



# Tri-County Women's Centre

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## **DIGBY OUTREACH**

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## **Tri-County Women's Centre**

### **Annual Report**

**1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023**

**Celebrated 20 years of service**

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**Annual Report**  
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## **Summary**

In 2022 Tri County Women's Centre celebrated 20 years of service!

As with the previous two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has of course had a significant impact on how services were accessed, and to some extent what supports were needed at different stages. We returned to in-person drop-in. Group programs were offered regarding a number of topics, programs and services to women, girls, and youth, mostly in-person and some remotely. We continue to hold most of our staff, community development and Board meetings over Zoom. We started a couple of new fundraisers this year, including a new major annual fundraiser: "Calendar raffle". Our awareness campaigns were once again mostly conducted via social media and/or online streaming events, however we returned to an in-person International Women's Day that was hugely successful!

The Tri County Women's Centre (TCWC), incorporated in 2000, began providing services in 2002. This was our twentieth 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 community members and be involved in projects and initiatives with a diverse group of stakeholders including, women, 2SLGBTQ+ community, 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 is full, with staff sharing offices. In Digby we have a shared space with Turning the Tides located at the NSCC Digby location. In Shelburne we provide access to our office with a shared space agreement with SHYFT Youth Services outreach worker, and have an office in Barrington one day/week . 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 across the tri-counties.

Over the last year we assisted hundreds (450+) of women, adolescent girls, youth, and families through our support services, projects, and medical clinic.

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 has a positive impact on people's lives.

Again, this year our project work, special events, community development and social advocacy initiatives concentrated on

- affordable housing across the tri-counties
- access to primary health care for our most vulnerable women, youth and 2SLGBTQ+ community
- mental health counseling and therapy services
- therapeutic intervention services for victims of sexualized violence
- Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program – western region
- working with Indigenous Women across the Maritimes toward reclamation of language and culture and rekindling of right relations
- responding to sexualized human trafficking and prostitution
- providing support services to victims and survivors of sexualized violence
- celebrating women and advocating for every individual to fight for equality with the International Women's Day campaign
- Ending violence against women participating in the #StartByBelieving campaign

Our operational (Core) funding from the Department of Community Services, via the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women (NSACSW) had remained the same since 2015. This presents a significant challenge as the demand 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 TCWC's overall budget. We continued to work with the NSACSW, and our elected officials, to advocate for a funding increase to a sustainable level. In March 2023 a one-time funding increase to all women's centres was received for use in the coming fiscal year. While we continue to negotiate our Service Level Agreement, we were advised that we would be receiving an increase to our annual core funding. Both fund increases are welcome news and will be represented in the 2023-2024 budget.

Provincially, through Women's Centres Connect, our association of women's centres, the Nova Scotia Association of Community Health Centres, the Nova Scotia Action Coalition for Community Well-being, a joint tri-county affordable housing network, and the Tri County Women's Health Coalition, we have helped to shape public policies that have a direct impact on women and those who are gender-oppressed, 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, staff, other service providers we have worked with, board members, community supports, and other volunteers that have enabled us to do our critical work across the tri-counties and the province.

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**

Every year, requests for our support and advocacy services increase. ***This year we provided direct support services and programs to approximately more than 450 individual women and girls over the course of approximately 3500 contacts.*** This demand for one-on-one support counselling and advocacy was met by securing grant funding to hire a second support worker position for 2022-2023.

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 single entry point; we work with women and girls on a broad range of issues and concerns. ***Poverty, violence, and social isolation continue to be the root causes of the reasons women come through our doors. This year that presented as mental health support, systems navigation, housing and/or food insecurity and gender-based violence being the most prevalent issues we addressed.*** Some other common issues that women present with are parenting, legal supports, sexual assault, discrimination, and access to primary health care.

## **Programs**

We try to reach as many women and girls as possible by providing programming to meet their needs. All of our group programs are open to all clients, even if their home site is a different location. The following are the programs we offered in the last year:

- **Breast Pump Program (all sites)** - Breast pumps with kits and educational support, available in all three locations, are loaned to nursing moms. *Funded by Yarmouth Community Health Board Wellness Funds*
- **Yoga Breathing Meditation (Yarmouth)** – Meditation and yoga-based program facilitated by a local instructor.
- **Yoga & Active Seniors Program (Digby)** - Facilitated by local instructors and staff in Digby.
- **Building Confidence with Art (Digby)** – An art program for beginners, facilitated by a

local instructor.

