

Interview with Karlyn Rapport

No date given

Location: Marquette

Women's Center in Marquette

START OF INTERVIEW

Jane Ryan (JR): I'm introducing Karlyn Rapport who will be talking about her experiences and the development of the Women's Center here in Marquette. Karlyn was in on the ground floor with the Founding Mothers and will share those experiences with us. The purpose of these tapes is to be part of a series to talk about the establishment of the Women's Center and its accomplishments in the region. It has been serving the Upper Peninsula now for 40 years. This year, 2013 is the 40th anniversary of the establishment. Karlyn.

Karlyn Rapport (KR): My name is Karlyn Rapport. And my husband and I moved to Marquette in 1958. My husband taught at Northern Michigan University as a director of theater and became chair of the department of communication performance studies. I am a speech and language pathologist and I had undergraduate degree and part of master's degree when we came to Marquette. I was one of three speech and language pathologists in the entire U.P. So although I had not planned to work, my colleagues indicated that there was no way I could stay home when the need for someone to work with people who had speech... children who had speech and language problems with so great. So I began...I'm a clinical speech pathologist so I began working with all the worst cases in the public schools of Marquette and Ishpeming, and indicated to them that they needed a public school speech therapist but I would hold down the fort until they were able to hire one, and I supervised students at speech and language pathology at Northern Michigan University. When my husband became chair of the department, my colleagues Sarah McClellan and I job shared and developed a rehabilitation program for what was then St. Marie's hospital when the two hospitals merged, we became, we were heading the rehabilitation team for Marquette General Hospital. The team at that time had different portions of the team services that had, so speech and language pathology might take a quarter of year

directing the team's efforts. And then occupational therapy would take over and physical therapy. But we worked as a team approach we had a physiatrist who came in from U of M. And traveled like once, maybe once every quarter and we had physicians like George Wilson serve, and Frank Munkers. George Wilson primarily then finally Mike Coyne was hired as the physiatrist they had the team. But Sarah and I broke ground basically saying, we had children, we didn't feel we wanted to work full time, we job shared half time, we didn't charge the hospital for the consultation time we did with each other and make sure that our patients had a seamless effort. And after our children grew older, we moved to three quarters time, and then full time. Sarah's husband, Bob McClellan has some legal issues with academic freedom. Because he was encouraging people, there was a condemnation of property around the university which inevitably became parking lots and so on. And he wanted to make sure that the citizens of Marquette were fairly treated in this exchange. And because of this, the university was extremely upset. And there wasn't effort to, I mean, his job was in question. My husband and I differed on this, I mean. I was supportive of Bob McClellan, Jim was supportive of the administration. And I saw that, I can't ask my husband to speak for me. So that was a click. Then I think that this was in the early, I don't know, early 60s maybe what this happened, Betty Friedan's book came out. It resonated tremendously and there were couple of clicks like my husband said, "I'm a liberated man because I allow my wife to work." Excuse me, you know. That was an eye-opening statement and, "You don't have to pay Karlyn very much because she enjoys her works so much." It was another. I think he was chair of that department, I thought, "I need to be valued for the work that I do." And so that's when Sarah and I developed this but the consciousness raising groups were taking subjects from Betty Friedan's for dance book. And I'm sorry that I can't remember who the first house was. But we would meet in people's homes. And I remember that some women would join us for maybe one session and say, "I can't do this because my marriage will be jeopardized if I delve into these feelings." And didn't stay with us. A couple of those marriages dissolved anyway, down the road. But the groups kept swelling and size and then we met at Pat Micklow's house. Many of these small cells together. And decided that we needed to have a conference on Women's issues. And I was part of the team that developed that conference, had speakers come for the conference I remember that Lana Pollack was a state senator, and she was invited Peggy Frazier with part of this group as well. But out of this conference, that was, out of this conference it was, I believe held at the Holiday Inn. That what

