commission as necessary.