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Interviewee: Bridget Hanna
Interviewer: Bryan Lida
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Bryan Lida: To start, could you just describe your current position at the Y, what it entails, and what your responsibilities are here?

Bridget Hanna: Sure. I'm the training and outreach coordinator, so that means that I organize our training for new advocates two to three times a year. I also coordinate all of our outreach, and I do a lot of that myself, so I spend a lot of time speaking to different groups, mostly schools about the issues around domestic and sexual violence. And I also coordinate our First Step response team, which are advocates that go on sexual assault advocacy calls.

BL: And can you describe those calls – the work anyway involved in those – are they crisis response for First Step?

BH: Yeah, First Step is crisis response. It usually entails going to the emergency room with a person who has been sexually assaulted.

BL: And what is a typical day like, if there is one. And if not, what kind of days do you have in the different areas you're involved in – a typical day of work or just kind of the day-to-day stuff you do?

BH: Ok, a typical day is hard to describe because working here, crisis can come up anytime, so you may have just a beautifully outlined day of spending half a day in a school and then the rest of the day catching up on phone calls and stuff. But, I can get a First Step call at noon and be gone for the rest of the day. But, I guess typically do a lot of contacting other agencies and trying to get the word out about our services and stuff like that, trying to go out as much as I can. I spend a lot of time organizing the training when that's going on too.

BL: Okay, and can you describe your initial involvement with feminism, or activism, or just with the Y in general, or just other agencies, and what was a typical day like then for you?

BH: Ok, so my first experience with activism, actually was in Cincinnati, Ohio, where I became pretty active in an inner-city, low-income neighborhood, and I lived down there for most of that time. So I spent a lot of time with the homeless shelter, which is called the Drop-In center, and I eventually did my practicum there. I also did a lot of protesting, and showing up at City Council meetings to talk about the needs of low-income people. I also volunteered for the Welfare Rights Coalition, which was probably my introduction to violence against women and poverty as a major issue for women. At the same time, in school, kind of started getting more into feminist theory, and also kind of looking at poverty in third world countries, and stuff like that.

BL: And you mentioned you did a practicum. Were you a Social Work major?

BH: Yeah, I majored in Social Work and had a minor in Peace Studies.

BL: Are there any events that stand out for you since your involvement with the groups you've mentioned, or with the Y, or just with feminism?

BH: Yeah, I guess a lot of things stand out, but how I got involved in Cincinnati was through the University I went to, Xavier, and they had a service learning project. And this guy named buddy gray* came and spoke to a group of students. And buddy was a homeless activist, who dropped out of college in the sixties, pretty much sold everything he had, moved down and started a homeless shelter by breaking into an abandoned building, and started to house alcoholic men. He was a major source of inspiration for me, and then he was killed about a month before I moved down to Over-the-Rhine. And that is something that has always stuck with me, just as a person of inspiration, and the tragedy to see that he was murdered in that neighborhood. So that's one thing that sticks out in my mind.

[* Bridget's correction – buddy never capitalized his name]

BL: Would you say that he was an individual who's inspired you to stay with feminism and activism to this day?

BH: Yeah, definitely. buddy gray. And I think there's also other people who have inspired me, but he's probably someone who sticks out in my mind because he was – it [his death] was really shocking to me, and it was just when I was starting to get involved.

BL: And, are there any troubles that you've encountered, since the very beginning, or since your beginning with the Y, or with just feminism or activism?

BH: What kind of troubles.

BL: Troubles with it meshing with your personal life, or with your time, or with your personal philosophies.

BH: Yeah, definitely. I think that working at the YWCA, for instance kind of, for me, requires a buy-in to the philosophy. And that buy-in really has to reflect my life, just as – I guess I kind of like to be congruent in where I work and the way I live my life. So definitely, from the time when I decided to move down to the inner-city, and started simplifying my life. And as I got more interested in feminism and realizing that there's a lot of things in my life that weren't congruent with that. And those are really difficult, I think. And that's the major thing about activism and service, in general, that I've found is it really makes you question yourself, and challenge yourself pretty often. So, it's definitely affected my relationship with my family, who

might not – not all of them probably feel the same way I do about a lot of issues. And it definitely has affected my time.

