

## Tri-County Women's Centre Annual Report April 1st. 2017 - March 31st. 2018

### Summary

The Women's Centre, incorporated in 2000, began providing services in 2002. This year will be our sixteenth year of providing services to women and their families, and being a strong voice for social change, as we work to achieve 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. Framing our work around these two mandates 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.

Between programs, projects and direct services, there is a steady flow of women, youth, and community stakeholders through our three locations. These are strong indicators that we are an accessible, supportive, and dynamic place for many.

As a tri county service it is essential we have our services and programs accessible across all three counties. Our main office in Yarmouth, at times crowded, is still meeting our needs. Our locations in Digby and Shelburne are suitable at this time, but do not allow for much growth. 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, projects and medical clinic. Programming is another part of our direct services and this year we offered a number of programs to women, girls, and at-risk youth.

It is very difficult to measure the difference our services make to the overall health of our community but we know from observation that our work contributes to change and positively impacts people's lives.

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

- working with Indigenous Women across the Maritimes to help document their lives and culture,
- affordable housing across the tri-counties,
- access to primary Health Care for our most vulnerable,
- therapeutic intervention services for victims of sexualized violence,
- the establishment of the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program,
- a youth leadership approach to drug use prevention,
- assessment tool for meaningful youth engagement,
- providing a forum for our local women in business,
- understanding the law in preventing sexualized human trafficking and strengthening our collaborative service delivery model to ensure we are addressing the needs of the victims and their loved ones,
- creating the conditions for shared learning and training on applying trauma informed practices for victims of sexualized violence,
- offering a Rural Girls Resiliency Forum in partnership with Acadia University,
- workplace wellness workshops for employees and business owners.

Our operational funding from the Department of Community Services, under the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women (NSACSW), presents a challenge 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 that 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 Association of Women's Centres, the NS Sexual Violence Services Network, Nova Scotia Trafficking Elimination Partnership, the Nova Scotia Community Health Centres Society, and the Tri County Women's Health Coalition, we have helped to shape

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public policies that have a direct impact on women, adolescent girls, and early childhood development.

For special events, we collaborated with Juniper House and the Labour Council to host a vigil on December 6<sup>th</sup>, our National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. On International Women's Day, we hosted a dynamic event at Town Hall, giving a special tribute to Norma Jean Profitt, one of five recipients (from across the country) of the Person's Award.

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, Friends of the Women's Centre, and other volunteers that have enabled us to do our critical work across the tri – counties and the province.

It has been another very successful and impactful year.

The following is a summary of the activities we have carried out, the partners we have worked with, and a list of the Board Members and staff, who contributed to our success.

**Direct Services**

- **Support Counselling and Advocacy**

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Every year requests for our support and advocacy services increases. This year, between our core staff and project staff (who, in their positions are at times required to provide support services), have provided services to 388 individual women and girls, over the course of 2051 contacts. 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.

The Women's Centre is 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 in turn 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, and access to primary health care.

- **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:

- ✓ **Creative Minds Program** – A personal empowerment program for women through creativity.
- ✓ **Wellness Wednesdays** – In partnership with Juniper House, the program offered women information on specific areas of public policy that impact them (legal/ housing/ Social Assistance) combined with information and sharing on keeping well.

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- ✓ **Voices** - A program for at-risk adolescent girls was offered at Barrington, Maple Grove, and Digby Junior High Schools. Funded by Dept. of Community Services and in Digby by the "25 Women Who Care".
- ✓ **Encore** - An aquatic, light exercise program offered in a 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.
- ✓ **Women's Self Defense Program** - Provided to women to increase their confidence under a threatening situation. Funded under the Community Health Fund.
- ✓ **Women's Walking Program** – Provided to women of all ages and abilities. Funded under the Nova Scotia Heart & Stroke Foundation.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Yoga & Active Seniors Program** - Facilitated by local instructors and staff in Digby.
- ✓ **Income Tax** – We assist anyone who asks to have their income tax completed each year.

### **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) **Social Assistance System Reform** - The Department of Community Services is doing a major restructuring of the Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA). Through Connect, and

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other social policy networks we are connected to, we try to keep informed on the reforms being suggested. It is imperative that people who need to be on this social safety system are provided more income to meet their basic needs.

2) **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.