- **Income Tax (all sites)** – We have one volunteer and three staff trained by Revenue Canada under the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP), who provide tax filing for those who meet the CVITP criteria.
- **Menstrual & hygiene kits (all sites)** – providing sanitary napkins and other supplies for women in need.
- Toolbox Tuesdays (Yarmouth & Shelburne)
- Social circle / Coffee Talk / drop-in coffee (all sites)
- Walking programs (Yarmouth & Digby)
- Grief & Loss group
- Self-image group (Yarmouth)
- Healthy Relationships workshop(s)
- Takeout Tuesdays (all sites)
- Garden to Table Collective Kitchen (Yarmouth)

## 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:

**Child Welfare reform** – we participate in an initiative lead by the NS College of Social Workers regarding recommendations to make child welfare policy more responsive to cultural and community needs

**Social Assistance System Reform** - The Department of Community Services is restructuring the Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA). Through Connect, and other social policy networks (ie. Community Society to End Poverty and Community Agenda for Social Assistance Reform) we are connected to; we try to keep informed on the reforms being suggested and speak up on behalf of women in our local communities at both an individual and systems level. It is imperative that people who access this social safety system are provided more income to meet their basic needs.

**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.

**Sexualized Human Trafficking and Prostitution** - We continue to find opportunities to work with others, like the Trafficking and Exploitation Services System (TESS), operated by the YWCA Halifax. We work to further our collective understanding of this issue and how to both prevent the crime and ensure adequate provision of the services victims need.

**Trauma Specific Counselling for Sexualized Violence** – through bridge funding from Dept. of Health & Wellness we provided sexualized violence trauma therapy services for the Tri Counties. These services transitioned to the provincial program under the umbrella of Avalon Sexual Assault Centre in March 2023. They continue to be offered out of our three locations.

**Media appearances:** TCWC was interviewed by media including, CBC, CIFA, CJS and the Yarmouth Vanguard about various women’s issues throughout the year.

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

#### ▽ **Trauma Specific Therapy for Sexualized Violence**, *funded by NS Dept of Health & Wellness*

On behalf of a community of stakeholders, we receive “bridge funding” 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
- Capacity building to build safer spaces and more informed service providers in this fiscal year, we provided the Trauma Specific Therapy Program in all three counties.

#### ▽ **Mental Health Services Project** *funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada and the Mental Health Foundation of NS*

Thanks to grant funding we hired a full-time social worker to provide general counseling and contracted several private practise therapists to provide more extensive therapy when and where needed. These services we available in Yarmouth, Digby and Shelburne Counties. Our social worker 9co) facilitated several group programs including SMART Recovery; Grief & Loss; healthy relationship; and a facilitator training for a peer support group of survivors of sexualized violence. **In 2022-2023 we provided 343 counseling sessions; 320 therapy sessions and group programs to over 80 individuals.**

▽ **Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program for Western Nova Scotia** - *funded by the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA).*

Tri County SANE launched in September, providing 24/7 medical and forensic response, by SANE trained nurses, to sexual assault at Yarmouth Regional Hospital, Roseway Hospital (Shelburne), Valley Regional Hospital (Kentville), South Shore Regional Hospital (Bridgewater), and Fishermen’s Memorial Hospital (Lunenburg). We continue to work on additional sites in Digby, Middleton, and elsewhere. Our SANE Coordinator provides community engagement and education to various stakeholders and service providers. **Approximately 3 cases/month or 41 cases in 2022-2023.**

▽ **TCWC Wellness Clinic** – *funded by the Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) and the Reciprocity Fund (Community Foundation of NS)*

We have extended our Partnership Agreement with NSHA for Tri County Women’s Centre Wellness Clinic funding again this year. Through grant funding we have been able to independently contract 4 nurse practitioners since November 2022 to provide casual clinic hours. Our clinic is for gynecological services for women and girls, and other health needs for women who do not have a family doctor; PAP/STI screening clinics for all; and a PRIDE Health clinic. We continue to work to build our team of clinicians in order to offer primary care, in the meantime operate much like a drop-in clinic with limited follow-up. Offerings including: **PRIDE Health: 19 appointments; PAP/STI Screening: 214 appointments; and Women’s Wellness: 159 appointments; and pregnancy tests.**

We are a member of the Canadian Association of Community Health Centres and the Nova Scotia Association of Community Health Centres.

▽ **Righting Relations / Apaji-wla'matulinej: Strengthening Adult Education for**



**Social Change** – *funded by the Catherine Donnelly Foundation*

And **Gender Equality** – *funded by Rural Community Foundation of Nova Scotia*

Apaji-wla'matulinej is led by Indigenous women. As women reclaim the language and culture, we are empowered to strengthen the foundations of our families and communities. Strong women working together to create radical change and rekindle right relations. TCWC provided administration for this project, however Women of First Light have now got charitable status and all project funds and final reports have been transferred to them.

▽ **Affordable & Supportive Housing**

In each county, we have co-chaired coalitions that address the need for more affordable and supportive housing: Digby Area Affordable & Supportive Housing (DAASH) group, Community Housing Options Initiative through Collaboration and Engagement (CHOICE), and Shelburne County Housing Coalition (SCHC). Since the Pandemic, this group was meeting as one joint committee, chaired by TCWC, meeting over Zoom. Shelburne & Digby have re-activated their own housing coalitions and TCWC has stepped back from the role of chair of all of the housing committees but continues to participate.

