

President's Annual Report

May 8, 2018 – Lise Bernstein

I'm sorry I can't be with you tonight...but I'm thinking of you as we celebrate the 14th year of putting Women's Voices' education and advocacy mission into action. It's been a challenging year at both the state and federal levels as we witness continuous steps to restrict human and civil rights, major cutbacks in basic human services including health care, housing and food assistance... and ongoing legislative attempts to deny access to women's reproductive care. We see intolerance of immigrants and refugees, discrimination against the LGBTQ community and the continuing toll of systemic racism. And, gun violence is a public health epidemic, taking too many lives, especially young people of color.

Our response to all of this is to redouble our efforts...to ramp up our capacity to do the hard work of resistance...and to partner with organizations in our community so that we strengthen our voices and our effectiveness.

We bring the collective voices of 475 members and 949 people who receive our education and advocacy e-mails. In addition, 1,877 people follow us on Facebook and 750 on Twitter. Despite the recent concerns about social media, we have found it to be a valuable tool in getting information out and motivating people to take action. Many thanks to Mary Clemons whose prolific Facebook posts and Tweets have been a tremendous asset to our social media presence. And our Marketing Director Judy Arnold manages our communications, such as our monthly newsletter, with strong writing skills. Through Judy's efforts, Women's Voices remains visible as a leader in social justice issues.

One of our most effective means of encouraging people to take action is our monthly education programs, which are free and open to the public. Each month about 100 or more people attend. Again this year we sponsored 9 education programs on timely issues including: increased intolerance of immigrants and refugees; the toll taken by the opioid crisis; the high rate of infant mortality in St. Louis; the school to prison pipeline; and voter suppression. Each of these programs featured local experts who gave us "on the ground" ways we can help address these issues. Many thanks to the Program Committee, chaired by Sue Flanagan, and the Membership Committee, chaired by Joan McKerrow, for their

hard work to make these programs possible. Please stand if you are a member of the Program or Membership Committee.

A major new initiative in 2018 is our focus on racial justice with the initiation of our project “Overcoming Obstacles to Create Community.” This includes a variety of programs designed to help us better understand systemic racism and how it affects communities of color in such destructive ways. We hope to foster understanding and civil discourse...and build bridges for ways we can bring about positive change.

A few weeks ago 28 Women’s Voices members and friends visited historic civil rights sites in Memphis...they returned with new perspectives on the civil rights movement. Watch for many upcoming programs that will be part of “Overcoming Obstacles to Create Community” the rest of this year. This project is the hard work of our Racial Justice Committee, chaired by Jeanne Bubb. Please stand if you are a member of this committee.

Since 2013, gun violence prevention has been a major focus for us. Through our Lock It for Love gun safety outreach project, we provide education and free gun locks to St. Louis area families. This year our goal is to distribute 1,800 gun locks at 46 events—a 20% increase over 2017. In addition, we continue to advocate against legislation at the state and federal levels that would put more people at risk of gun violence. We work closely with Moms Demand Action, St. Louis Children’s and Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospitals, the Washington University Institute for Public Health and the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri. In addition, we are a member of the newly-formed St. Louis Area Violence Prevention Commission. Many thanks to Barbara Harris and Mary Schuman who chair our Campaign for Common Sense Gun Solutions Committee...and to the many committee members here tonight who have made our efforts so successful. Please stand if you are on this committee.

Another hard-working group is our Advocacy Committee, chaired by Ann Ross. In addition to advocating for and against legislation on a variety of social justice issues, this year the committee worked on several new position papers and updated many others. You can read these on our website. Please stand if you serve on the Advocacy Committee.

To make all of our work possible, we must ensure that we have sufficient financial resources. In 2017, we implemented a Capacity Building campaign that raised \$53,000. This allowed us to hire our part-time administrative manager Laura Rose. Laura has been with us since last June...and she has been a tremendous help in our ability to operate more efficiently. As many of our committee chairs can tell you, Laura is a “miracle-worker” in getting things done well...and on schedule!

Our Annual Campaign goal for 2018 is \$30,000. Membership dues comprise 25% of our annual revenue. We rely on contributions from individuals and on grants for 75% of our income.

There are two ways you can help. First, if you are not already a Women’s Voices member, please join. Annual dues are \$40 and you can join tonight or do so online. You can also contribute to our Annual Campaign. There are envelopes on the tables...or you can donate online. Many thanks to Barbara Richter and members of our Development Advisory Board.

We hope you will join us in June for two events. On June 13, we will hold our program that was cancelled in January due to weather. Our speaker is Dr. Colleen McNicholas, one of only a few doctors in the Midwest who provide abortion care. She will update us on continuing efforts to restrict access to reproductive care in Missouri. Also, Women’s Voices will once again be marching in the Pride Parade on Sunday, June 24. Andrea Bauman is coordinating our group. More info will be in our June newsletter and on our website.

It has been my honor and privilege to serve as Women’s Voices president for the past four years. I am grateful for the talent, passion, persistence, knowledge and energy of our board, committee chairs...and our members. Without each of you, we would not have the fortitude to do this work. I have made many friends and colleagues over the past four years...many of whom I wouldn’t have met if not for Women’s Voices.

One person I did know prior to my involvement with Women’s Voices was Barbara Finch, one of our founders (along with Joanne Kelly, Ruth Ann Cioci, and Ann Ruger). Many of you were encouraged, cajoled and/or strongly advised to join Women’s Voices by Barbara. She is a dynamic woman, whose vision and creativity have brought Women’s Voices from a group of 25 in 2005 to a nearly 500-member strong organization today that is recognized throughout the

community as a leader in social justice. Barbara is a “small but mighty” force...and one to be reckoned with. I appreciate and value the role model she has been for me and countless others.

Finally, there are two other women who I greatly admire and respect—Mary Clemons and Ruth Ehresman. They are knowledgeable and effective advocates... and experienced, strong leaders. We are extremely fortunate that they are taking the reins to lead us this coming year. Together with their incredible board, Mary and Ruth will continue the 14-year legacy of Women’s Voices Raised for Social Justice.