came about was this pride for a Women's Center. At the time as a speech and language pathologist, I had been encountering so many cases of head trauma that were the result domestic violence. And people who needed my services, thereafter because of the traumatic brain injury they suffered. The fact that there was no place, no shelter for them. Often times family members felt so intimidated by the assailant that they didn't feel they could provide a safe haven for their daughter or without jeopardizing their own safety. The rehab team struggled to try to find services and each time we felt like we were inventing the wheel that there wasn't a coordinated effort and training or helping survivors of a domestic violence. That each agency was in its own silo trying to reinvent the wheel for that particular person that they weren't, they encountered, so the police were doing one thing not to well. One of the treatments for domestic violence calls at that time was that the assailant would be driven to Presque Isle Park. And his own vehicle to keys would be taken away and he would had to walk home. And they felt that would help him cool-off. Of course, he would come home more angry and enraged. But I remember one person saying that my husband beat me because I didn't iron his socks and the police officer saying, "Well, couldn't you iron socks?" But the point was that no matter what she did, she was going to be beaten and that nobody deserved to be beaten. So at this time where the Women's Center was developing, I felt that I needed to spend my efforts on trying to provide some community response for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. So that's where my efforts took place.

JR: And those were separate from the movement to have the Women's Center?

KR: At that time, we had a... first of all, we, I was able to bring this problem to American Association University Women. And we convened a spouse abuse task force. And that is we just identified every, we did phone calls, and through the community, and identified agencies that were in anyway touching base with domestic violence survivors. Brought them together to say, we need to have a community approached us. We need to have training for people who are dealing with survivors of domestic violence. We were having, we trained couples to have people come to their home. You know?

JR: To shelter?

KR: The survivors, I mean, for shelter. They were in individual homes. Where if it was a married couple. You know, the spouse. Both of them were trained in how to deal with people in crisis to

provide just some type of shelter. But this was not obviously an answer that's going to be a stay in providing what was needed. So we had a conference training, law enforcement, the courts, social workers, department human services, etcetera, medical professionals on how to work with domestic violence and survivors. We received the grant from AAUW at this conference of the purpose of the conference was develop a resource directory because survivors were being shuffled pillar to post and didn't know who to contact or where to go. So we wanted a step by step approach, getting the personal protection orders and where you help, how you could find shelter and how to find housing subsequent to this support during and advocacy and medical training...

JR: Did the various agencies respond quite positively they were grateful for the opportunity?

KR: They did. Yes. Yes. I think, yes. It was a unique experience. We tried to take this to national to the national convention of the American Association of University Women. Saying that this is a national problem that needs to be addressed. But we developed the resolution and we took Glenda Robinson was chair of the American Association of University Women's Marquette branch. As a time took a team of people to speak to the resolution, but nationally they said, they thought that this was just problem of the Northwoods. They didn't know, two years later, they adopted the resolution and took part of a national effort to deal with problems of domestic violence and...

JR: So you can feel the satisfaction of initiating a movement and getting local cooperation.

KR: Exactly.

JR: Did you parallel events happening with a Women's Center? Was there still a connection in some way?

KR: There was still a connection. I still, I was on the board. But a student of Jim's was raped. And she didn't know where to go. She came to my house. You know, and I provided what support I could but I knew that this couldn't be, she couldn't be alone in this. And other people who were on the board, there was another young member of the board who was raped and had similar experience. And so we felt that we had to have a sexual assault support network for these support system. So I was a part of the team that provide that, we were on call.

JR: And that was out of the Women's Center. Ok. So you've got this two important things moving forward.

KR: Developing...So I was serve on committees for the Women's Center like conference committees but I wasn't on the board until later. And I came on, I was on the board and served as chair. When other Women's Center left Northern, and developed the site where we are presently. At the time, now I had been a member of this spouse abuse shelter board from maybe, period of seven years and felt that the institution was fine going on it's own so there I could then divert and work with the Women's Center board at that time. What happened was that there was some concern by the state domestic violence and treatment board regarding what was happening at the spouse abuse shelter. And they felt that they needed to close the shelter unless....