BL: Would you say, for the most part though, your personal philosophies or personal theories, are pretty in alignment with the Y, or with feminist theory?

BH: Yes.

BL: And, kind of along those same lines, how have you changed, since you started with feminism, or with the Y?

BH: I have changed my language a great deal. I think growing up in this culture, your language can become pretty sexist. So that's one thing that's been really something that I'm conscious of not excluding groups of people, which is pretty easy with our language also. I think I also had to change some of my life expectations too, which is a good thing.

BL: And have any of your outlooks changed, or your theories on feminism or activism, your goals, or anything like that? Have they changed at all, or have they stayed pretty much the same since you started?

BH: I don't know, let me think about that for a minute. I'll think about it, and we can come back to that one.

BL: Did you have a primary goal when you began with studying Social Work at the university or starting with the homeless shelter? Did you have a primary goal?

BH: I think that I was pretty disillusioned with the world. I guess coming from a middle class background, I felt that I needed to know more about the experience of the majority of the people in the world. And, I think that's where I kind of started. I just wanted more knowledge, and I was a little upset that that knowledge wasn't something that I'd been taught. And so, I guess I kind of learned to break down barriers between myself and other people, and learned from people. And I think that definitely continues to this day. Working on the crisis line or in the shelter, one of the most extraordinary things that you can do is hear a story, and really learn about someone else's experience.

BL: What are you most proud of, whether personally, or collectively in the sense of feminism, or the Y, or activism in general?

BH: Well, I guess one of the things about activism that makes me proud, when I feel like I'm being active, is taking a stand on something. And I think that's pretty difficult because a lot of times you kind of put yourself in a vulnerable position. So, I'm definitely proud of the YWCA for taking stands in this community, and also, continuing work that is incredibly difficult, and has

not always had the backing of society – in a lot of times it doesn't. So that is something I'm definitely proud of.

BL: For the Y, or just feminism in general.

BH: Feminism in general, I guess, yeah. Well, I guess when I'm speaking, I'm speaking specifically about the YWCA, but feminism – it makes me proud to say I'm a feminist, just because of the long line of incredibly strong and brave women who have challenged society. And that's a real honor for me to try and follow their lead.

BL: Is there anything you would have done differently, so far? From college, if that was your start?

BH: No, so far I feel like I've been doing everything I want to do.

BL: And what contributions do you feel you've made to this organization, to back in Cincinnati, or to feminism or activism?

BH: It's kind of hard to say, because I feel like I'm so young. I guess I hope to do a lot more, but at the YWCA – and I think you'll find this too – just being here and listening to someone's story, and being supportive and advocating for someone. And every time you do that, I think you make a contribution. And I hope that when I'm talking to schools that – my hope is that when I walk out of that room, they have more knowledge and tools than I had, when I was their age.

BL: What do you feel still needs to be done, whether through you, or through the Y?

BH: A lot still needs to be done. As far as we've come in the feminist movement for women's rights, and I guess everybody's rights, I just feel like we have got a long way to go to continue to break down barriers. Obviously economic equality is something that we still need to achieve, I think. There's so much blaming of victims, which, especially when the victims are women, with relationships and sexual violence. I just feel like we have a long way to go with that. As far as the feminist movement and as the YWCA, I think that we need more men involved. I don't think this is – at the YWCA, we work a lot with domestic and sexual violence, and I don't think that it's just women's issues. In the past, I think that it has been a woman's issue, that women had to come together, and help each other, and help each other heal from the violence. But as far as men being the majority of perpetrators, I feel like that's a men's issue and that to end this violence, we need to have men involved, and have men buy in to feminism, and working to end the violence.

BL: Do you see that happening at all, with men? Do you see it getting better?

BH: I do. I mean, just having you and Josh here makes me really excited about that. And just in the community, talking to different men, who also want to be involved at some level. Or last

week, I was at a seminar for Ronan High School, and there was a man there, and I think he was from Futures or Families First. I feel bad, I don't remember where he was from. But anyways, he was there talking about healthy relationships. And I thought that was really powerful for those kids to hear that from a man.

