

Spokeswoman

A Place for Women to Grow

By Shauna Reid

Shovel in hand I set out on my first task, to rid our director of her dreaded nemesis - the Elderberry tree. With my partner, who had yet to be named, we attacked the creature with an urgency of fresh energy that could only have been equated with a one chance opportunity to remove the roots of hate, finally discovered.

And it was just as this, the project began. With pick and shovels we tackled, what was probably

once a beautiful place to visit, but much like many other things in our lives, time caused it to become crowded and overgrown. As I looked around the garden, I was struck by just how much love and care had went into the original plan. Flowers that had probably been collected from many different women, were planted with as much intention as the work we were about to take on. I kept this in mind as



I moved around the garden. There was so much to be done, how would we find the strength to stick with it? I looked up at the massive structure acting like a fire escape for the

Front Of The Bus

By Gemma M. Hickey

Once upon a time a little girl was told by her father that when she grew up she could be what she wanted as long as she had a dream

and worked very hard to make her dream come true. When the little girl grew up, she discovered that her father lied. Martin

Luther King Jr. had a dream. I had one too, but I am awake now. After rubbing my eyes, I have decided that like Rosa Parks, (see Marriage pg. 3)

St. John's Status of Women Council

April 2005

Special points of interest:

- *Justice is Served*
- *Women Make Demands*
- *Leadership in Policing*
- *Needle Exchange Program*



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A Place for Women

two apartments above. There were a group of women scraping the peeling paint; white chips were falling like snow in July all around our heads. Their task seemed endless to me but their approach was one of laughter and exuberance.

The garden was severely over grown. Giant bunches of Hostas formed massive clumps in several areas. They had the potential to generate dozens of newbies. Unfortunately, the never-ending care for those in need had left little time for the tending required to help the offspring plants develop their own identity. White and purple Phlox had stretched their necks way past the shabby neighboring fence, as they attempted to join the downtown beat with its continuous trek to the waterfront; to the world, outside this one sacred spot. Scattered Bachelor's threw their buttons in random clusters, but were kept at bay with an ever-present Creeping Jenny doing her best to contain this well established flock. Her battle with the Soldiers and Sailors was almost lost, as the boys made aggressive attacks all around the base of the decks and stairs. I worked particularly hard trying to ensure they were put back in their places, which was no small feat as I followed the roots up and under the darkest of corners. A crowd of pink Cranesbills Geraniums kept an ever present vigil; doing their best to stand out and be heard amidst the overpowering grasses and weeds. Their fight was a continuous labour of marches, holding their bright pink signs; refusing to be quieted by the masses who wished no less than their silence.



The author struggles with an overgrown monster.

As I pulled out the flowers that had once been planted with a purpose, I thought about the women's centre and its new found place in my life - of why I was here today. I had wanted a break from mothering my two and a half year old little girl, as well as one from my husband. Luckier than many women, I was afforded a 10-day stay of relaxation, as my spouse took my child on vacation alone. I came to offer a day of my "time off" and stayed a week. As the days turned into nights I got to know the other women on the project. Some had been involved with the women's movement for years, a natural progression of their paid work in the community. Some were once women in need and wanted to give back because of what the centre had done for them. Some, like me, were looking for a place to belong. Our time passed quickly as we got to know each other better. Late nights of painting and digging grew into stories of times past and hard laughs as we renewed our depleted stores of energy. And as we scoffed down the one too many pizza lunches with our red paint stained hands, I began to learn the true reason the women's centre existed.

A lifetime of volunteer work behind me, I still felt like I was alone in this city. I marveled at the irony of tourists overwhelmed with the generosity and friendliness of the people and me, a resident, looking to belong. I began to understand my need to be there. As a child, my growth had begun with a massive group of individuals. I grew up with 17 siblings, all crowded in one tiny house, relying on each other for survival; knowing that none of us could achieve alone what we did as a group. With a family of that magnitude, my name alone gave me a position in very large cluster of people. Since leaving that small rural community to live and work in the city, I missed the connection and comfort of people who naturally wanted what was best for me, because I was one of them. I was beginning to feel like I had come home again.

