



Tri County Women's Centre

Annual Report

April 1st. 2007 – March 31st. 2008

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Summary

The Women's Centre has had another year of growth and maturity as we move into our sixth year of operations. Working with women, their families, and our community partners, we have been a part of the continued efforts of creating a healthy and vibrant community in South West Nova.

This past year has also been a year of transition as we moved to a new location on Main Street in Yarmouth and hired a new coordinator. The new location has increased our visibility, and having a full staff compliment has taken some pressure off the core staff who did a commendable job of keeping services, programs, and projects going.

More women have accessed our direct services in the past year, which is partly due to our new location as well as our longevity in the community. We have also had a busy and successful year of partnering with a number of community and government agencies on specific projects and programs. A number of these were started in this fiscal year and will continue into the next.

Over the past year the Centre has been working towards establishing their own legal identity from Women for Community Economic Development (WCED), the sister organization that established the Women's Centre. This will enable both entities to apply for Charitable Status and other advantages, working to make it a better community and world for women and their families.

Being the only Women's Centre in the three counties of Shelburne, Yarmouth and Digby, and trying to ensure equitable services in all three counties continues to be a great challenge. A satellite Centre in Shelburne and Digby, one to two days per week, would enable us to offer outreach services so women in these areas could access our direct services and programs.

To continue to carry out our public policy work on women's equality, and be developing programming and best practices, it is imperative that we are looking to other funding bodies to assist with these opportunities. Over the last year efforts have been carried out to secure funding from a number of sources, which are highlighted in the projects listed below. As some of these projects have yet to receive funding we will list only those where funding is secure.

Our efforts to have our operational funding increased to address a cost of living increase for the staff and accommodate other shortfalls like our outreach services and additional staff have been met with limited success. If we are to be successful in our growth and in meeting the demands at both the individual and collective/community level, we need to find ways to increase our funding. To do

otherwise will lead us perilously close to staff burnout, staff turnover and an overall frustration of not meeting our mandate to women and their families in South West Nova.

It is still disappointing that we and other equality seeking women's organizations do not have an avenue to address public policy as it pertains to women's equality. We continue to encourage the government for the re-establishment of this mandate within Status of Women Canada.

Direct Services

As the Women's Centre is a multi-issue entry point for women of all ages, a large part of our direct services to them falls within our support counseling and advocacy service and programs.

Support Counseling and Advocacy Services

As was mentioned above, the number of women who have accessed our services over the last year has increased from the previous year. On average we are working with 18 new women a month and maintain a monthly contact with another 35 returning women. The overall average monthly contact is 45 women per month who seek out the Centre for support and advocacy on a broad range of issues. We have worked with 223 individual women over the last year. The support and advocacy provided to individual women usually represents 20 –30 contacts that are; visits to the Centre, accompaniment to court and other appointments, phone calls and referrals to other agencies. In turn, contacts can represent a tremendous number of hours of work with individual women. No woman is denied access to our services and she can use our services until she determines her situation is resolved and we are no longer needed.

Programs

Another important component of our direct services is delivery of programs. As much as possible we attempt to have the programs delivered in all three counties and gear them so they are age specific. We have programs for adult women, adolescent girls, and pre-pubescent girls. Some of the programs are delivered under our operational funding and some are delivered with additional funding from other sources.

For **Adult Women** we were able to offer two specific programs, Self-Esteem and KIPP (Knowledge is Power). Working with the Women's Place, the Women's Centre in Bridgetown, we delivered a *Self- Esteem* program in Digby. We also delivered two programs in Yarmouth, *Self-Esteem and KIPP* (Knowledge is Power Program) that was an open group that met once a week. We had 35 individual women participate in these programs. Over the latter part of this fiscal year we developed partnerships and opportunities to deliver programs in Barrington, Shelburne, Weymouth and Digby over the following year.

For **Adolescent Girls** we were able to deliver the *Voices* program in Digby Junior High in the spring (2007) as well as the winter (2008). We were also able to deliver the program at Yarmouth Junior High. When this program is offered in

the schools, the school staff chooses high-risk girls to participate in this 18-session program. The other two programs we were able to offer were *It's A Girl Thing* and *Cheer Squad*. *It's A Girl Thing* is a series of special events that are organized for a group of young girls that encourages personal empowerment, friendships and social supports. *Cheer Squad* is a program at Par en Bas, one of the Junior High Schools. This program uses cheer-leading techniques to get the girls physically active and to deliver strong messages on healthy eating/ lifestyle. We had 32 adolescent girls participate in these three programs. Additional funding from NS Health Promotion and Department of Community Services has enabled us to offer these programs

For **Pre-Pubescent Girls** our *Girl Power Camps* are offered every summer. These are weeklong day camps that are offered in different locations. Thirty girls between ages 9 –12 participated in these. Our summer students organize and deliver these camps.

