



Tri-County Women's Centre

Annual Report

April 1^{st.} 2015 – March 31^{st.} 2016

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Summary

The Women's Centre, incorporated in 2000, began providing services in 2002. This year will be our fourteenth year of providing services to women and their families and being a strong voice for social change, as a means to achieving equality for women across the tri- counties, the province, and our country.

Central to our work are our two mandates; 1) the provision of direct services and 2) initiatives to address women's economic & social well-being. As we frame our work around these two mandates, it enables us to work with incredible women and men, and be involved in projects and initiatives with a diverse group of stakeholders, women, youth, and families. It is through these relationships that we develop our strength, direction, and purpose.

From projects and programs, to the day-to-day running of the Centre, the steady flow of women, youth, and community stakeholders coming in and out of our three locations continues. These are strong indicators that we are an accessible, supportive, and dynamic place for everyone.

As a tri county service it is essential we have our services and programs accessible across all three counties. While our main office in Yarmouth is still meeting our needs, we re-located our Digby office, and continue to look for a more appropriate location for our Shelburne Office. Having a physical space and staff presence in all three counties enables us to be accessible, and to carry out our core services and project work equitably across the tri counties.

Over the last year, we assisted thousands of women, adolescent girls, youth, and families through our support services, programs, and medical clinic. It is very difficult to measure the impact of our services to the overall health of our community but we can be certain it has been positive.

Programming is another part of our direct services, and in the last year, we offered healthy relationship and health promotion programs to;

- at-risk adolescent girls,
- women recovering from breast cancer,
- grade 9 youth in three schools

Our project work, special events, community development and social advocacy initiatives have also had a positive impact. Over the last year we concentrated on;

- affordable housing,
- women's economic security,
- access to primary Health Care for our most vulnerable,
- community discussion and education on sexualized violence,
- intervention services for victims of sexualized violence,
- a youth leadership approach to drug use prevention,
- assessment tool for meaningful youth engagement,
- food security,
- promoting local women in business
- application of the law in preventing sexual exploitation

Our operational funding from the Department of Community Services, under the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women (NSACSW), is inadequate as the need for our services continues to grow. We cover a significant geography and it is imperative that we have outreach offices in Digby and Shelburne, to ensure our services are accessible. This is an added but necessary expense to us and we need to work with the NSACSW and our elected officials to ensure adequate funding.

Provincially, through Connect our Women's Centres Association, the NS Sexual Violence Services Network, and Poverty Coalitions, we have helped to shape public policies that have a direct impact on women, adolescent girls, and early childhood development.

Our success is based on the positive working relations we have with stakeholders across the service spectrum here in the tri counties and across the province.

We would like to thank all our funders, other service providers we have worked with, community supports, and volunteers that have enabled us to do our critical work across the tri- counties.

It has been a very successful and impactful year.

The following is a summary of the activities we have carried out and the partners we have worked with over the last fiscal year.

Direct Services

- **Support Counselling and Advocacy**

Every year requests for our support and advocacy services increases. Between our core staff and project staff (who, in their positions are at times required to provide support services), have provided services to 902 individual women and girls. This demand for one-on-one support counselling and advocacy services continues to speak to the need for another support worker position and additional hours for our outreach staff. For many of these women and girls we have provided services that require multiple appointments, phone calls, emails, and correspondence, that represents many hours of staff time. Depending on the complexity of the situation, we can be working with an individual for many months and at times years.

As a multi-issue entry point, we work with women and girls on a very broad range of issues and concerns. Many of the issues we work through with individual women pertain to their mental health, which is impacted by the poverty, violence, and the social isolation they live in. Other common issues women present with are; affordable housing, legal supports, sexual assault, harassment in the workplace, access to primary health care and a female clinician.

- **Programs**

As much as possible we try to reach as many women and girls as possible by providing programming to meet their needs. The following are the programs we offered in the last year:

- ✓ **Voices** - A program for at-risk adolescent girls was offered at Lockeport Junior High and Yarmouth Consolidated. Funded by Dept. of Community Services.
- ✓ **Encore** - An aquatic, light exercise program and supportive environment for women recovering from breast cancer. Funded by the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation (Atlantic Branch) in partnership with the YMCA Yarmouth and Cornwallis.
- ✓ **Mothers Weekly Discussion Group** - Open group for moms, held at the Early Years Ctr.
- ✓ **Budgeting 101** - For women and facilitated by students from U. St. Anne.
- ✓ **Weymouth Walking Group** - Digby Outreach and open to everyone.

- ✓ **Breast Pump Program** - Breast pumps with kits, available in all three locations, are used extensively by nursing moms. Funded through Community Health Board (CHB).
- ✓ **Building Confidence through Art** - Digby Outreach.
- ✓ **Credit Information** - Digby Outreach.
- ✓ **Kundalini Yoga** - Facilitated by a local instructor.

