



Tri County Women's Centre

Annual Report

April 1st, 2009 – March 31st, 2010

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Summary

This past year was a very busy, productive, and engaging one. More women continue to seek out the centre for services and programs. The number of women and adolescent girls who access the centre for support counseling and advocacy is a testament to the need and the service we provide. In collaboration with our community and government partners we initiated a number of projects to address some of the social and environmental issues in our Tri-County community.

This past year was our eighth year of operations and we continue to go from strength to strength. We have been successful in achieving some significant funding to address services for victims of sexual violence, housing services for youth placed at risk, and engagement of youth and community on illicit drugs in our community. A lot of this work will continue into the next fiscal year but the project development was done in this fiscal year.

This was the year we secured Charitable Status that will prove financially beneficial for ourselves and other initiatives we are carrying.

A significant disappointment over the last year is that our operational funding needs have not been addressed. We require additional operating funds in order to provide the professional level of services, programs, and community development engagement that is required of us. It is not from a lack of engaging with the various levels of government and decision makers, as we continue to show the positive impact of our services, programs and community engagement. We need to continue our efforts to have our funding and staffing priorities addressed and to have a cost of living increase added to our annual budget so we are able to provide an equitable service across the Tri-Counties.

Our physical location continues to be a challenge as we have outgrown the space. We require individual staff offices and other options for expanding our services. We continue to pursue the option of having our own location from which to build from.

We have completed our first full year of outreach services in Shelburne. Our funding restricted us to a staff person for only one day per week. We feel our presence has made a difference and we want to expand our services, programs and involvement as soon as we can. Ideally we want to be providing our outreach services in the Municipalities of Digby and Clare as well.

Our communications tools, mainly web site, toll free phone line and newsletters are working well. Being able to update our own web site on weekly or monthly bases has been important. We do get calls from women where the toll free line makes us accessible to them. We also continue to produce our newsletter two or three times a year. This is a helpful tool when we set up information tables and when someone comes in and inquires as to what we do.

In this past year there was also a provincial election. This is one of our opportune times to promote our services and ensure that our elected representatives fully understand and support our work and two mandates. We met with all 5 of our MLA's who represent our catchment area.

Board and staff have been working steadily on updating and revising our Policy & Procedures Manual. The next year could be the year to complete this important task.

It has been a good year and we look forward to building on the potentials and possibilities we have helped to create in individual women and girls and in the community.

Direct Services

One of our two mandates and central to our work is the provision of direct services to women, adolescent girls and youth. Our direct services are a combination of prevention & intervention services and programs. Our flexibility in making our services accessible and responding to community needs makes for a service that is appreciated by service users and other service providers.

Support Counseling and Advocacy Services

Our approach of ensuring this one-on-one service is accessible to women, adolescents and youth is central to its success. We can usually address the need immediately and if it doesn't require an immediate intervention, a support counselor will see the person within a few days. Being put on a waiting list is not how we provide this service. In this fiscal year we have provided support counseling and advocacy to 258 individual women and girls. When we combine that with the women / girls who require follow up services, we worked on average with 49 women/month. It is always important to realize that initial contacts are only part of the picture. Depending on the complexity of the situation a number of contacts (phone, visit, e-mails) are made between the service user and the support staff. It is not unusual in these complex situations to have 30 contacts/month over a number of months. This can represent a tremendous number of hours of work with individual women until their situation is resolved.

Programs

The other part of our direct service work is Programming. The sharing, education, friendships and social supports are the important outcomes that make programming so essential to our overall services. Some programs we offer under our operational funds and others we were able to offer due to specific project funding.

Programs for Adult Women

Moving Forward: A Self Empowerment and Self Esteem

Program– We were able to offer this program in a number of locations over the last year. The program covers a variety of topics including self-esteem, communication, goal setting, societal expectations and anger as a positive force, coping with change and stress management. The program focuses on women empowering women to take control of their life and to start their journey.