JR: Had they been funding it? Originally?

KR: They had been funding...

JR: Ok.

KR: The program part of it. And local dollars also. But it was because of some staff problems and management problems at that shelter at that time. And accusation that there had been inappropriate advances to vulnerable residents of the shelter that the spouse abuse, domestic violence people in board felt the Women's Center needs take this over or we are going close the shelter. Now, I was share and we were developing the... trying to go into the building and we were raising money funds for a building and then taking on the domestic violence and treatment program, it was an extremely frightening time.

JR: It was too much in terms of just managing, kind of...

KR: I thought, but you know, we had to do it. And so that was a tremendous challenge. While I was on Geri DeFant was on the board and talked us into having the bingo games as a way of fundraising. We thought, "How could we support gambling?" But she indicated that this was going to be a revenue source for us and that we would bring women in the shelter into the fold that hadn't heard about women's rights and that would be a whole different community that we would be touching base with. And it would provide a stable community fund for us. And so and we had this facility that we could renovate to have bingo games and rent out the facility to other

bingo games in the community providing rent and we had two bingo games ourselves, one for the Women's Center during week and one for the spouse abuse shelter. So it was actually Carl Levin, and I think his name was Reagan, it was another state senator, who said, another senator... a Federal senator, member of congress who said we will stand behind you. And Geri had this wonderful connection with Dominic Jacobetti. And Dominic understood the problems that we were facing. And I mean, he looked at the Women's Center like it was a Grand Trial. "So you need a roof? I'll put a line item in." I mean, he was a head of the appropriations committee. It was on the amazing period of time where we had support of just a wonderful people in the community and when people talked about Marquette, you know, we were, we took a group to Washington for the March for Reproductive Freedom, I think we participated in three different marches. But it was the first march we got a group of women and a bus to go to Washington, and we stopped along the way. Then we stopped, I mean, in Escanaba, in Newberry, along the way to Washington, picking up cells of Women, and we thought, we're going to be the only bus there. When we turn the corner into the mall, the sea, this army with buses. Approaching the mall to march in for women's rights. It was just awe inspiring. Sarah McClellan's mother was so... I don't... she must have been close to 80. She was suffragette. She was dressed in white and she marched with us. I mean, a moving thrill... and they had the Women's Center Marquette be and the women in Marquette County be part of this all is just a wonderful. So this was the start of our Founding Mother's projects and others perhaps can tell you about the education process that we wanted to have... Gail Griffith was one of our first directors and Sally May and Sue Kensington was an executive director and fairly early years but with, through Sally, we had programs on Television that talked about women's issues and tried to, we did a lot of public speaking to service groups trying to raise awareness. We were interviewed by the Mining Journal and had many conferences on various issues.

JR: And somebody commented that they it was important step while the support of Northern made a lot of difference initially in the providing space and some of the staffing to move out in the community seemed very important so that it wasn't associated just with university people, and well educated women, that this was to serve the broader...

KR: Exactly.

JR: Broader number of women in the Upper Peninsula. Obviously, if they were joining up in these smaller towns, that was reinforcement for the decision. If you had to summarize how you view the mission of the Women's Center, do you feel like its changed dramatically over time? You know, 40 years is a lot of time. Has it adapted do you think?

KR: I think that its remained, its remained much the thing, and ok, the mission presently is to...the vision is to have a world free from violence and discrimination where everyone is treated equally under the law. And the mission to support victims and survivors that of domestic and sexual violence in Marquette and Alger Counties, through programs that protect, educate, advocate, counsel, and empower. And we are a pro-choice organization so I think that...

JR: So it's in a way it's gone beyond just the consciousness raising of women needing to be out there pursuing careers or whatever lifestyle they choose to focus on many women who are still hurt by violence or discrimination and somewhere other...

