Bellingham-Whatcom County Commission on Sexual & Domestic Violence

Commission Meeting
Thursday, January 26, 2023
9:00 – 10:00 am
Virtual via Zoom

Members Attending: Greg Baker (Bellingham Public Schools), Beth Boyd (PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center), Christina Byrne (Western Washington University), Greg Hansen (City of Ferndale), Chris Kobdish (Unity Care NW), Erika Lautenbach (Whatcom County Health & Community Services), Ken Levinson (Nooksack Tribe), Alan Marriner (City of Bellingham), Jason McGill (Northwest Youth Services), Diane Miltenberger (Department of Social & Health Services), Jessyca Murphy (Make.Shift Art Space), Katie Olvera (KPO Counseling), Darlene Peterson (Bellingham Municipal Court), Adrienne Renz (Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services), Eric Richey (Whatcom County Prosecutor’s Office), Chris Roselli (Western Washington University), Garret Shelsta (Stuff You Can Use), Donnell Tanksley (Blaine Police Department), Annie Taylor (Department of Children, Youth & Families), Bruce Van Glubt (Whatcom County District Court and Probation), Rocky Vernola (Whatcom Community College)

Members Absent: Bill Elfo (WCSO), Stark Follis (Whatcom County Public Defender), Rebecca Mertzig (Bellingham Police Department), Moonwater (Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center), Dave Reynolds (Whatcom County Superior Court), Krista Touros (PeaceHealth), Pamela Wheeler (Opportunity Council)

Guests Present: Andria Fountain (Bellingham Police Department), Rodger Funk (WCSO), Amber Icay-Creelman (DVSAS), Kelly Frost (Clarity Mental Health & Recovery), Jake Weibusch (Whatcom County District Court Probation)

Staff Present: Susan Marks, Nikki D’Onofrio, Brooke Eolande

Purpose of Meeting

- Increase understanding of timely and controversial topic of reproductive justice and how it relates to our work together on prevention and interventions for domestic and sexual violence
- Identify how our agencies/disciplines we can support autonomy for survivors and their children within our own missions

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<tr>
<th>Agenda Item</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
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<tr>
<td>Welcome</td>
<td>Katie Olvera opened the meeting at 9:02 am.</td>
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screens, and monotask for the hour-long meeting
- Introductions in chat: name, title/agency, gender pronouns

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acknowledgement of Tribal lands</th>
<th>Garret Shelsta introduced himself and acknowledged the commemoration of the Point of Elliott Treaty, signed January 22, 1855. The Land Acknowledgement is not just something to say, it is something that we really think about. Garret shared that he has been reading <em>Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview</em> and asked us to consider how we can create justice and equity for our community. Garret read our Acknowledgment of Tribal Lands as developed by the Lhaq’temish Foundation.</th>
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<tr>
<td>MOTION: Consent agenda</td>
<td>Katie asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the November 2022 meeting. Chris Roselli moved to approve the minutes. Chief Tanksley seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously. Katie asked for a motion to approve the 2023 operating budget. Darlene Peterson moved to approve. Rocky Vernola seconded. The operating budget was approved unanimously. Susan Marks gave a couple of updates. We have set the meeting schedule for the year, which will be a mix of virtual and in-person meetings. We will have some one-hour virtual meetings, some meetings will be extended to 1.5 hours virtually to dive deeper, and some meetings will be in person. March Meeting will be 8:30-10 Virtual—Restorative Justice Project update. The May meeting (annual meeting) has always been an extended meeting. This year it will be 2 hours, in person. July will be a virtual one hour meeting, September 1.5 hours in-person, November back to virtual. This schedule will give us opportunities to dive deep, see each other in person, and also offer a balance in schedules. We have set first case review in April. Some Commission members will be on that team. We’ll look at an intimate partner homicide case. The Restorative Justice Work Group finished survivor interviews and we’re finishing analysis. This will be our topic at the March meeting—what do survivors think about using Restorative Justice to address those harms?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Minutes: November 17, 2022 Commission meeting</td>
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<td>• 2023 DV Commission operating budget</td>
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Reproductive Justice
- Definition & connection to movement to end domestic and sexual violence
- Discussion: What is one thing your agency or discipline does or could implement to support survivors related to the 3rd principle of reproductive justice in our work: “right to parent in safe, healthy environments”

Susan introduced today’s topic. We’ve put a lot of thought into this meeting. Reproductive justice can be a controversial issue but also one that has received intense national attention, and it feels important for us to touch base on it related to our work to increase safety, justice, and autonomy for survivors of DV and SA. Reproductive Justice isn’t receiving a lot of attention, though some aspects of it are—access to abortion and birth control.