In the spring we partnered with King Street Family Resource Centre and offered the program in Shelburne for the mentally challenged involved in Heritage Hall facilities. Summer and early fall we offered the program in Weymouth to the female staff with a Home Support agency. Late fall we offered the program in Barrington to the women participating in the Learning Network program.

This program was partially funded under the Shelburne Community Health Board.

Giving Birth: Trusting Your Body- Is a program for pregnant women and their support team focusing on pregnancy, labour and birth from a holistic perspective. This program is complementary to the pre natal program offered through Public Health. We offered one program in collaboration with Public Health and the other on our own.

STEP – Systematic Training for Effective Parenting- This interactive parenting program that was for both women and men, proved to be a catalyst for good discussions and learning moments for the 10 guardians who participated.

Programs for Young Women/Girls

Girl Power Day Camps – Is a week-long self esteem day camp for girls aged 9-12. Fifty nine girls participated in 5 camps that were offered over the summer. They were hosted twice in Meteghan and once each in Yarmouth, Port Maitland and Shelburne. This was funded in part under the Summer Student Employment Program where we were able to hire one student.

Voices – Is an 18 week school based self awareness program for high risk girls between the ages of 12-17 who are identified through the participating school. The program we offered at Digby and Shelburne Junior High were completed in the spring of this year. We were able to secure funding to offer the program in 8 schools throughout the Tri-Counties from October 2009 to March 2010. One of the programs was offered in French in the Clare area. The other schools were Digby, Maple Grove, Drumlin Heights, Barrington, Shelburne, Yarmouth and Weymouth. Funded by the Department of Community Services – Youth Development Initiative.

Youth – both female and male

Queer & Questioning Youth Group

Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/ Transgender Youth Group – In co-operation with Mental Health Services we provide space and refreshments for the youth group to meet.

Projects

It is primarily through project work that we are able to direct and carry out our other mandate - community development that will have a positive impact on women's equality and social justice.

Women and Pensions – We are one of five other women's centres across the province who have come together to continue discussions on how Canada's pension plan, social safety net and other services can improve to ensure a equitable social and financial safety net for older Canadian women. The main focus was organizing public forums to educate women on their rights and entitlements and glean from women how social security and services can be strengthened for women. Funded through Status of Women Canada.

I'm a Woman and Have I Got a Story to Tell – Based on the success of the first program we applied for two year funding to offer and evaluate the program (three times) and develop a Facilitator's Guide for the program *I am Woman and Have I Got a Story to Tell*. The first program was held in Shelburne. This is being offered in partnership with Addictions Services. Funding was through the Nova Scotia Gaming Foundation.

Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in South West Nova: Reducing the Harm/ Reducing the Violence – This project was completed in the first quarter of this year. The funds enabled us to carry out important community development work in the area of sexual violence over a 16 month period. We applied again to SWC to continue the momentum and address sexual violence prevention and intervention, including the hypersexualization of girls. Our intention is to establish a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program model

in coordination with a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) combined with targeted prevention programs. This project was funded under Status of Women Canada (SWC).

Youth Rant About Sexist Messaging – To assist the community and in particular youth, to develop our critical thinking about sexist messaging and the hypersexualized messaging that is directed at youth we applied for funds to assist us in some initial work. A core of seven youth were provided training and tools to lead the discussion on the topic with their peers. From that discussion youth were asked to identify strategies that would assist them and their peers to challenge and address the impact this negative messaging was having on youth, both female and male.

This is some of the work we want to continue to pursue with the next proposal to Status of Women Canada.

This project was funded under the Youth Secretariat.

Supportive Housing Youth Focus Team (SHYFT) – Over the last year the Women’s Centre and the SHYFT Committee continued to go forward with the vision of establishing a supportive housing option for youth placed at risk. The Business Plan was completed in December and an application went into the Federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Program to assist with capital expenses and human resources needs identified in the Business Plan to move the process to fruition. As an addition to the Business Plan a number of youth developed a DVD that tells the stories of youth in the areas who have or who are currently dealing with homelessness and need a supportive housing option. Again this year we participated in the national campaign called Raising the Roof & Toque Tuesday to raise awareness about homelessness.