3) **Sexualized Human Trafficking** - We continue to find opportunities to work with others, like the Nova Scotia Trafficking Elimination Partnership (NSTEP) and Nova Scotians for the Prevention of Prostitution and Human Trafficking, to further our collective understanding of this issue and how we both prevent the crime and ensure we are providing the services victims need.

4) **Pornography** - On line access to pornography and cable station content, is a significant public health issue that is affecting youth development and women and girl's safety. The images on EastLink, that had no filters, and the company not willing to do anything to make their services safer for women, families, and children, speaks to the normalization of this form of violence against women and children. There is a strong correlation between pornography and sexualized human trafficking. We need to keep this issue a priority within our sexualized violence prevention and intervention work.

### **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, while other parts of the work fall within our day-to-

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day operations, as we continue to make our communities a safer and better place for women and their families.

 **Community Supported Network (CSN) - Breaking the Silence: A Coordinated Response to Sexual Violence in Nova Scotia** - funded by the NS Sexual Violence Strategy.

On behalf of the community of stakeholders, we received funding for one year, and based on our performance, have been granted the second-year funding for this two-year initiative, to carry out the priorities that the community of stakeholders identified. The priorities are:

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

Over the last year, we were able to offer our Specialized Sexual Abuse/ Assault Trauma Counselling Program. As part of that, a Counselling Model Description Manual and Practices & Protocols Manual were developed. Other parts of the other two priorities have also been carried out. We co-hosted, with the Acadia First Nation Women's Group, an Honouring Mi'kmaq Men and Boys event. The CSN funding into the following year will enable us to continue to address these priorities.

 **Youth Truth Matters (YTM) Project - A Youth Leadership Approach to Drug Use Prevention** - 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 we provided. The youth in turn continued their 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, some of their youth and staff came to our community for training on our youth leadership approach. We were also invited back to their community (a second time) to continue to work with their staff and youth in their school settings. We are hoping Health Canada will

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release another program on drug use prevention so we can try and build on the successful youth focused leadership approach we were able to develop.

Within the YTM project, we worked with Mental Health & Addictions, under their "Evening the Odds" program, to further develop our Youth Engagement tool called RESPECT

<https://respectyouth.com/>

 **Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program for Western Zone of Nova Scotia -**

funded by the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA).

As the proponent for the SANE Program across our Western Zone, we have been working with the NSHA, the new SANE Program in Cape Breton, and the two established programs in the Province, Avalon and Antigonish, to ensure victims of sexual assault have access to a SANE Nurse. There have been unfortunate delays in hiring the provincial SANE Program Coordinator, which affects our ability to have the nurses trained in our zone. We have been able to get other parts of the program developed in anticipation of having the program operational in the coming year.

 **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.

CHOICE and DAASH are also working on the implementation of a Needs Assessment for both counties to determine the exact needs and housing priorities.

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 **Primary Health Care / Leahey Wellness Clinic** – funded under the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA).

Over the last year we were able to access funding under the NSHA to keep our clinic open. We have not been able to come to an agreement with the NSHA on our operational needs. We do look forward to signing a Service Level Agreement with them so our funding is secure for a five year period. Our clinic is for gynecological services for women and girls, access to Primary Health Care for at-risk youth, and anyone who does not have a Family Doctor. Over the last year 630 individuals accessed services through the clinic. We continue to be members of the Association of Community Health Centres Canada.

 **Righting Relations: Strengthening Adult Education for Social Change** – funded through the Catherine Donnelly Foundation.

We are collaborating with indigenous women across the Maritimes in the following ways: 1) capacity building for First Nations' women who are adult educators and for women working on First Nations issues, and 2) to change the paradigm of First Nations' women from victims and marginalized people to their "herstory" of resilience, power, love and hope.

### Other Events/ Activities

 **Health Fairs & Educational Presentations**

Over the last year, we participated in a number of health events and educational presentations on a full range of topics 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 also provides creative spaces for young women to learn and explore their

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talents. The event takes place 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 Tabitha Centre.
- **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 among the hundreds of women who participate.
- **December 6<sup>th</sup>. our National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women** - We collaborated with Juniper House and the Labour Council to host an evening vigil on that day at Frost Park.
- **International Women's Day ~ March 8<sup>th</sup>.** - The Friends of the Women's Centre helped us host a dynamic event at Town Hall where we paid special tribute to Norma Jean Profitt, one of five recipients (from across the country) of the Person's Award. Norma Jean spoke about the herstory and the continued need to work for women's equality and equity.

