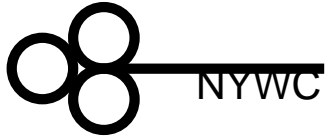


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# KEY NOTES



## North York Women's Centre: Opening Doors for Women

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### **A Volunteer's Perspective** **By Linda Sukloff**

I have lived in Toronto all my life. As a woman who has worked in and been a user of women's services in this city over the years, I had heard various things about the North York Women's Centre - all of them superlative. With this huge reputation, imagine my surprise upon visiting the Centre, to find that it is housed in a tiny, church office and staffed by one full time staff person, two part-time staff and about 60 volunteers! How, I wondered, did they manage to come by this great reputation with so few resources?

I began to discover the answer to this question soon after I became a volunteer at the Centre. Part of it, I believe, has to do with a dedication to the feminist and anti-oppressive principles that I also hold dear. But after there was a break-in and robbery of the office, I learned some of the more basic reasons for their reputation.

The robbers managed to get the following items: one fairly good computer (the only one capable of receiving Internet services), a very good printer, and a fax machine. Not very much, one might think - but unfortunately, that was just about everything. As Iris struggled with trying to get the insurance company to replace the computer, fax and printer

(meanwhile fuming a bit with the knowledge that most corporate sector organizations would have been able to lease new equipment in a heartbeat), the staff found a way to soldier on with the work. Iris brought her own laptop into the office in order to continue her work writing funding proposals, reports, board meeting agendas, etc. Pat did all of her administrative tasks at home while waiting for her desk at work to once again, contain a computer and printer. Robyn continued providing her usual cheerfulness, humour and energy to the volunteers, facilitators and women who use the program, in spite of the heavy sense of violation and waste that was experienced by everyone as a result of the break-in.

In an era where it seems that reputation is often based on bigness, expensiveness and grandiosity in general, I find it heartening to know that the qualities of care, dedication and self-sacrifice are still valued and appreciated, as is evident in the voices of praise for the NYWC which I have heard over the years. As women, we know that these are the qualities that matter, and that it is in the continued existence of organizations like NYWC and in the persistence of individuals like the staff and volunteers here, that in spite of everything, the revolution goes on.

## **Being a Student Placement at the NYWC By Nana Boateng**

If another student in my social work program at Ryerson were to ask me if a placement at the NYWC would be worthwhile, I would tell them that they would be lucky to experience what the NYWC has to offer. It has been a wonderful journey over the past eight months that I have been a student placement at the NYWC. The experiences that I have had have been extremely valuable, educational and memorable.

This year alone I have taken part in many new and exciting initiatives on behalf of the Centre. Some examples of the work that I have done as a student include, being on the steering and organizing committee of the Driftwood International Women's Day celebration, co-facilitating and coordinating an English conversation group, co-facilitating and co-coordinating anti-oppression training sessions for volunteers, and taking part in numerous community network meetings on behalf of the Centre. These experiences have definitely been valuable to my personal and professional growth. The experiences that I have had at the NYWC and the connections that I have made to staff and service users has reinforced my commitment and dedication to working with women and raising awareness of the social issues that negatively impact the lives of women on a daily basis.

The North York Women's Centre definitely has a special place in my heart and I will make every effort to contribute to the life of this wonderful organization.

## **A Letter from a Placement Student at the NYWC By Nina Vesic**

My name is Nina Vesic and I am a placement student at the North York Women's Centre. I am a student at George Brown College in the Assaulted Women and Children Counselor/Advocate Program. I started my student placement at the NYWC at the end of February and took part in the volunteer training sessions. Since starting at the NYWC, I have answered dozens of calls, made referrals and attended two outreach activities.

During my weekly placement days, I also prepare files for the legal clinic and the income tax clinic. I organize files and do general office work. While doing all of these things I have learned a lot about the Centre and its policies and practices. I have gotten so familiar with the NYWC that on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2003, I represented the Centre at a community fair in Scarborough

The staff has been a very big part of my being comfortable at the Centre. The atmosphere within our office is very relaxed and I know that if I ever have a question someone there will gladly help me. I know that next year when I discuss my first year placement I will have positive things to say about my placement experience at the NYWC and recommend it to other students looking for a placement position.

## A Farewell to Denise Miles

It saddens us to report on the untimely death of **Denise Miles**. Denise joined the North York Women's Centre as a bingo volunteer in 1997. The following year, she offered to develop a women's fitness program for the Centre. The *Women on the Move* program was born and Denise was thrilled to have the opportunity to promote it on Breakfast Television. *Women on the Move* has grown considerably since then and has become one of the Centre's most successful programs. We have Denise to thank for starting it all!