BL: This is kind of along the same lines, I guess, but how do you personally view the position of women, in general, in Missoula, or Montana, or in society?

BH: I would say that the way women are portrayed in the media still horrifies me. And I think that, to a large extent, are still sexualized. And if you listen to music lyrics or watch T.V., that continues to happen today. Economic equality, we still have not achieved that. And, like I was saying before, blaming women when they have been violated in some way. We still have a long ways to go in that.

BL: And what do you think contributes to all that, overall?

BH: Patriarchy, I guess.

BL: And where do you see the women's movement going, or the position of women? Do you see it getting better in the future? And what needs to happen?

BH: I definitely see it getting better. I am hopeful about that. The feminist movement has continued, and it will continue, and with each generation, there's kind of a new wave of energy and focus. And I definitely have hope and confidence that that will continue. As I look at my peers, one of the more positive things is that I feel like I hear more often girls and women not satisfied, and I think that can kind of be the source of energy for change. And I also feel like we have this wonderful source of wisdom from women who have been working for equality for a lot of years. That's one of the things I love about Missoula, is that it's a really great women's community, and it's a great source of energy and wisdom for me.

BL: What about the YWCA, as an organization? What can it do, or what can you do individually regarding women's position in Missoula, or just feminism in general?

BH: Education, I think. That's obviously really important to me. It's part of my job, and just something I believe in, that by educating people, people can learn to change or learn that they might want something different. We can also learn how to recognize signs of violence, so that as a society we know how to respond better. I think also, as the Y continues to take stands in the community about issues, that's also really important. As a respected agency in Missoula, I think it's pretty powerful when we take a stand.

BL: Do you have any feelings on, this is just from some of the other people I've interviewed – they mentioned that the Y has been here for 90 years, and how ingrained they are in the community, are you very familiar with that?

BH: About their history here?

Brian Lida: Yeah, as far as continuing to take a stand, do you feel that they [the YWCA] have done that in the past?

BH: I'm not really familiar with the *whole* history, but from what I've heard, the Y has continued to evolve and change as an agency, as any agency does that's been around for 90 years, and at times, has taken really hard stands. And I think that just the work that we do has required that we take a stand. That hasn't always been easy to do. So there is definitely a history of empowerment and challenging society.

BL: Is there anything you'd like to say to people 50 years from now on feminism in Montana, or in Missoula specifically, or just the Y?

BH: I guess, 50 years from now, I really hope that the Crisis Line doesn't even need to be in existence.

BL: Could you describe that really quick?

BH: The Crisis Line is a 24 hour line for people who have questions about domestic or sexual violence, or sexual harassment, or anything like that, or people who are being victimized, someone who has been victimized, but wants help, or a friend of someone who's in an abusive relationship, something like that. So 50 years from now, I would really, would be extremely happy if that wasn't even in existence anymore.

BL: What would the Y then focus itself on? Let's say domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse was not longer an issue.

BH: Then we wouldn't even need to be here. We'd all have to find new jobs. I mean that kind of really, really, really idealistic. I think that the YWCA would continue to be a place for women, and whatever issues face women 50 years from now.

BL: Is there any other comments or statement you'd like to make about feminism, or your life with feminism that I haven't asked you?

BH: I guess what really – there's a quote that I read, and I should know who said it, because I'm about to quote it, but that feminism is simply saying that all people are equal. And I think that's probably the definition that kind of stays in my heart and why I feel like all the work I have done has been a part of feminism, regardless of whether its focused on poverty or violence against women, or welfare reform. I just feel like feminism has evolved to believing that all people are equal. And when I tell people I'm a feminist, a lot of times they equate that with man-hater.

And I think that's really unfortunate, because that alienates men from this movement. So that's unfortunate that people have that perspective.

BL: And just going back to that last question, if you've thought more about it, what troubles have you encountered, I guess you just mentioned one there, since your beginning with feminism or activism.

BH: So any troubles?

BL: Yeah.