In this meeting, we’ll define reproductive justice and discuss why is it important. There are 3 principles of reproductive justice and we’re going to focus on the right to parent in a safe and healthy environment, free from violence.

Susan shared a brief slideshow:

Reproductive justice is three principles that say that all people have the right to:
- not have children
- have children
- parent in safe, healthy environments

Why this topic is so important:

Abusers use reproductive coercion frequently as a part of DV; can coerce/force survivors into having children and can coerce/force survivors into not being able to have children.

Homicide is leading cause of death for people who are pregnant or have given birth within a year.

Highest risk are adolescent girls, as well as Black and Indigenous women and girls.

Sexual assault and coercion are often part of intimate partner violence, and can also be perpetrated by friends, acquaintances, and stranger.

Some of these aspects don’t play into our jobs, but we all have this principle as part of our work: supporting the right to parent in a safe, healthy environment (which includes an environment free from domestic violence).
Susan gave the group a couple of minutes to think about this question: “What is one thing your agency or discipline does, could implement, or would like to explore to support survivors related to the right to parent in a safe, healthy environment?”

Susan invited each participant to share out and asked that when something stood out, to make a note and reach out to that member to follow up, as would have happened naturally in person.

Alan Marriner (City of Bellingham): Our office prosecutes misdemeanors DV and enforces DV no contact orders.

Adrienne Renz (DVSAS): Our agency does 24 hour call line, safety planning and explores cycle of abuse; we go into the schools to do prevention work; rural mobile advocate; safe shelter for singles and families; parenting classes “Parenting After Violence” and support groups for survivors of DV; recently able to have Morning After Pill available; something we could do: many people may not make connection between SA/DV, reproductive coercion – we make it clear that people can call for support around reproductive coercion.

Amber Icay-Creelman (DVSAS): We also have condoms in our bathrooms that are accessible at all times we’re open; we provide childcare during groups so that’s not a barrier to access groups.

Andria Fountain (BPD): Hopefully our officers can recognize when they respond, what kind of dynamics are happening in the home, focus on safety and dealing with any crimes, trying to make sure that the survivors on the scene are aware of what resources there are, and putting them in touch with available resources.

Annie Taylor(DCYF): Complex topic for our agency; most clients are non-voluntary; intervene in situations where DV is impacting family’s ability to parent in a safe environment; pair families (survivors and kids) with appropriate services—and offenders to treatment services; it’s an area where we can grow.

Beth Boyd (PeaceHealth): It is a complex issue, it’s a complex statement in terms of what’s the depth and breadth, what’s the scope; There are SANE nurses in the emergency department; how much follow up is done after
that, that’s an unknown for me. Reproductive justice are new words/terms for me. What does that really mean? What are all the pieces of that? Somebody would look through it and say “we provide this and not that.” I work in the cancer center. [DV & SA] is something the infusion nurses will pick up on, and they’ll call myself or another social worker in. It impacts men, too. It’s a continuum, we build on trust. They’re primarily there to deal with cancer, but to look at their whole life.

Brooke Eolande (S/DV Commission MSW Practicum Student & DVSAS jail advocate): A couple things I wish we were able to provide—resources for people going through the family law system and folks going through CPS; we don’t have resources to provide as much support in those areas as we used to.

Chris Kobdish (Unity Care NW): We provide primary care and behavioral health services; providers are trained to identify needs, including abuse and sex trafficking, and minors in a bad situation. We’re mandatory reporters; provide access to contraception, counseling, case management that refer to partnering agencies if it’s beyond our scope. I’d like us to be able to provide same-day LARC (long-acting reversible contraception). It’s difficult to be appropriately staffed. We desperately need counseling improvement.

Chris Roselli (WWU): 15,000 students, most of whom are traditionally-aged college students; not a lot of students have children; do have childcare and student have priority, but the waitlist is long; A lot of our outreach on campus is about resources available to students; Are those services available for faculty and staff as well? I’m going to look into that.

Christina Byrne (WWU Professor in Psychology Dept): Only childcare at WWU for staff is same as for students; when we talk about this issue it instantly becomes politically polarizing, what I like about this piece of it [focus on right to parent in safe, healthy environment], is it’s a way to talk about reproductive justice with less polarization. I look forward to thinking about how to bring that into the classroom. Getting students to think about reproductive justice more broadly.