Projects

Women and Pensions – As a partner to the project, we participated in the third phase that concentrated on public forums to educate women on their rights and entitlements. We were able to deliver these educational forums throughout the Tri Counties in the next fiscal year.

Smart Start- Job Readiness/ Re- Entry Program - With funding from the *Department of Community Services* we were able to offer a short version of our program over the winter. The 8 week program was offered at the Women's Centre with 8 women starting and 5 completing the program.

Reading for Good Mental Health – With funding from the *Nova Scotia Mental Health Foundation* and in partnership with the Tri County Learning Network, user-friendly brochures on mental health concerns were developed, printed, and distributed. They were done in both official languages and distributed broadly throughout the Tri Counties.

I am Woman and Have I Got a Story to Tell - With funding from the *NS Gaming Foundation* we were able to implement a program for women impacted by problem gambling. Working closely with Addiction Services, the program assisted women to develop creative ways to express themselves and cope with their addiction. With the results from this program we will be applying to the foundation for three year funding to pilot the program and further develop best practices.

Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in South West Nova: Reducing the Harm/ Reducing the Violence - With funding from *Status of Women* (that was announced just prior to the end of this fiscal year) we will be working with a number of community and government partners in the Tri Counties to address sexual violence prevention and coordination of services. We anticipate this will

lead to the establishment of a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program in the foreseeable future.

Youth Homelessness / Affordable Housing for Young Mothers – Over this fiscal year, and building on work that was carried out in the previous year, the Women’s Centre has kept housing needs for youth on the community agenda. With funding from *Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)* the Women’s Centre and the Yarmouth Working Group on Youth Homelessness will be able to carry out additional community capacity work on this over this next fiscal year.

Regional Process

We have started to meet with the Department of Community Services as part of the regional process. The department has wanted to implement a regional process for some time. With three women’s centres in the western region we meet together with the department representative. At this point we are developing terms of reference and other logistical details. We are sorting out how this process fits into the overall work of Connect, and if our funding priorities and other concerns will be addressed through this regional process.

Special Events

Each year we host different events at the Centre so the community feels welcome to come to the Centre and we are able to promote specific events that relate to women’s equality.

Women’s History Month – In October we hosted an evening to discuss many great women and in particular women we felt were special and deserving of recognition.

Christmas Tea – This has been a tradition since the Women’s Centre opened and was a wonderful success.

International Women’s Day - March 8th. – We hosted an open house that gave women in the community an opportunity to come to the Women’s Centre and celebrate with women all over the world, women’s wonderful accomplishments.

Caregiver’s Booklet - Working with NS Advisory Committee on the Status of Women (NSACSW) and the Yarmouth Regional Hospital, we hosted the local launch and promotion of the research and Caregivers Handbook developed by NSACSW and other partners to their longitudinal study.

Staff Training

Each year staff members at the Centre are involved in training and conference opportunities that assist in improving skills and current practices.

- Elizabeth Fry Society Train the Trainer session

- Sexual Assault Training
- Gambling Workshop & the Gaming Foundation Roundtable
- Board Governance

Community Partnerships/ Networks/ Collaborations

The Centre has also been involved on several advisory committees, boards and community initiatives.

- ❑ Quality and Accreditation for Addiction Services – Addiction Services underwent their most recent accreditation and invited the women’s centre to participate in that process.
- ❑ Yarmouth Centre for Sexual Health – This is housed in the Women’s Centre so our symbiotic relationship goes without saying. Having the centre housed within our centre makes for a win-win situation, as we are able to keep the Sexual Health Centre open and provide backup, as the paid hours are limited.
- ❑ Youth Health Centre Working Group (Department of Public Health) – This group is focused on the development of a youth health centre in the community.
- ❑ Factors of Youth Pregnancy Project (Dalhousie University) – Working with the researchers to access youth as informants for the research project. Also as members of their working group.
- ❑ Southwest Community Network – The Interagency meets to discuss social, justice, and equality issues and is a place for the Women’s Centre to meet community partners to address gaps and challenges.
- ❑ Yarmouth Learning Network – We work closely with the adult learning group and a staff member represents the Women’s Centre on their Board.
- ❑ Women’s and Business Network – We work with the Women’s Business Initiative (WBI) to address the needs of women business owners and program needs for women in, or thinking about being in, that sector.
- ❑ School for Warrior without Weapons – Initiated through the Shire this is a program for youth. We assisted in an advisory capacity to the program as well as promoting the program and referring youth.
- ❑ Roundtable on Youth Sexual Health (Province of NS) – This is a provincial roundtable under the Department of Health that is developing a provincial framework to ensure equitable and consistent delivery of services to youth.
- ❑ South West Shore Development Authority – We keep abreast of their initiatives and participate as much as possible in these.
- ❑ South West Community Justice – We work with young women who are going through the program and we sit on the community justice forums to discuss their criminal actions and what needs to happen to address the harm.
- ❑ West Nova Inclusive Employment Society – This agency works with the disabled community and we have a representative on the Board.