BH: I think I talked a little bit about that, but one specific one would be my relationship with my mom. She is a person who thinks that feminism equates to hating men, basically. And she's also – we've had difficulties with the whole pro-choice issue. So I guess she's come around a lot, as far as supporting the work that I do, but it's difficult and strains out our relationship sometimes, having difficult discussions about what I think of as feminist theories and what she think of as some radical, weird perspective that I might have.

BL: Do you have that feeling with anyone else in your life, outside of the Y, you know, friends, peers?

BH: Yes, definitely. Definitely peers also. Yeah totally, it's difficult – I guess sometimes when you buy into it to a certain extent its difficult even to really maintain friendships. Sometimes, if that person doesn't really agree, or acts in a way that is contradictory to believing that all people are equal. And that's a pretty broad statement. It comes up pretty often. Just in this society, with all this racism, and homophobia, and sexist comments that we hear at any moment.

BL: Well, I think that's all I have –

BH: I think the other one that we were going to come back to was – was it the one that was right after that question?

Brian Lida: Well we talked about how you have changed, your troubles, and just your primary goals –

BH: Did I answer that one? Primary goals?

BL: You did answer that one. Unless there's anything else you want to say about that or anything?

BH: Okay, no then.

Brian Lida: Well, thank you very much.

BH: You're welcome. That wasn't too long.

Note: A few minutes after the interview ends, Bridget remembers some other things she wants to say.

Brian Lida: Okay, just start again with any of those statements.

BH: Ok, I was talking about the fact that I can't really remember not being a feminist. I remember not having the words for it. And I remember not even liking that word, feminism. But, I was born the fifth of seven children, and I had four older sisters and two younger brothers. I also was born with a disability, and I think those two scenarios in my life kind of started me with this thinking. And for one, I'll talk about what it was like after my brothers were born. And I saw immediately how they were treated differently, and I was a tomboy for most of my younger life, and really just wanted to be like my brothers and get the same attention that they got, get to do all of the fun things that they got to do. And that interested me much more than what my sister's roles were developing as, like caretakers, and they babysat me a lot. Even though my sisters were really cool, and they played sports and stuff, it was just really subtle and something that I was aware of right away. And, I guess also, my relationship with my father changed a lot after my brothers were born. And that's something that has definitely been one of the most challenging things in my life. And also, being born with a disability, I was born deaf, I obviously have had the experience of being a minority in my family, instantly that was dealt with. And just immediately, the language of that – I was called hard of hearing for a long time, and I eventually grew to resent that, because it was talking about what I was lacking. And so I think those – and I could talk forever about those two parts of my life – were just definitely something that has focused and shaped my life. So growing up as a girl and wanting to play sports, which was okay for a long time, but eventually you just kind of get the subtle message that this isn't where you should be focusing all of your time. Or you get the not so subtle message from the neighborhood guys, where all of the sudden they don't call you to play, or something like that.

BL: Would you say you've had those – subtle messages anyway – throughout your life, since then? Not just with sports, but things you quote/unquote "shouldn't be involved in?"

BH: Yeah, with lots of things. Or for me, one really huge issue, I talked a little bit about this the other day, but when I shaved my head a year and a half ago – or two years ago now. The first time I cut it off, I didn't even shave it, it was like this length, which is like an inch or something, and my mom didn't speak to me for a month. I was totally shocked that she would be that upset over something. But that was a really clear message that I've kind of stepped out of the bounds, as far as how a woman should be dressed or how she should look. And dress has always been an issue with me.

[End of Side A]

[Side B]

BH: One of the really great things about my life, and this is kind of interesting because I grew up Catholic, and I went to an all girls school in high school. And I remember that the seed for feminism was planted there really subtly in just seeing my friends, these girls who really never spoke up much during high school, being the school president and stuff. And that was really awesome to see girls taking leadership like that. And also, some of the nuns were really awesome and talked about women, and being – and having power as women, and what that power looks like. That was awesome, even in the Catholic context, that that was happening. And I say even in a Catholic context because I know that obviously there's a lot of sexism in the church. Any questions about that?

