



Tri County Women's Centre

Annual Report

April 1st. 2008 – March 31st. 2009

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Summary

This annual review is a time to reflect on all the good work in the past year and the potential activities and opportunities in the future.

This past year, our seventh year of operations, has been one of accomplishments, more opportunities and more visibility of the centre in the Tri County area. The review highlights the partnerships, projects, programs and services and speaks to the energy output that we, the staff and board, have been part of. Fortunately that energy is reciprocated back to us through the lives of women and girls, and the many people we work with on a daily basis, as we all work to make our community a better place for everyone.

This past year we have been reviewing our current policy manual, revitalizing some parts, addressing policy gaps, while other parts have stood the test of time since the last review. The review should be completed in the first part of the next fiscal year.

We have been successful in accessing project funding in a number of areas, which has enabled us to deliver additional programs and carry out community development work across the Tri Counties. This is certainly one of the reasons we have continued to attract new women, adolescent girls, and youth to the centre. These are good indicators that we are responding to the need and engaged in the communities we serve.

Even though we are involved in a number of initiatives with our community and government partners, two in particular are being led by the women's centre; sexual violence and supportive housing for youth.

Our work in the area of sexual violence has revealed the need for specific services, and a stronger coordination between services, to address intervention and prevention of this crime. Within this area of violence we are realizing the impact that pornography culture is having on all of us.

We continue to move forward a vision for supportive housing for vulnerable youth, and through an inclusive community development process, develop the potential for our community to address the need.

We have been working with our partners in the Shelburne area to develop an outreach location for the women's centre and we anticipate setting up a satellite site in Shelburne County in the next fiscal year. We need to continue to look at the gaps in services in the Clare, Weymouth, and Digby areas and look at ways to address the need.

In working with our partners in the field of business development, we offered a conference for women in business called *Riding the Wave: Business Innovations, Trends, and You*. This was a very successful event that we want to build on in the future.

Over this past year we have been able to establish our own legal identity separate from Women for Community Economic Development in South West Nova (WCED). This makes it easier for both organizations as we continue our strong relationship and mutual support. Our application for Charitable Status has been submitted and we hope to have that in place in the next fiscal year.

We took the leap and changed our web site provider, with the site now being more "friendly" so we can keep it updated in house. We also incorporated a toll free line to our services so folks outside our exchange could access us more easily. As part of the communications piece we also produced our Fall and Spring newsletter.

This past year we have worked hard to have our operational funding addressed by meeting with elected representatives, the caucus of the three political parties, as well as representatives within the Department of Community Services. A straight funding formula that doesn't take into consideration the cost of living increases, staffing needs, and expansion of services puts tremendous pressure on the Board and staff to meet the needs of the community and to keep qualified staff.

Whether it is working with a group of women to enable more world class musicians to perform in our areas, offering programs to women and girls, providing training for youth to be peer advocates, or networking with women across the three counties on social policies impacting women and girls, we are pleased to be part of this movement for social change.

Direct Services

The provision of direct services to women, adolescent girls, and youth is central to our work. Their reality, experiences, and situations are

what focuses our work and the public policy areas we need to address. As expected, the majority of our direct services fall within our support counseling and advocacy service. Programming is the other major component of the services we offer, and at times it is necessary to custom-make programs to ensure the needs of the participants are being addressed.

Support Counseling and Advocacy Services

The number of women, adolescents and youth who have accessed this service over the last year has increased slightly from the previous year. On average we are working with 20 new women a month and maintain a monthly contact with another 30 returning women. We have worked with 230 individual women over the last year. It is important to realize that these individual women represent on average 20-30 contacts and for some more complex situations, the contacts are many more. Contacts represent phone calls, accompaniment to court and other appointments, support sessions, visits to the centre, case conferencing with other agencies and services, or referrals to other agencies. Each of these contacts can represent a tremendous number of hours of work with individual women.

Programs

Programming is the other side of the coin in terms of our direct services as it enables us to reach a number of women or girls at once, breaks down their isolation and is often an empowerment process for them.

We offered some programming under our operational funding and the rest under specific project funds. *These programs are described under each project.*

Adult Women

Our Moving Forward: A Self Empowerment and Self Esteem Program was offered in a number of locations over the last year. The program takes a look at women and the issues they face on a daily basis. The program covers a variety of topics including self-esteem, communication, goal setting, body image, 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.

The program was offered in Yarmouth out of the Women's centre and in Shelburne we offered the program in partnership with Juniper House and the Family Resource Centre. In Meteghan, we offered the program to a group of women in partnership with Addiction Services.

We also offered some half-day workshops to the clients of other service providers.

Giving Birth: Trusting Your Body is a program for pregnant women and their partners focusing on pregnancy, labour and birth from a holistic perspective. This program is complementary to the pre natal program offered through Public Health as it expands to encouraging mothers to trust their bodies using natural breathing and relaxation.

Women & Tobacco - In cooperation with Addiction Services, and the Women & Tobacco Advisory committee, we provided the space and they provided Auricular Acupuncture Therapy.