A number of these activities were funded under the Canada Mortgage and Housing SEED Funding.

Youth Tell Their Stories - To ensure that youth had a direct say in SHYFT Housing Services we developed a process for engaging with them. We were able to support training for 10 youth who were willing to be youth facilitators and do focus groups with youth both in and out of school. The information gleaned from these youth facilitated discussions was incorporated into the Business Plan. This was funded by the Yarmouth Health Board – Community Fund.

Riding the Wave: Moving Towards the Future - For a second year in a row we collaborated with the Centre for Women & Women's Business Initiative (WBI) and the three CBDC's in the counties and co-hosted the Women in Business conference called *Riding the Wave: Moving Towards the Future*. Business women tend to be outside our normal catchment population. It was a good opportunity to broaden their understanding of what we offer and see how we can possibly accommodate their needs.

Funded by the Provincial Community Business Development Corporation (CBDC) and the Centre for Women and Business (Mount St. Vincent University).

Tri County Local Food Network (TCLFN) - We have been very busy this past year developing promotional materials and a website on Buying Local and supporting local Farmer's Markets. We hosted a very successful Fall Fair to give local producers an opportunity to sell their wares, provide a forum for education on food production, preservation and promote the local food network.

Funded under Public Health - Healthy Eating Nova Scotia Strategy.

New Horizon's Project - as part of the work under the TCLFN, and based on the community interest in learning the old ways in food production and preservation, we have partnered with eight community organizations to develop community gardens and create opportunities to share in producing and preserving local food. The work will be highlighted at the Fall Harvest event the network will be organizing in November 2010.

Breast Feeding Friendly Initiative - To assist with this initiative we applied to have breast milk pumps (on loan) and kits available to women through the Women's Centre. In total we have nine pumps that are distributed between our locations in Yarmouth and Shelburne. They are well used and it seems there is a high demand.

Health Canada Project - Scenes through the Smoke Screen - Even though this project will be started in the next fiscal year a lot of time was spent getting the three year project submitted. This project will focus on engaging youth to develop digital stories and be mentors about the harm associated with illicit drugs. The other part of the project is focused on engaging with adults and guardians about illicit drugs and taking back our communities.

Regional Process

We continue to meet with the community liaison worker for the Department of Community Services in our Western Region. It is an opportunity for the department to hear about the activities at all three women's centres in the region. It is also an opportunity for the department to share with us anything that is going on and would be of interest to our centres.

Special Events

Again this year our annual Christmas Tea was a great success.

Student Placements

Every year we try and accommodate student placements, primarily from the School of Nursing and NSCC. This past year we had a student from the Addictions Program.

Staff Training

To the best of our ability we try and accommodate the needs and interest of staff to participate in training, conferences and other events to improve their knowledge, skills and be informed of current practices.

- Issues of Substance Abuse Conference - Halifax
- Modern Response to Sexual Assault Responses – Halifax
- Genuine Progress Index (GPI) – Halifax
- Hypersexualization Training – Boston
- Girls Action National Retreat – Quebec
- Voices Program Training with Stephanie Covington – Halifax
- Specialized Sexual Violence Courts – Site Visit – New York City
- The Face of Sexual Violence in the 21st. Century – N.B.
- Gender Identity - Yarmouth

Community Partnerships/ Networks/ Collaborations

Besides some of the agencies and groups already mentioned in the report, the Centre has also been involved on several advisory committees, boards and community initiatives.