**Other Events/ Activities**

▽ **Educational Presentations**

Over the last year, we participated in a number of events and educational presentations on a full range of topics (ie. consent, professionalism, mobility, sexual health information, sexualized human trafficking, and general TCWC information) in communities across the tri-counties.

▽ **TCWC Events**

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

o **International Women's Day - March 8<sup>th</sup>** – TCWC hosted a free evening event,

sponsored by Rudder's Seafood Restaurant & Brew Pub, an awareness event in recognition of the international event and participated in the IWD campaign

#EmbraceEquity. We had three young women (Amy, Arwen, and Olivia) perform

live music to kick the night off, the women of the local improv group “Catch 22 comedy crew”, and heard from TCWC’s Executive Director about the roles of TCWC & IWD. WE ended the night hearing from local journalist, Tina Comeau, about her career in a male dominated industry.

- o **National Canadian Film Day** – Participated in this national celebration of Canadian cinema by screening a Canadian film at the Digby office.

- o **Sexual Assault Awareness Month** – Several events including #StartByBelieving pledge signings, information sharing, and social media engagement.

∇ **Student and Work Placements** – Each year, when approached by learning and employment institutions to provide placements for their students and participants, we do our best to accommodate these requests. This year we had students and work placements from Nova Scotia Community College and Yarmouth Consolidated Memorial High School Co-op Program.

∇ **Fundraising** - We are very grateful to the community for their generous financial support.

We worked in partnership with SHYFT Youth Services for our major annual fundraiser Coldest Night of the Year in February. This fundraiser takes place nationally and supports organizations who serve and support individuals who are homeless or precariously housed.

### **Communication about Tri-County Women’s Centre**

We maintain a website, Facebook page, Instagram account, toll-free phone number, 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, 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 determinants of women’s health, addiction, housing and violence against women. It now meets quarterly as an information sharing network.

- **Juniper House** - As a 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 with the SchoolsPlus programs across the tri- counties and collaborate on program delivery wherever possible.
- **South End Kids Community Garden** – We administer the funds and activities of the garden.

### **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. Attached is a year-end report of the activities undertaken by Connect.

#### **Nova Scotia Sexual Assault Services Network**

Members include a number of key agencies from across the province that provide services to victims of sexualized violence. 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**

We are working closely with the NSHA and the other SANE sites to ensure access and consistency of SANE services across the province for victims of sexual assault.

#### **Community Society to End Poverty (CSEP) and Community Agenda for Social Assistance Reform (CASAR)**

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.

**Nova Scotia Action Coalition for Community Wellbeing**

We participate in Zoom meetings of the Coalition and also represent our local housing coalitions at the Housing Working group table of this coalition.

## **Our appreciation**

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.

## **Funding partners, grants and other financial contributions**

- Canadian Women's Foundation
- Catherine Donnelly Foundation
- Canada Revenue Agency
- Community Health Board – Wellness Fund
- Municipality of Argyle
- Municipality of Barrington
- Municipality of the District of Yarmouth
- Province of Nova Scotia – NSACSW, Department of Community Services
- Province of Nova Scotia – Dept. of Health & Wellness
- Province of Nova Scotia – NS Health
- Community Foundation of Nova Scotia
- Town of Clark's Harbour
- Town of Yarmouth
- Women and Gender Equality Canada

## Staff

Abby Cushing - Support Worker/Program Coordinator (Maternity leave)

Bethany Surette – Clinic Coordinator (TCWC Wellness clinic)

Cindy Atwood – Part-time Administrative Assistant

Desiree Bezanon - Support Worker/Program Coordinator (2022)

Glenda Moore - Sexual Violence Specific Trauma Counsellor

Ishbel Munro - Righting Relations Project Coordinator

Kylie Bullerwell – Project Counselor

Rebecca Cottreau - Financial Coordinator

Roberta Journey - Digby Outreach Worker

Robin Walker – Shelburne Outreach Worker

Shana Vidito - Western SANE Coordinator

Shannon (Shay) Hipson – Community Support Worker

Shannon Watkins – Assistant Executive Director

Trish McCourt - Executive Director

## **Board of Directors**

Donna Frison-LeBlanc – Co-Chair

Alix d'Entremont – Co-Chair

Nancy d'Entremont – Treasurer

Sarah Thompson – Secretary

Emma Leon – Director

Jessica DeMille – Director

Melissa Merritt – Director

Tasha Smith – Director

Tiffany Wagner – Director

Katelyn Charlton – Director

Sara Hurlburt – Director

Rhonda Robicheau - Director

**Appendix**

**Women's Centres Connect Annual Report 2021/2022 – PDF attached**