Adolescent Girls

The Voices program was offered at Yarmouth Junior High. Voices is an 18 week school based self awareness program for high risk girls who are identified through the participating school.

Mixed Gendered

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

Projects

Girl Power Day Camps – These program-focused camps were offered again over the summer 2008. Fifty girls participated in 4 camps that were hosted twice in Meteghan, and once each in Yarmouth and Port Maitland. The week-long day camps are for girls aged 9 –12. This was funded under the Summer Student Program, where we were able to hire two students, and the Youth Development Initiative (YDI) under the Department of Community Services.

Women and Pensions – In cooperation with five other women’s centres across the province, this was the third phase of this project. This phase extended from our last fiscal year into this one. The main focus was organizing public forums to educate women on their rights and entitlements. Funded through Status of Women Canada.

I am Woman and Have I Got a Story to Tell – This program extended over the last fiscal year as well as this one. Working in partnership with Addictions Services, the program worked with women impacted by problem gambling by assisting women to develop creative ways to

express themselves and cope with their addiction. With the work created out of this program, a book entitled "I'm a Woman, and have I got a story to tell!" was created and launched here at the centre. 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, which continues into the next fiscal year, has enabled us to carry out important community development work in the area of sexual violence over this last year. Working with a number of community and government partners in the Tri Counties, we have come to a consensus that to address sexual violence prevention and intervention, a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program model, in coordination with a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), combined with targeted prevention programs is what is needed and where we need to be going. This project was funded under Status of Women Canada.

Supportive Housing for Youth – Building on work that was carried out in the previous year, in cooperation with a number of community and government partners, the women's centre formed an ad hoc group called SHYFT (Supportive Housing with Youth Focus Team) to address the housing needs of vulnerable youth in Yarmouth. The team has progressed with the business plan which will be completed in the next fiscal year. We were also part of the national campaign called Raising the Roof & Toque Tuesday, to raise awareness about homelessness. We sold a number of toques which has entitled us for funds next Fall to assist with our local efforts. Two representatives from SHYFT were able to go to the national conference on homelessness in Toronto. This project is funded by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC).

Moving Forward: A Self Empowerment and Self Esteem Program – We were able to offer our program in Weymouth and Digby. Funded by the Digby Community Health Board.

It's a Girl Thing –

This personal awareness program is for girls between the ages of 13-15. Using a weekend retreat format, the girls were given a safe space to talk, share, and further their awareness and thinking about the social norms and messaging they are and will be facing and how to confront them. Funded by the Yarmouth Community Health Board.

Cheer Squad –

This is a mixed gender group of youth who develop routines – dance, tumblers, tosses, etc. – as a way to maintain fitness and delivering messages about healthy lifestyles. Through the project funds, all the participants were able to get uniforms. They were also able to go to some cheer squad events, both to perform and to learn. Funded by the NS Department of Health Promotion and Protection.

Voices –

We were able to offer this program at Digby Junior High. Voices is an 18 session program for high risk girls/ young women between the ages of 12-17 that uses an interactive journaling process to do some self exploring and learning strategies for taking care of themselves. Funded by the Department of Community Services – Youth Development Initiative in Digby.

Riding the Wave: Business Innovations, Trends, and You –

In cooperation the Centre for Women & Business- Women’s Business Initiative (WBI) and the three CBDC’s in the counties, we co-hosted with them, our Women in Business conference. It enabled us to invite 4 experts in the field of women and business success to Yarmouth. Funded by the Provincial Community Business Development Corporation (CBDC) and the Centre for Women and Business (Mount St. Vincent University).

Tri County Local Food System –

In cooperation with a number of partners, in particular Public Health, and some individual producers, we co-hosted a very successful local food network forum. From that we have been overseeing the continuation of the theme areas that the community wants to further work on.

Funded under Public Health - Healthy Eating Nova Scotia Strategy.

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

Each year we try to host events to invite the broader community into the centre. This past year we had a federal election and invited the general public to come to the centre and have an open dialogue with the four candidates at separate times.

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

Staff Training

Whether it is specific training or providing opportunities for staff to participate in conferences, improving skills and being informed of current practices is imperative for the core staff and project staff when appropriate.

- Legal Limberness/ Board Governance – Service Canada – attended by Karen.
- Networking Conference for services in South West NS – Digby Family Resource Centre – attended by Michele and Bernadette
- Collaborative Strategies for Community Development – NS Department of Economic Development – attended by Bernadette
- Aboriginal Healing Conference – Gaming Foundation- attended by Kirsta
- SMAC – Start Making Abilities Count – TCWC and the WNIES – attended by Karen
- Motivational Interviewing – South West Health Authority – attended by Michele
- Atlantic Summer Institute on Healthy & Safe Communities – Dept. of Justice Canada – attended by Karen
- Safely on Your Way – FLIPAW (Family Law Information Project for Abused women) - Legal Education Society of NS – attended by Karen, Michele, Kirsta, and Bernadette
- Brian Vallee – Author of Life with Billy & the War on Women – Metro Interagency on Family Violence – attended by Bernadette
- Hypersexualization of Women & Girls – Antigonish Women’s Resource Centre – attended by Kirsta

Community Partnerships/ Networks/ Collaborations

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

- Women for Community Economic Development (WCED) – Money Management Project. As this project was housed here at the Centre, it has drawn women into the Centre that hadn’t been here before and wouldn’t necessarily otherwise come in. We also have

representation on the advisory committee. Under WCED we hosted a regional meeting for Coastal Communities Network (CCN).