- ❑ Women for Community Economic Development (WCED) – Money Management Project. Assisting and promoting the project.
- ❑ Yarmouth Centre for Sexual Health – Continues to be housed at the Women’s Centre, which enables some of their services to be available while the Women’s Centre is open.
- ❑ Canadian Rural Partnership – National Project looking at the needs in rural communities across Canada looking at what services are provided and what services are needed to sustain our rural communities.
- ❑ Women and Tobacco Advisory Committee – This committee is focused on the promotion of resources and services for women dealing with tobacco cessation.
- ❑ A partner for Children and Family Supports (PCFS) – This interagency comes together to share understanding of everyone’s services and to develop collaborations.
- ❑ 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 Fishnet – Shelburne/ Lockport – We are in regular communication and continue to make connections and create possibilities to work together.
- ❑ West Nova Inclusive Employment Society – This agency works with the disabled community and we have a representative on the Board.
- ❑ Youth Health Centre Working Group (Department of Public Health) – Working to establish community and school based health services for youth.
- ❑ Chamber of Commerce – We are a member and when possible participate in their events.
- ❑ Hospital Hullabaloo – Assist the Hospital Auxiliary with their major fundraising event.

Provincial and National Associations

Our provincial and national associations make it possible for us to be more effective in our work. Whether it is our ability to address our core funding priorities or public policies that impact women’s equality, we are better and stronger due to these relationships.

Connect! The Association of Women's Centres in Nova Scotia -

As a member in our Association we participated in a strategic planning session to prioritize our work for the next year. We have been engaged with the Department of Community Services on Service Level Agreements. We have been on the Working Group to address the Domestic Violence Elimination Bill – Bill 81 and have been a voice for integrated domestic violence courts. We hired a coordinator in January to assist with our efforts to have public policy that impact women and our funding priorities addressed.

Feminists for Just & Equitable Public Policy (FemJEPP) – We continue to be an active member of our provincial coalition of equality seeking women's organizations. As part of FemJEPP's work on poverty we hosted some discussion groups with women. Continue to have the recommendations outlined in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Report adequately addressed.

Women's Innovative Justice Initiative (WIJI) – We are represented via Connect and appreciate the research and feminist analysis that WIJI contributes to; integrated specialized courts for sexual and domestic violence, training for hospital and justice personnel, and justice response to violence against women.

Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) – We continue to be a community voice and through our associations (Connect/ WIJI/ FemJEPP), we contribute to FAFIA work and analysis. FAFIA monitors our federal and provincial governments' compliance to United Nation's International Treaties. These are treaties our governments have signed to advance women's equality in our country. We assist FAFIA in being a strong voice at the International table.

Priorities for the Next Year

Building on the current work and other gaps we see in services, there is a need to be working with our many community and government partners on these priorities:

- Have our operational funding priorities addressed
- Build on the work we have started to address sexual violence services; development of a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) program, a SART (Sexual Assault Response Team), and the hypersexualization of women and girls

- ❑ Complete our Policy & Procedures Manual
- ❑ Continue to develop the Tri County Local Food Network as part of our pro-active efforts to address greenhouse gases and support our local economy
- ❑ Pursue the option of a Women’s & Youth Health Clinic within our services
- ❑ Creation of women led cooperatives & small businesses
- ❑ Affordable & Supportive Housing for young mothers
- ❑ Strengthen our outreach capacity - providing our services and programs into our more rural and isolated communities.
- ❑ Adolescents
 - Supportive housing for youth
 - Programming such as Voices in all the schools
 - Youth Health Centre
 - Community development process to engage with youth – hypersexualization, housing, illicit drugs and addiction issues
- ❑ Creative programming for women dealing with gambling addiction
- ❑ Smoking Cessation for women

Core and Project Staff

Name	Position
Bernadette MacDonald	Executive Director
Michele Archibald - Hattie	Program Coordinator/ Support Counselor
Karen Stewart	Financial Coordinator/ Support Counselor
Kirsta Morris	Project Coordinator/ Sexual Violence Project
Carole Hill - Bojarski	Project Coordinator/ Women & Pensions

Board of Directors

Renee Meuse-Bishara, Co-Chair

Darlene LeBlanc, Co-Chair

Debbie Roberts

Lynn Comeau

Fleurette Surette

Tasha Smith

Wanda Doucette

Ann d'Eon

Lois LeBlanc

Sherry Repel

Heather Ackles

Staff who participate in Board meetings:

Karen Stewart, Bernadette MacDonald , Michele Archibald-Hattie