This garden represented what I believed in feminism - that the foundations were laid with

the vigor of good people and they must be constantly checked everyday. Just like these flowers, the principles of feminism have to be continuously cared for, fertilized and rejuvenated if they are to grow stronger and replenish itself.

Sometimes there is even a need to rip up a scattered bush of philosophy and replace it with an even healthier root of ideals, this only adds to the strength of the entire movement. And just as the word suggests, if we are to continue a movement that builds stronger women, we have to find ways of encouraging all women to be a part of it.

As I fitted the last of the stones in place, nailed the last of the flower pots together, I smiled at the thought that maybe, just maybe, my two and half year old little girl will dig up what I worked so hard to plant. Maybe she'll divide the little Astilbie, planted under the abhor, and find a new spot for the Lupines that invariable will overcrowd the Creeping Veronica and create for herself what she needs to be a stronger woman.



Taking a well deserved break.

Marriage

I will not sit at the back the bus!

It is not a secret that the major locus for the argument against same-sex marriage in Newfoundland and Labrador comes from the conservative elements of Christianity who, whether they argue against lesbian and gay rights on explicitly religious ground, argue fundamentally from a sense of religious feeling. As a Christian, I understand to a certain degree, the conflict that other Christians experience in attempting to reconcile the apparent teachings of Christianity with the rapid evolution of the modern world. I also have compassion for those who are afraid for the fate of their treasured social institutions in these times of change, but in Canada we have freedom of religion and that essentially means freedom from religion.

There is no conceivable way that same-sex marriage could either cheapen existing marriages, damage the institution of marriage, influence heterosexuals not to marry or, in extreme cases, contribute to the already high divorce rate in heterosexual marriage. If fairness to lesbians and gays could possibly produce these deleterious results, then we must ask ourselves how meaningful the institution of marriage is in the first place. Furthermore, some opponents of same-sex marriage contend that marriage is an institution uniquely constituted for the purposes of promoting and nurturing procreation, and that since lesbians and gays supposedly cannot procreate the right to marry should not be extended to them.

Marriage is a contractual arrangement that confers many rights, protections and obligations that have been tuned over time to serve the real needs of couples, but nowhere in Canadian law does it specify that married couples must procreate. If opponents of same-sex marriage want to be consistent, they should lobby to forbid the infertile people and post-menopausal women the right to marry, and for the annulment of marriages that do not produce offspring, by some deadline. (Victory pg. 5)

Making a holiday difference

By Lisa Zigler

2004 Sponsor A Woman and her Children for the Holidays program was a huge success.

Now in its second year, this program assists women with children who need assistance over the holidays. Beginning in October, we begin to receive countless requests for assistance over the holiday season. Many of the women we work with live in poverty. Consequently the thought of having to explain to their children that after the rent is paid and some food is purchased, there is no money left for presents is overwhelming. These are just some of the comments that we heard from these women.

“How do you explain to a six year old that there will be no Santa Claus?” – Single mom making minimum wage

“My son watches TV. He sees what his friends get. He wants to know why Santa Claus doesn’t like him?” – Woman who left abusive relationship and is struggling to pay her bills.

“My daughter would be happy with a new winter coat. She hasn’t had one in five years” – Mother of 16 year old daughter

“My kids know our situation...they don’t even ask about presents anymore” – Single mom with two children aged 7 and 9.

In response to these heartbreaking stories, staff at the St. John’s Women’s Centre created *The Sponsor a Woman and her Children for the Holiday’s Program*. Women in need are matched up with donors (individuals, families and/or businesses) who then purchase gifts and food for their sponsored family. All information remains confidential and gifts are dropped off to the centre and delivered by a team of “Elves.”

