



Vermont
Works for
Women

February 18, 2009

To Leslie and all those who participated in the Clothes Exchange last year,

Now that we've headed into the period when CE activities begin to heat up, I thought it time for me to reflect upon the ways in which your efforts last year made a difference to Vermont Works for Women.

Support from the Clothes Exchange was critical in two important ways. Certainly, it helped sustain our core commitment to scholarship support for Rosie's Girls campers in Barre – 85% of whom requested partial to full tuition assistance and to expand supportive services for incarcerated women that reduced the recidivism rate of our modular home program graduates to 6% – a rate one-fifth the state average of 29%.

The boost that we received from the CE *also* enabled us to pursue new ventures and program models. This summer, we trained a team of young women to prepare meals for children enrolled in Winooski's THRIVE program and for residents of the convent of Our Lady of Providence. This winter, we will train Winooski residents to assess the efficiency of their homes – and to make a number of simple changes to trim their heating bills.

We've been able to direct new energy this year to launching an on-the-job training program for women interested in efficiency and renewable energy. Fresh Energy is designed as a self-funded social enterprise that will train women for fields in which there is great opportunity and too little diversity. As I write, a Fresh Energy crew of four is working at Burlington's Northgate apartments in partnership with J.A. Morrissey, pulling old insulation, replacing rotted sills, blowing new cellulose and sealing cracks that have allowed heat to literally pour out of those units for twenty years. Our current crop of trainees is terrific: hard working, eager to learn the fundamentals of building science, and quick to pick up technical skills. To date, they have weatherized over 60 units at Northgate – which are projected to reduce residents' utility bills from one-third to one-half.

Works in progress include a partnership with UVM to conduct a longitudinal study of Rosie's Girls and develop evaluation tools that can be used by all partner sites (in 2009, the program ran in six Vermont communities and an additional five sites nationally and is slated to add another two Vermont sites next year).

And we're exploring the feasibility of developing a work crew opportunity for TJ participants that would prepare meals for childcare centers serving low-income children who are eligible for food supports. Federal money exists for such meals, but Vermont providers have been slow to access it because of the paperwork involved or because they do not have a facility in which they can prepare full meals. Using the Winooski

32A Malletts Bay Ave. / Winooski / Vermont 05404

(phone) 802.655.8900 or 800.639.1472 / (fax) 802.655.8922 / vtworksforwomen.org / rosiesgirls.org

Community Center kitchen, we'd train women in food prep and safety skills, involve them in managing the business end of things, and develop their customer service skills. More children will eat good food at no extra cost to the state. It's a win-win for everyone if we can make the money work.

In her book about creativity, Twyla Tharp asserts that "[i]n order to *be* creative you have to know how to *prepare* to be creative." The support that we received through the Clothes Exchange last year helped us prepare to be creative and flexible in the ensuing months, to take risks that matter, and to stretch beyond our comfort zone – in spite of changes in the economy and in state and federal funding priorities.

To a small nonprofit that struggles to keep at least one eye trained on the future while we fight today's fires, this was perhaps your gift's greatest value.

With thanks again from all of us,

Tiffany W. Bluemle
Executive Director