
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN

2018 ANNUAL REPORT

Introduction

Mission and Purpose

The Morris County Advisory Committee on Women was established by the Board of Chosen Freeholders of Morris County on December 22, 2003. The main goals of the committee are to serve as a fact finding resource by studying the needs, problems, interests and concerns of the women who reside and work in Morris County, research and centralize information regarding resources, issues, events and programs which involve women's concerns and promote their interests, advise and promote reforms in the law, public policy and public attitudes that will advance the status of women, and recommend programs to address the needs of women including, but not limited to, business, leadership, equal opportunity and quality of life issues.

Membership

At the beginning of the 2018 calendar year, the Advisory Committee on Women had 9 members: Pam Bennett-Santoro, Joann Bjornson, Allison Delcalzo-Berens, Carole Harper, Virginia Lyttle, Elaine Muller, Patti Page, Gayle Pearson and Shelby Rhodes. The Freeholder liaison to the committee was Kathy DeFillippo and the Human Services liaison to the committee was Jennifer Carpinteri. In June, Lila Bernstein was appointed to committee membership by the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Focus Areas

At the beginning of 2018, the committee was in the process of two research projects: issues surrounding homeless women and families and issues surrounding incarcerated and newly released women. The committee was also in the middle of planning the Leanna Brown Memorial and developing the Seeds of Change Award. Furthermore, the committee determined one additional area of focus for 2018: women veterans.

Committee Planning Activities

Pam Bennett-Santoro and Elaine Muller stepped down as Chair and Secretary of the committee respectively in January. Allison Delcalzo-Berens was approved as Secretary in January and Gayle Pearson and Virginia Lyttle were approved as Chair and Vice-Chair in March. The committee reviewed and edited the Advisory Committee on Women Bylaws and approved changes in May. Several members elected to have individualized business cards printed by Joann Bjornson to recruit new members or advertise the committee in the community. The committee developed a work plan with goals for the 2019 calendar year in November. This work plan will guide the functions and goals of the committee and ensure stability and continuity.

Seeds of Change and Memorial Activities

The committee received nominations for the Seeds of Change Award from individuals throughout the county. While all were impressive candidates, the committee selected Lila Bernstein, an active and prolific volunteer in the Morris County community, as the award recipient in March. The Horticultural Memorial Program took place on Friday, April 27 at the Frelinghuysen Arboretum with the purpose of honoring Leanna Brown and Patricia Maynard. Remarks were made by Kathy DeFillippo and

Carole Harper among others. Allison Delcalzo-Berens presented the Seeds of Change Award to Lila Bernstein with the following speech:

When Leanna Brown passed away last year, the Women's Advisory Committee spent some time contemplating her contributions and her legacy. Out of these discussions, we came up with the idea of promoting Leanna's values of grassroots activism and building up the community in which you live by honoring a woman in the county who reflects these values. We named this award the Seeds of Change Award to celebrate Leanna Brown and the many other women, like Pat Maynard, who have planted seeds, nurtured the seedlings and cultivated real change over time. The Women's Committee solicited nominations for a woman who has planted seeds to benefit other women in our community and selected a winner after a careful review of the candidates.

Lila Bernstein is a long-time resident of Morris County. Throughout her varied professional career Ms. Bernstein taught secondary school English and Guidance, was a school district's Public Information Officer, was Manager of Human Resources for an international corporation and worked as a consultant to the pharmaceutical industry. Ms. Bernstein received a BA from Brooklyn College and an MS from Columbia University.

More recently, Ms. Bernstein has served on the Morris County Youth Services Advisory Committee, she is a trustee of the Mendham Township Library and is a fourteen-year active member and has served as chair of the Morris County Child Placement Review Board. Ms. Bernstein is a member and past chair of the NJ Child Placement Advisory Council and has worked with CPAC on reports to the state Legislature and the state Supreme Court. Ms. Bernstein has been instrumental in developing the Aging Out Program for youth in foster care and has been a presenter at conferences and public hearings.

Ms. Bernstein has also served on the Steering Committee for the Rachel Coalition, where she organized the Coalition's Candle Light Vigil and helped develop a program that offers small no-interest loans to underserved women. Ms. Bernstein has been a Board member and leader of the National Council of Jewish Women, where she chairs the NCJW Teen Dating Abuse initiative, is an events facilitator at senior citizen housing and co-chairs the Project Evaluation Committee charged with evaluating the Center for Women programs.