BL: Yeah, I would say, if you can remember your experiences in the Catholic high school, and your experience with the high schools here, do you see, with the students anyway, a lot different approach to women?

BH: Well definitely, because all the guys I grew up with went to this other Catholic, all boys, school. And just the difference that I saw even in one of my brothers who started at that school. He was very focused on football. And the way that they treated girls was not always in an appropriate way.

BL: That was an *all* boys school?

BH: Yeah, it was an all boys school. A lot of my friends went to the all boys school.

BL: So you guys all knew each other though?

BH: Yeah, so we all kind grew up together, and then split up in high school. So definitely differences. Just kind of an equivalent, I went into Loyola, and there were a couple of young men there who just really got it, you know. They really got what I was trying to talk about. And I could tell they had given thought to it before. So, I guess that would be the Catholic high school comparison [In Missoula]. And then, as far as going out to high schools, sometimes people get it, and sometimes they don't, but I don't think they're all that different from the Catholic school that I went to.

BL: And is there anything – I guess I haven't really asked you about the high schools yet – the work you do at the high schools. How do you see sexism or racism being perpetuated in there, or do you? And what do you think the situation is like?

BH: Well, I think it's probably pretty similar to the rest of society. That there's a lot of good things happening in the high schools. There's the GUTS group, which is Girls Understanding Their Strengths. I think that's a wonderful place for girls to go, and become involved in. But of course, teenagers pretty much absorb pop culture, and then they kind of reflect it back out. So I

definitely see a lot of that there, but I don't think that that's probably any more – I mean it's a little more extreme in the teenage years.

BL: But would you say that, proportionately, it's pretty similar to society as a whole.

BH: Probably.

BL: Ok, you mentioned that also you wanted to talk about some other inspirations that you had. You mentioned buddy – anything else on that?

BH: Definitely, I spent one summer, and then a couple of months after I graduated in Northern Ireland. The first time I went there was really to learn more about the conflicts in Northern Ireland, and specifically the work with Catholic and Protestant kids in a summer camp. And we just tried to integrate them. There wasn't much curriculum to that really, just trying to provide a safe place for kids to go to, whether you were Protestant or Catholic. And I met a woman there, who totally inspired me as a feminist. Well kind of a feminist but probably – I don't even know if she has that word in her language. And, it was just great, because women would get together, and women would talk about what was going on, and she was kind of like everybody's backbone in that. She was just a really strong woman, who cared about the women in her community. And they would just do things like go and have tea and just talk or walk around the neighborhood and just stop in and see each other and make sure everybody was doing ok. It was really amazing grassroots feminism, I guess, and they probably would never even use that word. And the other reason why she inspired me is that she was a survivor of domestic violence. And as she kind of – she was probably one of the people who inspired me to start working at the YWCA, just because she was the first person who ever had told me her story of being in a violent relationship, a marriage, and having kids, and what that was like in Northern Ireland. So she's definitely a source of inspiration.

BL: And are there any women here that you met initially at the Y, that have kind of been a mentor?

BH: I would say Sally Mullen, who was the previous director here, is definitely a mentor in my life. I loved spending time with her and learning from her. I could just go and pick her brain for hours, because she's done so many amazing things, and she's so wise.

BL: Is there anything specific that she helped you with, getting started?

BH: Yes, definitely lots of specific things. I've picked her brain a lot about the Missoula community, because she seems to know it inside and out. She helped me a lot with getting contacts and simple things like that. But also, she just really believes in people, and she shows that. Just watching her direct an agency is kind of like --- because she really knows how to build people's confidence, and how to check in with everybody, and create a place where everybody feels safe regardless of our differences. She is obviously an incredibly empowered woman, and

you just get that sense when you're around her. She knows her power and is not afraid of speaking up or doing what needs to be done. And she also has a really great outlook on life, I feel like. She's been through a lot and has a lot of knowledge.

Brian Lida: Well you mentioned all that you wanted to talk about, but feel free to go on.

BH: No, that's ok.

Brian Lida: Ok.

BH: Thank you.

Brian Lida: Well, thank you too.

[End of Interview]