Social Advocacy

Over the past year, we have advocated for progressive social policies in a number of areas that have a direct impact on women's social and economic safety:

- 1) **Maintenance Enforcement** - We continue to express support for a more effective Provincial Maintenance Enforcement (ME) Program, where the court - ordered ME payment that is not paid, is guaranteed by our provincial government. Our provincial government uses their power to extract the funds from the payor as a debt to the government.
- 2) **Income Rates** - For people on Provincial Income Assistance rates are still extremely low and getting access to special needs funding is very difficult. We have been encouraging a "systems change" that includes rates based on the low-income rate called the Market Basket Measure (MBM) and for this to progress to a social safety net system with the Federal government that is based on a guaranteed livable income (GLI).
- 3) **SANE** - Expansion of the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program (SANE) across the province is essential for the development of effective intervention services for victims of sexualized violence. We have been advocating for this program expansion for a number of years, and we applied to be the proponent for any expansion across the western region.
- 4) **Affordable Housing** - This is a serious issue for women across the age span and we have been working with stakeholders across the tri-counties and province to have more financial resources

made available and better coordination of policies across our provincial and federal governments, so affordable and supportive housing needs can be adequately addressed.

5) **Protecting Communities and Exploited Person's Act** - The application of the laws to **protect citizens from sexual exploitation** requires in-depth education and training for all stakeholders. As a way to control demand, and ensure people who have been sexually exploited receive the services they require, we have been working with other stakeholders to advocate for specialized training on this.

6) **Midwifery** - The program needs to be expanded to other regions of the province, especially the tri - counties. We hosted a live stream event that was based in Halifax, and followed up with letters to relevant government officials, advocating for program expansion.

7) **Pornography** - On line access to pornography is a significant public health issue that is affecting youth development and women and girls safety. While the images the pornography industry is putting out are getting more violent to towards women, and there is no significant movement to implement controls by our government, we continue to monitor work being done in other countries to control access for youth under 18 years of age.

8) **Torture** - As part of our overall work on misogyny and addressing violence against women and girls, we are working with allies to have domestic torture included in our criminal code.

9) **Operational Funding** - Our current operational funding envelope from the Province of Nova Scotia is not adequate to address the requests for our services and the large area we cover with our services. We lack the financial resources to address; staff cost of living increase, health and retirement benefits, increased operational costs, and additional staffing that is required. Our needs have been expressed but it will take many voices to assist us in getting adequate funding.

Projects and Community Development Initiatives

Our community development projects & initiatives over the last year have been significant. For some of the work we have specific funding and for others parts of the work it falls within our day-to-day operations, as we work to make our communities a better place for women and their families.

Women's Economic Security - funded by Status of Women Canada

This project was in the final months of operation at the beginning of this fiscal year. The education and work the staff and Board went through on the development of Social Enterprises, as a model for addressing women's economic security, provided insight and promise. Our lesson, in establishing a social enterprise to assist seniors was "putting too many eggs in one basket". As we know, when there was a structural change within the programs at the Health Authority, our Social Enterprise was in jeopardy. With the right leadership, the Social Enterprise model of business is a good fit for women who cannot work in the traditional workplace. One aspect of the project was creating opportunities to address service gaps that impacted women seeking employment. One gap was the disconnect between employers and employment incentive programs. We hosted educational sessions between employers and the employment incentive programs managed through the Employment Centres. With the recent re-structuring of the Career Resource Centres, there will be staff positions specific to doing this work with employers.

The project enabled us to do some extensive groundwork in Yarmouth Town and County on affordable & supportive housing, and this work continues today under CHOICE.

Sexual Violence Demonstration Project - funded by the NS Sexual Violence Strategy

A lot of the work under this funding commenced in the previous fiscal year, and was concluded in the early part of this fiscal year. This funding, with the support of all relevant stakeholders across the tri-counties, enabled us to begin the work of being the Sexual Assault Centre for the tri-county community. We provided the leadership to the NS Sexual Violence Strategy when they were hosting regional stakeholder gatherings to assist communities to identify their priorities for improving intervention services for victims of sexualized violence.

The stakeholders identified three critical areas:

- Trauma Specific Therapy for victims
- Coordination/Navigation/ and Delivery of support services for victims that are inclusive and culturally appropriate
- Mapping our Justice System and services for sexually exploited persons

On behalf of the community of stakeholders across the tri-counties, we submitted a proposal to coordinate and address these three critical areas of work. We were successful in accessing funds for two years and the work will begin the first of the next fiscal year.

As an extension of this work, we collaborated with the YWCA in Halifax to have some of our female youth leaders involved in the training and knowledge exchange on their cyberbullying project.