Ms. Bernstein has served the Jewish Women's Foundation of NJ as a Trustee and has served on the Grants Committee, Membership Committee and the Committee on Women Veterans. She chaired a community wide conference titled "In her Boots" on the issues facing Women Veterans as they attempt to acclimate to their families and communities after their discharge.

Lila Bernstein's extensive record of community service in Morris County and beyond, and her passion and commitment to the health of her community and the welfare of its residents more than qualifies her for this prestigious award. On behalf of the Morris County Advisory Committee on Women, it is my great honor to congratulate the first Seeds of Change Award winner: Lila Bernstein.

The committee plans to continue the Seeds of Change Award as an annual event by soliciting nominations, selecting an annual winner and working with the Freeholders to award the winner with a resolution.

Homeless Women and Families

During the committee's housing providers' stakeholder meeting in April 2017, several issues were identified as barriers to stable housing for women and families:

1. lack of affordable housing options and conversion of voucher-accessible housing into luxury apartments

2. lack of transportation to second and third shift jobs and lack of transportation from more rural areas of the county
3. lack of efficient access to quality, affordable childcare
4. reentry into society after jail discharge
5. lack of resources for immigrant or relocated families
6. lack of resources and presence of discrimination for middle-aged women

After researching these issues, the committee had several findings. First, as noted below under the “Incarcerated Women” heading, the Successful Transition and Reentry (STAR) program, has been implemented to increase access to services for women after their release from the correctional facility. Second, regarding transportation issues, the committee learned that Morris County completed the Master Plan Circulation Element which includes a list of anticipated projects to improve transportation throughout the county. The freeholders and the Human Services Department are aware of the barriers that residents face and are working to alleviate some of the burden through new initiatives such as the Navigating Hope project.

Through collaboration with the Advisory Committee on Women, the Community Assistance Services (CAS) Committee has incorporated the issues of lack of affordable housing, lack of affordable childcare, lack of resources for immigrant or relocated families and barriers to housing for middle-aged women into the work plan for CAS. The CAS Committee established a Childcare Workgroup in spring 2018 to address specific goals related to improving access to affordable, quality childcare for low-income and homeless women. The Permanent Housing Subcommittee under CAS has been given the task of addressing issues of affordable housing and voucher-accessible housing and has planned and/or implemented several initiatives such as the Landlord Appreciation Project. The committee is considering focusing on one of these barriers in 2019. The committee plans to hold a follow up breakfast for the stakeholders to report these findings and to hear updates from the stakeholders.

Incarcerated Women

After a two-year analysis of the correctional facility and services for newly released women, the committee closed this research project in July. Based on committee member inquiries, the Sheriff has reported that women are included in the Hope Wing project if they present with this need by receiving the same curriculum in a small group setting or one-on-one setting. Additionally, since the beginning of the committee’s inquiries about the correctional facility, JBWS has reinstated its monthly programs with both female and male inmates and a new county-led initiative to support inmate reentry into mainstream society has launched. This new initiative, Successful Transition and Reentry (STAR), has the goal of assisting inmates with connection to services before their release and following up with former inmates for a twelve-month period after release.

The committee is looking forward to continued collaboration with Sheriff Gannon, Warden Klein and the Sheriff’s Office and anticipate representatives to be in attendance for this purpose at committee meetings as needed.

Women Veterans

The committee began its research into issues facing women veterans in Morris County by inviting key stakeholders to provide insight into the topic. The September committee meeting included a lengthy discussion with guests Kenneth Brenzel, Morris County Veterans’ Services Officer, Jeanine Decker, Program Manager for the Women Veterans Health Program at Veterans’ Affairs and Catherine Gutierrez, Director of Military Services and Operation Sisterhood at Cornerstone Family Programs. Through anecdotal stories provided by these guests and by utilizing resources from a successful initiative surrounding the same issue in Essex County, the committee has found that a primary barrier for women veterans is lack of participation in services and hesitation to self-identify as veterans. The committee will be pursuing further ideas around this barrier in 2019. The committee also plans to invite a representative from a veterans’ organization or a female veteran to apply for membership on the committee to continue to inform its work in this area.

Moving Forward

The committee plans to use 2019 as a reorganizing year, taking time to build membership, amend bylaws, reinforce infrastructure and increase visibility. The committee would like to maximize impact and scope in 2020 with several ideas to plan larger scale events and explore new initiatives. The committee has pledged to hold monthly meetings in an effort to streamline the committee structure and breathe new life into the committee's mission.