

**Indiana Commission for Women  
Hoosier INsight  
St. Margaret's House Listening Session Report  
South Bend, Indiana  
Tuesday, April 12, 2011  
1:00 – 2:00 pm**

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## Overview

At the request of members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the Indiana Commission for Women (ICW) held a special listening session at St. Margaret's House on Tuesday, April 12, 2011, in South Bend, Indiana. St. Margaret's House is a day center works to improve the lives of women and children by providing individual attention to their immediate needs, breaking the bonds of isolation and helping them acquire skills to better their lives. Women who use the services of St. Margaret's House are generally homeless and/or transient. The session was held 1:00pm – 2:00pm to accommodate the Center's program schedule for its clients.

As a group, the participants identified twenty-two (22) issues facing women in Indiana. Given the time constraints, the group voted by a show of hands what the most pressing issue facing women that they wanted to address, which was access to housing. Given the nature of the group and special concerns of the participants, the session was conducted in a more conversational manner; however, they were asked to respond to the same specific questions as other listening session participants. Their responses will help in identifying key components for developing a plan of action that addresses the issue in Indiana. The results of the discussions are detailed later in this report.

## Participants

The St. Margaret's House special listening session was sponsored by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (AKA). This session occurred after the daily lunch provided by St. Margaret's and was open to clients of St. Margaret's. In total, there were fifteen (15) women in attendance; however, the group shrunk as individuals left for other appointments and responsibilities.

## Issues Identified

The participants of the listening session identified issues they believed were barriers to women's full participation in society. These issues were then voted by a show of hands to determine the top issue facing women in Indiana.

- Support for single women 50+
- Transportation (more routes, later hours/24-7)
- Focus on women's issues
- Cost of education
- Minimum wage/better jobs
- Equal pay for equal work
- Outdated rules for housing
- 24/7 health clinic (not ER) (Project Homecoming)
- Lack of Insurance
- Lack of support for single parents
- Sex offenders
- Domestic violence
- Westside neighborhood revitalization
- Crime/safety
- Small business start-up info and resources
- Health care affordability and quality
- Child care

Lack of action plan  
Lack of support for homeless women  
Ex-offender re-entry  
Rehabilitation  
Access to housing

## **Top Issues & Discussion**

The top issue that was identified by the participants was:

1. Access to Housing

Once this issue was identified, the participants worked as a full group to further discuss the components of each issue. Participants were asked to consider a series of questions regarding these issues in order to start developing a plan of action for how we should work to overcome these challenges in Indiana. The questions were divided into five categories and are listed below.

### Frame It

1. What are the critical components of this issue?
2. What should be addressed first?

### What's in Place Now?

3. Are there any existing programs in place to help solve this issue?
4. Are there any agencies or organizations who currently deal with this issue?

### Who should be involved?

5. Who are the people/organizations that should be involved in this issue?
6. Who should be responsible for strategizing ideas and implementing solutions for this issue?

### Community/State Actions

7. How can the community work on solving this issue?
8. Is this an issue that should be addressed statewide? How?

### Next Steps

9. What resources are needed to work on this issue?
10. What are the next steps that should be taken to address this issue?

## Issue: Housing

Access to affordable, safe and quality housing was the top priority that the participants wished to discuss. The discussion of this topic is below.

### *Frame It*

- System for evaluating need for support has outdated requirements
- Safety/crime is a consideration as most low-income housing locations are in bad parts of town
- Cost is still a factor
- Housing may not be up to code
- Extra costs to consider, e.g. utilities
- Discrimination against truly low-income people
- Delays in processing forms
- System doesn't work
- Long waiting list
- Don't provide enough support

### *What's in place now?*

- Stone Soup Community Center (Methodist Church)
- The Homeless Center
- Section 8 Housing Authority – “some places work, some don't”
- Real Services
- Long-term requirements

### *Who should be involved?*

- Mayor, local government
- Lawyers
- Case Workers
- Housing Authority
- State and federal government
- Landlords
- Law enforcement
- Governor
- Women affected by issue
- NAACP
- Civil Rights groups

### *Community / State Action*

- Support and educate about needs
- Find financial resources to support programs and assistance
- Help in finding and identifying services
- Get churches and other spiritual groups and leaders involved

### *Next steps*

- Place to receive full-service – one place to get support **and** resources
- Create a coalition of women to better support and identify the challenges
- Educate community, leaders **and** people receiving services of the challenges
- Support organizations who are already helping – “support the supporters”

## Conclusions

There are many barriers that create challenges to women in Indiana. The *Hoosier INsight: Women's Issues Listening Sessions* project is the first step in starting conversations to help to address the challenges that women still face in our state. The results of all of the sessions held around the state as well as of the accompanying survey will contribute to a report that will help to identify the top 3-5 issues that present major barriers to women in Indiana. These discussions are the beginning of a process to help move women in Indiana forward by engaging Indiana residents in public deliberation.

The *Hoosier INsight* project will help ICW continue to voice the needs, concerns, challenges, and viewpoints of women in Indiana. By better understanding the specific needs and desires of women, the commission will be able to better identify the ways in which they can help to remove barriers that hinder their participation in all areas of society.

A statewide event will occur once the results of the listening sessions, as well as the supplemental online women's issue survey, are compiled. ICW will facilitate a statewide debriefing effort that will guide key community partners and stakeholder to synthesize the results into a shared statewide action plan. It will be ICW's opportunity to inform the community on the primary issues affecting women regionally and statewide that were identified during the listening sessions; to expand coalitions and build capacity to work across networks and to improve outreach efforts on multiple issues.

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### \* Summary Report Disclaimer

This summary report was prepared as an account of key issues, challenges, and suggested solutions described during a public discussion sponsored by the Indiana Commission for Women (ICW) and supported by local partnering organizations in conjunction with its *Hoosier INsight: Women's Issues Listening Sessions* initiative. The compilation of this summary report is provided as a courtesy and should not be considered in any way as an endorsement or promotion by the Indiana Commission for Women, by the State of Indiana or by ICW's partners and supporters. Opinions expressed are strictly those of session participants and not necessarily those of the Indiana Commission for Women, of the State of Indiana or of its partners and supporters. Recommendations from this meeting, together with inputs received from other sources, may inform the creation of a final report and potential plan of action to address the issues and challenges discussed as well as potential future ICW initiatives, programs and services. Furthermore, ICW may use information obtained from this meeting and from the results of this initiative to offer suggestions to other agencies, organizations or entities better suited to address particular issues and/or challenges uncovered during this initiative in order to facilitate maximum cooperation and collaboration between ICW and other entities. The Indiana Commission for Women and those associated with the agency do not assume any legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of any comment made or of any third party's use or results of such use of any information contained in this summary report.