Youth Truth Matters (YTM) Project - funded by Health Canada

Our YTM project, a youth leadership approach to drug use prevention in youth, has enabled us to work with a number of youth through the leadership training they participate in, and their continued involvement through facilitation of youth forums, and special school and community events organized through the project. At the request of the Nunatukavut project in Labrador, we hosted a youth training event and brought together staff and youth from both projects, as well as youth and their adult leaders from other parts of the province.

Affordable & Supportive Housing

In each of the three counties, we have been collaborating with stakeholders to continue to address the need for more affordable and supportive housing. In Digby County we have the Digby Area Affordable & Supportive Housing (DAASH) group, in Yarmouth County we have Community Housing Options Initiative through Collaboration and Engagement (CHOICE), and in Shelburne we have Shelburne Area Affordable & Supportive Housing (SAASH) group. The three stakeholder groups are working to identify and prioritize actions to address the housing needs in their county for the most vulnerable.

In Digby, DAASH was able to access funds to do a business plan and design work on a former convent site. Both CHOICE and DAASH are working with the broader community of stakeholders

and volunteers to determine the interest in forming not-for-profit housing societies that can oversee the building and management of affordable housing.

CHOICE and DAASH are also working on the implementation of a Needs Assessment for both counties to determine the exact needs and housing priorities, that will be administered under the Women's Centre. SAASH is working with the South Shore Housing group to have their Needs Assessment completed for Shelburne County.

Food Security

The Tri County Local Food Network invited key stakeholders to a one-day dialogue session to examine some solutions/ model to food insecurity for our most vulnerable. The current model of Food Banks, based on a charity model with a high level of scrutiny, is disempowering for the people who need to use the service and keeps many people away because of the indignity they are put through. A model called a "Food Centre" is based on empowerment, and skills development, where the user gets to shop for what they need and pays what they can. Volunteering, if they can, is encouraged as a way to compensate if they are unable to pay at that time.

Access to Primary Health Care / Leahey Wellness Clinic - funded in part under Youth Health Clinic Initiative (Public Health) and community fundraising

When we established the Leahey Wellness Clinic, we were focused on access to gynecological services for women and girls and access to primary health care for at-risk youth. What we did not factor in was the significant need for access to primary health care for people across the tri counties who do not have a Family Doctor. With 518 individual people accessing services in the last fiscal year (open two half - days a week) it was imperative we maintain the service. This past year has been a watershed year in keeping our clinic open. After a number of community fundraisers, meetings with health authority officials, and a strong advocacy, we have been able to secure yearly operational (Grant) funding to keep open.

With our secure funding and status as a community health clinic, we have joined the Community Health Centres of Canada Association.

Other Events/ Activities

Sexual & Reproductive Health Awareness week

A display was set up during the week to promote the topic. As part of this work, we provide free condoms and information to the schools, U. St. Anne, and individuals as well as through our clinic. Over the year, we do free pregnancy testing here, give out thousands of condoms and provide condoms to schools and other locations when requested.

RESPECT – An Assessment Tool for doing Youth Engagement

In partnership with our local Addiction Services / Gambling Initiative, we developed this tool and will be doing some provincial training and promotion on the tool. Started under the YTM work, we will be working with others to determine how it can be used, who owns it, and if licensing is required.

Sara Corning & Recognition of her Humanitarian Work

We are collaborating with a group of local people working to have her humanitarian work recognized publically. She was from Yarmouth (Chegoggin) and as a nurse, was central to saving the lives of several thousand Armenian and Greek orphans in 1922. She moved back here when she retired from nursing.

Health Fairs & Educational Presentations

Over the last year, we participated in a number of health events and educational presentations on a broad range of topic in both the communities and schools across the tri-counties.

Harmony Bazaar

This musical event promotes women in the music industry, primarily from across the province and Atlantic region. It happens in Lockeport, and because it is in our catchment area, we are one of the sponsors for this fun and essential event.

Events We Hosted

Each year we host events that pertain to our work and continued relationships with other service providers and our community.

- Holiday Tea - Each December we host this event as part of the festive season, and combine it with a fundraiser for a community cause that is outside our work. We invite stakeholders and community to share some food and fun. This year we raised funds for the Breakfast Program at Central School. Some of the students from the school came to the event and sang some songs of the season.
- Women’s Winterlude - This is a very popular event where; women - run businesses get to showcase their business, workshops on various topics are provided, and lots of social networking takes place between the hundreds of women who come.
- Special Events Pertaining to Women - Each year there are certain dates and months that are significant to our herstory as women. These are times when we articulate the need for equality in our society and celebrate our accomplishments. The dates around which we did some level of awareness this year were; International Women’s Day, Sexual Violence Awareness Month, Person’s Day, and National Day of Remembrance on Violence Against Women.

 **Student Placements** - Every year we are asked by learning institutions in our region to provide placements for their students. This year we had students from U. St. Anne and Dalhousie Nursing Program.