- ❑ 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.
- ❑ Women’s and Business Network – We work with the Women’s Business Initiative (WBI) & the CBDC’s to address the needs of women business owners and program needs for women in, or thinking about being in, that sector.
- ❑ Women and Tobacco Advisory Committee – We sit on this committee that focuses on the promotion of resources and services for women dealing with tobacco cessation. Three information sessions have been delivered to service providers across the tri counties on the resources and programs available for women dealing with tobacco addiction.
- ❑ SHYFT – Supportive Housing with Youth Focus Team – is a collaboration of community and government agencies coming together to develop a community based solution to youth housing needs.
- ❑ Hear! Here! – We worked closely with this group in their first year to assist in getting them established. They are developing their capacity to invite world class musicians into the area, in particular classical music. We sponsored the acquisition of a donation from VIA Rail that initiated their first fundraiser working towards their endeavours.
- ❑ Partners for Children and Family Supports (PCFS) – This is an interagency that 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. We also have representation on the advisory committee on the initiative “In home Literacy”.
- ❑ Women’s Fishnet – Shelburne/ Lockport – We participated in their AGM 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. We co-sponsored a workshop with them this past year called SMAC (Start Making Abilities Count).
- ❑ Dalhousie School of Nursing/ Nova Scotia Community College/ Department of Community Services – We had one student from the community college and one student from the Nursing School do their placements at the centre. We also had a workplace for six

months with one of their clients. We also participated in a number of the Career Days that NSCC sponsored.

- ❑ Health Fairs – we participated in a number of these events this past year – Lockport/ Digby/ Barrington/Breastfeed Information Day – VON. We also did a presentation on the Women’s Centre at the Tri-Counties *Promoting Schools* conference.
- ❑ Youth Health Centre Working Group (Department of Public Health) – the work with this group, which is focused on the development of a youth health centre in the community, continues.
- ❑ Chamber of Commerce – We are a member and when possible participate in their events.
- ❑ International Work – We have been working with *Asociacion Humanitaria San Fransisco de Asis* who are situated in Northern Peru. Working with their main Director, Rosemary Gordon, we assist with their funding applications to a number of international humanitarian foundations. Besides doing remarkable work on animal care, Rose and her team also carry out community development work that benefits women and their families.
- ❑ TREPA /Clean Nova Scotia – we co-sponsored a noon hour event on drive wise.
- ❑ Buy Back Nova Scotia – we are part of this broad coalition of groups and individuals who want large tracts of land protected from private ownership.

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 make it a priority to participate in the required meetings. It has been a busy year for Connect which had an Assembly and identified a number of priority areas for the next three years. Four representatives from our Centre were able to attend. We did a submission to the NS Poverty Reduction Strategy Working Group and continued our efforts to have our funding priorities addressed by meeting with all the political parties and our elected representatives. We are also represented on the Domestic Violence Working Group to address the Domestic Violence Elimination Bill – Bill 81.

Feminists for Just & Equitable Public Policy (FemJEPP) – We continue to be an active member of our provincial coalition of equality seeking women’s organizations. A project funded through Status of Women Canada has enabled us to further develop collaborative relations with the policy makers within the Department of Community Services, as we work towards improving the situation for women buried in poverty. A good part of the work over the last year was spent on the Poverty Reduction Strategy as the FemJEPP coordinator was the co-chair of the Working Group commissioned to develop the initial report.

Women’s Innovative Justice Initiative (WIJI) - We are represented on the provincial coalition through Connect. WIJI was very involved in the FLIPAW project - mentioned above – and continues through a Law Foundation project, to carry out research and analysis on integrated specialized courts for 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:

- Continue to address our funding priorities for the Centre through our association Connect! and our own local efforts
- Building on the work on sexual violence, work with all partners through the development of a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) program and a SART (Sexual Assault Response Team)
- Complete our review of our Policy & Procedures Manual
- Women’s Health Clinic – as an extension of our services
- Job Readiness/Re-Entry program for women
- Affordable Housing for women and their families
- Pre-natal review process - Holistic and natural childbirth
- 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 address youth and addiction issues
- Women and Pensions
- Creative programming for women dealing with gambling addiction
- Smoking Cessation for women
- More connections with our ethnic minority populations
- Women in Business - Continue to offer training opportunities

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
 Lynn Comeau
 Fleurette Surette
 Tasha Smith
 Wanda Doucette
 Ann d'Eon
 Lois LeBlanc
 Debbie Roberts
 Natasha Yorke
 Angela Pauze-Bullerwell

Staff who participate in Board meetings
 Karen Stewart, Bernadette Mac Donald , Michele Archibald - Hattie