KR: Philosophy, it is a feminist organization that believes every individual's entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. Women and men should be treated equally under the law and by society in general. And no individual should be discriminated against or limited by society on the basis of age, sex, or sexual orientation. And we were pro-choice organization providing services in a non-judgmental and supportive manner to individuals as they make decisions in the life.

JR: And I think it's always interesting to point out you do serve men. The numbers might not be proportional but there are men who are subject to abuse or need some support in dealing with issues relating to their relationships.

KR: And at the same time that we advocate for change in the large society to illuminate bias to enhance vulnerable individuals to be fully functioning members of society. So we tried to advocate for legislation. We have to be careful because we were 501(c)3 that... and I think recently, the advocacy is taken on by sister organizations like the American Association of University Women, when the league was fully functioning in Marquette, as well. But we do try to keep abreast certainly of legislation that's going to affect women and encourage women to take some individual stance on that.

JR: Does Northern still play any role?

KR: Well, we maybe use, I think certainly to the extent that we call on faculty members as resource people and for example, when we have a domestic violence awareness month, or sexual assault awareness month, we call on faculty members we have to present colloquiums or they've been very active in Our Evening of Elegance which is a main fundraiser. Student organizations have helped fundraise and for us, there is, you know, we have a brown bagel lunches and Northern students resident advisers come into those brown bagel lunches which take particular issues, for example, we had a presentation on human trafficking by two of our staff members who have had training, it seems to be domestic violence on steroids. And so that the...but at any rate, so we continue to keep that connection between Northern and the Women's Center, Harbor House.

JR: How had the bingo no longer taking place? How do you, what, are grants and things the major source for both spouse abuse?

KR: The grants provided perhaps 75% of the funding for programs at the Women's Center and Harbor House. And certainly the domestic violence treatment board is a major funder for our spouse abuse shelter, Harbor House. We have to raise from the community 200,000 dollars a year. It's about 600 dollars a day in additional revenue. So we have a number of fundraisers the Evening of Elegance is a major yearly fundraiser we have holiday cards that go out, reminding people about our mission and what we do, mother's day cards. We have what we call offered party fundraisers that is the organizations may have a fundraiser for us. For example, organizations or individual businesses. So this Oasis gas station, a portion of their sales, went to the Women's Center-Harbor House. The Rotary Club has provided some funds like 12,000 dollars that they say will pay for... they're putting that toward mortgage payment for Harbor House.

JR: So there's broad community support.

KR: There was broad, now there is broad community support. The Founding Mothers have returned to the board because they feared that this was...this is my second year, as a returning Founding Mother on the board. But the prosecuting attorney's office felt that there was danger of losing community support and also Harbor House. They felt that this is something that the courts could not afford to lose. That they saw women coming in, they needed to support, they needed to advocacy, they need to protect, you know, someone to help them through personal protection orders sit with them in court, while the assailants are being accused and they needed shelter. And

they needed support to help them get on their feet. So that they can provide a life for themselves, rebuild their lives and provide a life for themselves and their children, needed treatment for the children in trauma who have witnessed the

JR: And these are all things that the Women's Center and the spouse abuse shelter have provided.

KR: These are all things that we are doing. Has provided. So the comfort and support to children who have been uprooted and children's programming, the help for women to say, "What now?" Or how were you going to support yourself. And

JR: So the era right now is a rebuilding of financial support.

KR: The financial community support. And I think that we have had, I think the Founding Mothers have helped the community feel that the shelter's in good hands, and Women's Center is in good and experienced hands. And they know that we need this. I mean maybe it's unfortunate, we need this. But this is reality.

JR: Reality.

KR: This is reality. And...

JR: As announce side person the fact that the folks who were involved early on still carry that passion for the mission is, speaks for itself and it can't help but be drawn in to that.

KR: And we are trying to gather younger women to join us. And they need to be feminist, they have a lot of time and they need to be able to accept challenges that are daunting.