Denise was elected to the Board of Directors in 1998 and was soon appointed to the position of Vice-chair. She was elected board Chair in 1999 and served in that position until 2001.

Denise brought a unique blend of skills to the NYWC and to every aspect of her life. She was committed to community work, both at our Centre and in her work with youth on parole. Her work as a fitness trainer reinforced her belief that physical fitness leads to improve self-esteem and, ultimately, in improved quality of life for women and their children.

The NYWC would like to extend its condolences and support to Denise's family and friends. We hope they can take some comfort in knowing the impact she has had on those who know her. She will be greatly missed.

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## Increased Security in the NYWC Office

Many people know by now that the NYWC's office was broken into twice in a four-week period, and the Centre's fax machine, printer and computer were stolen. To prevent further break-ins, the Church of St. Philip the Apostle installed a steel door and frame and replaced the locks on all exterior doors. A monitored security alarm system has also been installed. We would like to thank **Alarm Guard Security Services Inc.** of

North York, who have not only donated the alarm system but have waived the monthly monitoring fee. Thank you to Ken Hall, Mayank (Mike) Chaudhary, and Ron Jagmohan for making this possible.

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## A New Home for the NYWC

After 13 years located in the loft of St. Philip the Apostle Anglican Church, the NYWC is moving.

While we appreciate the space and support provided to us over the years by the St. Philip's community, it is time to move on. The shortage of appropriate program space and increasing difficulties in ensuring women accessibility has led us to this decision.

The Site Search Committee would like your input. What would you like to see the committee focus on in looking for new space? What do you think our priorities should be? Do you have any leads on safe, affordable, accessible space?

Please forward your ideas, suggestions or comments to Iris at [iris@nywc.org](mailto:iris@nywc.org).

## Spring has Sprung New Programs at the NYWC

NYWC is proud to announce the start of "*Finding Centre: Building Self-Esteem*", a self-esteem support group beginning this May. Although many of our programs currently address issues of self-esteem and assertiveness, this group will be specific and supportive. Furthermore, once again, the NYWC will be offering "*Panic to Power*", an experiential anxiety support group. However, for this spring, the group will focus on addressing a younger peer group - ages 19 to 35.

## Community News

### **Congratulations to:**

- NYWC's Jill of all trades, Michelle Lavergne, on the completion of her MSW degree;
- Telephone volunteer, Proscovia Ssomko, on her new job;
- Telephone volunteer, Nancy Demoe, on the birth of her granddaughter.

### **Our Condolences to:**

- Legal clinic lawyer, Marisa Zanini, on the death of her father;
- Group facilitator, Berte Rubin, on the death of her husband.

### **A big welcome to the following:**

#### **New staff:**

**Co-facilitators:** Anya Kater, Pina Grosso and Elana Segal, *Survivors of Violence*

#### **Our new volunteers:**

##### **Co-facilitators:**

- Jeanette Williamson and Fiona Davis - *Speak Up*
- Anne Riebe and Beth Hamilton - *Finding Centre: Building Self-esteem*

#### **Office Volunteers:**

- Teresa Jondrey
- Fermida Dhanani
- Vicky Matthews
- Nancy Demoe
- Renana Almajar

#### **Legal Clinic Reception:**

- Mahesika Assalaarachchi

#### **Placement students:**

- Kim Julien - GBC, Human Services, Counselor Program
- Nina Vesic - GBC, Assaulted Women & Children's Counselor Advocate Program

#### **Committee Members:**

- Shelly Baker - Program Committee
- Jeanette Williamson - Program Committee
- Sushma Smaddar - Fundraising Committee

## Our Thanks

We'd like to thank our placement students, Kim Julien and Nina Vesic, for their commitment to the NYWC. Also a big thanks to Nana Boateng, our placement student from Ryerson, who also worked at the Centre last summer. She will be leaving us in May and we wish her all the best as she continues her studies.

## Thanking our Supporters

We would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their recent donations to the North York Women's Centre

### **\$1,000 & more**

Procter & Gamble

### **\$100-499**

Lauri Maki

Marjorie McLeod

Francine Morissette

Noreen Stuckless

### **To \$99**

Audrey Danaher

Vicky Jaluague

Nancy E. Fine

Joan Kerrigan

Roz Giller

Marion Kirk

Jo Gratacos

Nhu Le

Helen Hansen

Ann Simpson

Gertrude Holcomb

Rose Weinberg

Jean Hyndman

*Thanks to all those who specifically designated the North York Women's Centre to receive their workplace United Way donation.*