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- **Sexual Violence Awareness Month (April)** - We promoted educational messages on sexual violence prevention throughout the month and hosted a public “Call to Action” to bring attention to this crime that many women deal with in silence.
  - **Orlando Massacre** – We worked with SHYFT Youth Services and Acadia First Nation Women's Group to hold a public vigil to denounce homophobia.
  - **Women's Circle for New Immigrant Women** – We hosted an event for new immigrant women and invited other agencies to come and share with the women the services and programs they provide.
- ✚ **Student Placements** – Each year, when approached by learning institutions in our region to provide placements for their students, we do our best to accommodate these requests. This year we had students from Nova Scotia Community College, Université Sainte-Anne, Dalhousie School of Nursing, and the Co-op Program through Yarmouth High School.
- ✚ **Fundraising** - We are very grateful to the community for their generous financial support. In particular, to a group of women and men called “**Friends of the Women's Centre**” who have come through repeatedly for much needed funds. Each year **Shopper's Drug Mart (Digby)** chooses a community agency for their community drive and we were the successful recipients again this year.

### Communication about Tri-County Women's Centre

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

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### 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, that we are able to create positive change in our communities. Below are the agencies/ groups we are most connected with:

- 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.
- Juniper House - As our sister agency, working to address violence, inequality, and social injustice for women across the tri-counties, we value their support and work together when it is possible.
- SHYFT Youth Services Society – We have a close working relationship with SHYFT and collaborate on joint projects whenever possible.
- 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 wherever possible.
- Acadia First Nation Women's Group - We have a close working relationship and always welcome the opportunities to work together for the benefit of Mi'kmaq women and their families.
- Yarmouth Women in Business Group - We work with representatives from the group to host the Winterlude event.
- South End Kids Community Garden – We continue to have a close working relationship with the project leader to continue the success the garden generates in the community.

### Provincial Partnership and Collaborations

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### 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. With additional funding for our Connect Coordinator, that the NSACSW was instrumental in advocating for us, we have been able to increase her hours of employment. 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 members of the network. It enables all of us to stay connected, share resources, and advocate for the identified priorities within the Nova Scotia Sexual Violence Strategy.

### SANE Program Expansion across Nova Scotia

Over the next year, we will be working closely with the NSHA and the three other SANE sites to ensure access and consistency of SANE services across the province for victims of sexual assault.

### Poverty Coalition

We stay connected to poverty coalition work being done provincially and nationally. The Transformation Process the provincial government is undertaking to re-design the Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA), the social safety net for many women and families in the province, is one public policy area we are giving our attention to.

### **Our appreciation**

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On behalf of Tri County Women's Centre 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 past year in the tri-county area and across the province have been vital to our successes. We are appreciative of everyone's support.

**Staff**

| <b>Name</b>          | <b>Position</b>   |
|----------------------|---|
| Bernadette MacDonald | Executive Director  |
| Karen Stewart        | Financial Coordinator up to June 2016                                 |
| Gayle Morrison       | Started June 2016   |
| Elisha Stairs        | Support Worker  |
| Lisanne Turner       | Community Supported Network - Sexual<br>Violence Intervention Project |
| Marlene Surette      | Office Manager  |
| Bethany MacDonald    | Medical Office Assistant (LWC)  |
| Valarie Cormier      | SANE Program Coordinator  |
| Roberta Journey      | Digby Outreach Worker   |
| Courtney Gregory     | Shelburne Outreach  |
| Sharon Goodwin       | Workplace Wellness Project – (Job Creation<br>Partnership Program)    |

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|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Amy MacKinnon   | Shelburne Co. YTM Project /Voices Facilitator |
| Kirsta Morris   | Yarmouth Co. YTM Project /Voices Facilitator  |
| Miranda MacLean | Digby Co. YTM Project/ Voices Facilitator     |

**Board of Directors**

| <b>Name/ Position</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| Lynn Comeau – Co-Chair   | Gloria Goodwin - Treasurer                |
| Lisa Bowden – Co-Chair/ Secretary  | Robin Walker –Director from Shelburne Co. |
| Fleurette Surette -Director  | Chelsey Belliveau - Director              |
| Elinor Keter –Director   | Brenda Francis – Director from Digby Co.  |
| Callista Weir – Director   | Mary Thompson - Director                  |
| Karen Holmes – Director<br><br>Brenda Deveau –Director<br><br>Lauren Race – Director<br>All three resigned in January 2017 due to other commitments. |   |