 **Fundraising** - As mentioned, our operational funding is not enough to cover our costs and the need to raise additional funds is always present. We are very grateful to the community for their generous financial support. In particular, we are very grateful to a group of women and men called “**Friends of the Women’s Centre**” who have come through time and again for much needed money. This year, it helped to keep our clinic open as we negotiated with our Health Authority for grant funding. Each year **Shopper’s**

Drug Mart (Digby) chooses a community agency for their community drive and we were the successful recipients again this year. We co-sponsored a **Family Fun Day** with SHYFT Youth Services, and half of funds raised was used to support the Leahey Wellness Clinic.

Communication about TCWC

We maintain an up to date web site, put out a quarterly newsletter, have a Facebook account, maintain a toll -free phone number and our three locations, and use our local newspaper/ radio to promote our events and work.

Local Partnership and Collaborations

We do not do our work alone, and it is only through our partnerships and strong working relationships with a number of agencies. Below are the ones we are connected to the most:

- Tri-County Women’s Health Coalition – The coalition is focused on the broad determinates of women’s health; addiction, housing and violence against women. They are also the Advisory Committee to our work on sexualized violence.
- Public Health – The Community Health Promoters at Public Health are particularly supportive and helpful in a number of areas of our work. We are very thankful for their abilities and our strong partnership.
- SchoolsPlus – We work very closely with the SchoolsPlus programs across the tri-counties and collaborate on program delivery when possible.
- Acadia First Nation Women’s Group - We have had some good conversations about having a closer working relationship and co-hosting future events that will benefit Mi’kmaq women and their families.
- West Nova Inclusive Employment Society (South West employment Services) – We have contributed staff time to their Board, which was especially appreciated this year as they underwent a transition to a combined service with other employment program providers in the area.
- SHYFT Youth Services Society – We have a close working relationship with SHYFT and have collaborated on a joint project (funding pending) to co-facilitate programs for female and male youth at- risk.

- Yarmouth Women in Business Group - We work with representatives from the group to host the Winterlude event.

Provincial Partnership and Collaborations

Connect – Nova Scotia Association of Women’s Centres

Our membership in Connect is central to our success in obtaining operational funding, addressing public policies pertaining to women, and being a strong voice for women in the province and across the country. Connect membership consists of nine women’s centres located across the province, who are autonomous organizations that identify their own priorities based on community needs. We have a part time coordinator who is able to do the necessary work of our Association. Attached is a year-end report of the activities undertaken by Connect.

Nova Scotia Sexual Violence Services Network

A number of key agencies from across the province that provide services to victims of sexualized violence are part of the network. It enables all of us to stay connected, share resources and best practices as we develop and implement a Nova Scotia Sexual Violence Strategy.

Poverty Coalitions

We stay connected to poverty coalition work that is being done provincially and nationally. This year, with the changes to public policies pertaining to our provincial social safety net program, Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA), it has been particularly busy.

Our appreciation

On behalf of TCWC Board and Staff, we want to thank the provincial government for on-going operational funding. As well, the other funding sources, highlighted in the annual report, enabled us to carry out a number of programs and initiatives. The agencies we worked with over the last year in the tri-county area and across the province have been vital to our successes. We are appreciative of everyone’s support.

Staff

Name	Position
Bernadette MacDonald	Executive Director
Karen Stewart	Financial Coordinator
Keely King (to June/15)	Support Worker
Lisanne Turner (July/ 15 – March/ 16)	Support Worker
Marlene Surette	Office Manager
Bethany MacDonald	Medical Office Assistant (LWC)
Roberta Journey	Digby Outreach Worker
Patricia Vanaman (to January / 16)	Shelburne Outreach /SV Demo. Project
Tonya Seabrook (to May/ 15)	Sexual Violence (SV) Demonstration Project Coordinator
Amy MacKinnon	Shelburne Co. YTM Project / SV Demo. Project/ Voices Facilitator
Kirsta Morris	Yarmouth Co. YTM Project / SV Demo. Project / Voices Facilitator
Miranda MacLean	Digby County YTM Project/ SV Demo. Project / Voices Facilitator
Evan Nemeth (to June 2015)	Digby Co. YTM Project/ SV Demo. Project
Kathleen d'Entremont - Mooney (to May/15)	Women's Economic Security Project
Melissa Amero (to June/15)	Women's Economic Security Project/ Social Enterprise Coordinator
Debbie Roberts (to Sept./15)	Women's Economic Security Project – Kiosk

Board of Directors

Name	Position
Lynn Comeau - Co-Chair	Gloria Goodwin - Director
Lisa Bowden - Co-Chair	Theresa Brown - Director
Fleurette Surette -Treasurer	Karen Holmes - Director
Ina Comeau – Collins - Secretary	Brenda Deveau - Director
Lauren Robinson - Director	