- ❑ Women for Community Economic Development – With the project focusing on Women and Money Management we will be on the Advisory Committee to the project.
- ❑ Dalhousie School of Nursing/ Nova Scotia Community College/ Department of Community Services – When appropriate, and to the best of our ability, we offer a community study or work placement for students or clients.
- ❑ Women and Tobacco Advisory Committee – We sit on this committee that focuses on services and promotion of resources on women and tobacco cessation.
- ❑ Partners for Children and Family Supports – An interagency that comes together to share understanding of services and develop collaborations.
- ❑ Chamber of Commerce – We are a member and participate, when possible, in their events.

Provincial and National Networks/ Coalitions

Our relationships with our provincial associations are central to our ability to address our core funding priorities and public policies that impacts women's equality.

Connect! The Association of Women's Centres in Nova Scotia - As a member in our Association we make it a priority to participate in the monthly meetings. Our main funding priorities still need to be addressed by the provincial government and will be of utmost importance over the next year. Formulating our submission to the NS Poverty Reduction Strategy working Group will be another priority. We will also be organizing an Assembly to bring board members and staff from all centers together to develop a strategic plan for Connect.

Feminists for Just & Equitable Public Policy (FemJEPP) – As an active member of our provincial coalition of equality seeking women's organizations, we work through FemJEPP to address women's equality. This past year we have been very involved in the Nova Scotia Poverty Reduction Strategy as FemJEPP's coordinator is co-chairing the Working Group for the strategy.

Women's Innovative Justice Initiative (WIJI) - We are represented on the provincial coalition through Connect. WIJI is working on a number of fronts dealing with the justice system; moratorium on restorative justice for adult perpetrators, specialized courts for domestic violence, training for hospital and justice personnel, and justice response to violence against women.

Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) – Our Canadian Coalition monitors our federal and provincial governments' compliance to United Nation's International Treaties that our governments have signed to advance women's equality in our country. Through our provincial coalitions we assist FAFIA in being a strong voice at the International table.

Priorities for the Next Year

Working with our many community and government partners we see these as our top priorities over the next year

- ❑ Addressing our funding priorities for the Centre through our Association Connect!
- ❑ Coordination of Services for female victims of sexual violence/ SANE Program
- ❑ Women's Health Clinic
- ❑ Longer term funding for our Job Readiness/Re-Entry program for women
- ❑ Adolescents
 - Youth Homelessness and Affordable Housing
 - In-depth programming for adolescent girls
 - Youth Health Centre
 - Addiction Issues
- ❑ Women and Pensions
- ❑ Creative programming for women dealing with gambling addiction
- ❑ Smoking Cessation and Pregnancy
- ❑ More connections with our ethnic minority populations
- ❑ Programming and needs assessment/analysis with Women in Business
- ❑ Public Transportation
- ❑ Update our Policy & Procedures Manual

Core and Project Staff

Name	Position
Bernadette MacDonald	Coordinator
Michele Archibald - Hattie	Program Coordinator/ Support Counselor
Karen Stewart	Financial Coordinator/ Support Counselor
Kirsta Morris	Project Coordinator / Gaming Foundation Program Facilitator/ Youth
Cynthia Duncan	Project Coordinator/ Mental Health Project
Carole Hill - Bojarski	Project Coordinator/ Women & Pensions
Cynthia Fiander-Cormier	Program Facilitator – Smart Start
Sue Guy	Program Facilitator – Smart Start
Hilda Saulnier	Office Manager - Work Placement

Board of Directors

Renee Meuse-Bishara, Co-Chair

Debbie Roberts, Co-Chair

Lynn Comeau

Fleurette Surette

Natasha Yorke

Tasha Smith

Lois LeBlanc

Angela Pauze-Bullerwell

Darlene LeBlanc

Karen Stewart

Bernadette MacDonald

Michele Archibald - Hattie