



North York Women's Centre: Opening Doors for Women

What's New at the NYWC

The North York Women's Centre has launched an exciting new project designed to empower young people with the information and skills to reduce violence against women and promote healthy, equal relationships. The project will focus on youth living in the Don Mills and Sheppard (Peanut Plaza) neighbourhood in northeast North York. Young women and men living in this neighbourhood will gain valuable leadership, communication and conflict resolution skills while raising awareness and understanding of violence against women and intimate partner abuse.

Through the *Engaging Youth in Building Violence-Free Intimate Relationships* project, youth living in the above neighbourhood will receive leadership training and engage in activities that empower them to both respond to domestic violence in their communities and serve as role models of respectful male-female relationships. They will then develop and produce a dramatic presentation that raises awareness of the issues, attitudes and social conditions that allow domestic violence to occur. This presentation will be delivered to neighbourhood schools,

community centres and other public venues in spring 2005.

The objective of the project is to increase awareness and understanding of domestic violence and enhance the ability of the local community to respond to the needs of abused women. By focusing on youth, the project's long-term goal is to break the cycle of violence and reduce the risk that

young women and men experience in relationships with their future intimate partners.

The project is made possible thanks to a Freedom of Violence grant from the United Way of Greater Toronto. The project is overseen by a Steering Committee made up of individuals and organizations working with women, youth and the local community.

We are currently looking for funding to have the presentation videotaped, so that copies can be made available to community groups and interested individuals.

For more information on the project, please contact the North York Women's Centre at 416-781-0479.

**The North York Women's Centre:
A Place for All Women
By Stella Mah**

As a third-year social work student from Ryerson starting my first field placement at the North York Women's Centre, I was immediately thrilled and excited to be able to finally have the opportunity to work within the anti-oppressive, feminist framework that I had only read about in textbooks for the last two years. The structural oppression of all types of women began only as a keen interest of mine, and with time, evolved into a way of life as I realized the multiple barriers that women still constantly face, even in the new millennium. It's true what they say, you know; the personal really is political.

Since the past three months of having the opportunity to grow and learn from this Centre, I have been able to engage myself in various activities that have allowed me to gain interpersonal skills, learn crisis-intervention and familiarize myself with the community of wonderful and supportive women that keep the Centre alive. For instance, helping to organize this year's Annual General Meeting and 15th Anniversary celebration was an amazing experience that allowed me to understand the in-depth history of the Centre and how it has evolved today, as well as listening to the experiences of women and the Centre's role in changing their lives. With the addition of musical performances, singing, laughter and tears there was nothing more incredible than witnessing women from all walks of life, coming together with such support and solidarity.

As well as being a part of the AGM this year, I was able to help facilitate the volunteer orientation training with student colleague, Sherry Turcotte, and program and volunteer coordinator, Celia Joseph. It was wonderful to learn and engage in informal and intriguing discussion from so many diverse women that have decided to share their time with us here

at the Centre. I had the opportunity to meet and introduce myself to these women and have learned so much from hearing their stories, and to them I give much thanks.

Though I am excited to further involve myself in the Centre over the next few months with project coordination and group co-facilitation, I would love to

see this grassroots women's centre further thrive to its full potential. With a ratio of three staff members and 78 volunteers, it is highly evident that volunteers and the time they offer are highly essential in keeping this organization alive to continue to offer essential and supportive services for women. And even with the lack of government funding to social services, the Centre continues to offer free programs and workshops to break down accessibility barriers with the goals of inclusivity. Please consider getting involved in the NYWC, either with your valuable time or any sized donations. At the Centre, there is always a place for all women, no matter what your social location. I guarantee you; it will be a life changing experience.

It is with the deepest sorrow that we inform you of the death of Jane Bernard, a long-time NYWC volunteer and dear friend.

We were privileged to have Jane join the North York Women's Centre in April 2001 as a telephone volunteer. She very quickly became a group facilitator and focused her energies on developing and delivering support programs for women in the community. She was elected to the board of directors in September 2003 and appointed chair of the program committee soon afterwards. Despite these additional commitments, Jane never stopped facilitating women's support groups and workshops. She continued to give of herself: freely, generously and compassionately.

Jane touched the lives of the Centre's staff, volunteers and the hundreds of women who attended her programs. We offer our most sincere condolences to her family, especially her children Katelin and Kyle.

Good-bye Jane. You will not be forgotten.

15th Anniversary Celebration

The NYWC's 15th Anniversary Celebration and AGM, held on Tuesday, September 21, 2004 proved to be both enjoyable and moving. It was wonderful to see women from the NYWC's early days join with current staff and volunteers in celebrating the NYWC's successes.

The evening began with an inspiring speech by Luella Lumley, one of the NYWC's first board chairs. Wendy Fraser, the first NYWC staff member and longest serving employee, then led a group of the NYWC's founding members in a hilarious presentation of songs depicting those early years. Many thanks go out to Wendy for pulling the group together and

working out the details. Thank you also to Luella Lumley, Alice Costentino, Sherry Nelligan, Setsuko Shigetomi-Pye, Carol Kugler, Karen McDonald, Margaret McReynolds and Camille Marshall.

