

Queer Survivor Council to Advise SafeSpace

A new resource being set up by SafeSpace, a "Queer Survivor Council," will advise the anti-violence agency on policies, service gaps, and other concerns, according to Resource Coordinator Connie Beal, an Americorps Vista worker with the group. In addition the council will be the source for a speakers bureau of survivors of domestic and anti-lgbt violence to share their experiences in training settings.

"The Women's Rape Crisis Center and the [statewide] Domestic Violence Network have survivor councils," Beal noted. Those organizations provide speakers who have suffered sexual assault and other violence to remind agency staff and volunteers of the all too real experiences and needs of constituents they seek to help. However, "It's very rare to have [a speaker] who is queer."

The aim of the project is to "help us stay grassroots, to keep active, to empower survivors, to educate people in the speakers bureau, to provide advice, and for survivors to have a say," Beal explained. The Queer Survivor Council will be launched in October, during Domestic Violence Awareness month.

"Our survivors lead us, queer survivors especially," she added. In a speakers bureau role, they can address sexual and gen-

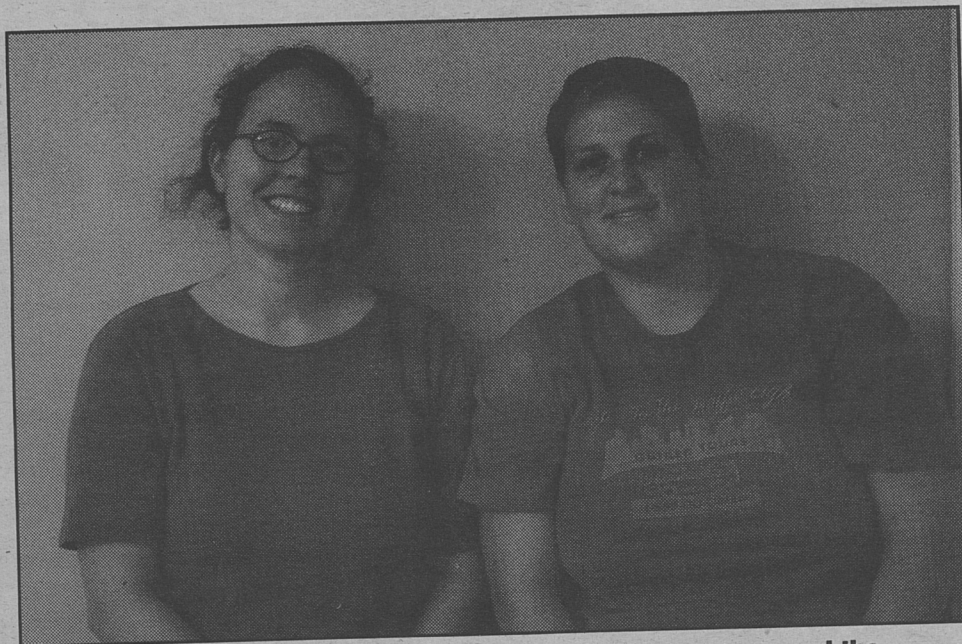
der identity questions that can arise following an incidence of violence, particularly when the violence has an anti-lgbt component, such as the use of anti-gay, anti-lesbian, or anti-trans epithets during an assault.

According to its web site, SafeSpace provides information, support, referrals and advocacy to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning survivors of physical, sexual, and emotional violence across Vermont. Advocates may meet with survivors face-to-face, help access protection orders, and accompany survivors to court or to the hospital.

SafeSpace also identifies itself as a resource for the community regarding lgbtqq physical, sexual and emotional violence. The agency works to reduce barriers for people to access help and/or information through other agencies and institutions. The group is active statewide, with offices in Burlington.

"We are survivor-centered," declared SafeSpace Director Kara DeLeonardis. "We are really accountable, and the Survivor Council will help us continue to be true to the social change part of our purpose."

DeLeonardis noted that the anti-violence movement has become increasingly professionalized, implying the potential for dis-



Kara DeLeonardis (left) and Connie Beal of SafeSpace announced the formation of a Queer Survivor Council.

tance between the service providers and their clients. "A lot of us [professionals] are survivors but that's not our primary focus," she added.

"The real question a Survivor Council can answer is, 'Are we doing what they need us to do?'" DeLeonardis explained. The agency will look to the council for feedback on their web site, the effectiveness of their outreach efforts, and whether staffing the agency's "warmline" 24 hours a day should become a priority, among other concerns.

SafeSpace is considering "a couple of models" for choosing members of the council, which might include community activists as well as queer survivors. The council will not be limited to the agency's volunteers, board members and staff.

Anyone interested in helping to form the council or in serving on it may contact Kara DeLeonardis at SafeSpace: 863-0003, or Kara@safespacevt.org. For more information on SafeSpace, visit their web site: www.safespacevt.org. ▼

VT Freedom to Marry Hires Field Director

As of August 1, the Vermont Freedom to Marry Task Force will have the services of a paid field director for the first time. VFMTF president Beth Robinson said in an interview that a grant from the Civil Marriage Collaborative of the Proteus Foundation allowed the group to hire Robyn Maguire. The group is also looking for office space, although the grant request for that was not funded.

