
KEY NOTES



North York Women's Centre: Opening Doors for Women

A Letter From a Facilitator

Hello. My name is Roz and I have been a facilitator at the North York Women's Centre for 10 years. To tell you the truth, I hadn't even realized it was 10 years until Elise called to tell me I was being honoured for my 10 years of volunteering. The time has really flown by.

I'd like to tell you something about my experience with the women's groups and why I keep coming back. I have been in groups with women from many diverse backgrounds, some born and raised in Canada, others from various countries around the world. I have encountered women who have come to group feeling sad, depressed, lonely, afraid of speaking out, and I started out thinking "How will I manage all of this?"

Fortunately, facilitating is an ongoing process in which everyone learns, both facilitators and participants, without even realizing it. Almost miraculously the group turns out to be a safe haven, a place where a woman can take some risks and start sharing issues and eventually even initiating small changes in their lives. At times, just asking "How are you today?" or "How does that make you feel?" allows someone to express their feelings of anger, pain or fear instead of instantly burying these emotions.

My experience has been that women coming together in groups will naturally create bonds of acceptance and support for each other. It's great to

watch this happen and be part of the process. Women sharing their stories, their experiences, their feelings is the glue that strengthens the bonds of connection and support.

Facilitating has helped me to understand myself and others at a deeper level. It has helped me to be empathetic and to feel what it is like to walk in someone else's shoes. These are some of the reasons I keep coming back to the Centre, but more importantly it's the woman who comes up to me after the group and says "Thanks Roz. You've been a great help. I'll see you next week".

- *Roz Giller, 10-year Volunteer*

North Toronto Community Fair Event

Volunteering at the North York Women's Centre for over a year now has been an incredible experience, as I have gained knowledge in an area of work that I am very passionate about while working with wonderful individuals who have common goals. Attending the North Toronto Community Fair outreach event was a great success! We were able to reach out to our community by letting many know about our available services. It was a great fun filled event full of food and entertainment! Yet the greatest success for us is knowing that our services are being made available to help those in need.

- *Lisa Guluzian, Office Volunteer*

Our Volunteers' Impressions

As our grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation winds up this year, I sat down with a few of the volunteers who had been trained as facilitators through the grant. Knowing our opinion of them – as talented, tireless, committed and passionate volunteers – and the effect they have had on our lives and work, we were curious to know about our impact on them, and how the training and the experience of facilitating had changed their lives.

The responses, to say the least, were profound. As most members, volunteers and staff know, NYWC is a very special place, and this place is made all the more special by the commitments of our volunteers. They give so much to us, and it seems we also give back to them.

Volunteering as a facilitator changed my life, one woman told me. “I was once abused, and many of the women in the groups were too. I cannot solve their problems for them, but when we come together as women we develop the tools to make changes and to deal with things”.

The facilitator training, which takes place over four consecutive Saturdays for a total of twenty-four hours, prepares our volunteers well for the task of facilitating groups. One volunteer said “one of the biggest things I learned in the training was to be more assertive with myself and how I interact with people. I also learned to listen: the training taught me to become an active listener.” Not only these concrete skills, but volunteers also learned or developed greater empathy, “to be empathetic to another human being, to not be so quick to judge or to assume things about somebody”. As well, another volunteer mentioned the job skills she has attained from both the training and the facilitating. “The facilitating is a good way for me to keep my foot in the door in this field,” she said. “It has allowed me to explore other avenues for finding work. I acquire new skills as a facilitator with every group I do.”

Finally, sometimes the impact of the training and the facilitating has been difficult to put into words. It does not necessarily result in concrete outcomes like job skills or experience, nor as soft outcomes such as learning listening skills or better communication. Sometimes, the training and the

facilitating have had an impact on the heart. As one volunteer put it, “I don't even know how to articulate it, but I can't see myself disconnected from the NYWC entirely. In order to do the work, your heart has to be in it, and it's nearly impossible for your heart not to be in it when you come here. It's hard not to be impacted by the place and the work. A year commitment is nothing when you understand how much emotion and life there is within the Centre”.

Volunteers make up a big part of the life and heart and emotion at NYWC. We thank you all for the time, commitment and heart you have given to our community. We hope you to see you facilitating groups for many years to come.