Up next came Claudia White, long-time board chair, volunteer and social activist, who spoke about the "middle years". She honoured the many volunteers who worked tirelessly to "stabilize" the organization and fight for stabilization funding for women's centres across the province.

The most moving part of the evening came when a former program participant spoke about the role the Centre played in helping her to cope with the breakdown of her marriage and adjusting to her new role as a single parent with two young children. It was inspiring to see her daughters by their mother's side as she still struggled to get the words out so many years later. Equally inspiring was the pride in their mother's face as they shared with us all their talent on the violin.

Vera Ali-zadeh, a former volunteer with the NYWC, was up next. She spoke about the warmth and acceptance she felt when she joined the NYWC as a volunteer, just three months after arriving in Canada. She credited the Centre for helping her to learn English and paving the road that led her to where she is today.

The 15th Anniversary Celebration ended with a presentation by a group of young women from Victoria Park Secondary School that was recently awarded a donation to the Centre by the Toskan Foundation. Wrapping things up, our current board chair, Sharissa Ellyn, brought us to the present day.

The North York Women's Centre
Opening Doors for Women
By Sherry Turcotte

Opening doors for women. I have read this phrase quite often during the past year and half at the NYWC. I started as a volunteer and for the past three months I have enjoyed my time here as a placement student through George Brown College in the Advocate/Counsellor for Battered Women and Children program. *Opening doors for women;* this statement says a lot about the work and programs that the NYWC is determined to offer to our community. Since my involvement with the Centre, I have come to appreciate just how important the women here feel about opening doors for every woman. The time they spend brain storming ideas for new programs or trying to make existing programs fresh is amazing. It is important to them that they reach out to all women and make those doors that are difficult more accessible and more meaningful.

As part of my placement I was able to co-facilitate a program with two of the women who have been facilitating programs at the Centre for a while. Mary Benedetto and Roz Giller were kind enough to include me in the *Breaking Free* program. I am grateful to have been a part of two different styles of facilitation and will take these skills to my next placement and future work experience. Thank you both, Mary and Roz, for your knowledge and acceptance. Along with the co-facilitation, I have been able to do some outreach and also

have an opportunity to do a couple of presentations in the community about the Centre and what it offers.

One of the goals for the NYWC for the new year is to celebrate International Women's Day. Celia Joseph, the program and volunteer coordinator, asked me and another placement student, Stella Mah from Ryerson University, to be a part of this initiative. This has been to my surprise, a huge task, but nonetheless very rewarding and fun. I look forward to seeing the final results of our labour in March.

My placement here at the Centre ends at the beginning of April, however, it is my desire to continue on again as a volunteer helping the North York Women's Centre open doors for women that may otherwise have been closed.

Community News

We welcome the following new volunteers: Renee Xu, Ling He, Ilene Lyon, Yoon-Hye Yook, Mary Clare Argiropoules, Susana Garcia, Gabrielle Pop-Lazic, Betty Yu, Krystyn Mekbeb, Linda Dabydeen, Linda Cameron, Kali Hewitt-Blackie, Sara Sheard, and Pamela Jacobson.

Our present placement students are Sherry Turcotte, a student from George Brown who has been also volunteering in our office for the past year and Stella Mah, a third-year social work student from Ryerson.

We welcome back Kithar Tsui, a former volunteer, who has returned as an office volunteer.

Good-bye to the following volunteers and facilitators who are, unfortunately for us, moving on: Anya Kater, Elaine Hunter, Chanelle Gallant and Lucinda Velasquez. Mei Zhao, one of our office volunteers, is leaving in January to return to China for a two month visit.

Our congratulations and best wishes to Celia Joseph, our Program and Volunteer Coordinator, and Jacque Turnbull who were married November 28th.

We would like to thank Renee Xu for generously donating her time and skills to maintain our website.

We would like to send our condolences to former staffer, Wendy Fraser, on the recent death of her mother, Tena Young.

Our thoughts are also with board member, Rachael Turkienicz, on the recent passing of her father.

Thanking our Supporters

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

\$100 and over

Mary-Ellen Anglin
Armour Heights Presbyterian Church
Women's Association
Susan Flynn
Wendy Fraser
Elizabeth Gray
Anne Kutty
Lorpon Labels
Adrian Lo
Irene Taylor, Praxis
Dee Stapleton
James Irwin, Wildrose Gardening

To \$99

Lorraine Campbell
Patricia Archer
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Patrick Kelly
Maureen Richards
Vanessa Tonoo
Toronto Dominion Bank
Claudia White
Sarah Zinman

Thanks to all those who specifically designated the North York Women's Centre to receive their workplace United Way donation. Please remember that if you are making a donation to the United Way through your employer, you can specify on the back of the form that you would like your donation to go to the North York Women's Centre. Our official name, which must be used on the form, is the "Resource & Information Centre for North York Women". Our charitable registration number is 14026 3013 RR0001.