Darlene Peterson (City of Bellingham): Thinking about our DV court, I appreciate that we have a victim advocate and victims have opportunity to
be heard before sentencing and they have opportunity to be heard when they want a NCO lifted.

Diane Miltenberger (DSHS): We have a 30 hour a week family support specialist; issue support services to clients getting safe, stable housing, other services; individual responsibility plans—activities to become healthy; parenting after violence groups, Darkness to Light, and New Beginnings group here in the office.

Tank (Blaine PD): I don’t think we would do anything differently other than ensure our training is up-to-date, warning signs of abuse, why people are in those situations and how to help people to get out; officers know about cultural context of abuse, how DV looks.

Erica Lautenbach (Whatcom County Health & Community Services): A lot of money to put out into community for prevention and intervention programs. We call everyone who is newly diagnosed with STD or reportable condition—opportunity for public health nurses to understand what circumstances are around that; might be first time talking about abusive situation or SA; Support needle exchange--partner with Planned Parenthood to connect injection drug users with LARC (long-acting reversible contraception), injection drug users are especially vulnerable to SA; Nurse-family partnerships, opportunities to support healthy relationships; money from child fund opportunities.

Garret Shelsta (Stuff You Can Use): We do serve adolescents, including parents who are adolescents. We need to train and offer resources from our faith tradition that will help church leaders support parents because they might see that children are in an unhealthy environment.

Greg Baker (Bellingham Public Schools): Education—direct instruction of kids, teaching them what it means to live in a family of a safe and healthy environment; we partner with community partners who know more about these issues; convener for parents and kids and bring those partners who know more.

Greg Hansen (City of Ferndale): This is a really big topic, especially for a city. Making sure police department are well trained and able to recognize subtle cues in the moment and be able to direct people to resources in the moment. The City of Ferndale arranges that the North County DV Advocate
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<tr>
<td>Caryl Dunavan</td>
<td>Serves other cities, leads on DV, speaks with local/state representatives, brings up DV good law in place and funding services available.</td>
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<td>Jake Wiebusch</td>
<td>Work with perpetrator/defendant, get connected to treatment in community, DV court for Bellingham &amp; Family Justice Calendar with Judge Anderson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jason McGill</td>
<td>Drop-in services, healing circles; Skagit County primarily serve single moms, work with local entities.</td>
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<td>Jessyca Murphy</td>
<td>Mission is to serve all ages, expanded educational opportunities, art studio space.</td>
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<td>Katie Olvera</td>
<td>Empower clients to make their own choices, teach at WWU, course on “Child Rearing”.</td>
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<td>Kelly Frost</td>
<td>Adding DVIT, hope to break cycle of violence and make it safe at home.</td>
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<td>Ken Levinson</td>
<td>Part of what we do is establishing paternity, cases where we cannot establish paternity if DV or SA, could do a better job of asking about that.</td>
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*Note: The information is a summary of various services and approaches to addressing sexual and domestic violence.*
and deserve the right to parent their children and are involved in a complex cycle of domestic violence? Supporting families, keeping children safe, and not punishing survivors by potentially removing children?

Rocky Vernola (WCC): This is an area we haven’t focused on in education because we roll it into Title IX. We do have early childhood ed programming and criminal justice programming. I want to bring back to my institution—do we address this in those curriculum pieces and if not, how do we infuse that? I’ve realized there’s a lot of work we can do at WCC, not just focused on students and student-issues, but also the broader community. The child tax – maybe this Commission could have a voice in how that’s used—safe housing, for example.

Rodger Funk (WCSO): Complex and polarizing topic. As law enforcement we need to go into every situation completely neutral. We can show empathy and focus on what happened and not lay blame. We can connect people with those resources.

Eric Richey (Whatcom County Prosecutor): Our office does some advice on the Prop 5 group on how to distribute the money. My office does not support parents, we usually prosecute parents who are inflicting harm on children. We make sure they have their rights and are provided every opportunity to have a defense. But I see myself as supporting victims. Our victims are usually children.

Susann noted that this was an opportunity to learn a lot about each other’s missions and services, and also how we can support survivors who are parents, and then invited participants to reach out to one another to learn more and/or to develop partnerships.

Adjourn

Katie thanked everyone for participating. The meeting adjourned at 10:00 am.