Maguire, who moved to Vermont in May for family reasons, most recently worked for the Freedom to Marry Coalition in Massachusetts as the director of field development and

training. After the Massachusetts Supreme Court's *Goodrich* decision mandating full access for same-sex couples to marriage, Maguire worked in close collaboration with another Vermont resident, Mass Equality's Marty Rouse.

"It's exciting to come back to Vermont where this process all began," Maguire said in an interview in mid-July. "Civil Union puts Vermont ahead of the game, as it shows that the state clearly values recognizing same sex-couples and honoring their relationships."

Robinson said that Maguire will work three-quarters time to help

move the marriage conversation in the state forward. "For awhile we've been in a holding pattern, playing defense on civil unions. We're not in a holding pattern any more."

The *Baker v. State* lawyer added that she's less worried about a caustic backlash over moving from civil union to marriage. "More Vermonters support same sex marriage than ever before," Robinson explained, noting a November 2004 AP election-day poll that found 40 percent of Vermont voters said they supported marriage and 37 percent supported civil unions, with another 21 percent supporting no recognition for same-sex

couples. In 2000, the year the first-in-the-nation civil union law took effect, polling showed an even split of 49 percent for civil unions, and 49 percent against.

"Nationally we're not leading the pack," Robinson said. "To our immediate north, there's marriage [equality]. To our immediate south there's marriage. The sky isn't falling, and it's the same sky here." A reinvigorated campaign for marriage equality, she suggested, would be hard, but not as ugly as the "Take Back Vermont" and "Listen to the People" civil union backlash.

"We hope to build enough of a base of support, of enough depth and breadth, to assure legislators that [passing] a marriage bill won't result in a backlash," Robinson said.

The reinvigorated organiza-

tion is working on a new DVD and has already printed a new brochure focusing on the differences between marriage and civil union. The group plans to have a volunteer-staffed booth at the Addison County Field Days, the Tunbridge and Champlain Valley fairs, and at the State Fair in Rutland.

As the organization notes on its web site, "not all VFMTF supporters embrace the institution of marriage; some do, and some don't. The core values that unite VFMTF are the beliefs that gay and lesbian Vermonters should have the same legal choices as our heterosexual counterparts, and that laws which treat us and our relationships as second class denigrate all of us, regardless of our desire to marry." ▼

Treat Pot Like Booze and Save \$\$\$, Economists Say

Montpelier - In a report released in June, Dr. Jeffrey Miron, visiting professor of economics at Harvard University, estimated that replacing marijuana prohibition with a system of taxation and regulation similar to that used for alcoholic beverages would produce combined savings and tax revenues of between \$10 billion and \$14 billion per year nationally and from \$8.3 million to \$9.4 million or more in Vermont.

Vermont Marijuana Policy Project State Organizer Nancy Lynch urged Vermonters to consider how these

savings and revenues could be used locally. Nationally, a group of more than 500 distinguished economists - led by Nobel Prize-winner Dr. Milton Friedman - released an open letter to President Bush and other public officials calling for "an open and honest debate about marijuana prohibition," adding, "We believe such a debate will favor a regime in which marijuana is legal but taxed and regulated like other goods."

"With Vermont's Medicaid program facing a 2006 shortfall of up to \$70 million, we need to look closely at how we're spending our money and

whether we're getting our money's worth," Lynch said. "A system of taxation and common-sense regulation will not only save money that Vermont desperately needs for health care and other programs, it will give our state better control over marijuana."

Legislation to regulate marijuana was introduced in the Vermont House by Rep. Winston Dowland (P-Derby Line). The bill, cosponsored by Rep. David Deen (D-Westminster), did not make it out of committee before the end of the first session of the legislative biennium.

Using data from a variety of federal and state government sources, Miron's paper, "The Budgetary Implications of Marijuana Prohibition," concludes that replacing marijuana prohibition with a system of legal regulation would save Vermont approximately \$6.6 million annually in government expenditures on prohibition enforcement, while taxation of regulated marijuana sales would raise between \$1.7 million and \$2.8 million in new revenue if marijuana were taxed like ordinary consumer goods. Revenue would increase if marijuana were taxed at the higher rates that apply to tobacco and alcohol.

Lynch admitted in an interview that the savings figures do not reflect the costs of setting up regulatory agencies, hiring inspectors, establishing

product standards, or promulgating rules for marijuana production and sale. Further, the costs for enforcement, perhaps along the model of alcohol enforcement, have not been taken into account, including testing of unauthorized users, their arrest, prosecution, and incarceration for those found guilty of violating regulations.

While Miron notes that many factors beyond costs and tax revenues would need to be considered in evaluating possible changes in marijuana laws, he said, "These budgetary impacts should be included in any rational debate about marijuana policy."

Miron's report is available at <http://www.prohibitioncosts.org>. ▼