The impact of this year’s program:

- 50 families were “sponsored” by generous donors.
- A couple hundred extra gifts were dropped off to the women’s centre.
- Many of these extra gifts were in turn donated to the Association for New Canadians and Iris Kirby House. As a result, a couple hundred other families were helped.
- More than \$8,000 in cash donations was made. This money was spent on food gift certificates, taxi chits (for emergency appointments) and personal care items. We in fact have enough grocery gift certificates to assist women with emergency food assistance throughout the long winter months.

This program could not have been carried out with a dedicated team of volunteers. These individuals gave their time to help organize the program, accept donations and deliver gifts. Thanks to everyone, especially to Jill Drover, her mom, all of our board members and women from the community who helped coordinate deliveries and to our team of dedicated “Elves.” You all made a significant difference in the lives of others.



Victory

Generally speaking, marriage works and works well, high divorce rates notwithstanding, or we would not be in such conflict over who is permitted to enjoy it. It is an issue with direct, here-and-now, bread-and-butter importance to many lesbians and gays.

All of the arguments against same-sex marriage have absolutely nothing to do with logic or consistency. They are merely a facile way to emphasize the differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals and to deny lesbians and gays their rights. Marriage should be a human right, not just a heterosexual one. Calling marriage something other than marriage would send a negative message – you can get on the bus, but you have to sit at the back. On Dec. 21, 2004, same-sex couples in Newfoundland and Labrador were granted the right to sit wherever they wanted by Chief Justice Derek Green. The first same-sex wedding took place on Dec. 23, 2004 and every other same-sex couple in the province is still celebrating their honeymoon with them.



Celebrating a long overdue victory.

RCMP Corporal in Natuashish wins Leadership Award for policing

By Helen Cleary - Escott

The RCMP in Newfoundland and Labrador is congratulates Cpl. Amy Mitchell from the Natuashish, Labrador detachment. Cpl. Mitchell recently won the leadership award at the Atlantic Women in Law Enforcement Conference in Saint John, New Brunswick .

The leadership award is given to an officer who distinguishes herself by superior accomplishments or continuing long-term involvement using leadership skills which make a significant contribution within the agency or the law enforcement mission.

Cpl. Mitchell, a native of Middle Arm, joined the RCMP in January 1990. Following recruit training, she was posted to Nova Scotia, where she has served in Bridgewater, Kingston, Lunenburg and Tantallon detachments, as well as Tantallo's general investigation section. In 1999, she transferred to Newfoundland and Labrador, where she served in two isolated Innu and Inuit communities, Hopedale, then Makkovick, Labrador. Upon serving in these remote detachments for a number of years, she was transferred to major crimes unit in St. John's.

In July 2003, Cpl. Mitchell was promoted to the rank of corporal as the NCO in charge of Natuashish detachment. Prior to her arrival, policing this community was done on a weekly rotational basis by three RCMP members out of Goose Bay. Cpl. Mitchell had the choice of living in Goose Bay and rotating in and out of the community. However, she chose to take a leadership role and live in Natuashish full-time. The benefits to the community and the RCMP of having her live in the community are many in that there is more proactive community involvement, and the continuity

of investigations and supervision has been brought to levels that have never existed. Cpl. Mitchell's leadership skills were instrumental in guiding her co-workers into being solid investigators as she also encouraged them to become involved in community programs such as basketball and floor hockey.

Cpl. Mitchell reinvigorated the Tribal Police Constables who had become stagnant and unproductive. This was a major step in enhancing RCMP relations with the band council and the community-at-large. She has developed the relationship between the RCMP and the band constables to the point where they have become productive and contributing to the healing of the community. Proactive community policing initiatives involving youth, elders, schools, inter agency meetings and band council liaison is now the norm.



Reaching injection drug users

A project of the ACNL

By Tree Walsh

Infection rates worldwide are staggering. At least 19.2 million women are infected with HIV worldwide. Some 1.2 million women died in 2002. On average, that is 3,287 deaths per day. Every day nearly 7,000 women become infected with HIV. In Canada nearly 25 per cent of new infections occur in women, up from 12 per cent just a few years ago. Young women - age 15-29 - account for almost 40 per cent of new HIV infections reported among women in Canada with Aboriginal populations being disproportionately affected than non-aboriginal populations. In early 2004, the AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador (ACNL) received funding from the AIDS Community Action Program/Population and Public Health Branch of Health Canada to carry out a needs assessment with injection drug users (IDUs) in St. John's. The impetus to carry out this project came from a rise in the number of people living with HIV/AIDS, and the increased awareness of the levels of injection drug use (IDU). Since the beginning of this year, there have been eight people newly diagnosed HIV positive, and three more with AIDS. Of this total, three are women: two HIV positive and one with AIDS.

The goal of this project is to reduce the risk/spread of HIV/HCV and other infections related to IDU in the St. John's metro area by increasing awareness and understanding of issues related to IDU. We plan to do this by engaging directly with people who inject drugs and the front line services they have contact with in order to increase the knowledge base around the risks involved and safer practices related to IDU; and to identify the specific needs of IDUs and the barriers to getting these needs met. An advisory committee made up of representatives of the IDU community, health care providers, addiction services, SJSWC/Women's Centre, other community agencies, and the police, supports the work of this project.

Drug use, and injection drug use in particular, is a controversial topic. In addressing this issue the main things we need to remember are that drug users are human beings trying their best to

survive and that we all deserve to be treated with respect and dignity - regardless of our life choices and/or circumstances. It is also essential to recognize that total abstinence from drugs and alcohol is not a viable option for many individuals and for youth in particular. The best way to help people is to meet them where they are in their lives, and that means working from a harm reduction approach.

Harm reduction looks at drug use from a public health perspective, rather than from one of law enforcement. It accepts, for better and for worse drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them. It sees drug users as people in need of care, treatment and support rather than just punishment. Harm reduction strategies attempt to reduce the specific harms associated with drug use, without requiring abstinence. Thus, they seek to reduce the likelihood that drug users will contract/spread HIV, Hepatitis C and other infections; or otherwise harm themselves or members of the general public. Examples of harm reduction approaches to address drug use include needle exchange and methadone maintenance treatment.

Sharing drug-using gear, syringes, spoons, water, filters etc. are obvious avenues for the transmission of infections (harms). Other potential sources of harm related to this activity include the unsafe disposal of used syringes and the spread of infection through unsafe sex.

The AIDS Committee has operated a needle exchange since the early 1990s, to date this service has not been funded, therefore supplies have been either paid for from our general operating budget or donated. This lack of funding also means needle exchange services are only available during our regular office hours - 8:30 a.m. to 4:p.m. Monday to Friday (closed noon to 1 p.m.). We provide needle exchange (i.e.: provision of clean syringes and proper disposal of used ones), filters, alcohol swabs, condoms, lubricant etc., along with information and support. We also offer a drop-in health clinic on Thursdays from noon to 3 pm. Among services the nurse provides are: free, anonymous testing for HIV, HCV, STIs etc., wellness check-ups, safer injecting and vein maintenance information. With funding, we would be able to expand access to these services both in terms of hours of operation and through partnerships with other community agencies via satellite locations and street outreach.

The final report of the Oxycontin® Task Force contains a number of recommendations regarding harm reduction services. Two of these recommendations are specific to work the ACNL is doing - expanding the IDU needs assessment to include the entire province and annual funding for the needle exchange. Implementing the harm reduction service recommendations would be a giant step towards making our communities healthier and safer for all of us.

If you would like more information or have something to contribute please contact Tree Walsh at: tree@acnl.net -- 579-8656 or 1-800-563-1575.



Feminists on the march for women's history month

By Phyllis Artiss

On Sept. 30, the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women (PACSW) organized a media event to usher in Women's History Month (October). In particular, Canadian feminists celebrate Oct. 18, Person's Day, for it was on Oct. 18, 1929 that women were officially ruled by the Privy Council of Britain as 'persons' qualified to vote in the Canadian senate. This year marked the 75th anniversary of Person's Day, and women in this province were on the move once again . . . to celebrate their victories, to deplore their losses in the current climate of fiscal restraint, and to demand, yet again, equal rights for all women in our province and our country.

On Sept. 30, 2004, the federal/provincial/territorial ministers Responsible for the Status of Women met in St. John's at the Fairmont Hotel. Fifty women representing women's groups from across the province gathered at the hotel to listen to addresses by leading national and provincial feminists, and to present an urgent petition to the ministers - five demands for feminist equality.

I was one of the women lucky enough to be present at that media event. We listened to inspiring addresses by Sheila Day (human rights expert with the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action), Bonnie Diamond (National Association of Women and the Law), Lorriane Michael (National Action Committee on the Status of Women), Lorraine Sheehan (NL women's councils/centres) and Joyce Hancock (PACSW).

We enjoyed a display of hooked rugs and paintings by mother/daughter artists Frances Ennis and Sheila Coultas, and their wise feminist words about the principles that inspire their work.

Then we trooped out of the media conference room, lustily singing Bread and Roses and made our way along the hotel corridors, up the stairs and eventually to the meeting room where the FPT ministers were gathered behind closed doors. Leading our group were Dorothy Inglis and Nancy Riche, both wearing their Person's Award medals.

When we arrived at the locked doors, Nancy and Dorothy pushed past the guards. "Step aside!" said Dorothy in ringing tones as she and Nancy entered the room, "We're going to the front." And they did.

They presented the five demands for feminist equality to Liza Frulla, federal minister for the Status of Women, asking that FPT ministers move forward on these. Minister Frulla and provincial minister for the Status of Women, Joan Burke, responded graciously, whereupon Nancy and Dorothy rejoined the rest of us and we left, again singing Bread and Roses as we departed.

I can't imagine better leaders and role models for women in this province than the two who led the way into that room at the Fairmont on Sept. 30. Nancy Riche was born and brought up in the Battery on the rocky cliffs on the fringes of St. John's, started working for justice for co-workers in her local union early in her career, and went on to win national and international recognition in the labour movement. She served as secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Labour Congress (representing more than two million union members across Canada), as chair of Women's Committee of the CLC, and chair of the Women's Committee of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, with 156 million members in 85 countries. In her 'retirement' she moved back to St. John's, where she con-



Minister Frulla (right) earlier in the day at the Women's Centre.

tinues to lead the way, not only in the feminist movement and local union activities, but also politically. Recently she was elected president of the New Democratic Party of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Dorothy was born and lived her early years on the other margin of the country: in British Columbia. In her first job she organized fellow workers into a union, and has been active ever since in the women's movement and social justice organizations locally and nationally. A founding member of the first Status of Women Council in this province when she moved here in the early 1970s, for several years she was author of a weekly feminist column *Bread and Roses*, later published as a book that won a national award). Lifelong active member of the NDP, she sits on the national Council of Canadians. In November 2004 she pulled up stakes and moved back to BC with her husband to live close to her children and their families, where she continues her passionate engagement in feminist activism that is always linked to wider political and social issues. Both Nancy and Dorothy have been awarded honorary doctorates at Memorial University. Both are courageous, outspoken, energetic and passionate in supporting the many causes they believe in. And both are unbelievably generous and inclusive in mentoring other women. I know, because both have been important mentors to my students . . . and to me . . . over the decades.

Thanks to Dorothy and Nancy, to the wonderful women at the advisory council for organizing the media event, and to all the women who helped make that day a success.

Here are some comments from women who participated in the event, as printed in *Re/Claiming Our Feminist Voices*, produced and circulated by PACSW (and special thanks to Michelle Smith and Melanie Parsons for making this available online and in a classy booklet, which I used in this account).

"Newfoundland and Labrador women are leading the new wave that will wash this nation! Take notice politicians -- federal, provincial and territorial! Women are on the agenda to stay - until every last woman in Canada enjoys that promise of personhood that was fought and won by our mothers in 1929 in the historical Persons Case."

- Bonnie Diamond



Nancy (left) and Dorothy march in with five basic demands.
(photo courtesy PACSW)

"What was done in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador on Sept. 30 was done for all the women of Canada. Our demands were the demands of the women of Canada. While we had a good time (crashing a meeting of FPT ministers is always a good time) the important thing about this is the follow up. Will they respond? Will they respond correctly? Will the lives of women in Canada be better because of this action?"

- Nancy Riche

"Women are fed up with hearing the debt and deficit rhetoric espoused by our provincial government. We watched the federal government "talk this talk" in the mid 1990s and it became abundantly clear that the erosion of our health, education and social programs was the result.

Poverty, violence, unemployment and childcare . . . are important issues - women's issues - right now. We know with absolute certainty that a fiscally driven agenda is hurting women, families and communities. . . . It is unfair that our provincial Status of Women minister is buried within four government departments, allowing her little time to give the necessary attention to address the serious social and economic equality issues women are bringing forward. "

- Joyce Hancock

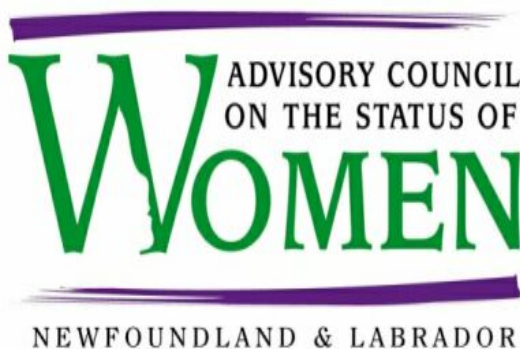
"Women are also being silenced. Women's centres are no longer the place of political action and policy discussion. They are now service centres where women feed, clothe and seek housing for other women and their children. Women are caught up in offering services that should be offered by government, and in dealing with the impact on women of cuts to government services. Responding to these needs is taking away from what the centres were initially set up to do. It is removing the voice of women from the public discourse. Women have become invisible and silenced."

- Lorraine Michael

Here are the five demands we presented to the FPT ministers on Sept. 30.

1. Strengthen the federal government structure for the status of women
2. Restore and strengthen the federal and provincial/territorial grassroots advocacy mechanisms to improve the status of women
3. Fully implement the recommendations of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
4. Restore core funding for equality-seeking advocacy and anti-violence organizations
5. Improve government accountability and transparency for advancing women's equality. Please copy these and lobby for their implementation at every opportunity. Our strength grows with the number of women who keep these demands alive! You can access the complete text online at <http://pacsww.com> OR phone PACSW 709-753-7270. And if you want to keep abreast of follow-up action on this and other feminist events, be sure to sign up for the PACSW listserv by emailing Michelle Smith, pacswwlcd@nf.aibn.com

This listserv also provides daily updates and feminist analysis of most current news of special interest to feminists in this province and beyond, and provides opportunities to discuss these issues with other feminists.



The GIA project lives

Jane Robinson

SJSWC's Gender-Inclusive Analysis and Housing Policy Development (GIA) Project is now in Phase IV. We have set up a Housing Policy Working Group which is province-wide, and meets each month by video-conference. I am co-ordinating this group as well as a list-serve network on housing issues in the province. Funding for the project has been received from Health Canada and Status of Women Canada.

The Working Group provides a forum for discussion and resolution of housing issues of women on low incomes and other disadvantaged persons in the province. Its mandate is to recommend and implement changes to housing policies and practices; and to develop a provincial housing strategy document in response to the recommendations and directions from the *Something's Got to Change Research Report* and Workshop. For more information on the report and workshop, visit www.sjswc.ca.

Here are some of the issues the working group is addressing:

- Affordability – skyrocketing rents and inadequate incomes to cover rent and heating costs.
- Accessibility – the need for more housing for seniors and people with chronic conditions and disabilities.
- Adequacy – accountability of private landlords and NLHC for needed repairs and health conditions of their rental units; and safety and security of individuals living in boarding houses and bedsitters.
- Lack of public information on housing rights and resources in province.
- Emergency housing for low income women and consumers of mental health services who are at risk of homelessness.
- Need for more affordable housing in the province.

About 20 people hook into each video-conference, from sites in Lab West, Happy Valley/ Goose Bay, Port aux Basques, Stephenville, St. Anthony, Grand Falls, Gander, Marystown and St. John's region. Provincial government officials from HRLE, Health, Government Services, Residential Tenancies, Women's Policy and Newfoundland and Labrador Housing take part from the site at the Confederation Building. Participants represent women's centres and shelters, organizations of people with disabilities, mental health agencies, international students at MUN, Human Rights Commission, individual MHAs, seniors, anti-poverty groups, housing service providers, immigrants and refugees, and women in training programs.



Since the working group was formed a year ago, some of our achievements are:

- A list-serve of 50 groups and individuals who share information and action on housing issues in the province.
- Links with national working group on women and housing; Canadian Housing and Renewal Association; National Housing and Homelessness Network; Green Communities Association; St. John's Advisory Committee on Homelessness.

- Residential Tenancies Section of government set up a 1-800 number for information and complaints on landlord – tenant issues – 1-877-829-2608.
- Residential tenancies and HRLE collaborated on an income support cheque insert on landlord tenant issues, in June 2004.
- Advocacy for inclusion of social condition and family status in provincial human rights code.
- Province-wide mailout of plain language information on housing rights, to be sent out to 130 groups in province by Residential Tenancies Section.
- Advocacy for proposal development funding for non-profit groups applying to the Affordable Housing Initiative.
- Letter writing campaign to federal and provincial politicians on National Housing Day, Nov. 22, 2004.
- Subcommittees working on HPWG Terms of Reference; Building Codes and Inspections.
- Meeting with Canada Land Company re divestment of federal land in Pleasantville.
- Presentation to the Canadian Public Health Association Annual Conference.
- Outreach and promotion.
- Work towards a Provincial Housing Strategy document.

If you would like to be part of this network, or for more information please contact giaproject@nl.rogers.com .

What has been happening at SJSWC and the women's centre.

By Lisa Zigler executive director

The St. John's Women's Centre has been a beehive of activity over the past several months. In addition to the 300 ongoing requests - for support, information and referrals that we continue to receive every month - we have started some new program initiatives. As a result of some outreach to women in the business community and through assistance from the Newfoundland and Labrador Organization for Women Entrepreneurs (NLOWE), we attracted the attention of Gehan Mabrouk, president of Accents Interiors and Landscaping Inc. With the help of more than 50 volunteers, Gehan and crew of women - and a few men - transformed the garden in back of the centre into a healing, relaxing oasis with newly built furniture, fresh paint and new plants. Next year, we will be inviting women in the community to plant an item they will dedicate to another woman who has influenced their life.

Towards the end of the summer, we got calls from women needing assistance with school supplies for their children. Returning to school can be an expensive proposition for parents, especially those who are living on a fixed income. We also received many calls from women who were involved with the Aliant labor dispute. Being out on a picket line for four months meant that many of these parents had no other options for their children. In partnership with various unions including the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour, and co-operation by the local business community (such as Staples in Mount Pearl), we were able to assist a significant number of families. Volunteers who were involved with distributing these items often found a line up around the block when they showed up at the centre.

We have completed our second annual "sponsor a woman and her children" for the holidays program. Last year, we were able to assist 35 families by matching them with generous donors. We also had so many other gifts donated that we were able to help the women who drop into the centre on a regular basis. We were also able to make large donations of toys and other items to both the Association for New Canadians as well as the Native Friendship Centre. These two organizations in turn helped a large amount of families. This year, we matched 50 families with donors and we are received many other gifts and monetary donations that we will use to help other women and their children.

The clothing bank continues to be a very popular service at the centre. Many women just cannot afford to purchase clothing, especially for children. We have a dedicated volunteer who comes to the centre and organizes the clothing on a regular basis. Thank you Anne! We are also seeing a lot of new faces coming in and wanting to see what we have available.



Our food assistance program helps women out by providing donations of non-perishable food items.

While not a food bank where women can get assistance on a monthly basis, our program is intended to meet the gap when money is low and the children are hungry. We are trying to get the word out there that we need donations of non-perishable food on a regular basis. We also have a personal care distribution program. As a result of some generous donations, we are now able to assist women with shampoo, toothpaste, mouthwash and other personal hygiene products. The women's centre continues to collect and lend out a wide variety of books and videos to women in the community. We have a VCR now and we hope to have movie afternoons, weather permitting, throughout the cold and long winter months.

Throughout the summer and fall, we have offered social work field placement experience to two students. We were able to start a short-term, time-limited counseling program with assistance from Jennifer Muthanna, who completed her MSW internship at the agency. Jill Drover, a fourth year social work student became quite involved with the drop-in and other activities. We also received HRDSC funding to hire a summer student. Amy Fudge was employed for July and August to help with the drop-in, fund-raise and better organize our space. We look forward to working with other students throughout the upcoming year.



Over the summer, a volunteer orientation manual was developed and we are currently recruiting volunteers who would be interested in becoming involved with us. We hope to do some training with potential volunteers in mid January 2005. SJSWC was also busy since the spring. The work on the GIA housing project continued (see Jane Robinson's article in this issue) and we are now in the process of working toward starting a multi-year project whereby we will partner with other organizations and members of the business community to work towards building a housing and support centre for women in the City of St. John's. We are very excited about starting this important project. We hope to receive funds from the Status of Women Canada to begin the process early in the New Year.

**The St. John's Status of Women
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index.html](http://www.sjswc.ca/index.html)

SJSWC is an equality seeking organization and as such speaks out publicly on a wide variety of issues that are of concern to women.

In the past several months, some of the topics that SJSWC has spoken out about include violence against women (including sexual harassment), poverty, equal marriage for lesbians and gays, reproductive freedom and women's participation in the political process.



Our partnerships and community work continues to be an important part of the work SJSWC does in the community. We work with a wide variety of individuals and organizations such as the Regional Co-ordinating Committee Against Violence, the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the Women's Policy Office, and many others, to advance the equality of women in this province. SJSWC was also involved on the political front. We continue to maintain our feminism fits program whereby we encourage women to write to the premier and other politicians once a month on issues impacting their lives. We submitted a wide variety of briefs to the government on the minimum wage; the proposed lobbying bill and we are now in the process of writing a brief for the federal government's Standing Committee on the Status of Women. SJSWC also responds to local and national issues. We are frequently called upon by the media to comment on a wide variety of issues. We write letters to the editor, we appear on TV and we are guests on some of the radio call in shows. We also have engaged the public by offering letter-writing nights on the issue of equal marriage for lesbians and gays. By preparing a sample letter and some background information, we were successful in sending out dozens of letters to federal and provincial politicians about this important issue.

Our fund-raising efforts continue to be ongoing. As a result of the media coverage that we received from our garden transformation project, the Royal Bank of Canada made a donation to the women's centre. We also received generous donations from Elinor Gill Radcliffe who was one of the original women who, more than 32 years ago, donated their own personal funds towards the downpayment of building at 83 Military Rd. Other donations have included free updates to our webpage by AppleCore Communications and a donation of monthly bookkeeping services from Marion Penney. Judy Sparkes-Giannou also continues to help, often behind the scenes, by finding donations of supplies, gift certificates and other much-needed items. A heartfelt thanks you to all of our supporters, donors and volunteers. With me being the only paid employee, we would not be able to do what we do without you.

For more information about our activities and to find out how you can help us help others, visit us on the web at www.sjswc.ca