- *Elise Thorburn, NYWC Staff*

Girls' Group at CW Jefferys

As a student in the Social Work program at York University, I was searching for an organization that would not only allow me to utilize the skill set gained through my education, but would challenge me professionally. Choosing the North York Women's Centre as a practicum placement proved to be one of the best decisions I could have made. Much to my appreciation, I had the opportunity to co-facilitate support group sessions in the Centre and outside within the community. I am fortunate to be a part of a wonderful anti-violence initiative at CW Jeffreys' high school, aimed at spreading awareness among young women about their rights. This continues to be an extremely rewarding experience; the students at the school have been very welcoming and are eager to participate in the group. They provide us with insights and ideas, from which the group benefits as a whole and from which I continue to learn as a co-facilitator. My experience thus far has made me feel blessed to be a part of a wonderful team that comprises the North York Women's Centre and I am looking forward with enthusiasm to continuing my work here. Thank you everyone!

- *Joanna Potkanska, Placement Student*

A Humbling Experience

If ever I thought I was indispensable to the NYWC, the past year has set me straight. And if ever I questioned how supportive the NYWC community could be, that was clarified to.

In October 2007, after five years of waiting, I learned that a child would be placed with me for adoption. The following weeks were a complete blur as I tried to ready both my home and the NYWC for this change. I couldn't have met with more support.

The Board very generously supported a ten-month leave so that I could devote time to my newly expanded family. (Yes, it is something I am legally entitled to in Ontario, but we all know that there's much more to it than that.) Thinking outside the box, the Board put in place a structure that worked for everyone involved. It involved recognizing and valuing the inherent strengths and abilities among the staff team and supporting team members in building their skills and taking on leadership roles. The Board was not disappointed.

As for the staff, they enthusiastically stepped out of their comfort zone, took on new challenges, and worked tirelessly to ensure they were setting both the organization and each other up for success. The three "M"s – Melissa, Mulu and Maribeth – did far more than hold the place together; they made it thrive. I returned in September to find a solid set of well-developed programs, an extraordinary group of skilled and committed volunteers, and higher-than-expected donation numbers.

From both my daughters and me, I would like to extend a huge thank you to everyone at the NYWC. I am touched at how everyone pulled together to achieve that tricky balance between letting me take the time to be with my girls and keeping me connected with what was going on "back at the office". What a wonderful world this would be if all workplaces worked this way.

- *Iris Fabbro, Executive Director*

Community News

Please join us in welcoming **Elise Thorburn** to the NYWC staff team. Elise joined us in September, bringing with her considerable energy and enthusiasm on top of her skills and experience working with women internationally.

At our Annual General Meeting, held on September 23, 2008, the membership elected six talented women to the NYWC Board of Directors. They are **Elissa Hermolin, Paula Hunter, Rubaiyat Karim, Karen Lourdes, Courtney McLeod** and **Shannon Persaud Tolnay**. **Trisha Cipriani** was re-elected to a second term. The Board has a lot of work to do this year and in the years ahead. We are confident that they are up to the challenge.

The NYWC would also like to extend a warm welcome to all of our new volunteers: **Gael Ferris, Mary Thomson, Janice So, Oris Johnson, Ashmani Boodnarine, Kaberi Dutt-Choudhury, Adriana Todirascu, Nicole Best, Lisa Leinveer, Violah Shamu, Lynda Currie** and **Sophia Aikens**.

We are privileged to have two field placement students join the NYWC team. Please welcome **Joanna Potkanska** from York University and **Kathleen Lortie** from Ryerson University. They will be here until spring, so drop in and say hi!

As always, we have some NYWC baby news! **Harpreet Thind**, NYWC Director, gave birth to a beautiful son, Lucas Thomas. He was born on October 11th and weighed 6 pounds 14 ounces. As well, workshop facilitator **Christine Fung** gave birth to a gorgeous baby girl. Allison Hiu was born in September 2008. Congratulations to our new moms and their families!

Lastly, we have some goodbyes. **Tanya White** and **Andrea Sanche** resigned from the Board to pursue career opportunities and **Robin Tameshtit** completed her term. Intrepid office volunteer and facilitator, **Jessie Andre**, has left the NYWC (with promises to return) to take a new job. We hope each of them keep in touch.

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NYWC is a community of diverse women providing resources and support to effect positive change. We deliver this in a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment for all women in the community of North York and surrounding areas.

Launched in 1998, *Key Notes* was created to enhance communication within the NYWC community. Contributions, suggestions and comments are always welcome. If you would like to contribute an article, or help put *Key Notes* together, please contact us.

North York Women's Centre

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