JR: Do you feel and I think this was part of motivation for this oral history to be developed, that younger people need, that younger women need to be made help to be aware of the history and the fact its these things don't take place without a lot of energy work and ongoing passion about.

KR: Yes, yes. Definitely so. Even our staff have been amazed that the journey that we've taken to get to this point. And still there are incidents where you just know that...we have a lot of work to do. A police officer saying to rape victim, "Well, if you hadn't gone into the bar on New Year's Eve, this was Satan's work." I mean, blaming the victim for a rape that occurred and when she was given a drug in her drink.

JR: Do you still work with law enforcement, training?

KR: Definitely. We have a good relationship with law enforcement.

JR: Good.

KR: So in this particular case, a call to supervising officer.

JR: It was an aberration so to speak.

KR: Yeah. This is an unusual situation you need to be aware of and fortunately there was a victim and advocate present. So that the advocate could speak to this, when this occurred. So there still, still work to be done in this area. And it's very difficult for me to understand why women are victimized globally. I mean, and still it's just hard to ...

JR: And trafficking is an issue in the U.P. even? And that amazes me. It is? So we need to become more aware of that. Karlyn, as we're drawing to a close, do you have any particular anecdote or particular things that you were specially proud of having happened or being involved with or anything you'd like to share personally that?

KR: I'll have to think on that. I think to be able to see the spouse abuse shelter working after so many years, I mean. That is just for me is, and to see it working so well. I mean to, I just treasure the step that we've been able to hire who have the same passions that we do and treat people that come with in our care with such respect and caring.

JR: And there's a new building. Relatively new home. Isn't it...

KR: We moved? Yes. Are you ready? I didn't notice but the first house we bought was a brothel! I didn't know this years and years ago. You know, it's just hysterical, but I mean quite a bit before, we came to this community. But the house we now have is right across from the sheriff's office from the court house. And when we had this house further down on Fisher Street, they had in alarm that would go off at the sheriff's office so that we had at least of, we had law enforcement support immediately if it were needed. But this is right across, I mean, it's daunting an assailant would have to be out of this mind to, to, right across from the sheriff's office. The other thing was that when we first started the address of the shelter was "hidden" and people in community didn't, it wasn't put out for publication as to where we were. But then there was a change in attitude that it is not the survivors' fault. You know that, and they deserve the

protection. I think Gary Walker was quite instrumental when woman became frighten about testifying against the assailant, fearing further abuse, worse abuse, if they came, if they provided testimony, or the Stockholm syndrome would take place where, “Well, he was drunk at the time.” So that excused this terrible reading in their minds that, “Normally he’s not, he isn’t like this.” Well, Gary Walker said that you don’t...

JR: He was prosecuting attorney at that time.

KR: Yes. He was a prosecuting attorney at the time and said, “The crime is against the society. And that if you, the evidence was there when the police officer came in. So if you were not going to press charges, the prosecuting attorney’s office is going to press charges.” Taking the onus out of the hands of a woman so that her partner cannot accuse her that it’s her. It is his behavior which has brought this on and his behavior which society cannot tolerate, because nobody deserve to be hit. So that kind of change happened early and that was part of the spouse abuse task force working to say, this is problem we often can get women when they were faced with their accuser in a courtroom, don’t have a courage to continue to...

JR: My sense is we were very fortunate with the coming together of people with these enlightened philosophies and views and willing not just to say that’s a good idea but to take action whether we were talking law or women....

KR: Very definitely. One the first conferences that we had to train ourselves, I mean, we were so afar ahead of the game that where the first offered, I think that’s Gelles, Richard Gelles was one of the first researchers in domestic violence with a speaker at the conference, just was a...

JR: Okay. Well, thanks to all of you who were involved in pulling those things together and contributing and still are contributing. We are grateful. This is fun. Anything you’d like to add?

KR: No, I think that’s it. I have no idea how long I talked to you.

JR: It was good. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW