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# KEY NOTES



North York Women's Centre: Opening Doors for Women

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## Spring is finally on its way!

As we finally begin emerge from a long, snowy winter, we at the North York Women's Centre are definitely ready to welcome in some warmer, sunnier days. Our renovations to improve the visibility and safety of the building are finally complete, thanks to the **Ontario Trillium Foundation**. If you're driving by Bathurst and Caribou at night, you can't miss the bright "201 Caribou Rd." sign and the well-lit porch to the building.

In our efforts to continually reach out to the community and the women that need us most, we are very happy to announce that we have a new staff person, **Miriam Gbehe Guzman**, who will be joining us as a Program and Community Outreach worker.

For myself, the past few months have been a new learning experience, filled with many challenges, but also rewarding as I have taken on the role of **Executive Director and Program Manager**. I have been with the NYWC for two years now and I am always proud and amazed at the work we do, made possible only through the dedication of many volunteers. I look forward to continuing this work in the coming months and working to keep opening doors for women.

~ *Melissa Wong, Executive Director (Acting)*

## Farewell NYWC...

A few words from NYWC's outgoing students...

As I did in my previous newsletter article, I want to start off by thanking everyone I've met at the NYWC for such a memorable experience. This was my first placement setting in my social work studies and I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to do it here. Since September I have co-facilitated a number of different support groups, participated in outreach to other community centres, took part in the 2008 International Women's Day event at Driftwood Community Centre and became part of the Centre's volunteer committee. I also had the wonderful and challenging experience of developing and implementing a 10-week support group for young high school women with my fellow placement student Kameela. These experiences have been such a tremendous learning opportunity and have given me memories to last a life time. I will conclude by again thanking all the wonderful women who have made my time at the North York Women's Centre such a positive experience and I won't say goodbye... I'll simply say see you soon!

~ *Elise Hannan, Ryerson University placement student*

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I feel extremely fortunate that I was able to complete my placement here at the NYWC. Working within the Centre and with the participants, volunteers and staff here, I've been inspired by how passionate and compassionate the women involved are. As a placement

## Farewell cont'd...

student the NYWC has offered me invaluable experiences such as co-facilitating groups, committee work, and participating in program planning, however my most valued experience here is simply being witness. The staggering amount of work and dedication I've seen from volunteers and staff is an empowering experience in itself; when added to witnessing the growth and successes of group participants I feel so grateful for the opportunity I've had to be included in the NYWC atmosphere. Thanks a million!

~ Kameela Mahadeo, York University placement student

## NYWC's Community Corner

I am going through a career change process and have developed the need to work with women where I can contribute and make a difference. My quest has led me to North York Women Centre as a volunteer since January, 2008. I chose NYWC because of their Vision, Mission Statement and their Guiding Principles. I felt that what they represented was a good fit for my aspirations. It is now March and I have had the opportunity to learn a great deal. Early in my volunteering, I was invited to Driftwood Community Centre where they were putting together an event to celebrate International Women Day with the community. I immediately realized that I felt as if I was part of something much bigger - I truly felt that I was part of the community. The mental and emotional stimulation was such a rush that I did not feel it was work - I realized that I have a passion for outreach and for the NYWC.

I attended the next meeting thereafter, and to my surprise, I was asked to emcee the event. The week after, I was asked to do the radio interviews. I was amazed at the opportunity that was being offered to me to be an integral part of the community planning meeting. I have developed a better understanding of people, greater awareness of community planning and I find that getting involved in social service organizations is highly gratifying. One highlight was the fact that I had the privilege to introduce Councillor Maria Augimeri. I got a great deal of satisfaction helping out in the community. Becoming

involved with a non-profit such as NYWC has given me a firsthand look at some of the problems and issues facing the community. Through outreach, I have seen the generosity and the good works non-profit organizations generate. I never dreamt that through my involvement with NYWC I would learn so much in such a short period of time.

~ Jessie Andre, NYWC Office Volunteer

It has been over a year now that I was introduced to the NYWC out of the blue by the North York Central library. I was overwhelmed with anxiety as I attended my first workshop, but was amazed with the amount of emotional support that I received from the facilitators as well as the other participants. By attending the NYWC I was able to do deep self-reflection as I faced the struggles affecting my personal life. The self-knowledge I gained at the NYWC included how to empower women to think, act, and ponder over situations in their lives that touch the core of their mind, bodies and souls. When it comes to the NYWC, feelings of joy and happiness are the two major emotions that run through my body. No university degree is more powerful than the universal tools of self-knowledge one gains by attending the NYWC. Authentic Communication, Building Self-Esteem, Exploring your Emotions through Art and Panic to Power are just some of the groups/workshops I have attended – all were flowing with dynamic and powerful information I received about human relations. Thank you NYWC for your support and the wonderful friendships I've gained from coming out and learning about self-knowledge.

~ Celeste, NYWC member and participant

*This section is dedicated to NYWC members, group/workshop participants and volunteers to contribute to our triannual newsletter, Key Notes. If you are interested in writing a piece for our Fall, 2008 issue, please contact Maribeth at 416-781-0479 ext. 22 or maribeth@nywc.org*

## International Women's Day

### – Bathurst-Finch Community –

I had the pleasure of being invited to a special event held at Antibes Community Centre in celebration of International Women's Day (IWD). The event was organized by the Bathurst-Finch Action for Neighbourhood Change, an initiative aimed at working with the community to create a better neighbourhood for everyone. For many women attending, International Women's Day is a national holiday in their home countries, making this event even more significant to these women and making us wonder if there will ever be the same response in Canada. There was great food, guest speakers, and even belly dancing! Most importantly, the event was a wonderful celebration of women and included tremendous stories of women's strength, vision, and courage.

~ Melissa Wong, Executive Director (Acting)

### – Driftwood Community Centre –

The International Women's Day celebration at Driftwood Community Centre on March 7, 2008 was an exceptional event. There were many booths arranged, including NYWC. Throughout the day were able to watch many talented entertainers. Women of all ages enjoyed the morning work-out and stretches. Having breakfast and lunch included kept our bodies satisfied. I look forward to future IWD events.

~Cheryl Wilkinson, NYWC Office Volunteer



*Above: The Bolivia Nueva dancers at the Driftwood Community Centre IWD Event*

*Left: NYWC (L to R: Lilian Zepeda, Elise Hannan and Cheryl Wilkinson) at the Driftwood Community Centre IWD Event*

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## Community News

A reminder to all NYWC volunteers, members, supporters and friends: our **Annual Picnic** will be taking place on June 7 from 12-3pm in Earl Bales Park (Area 1). As in years past, food, games, and a chance to meet others who are a part of the NYWC community will be provided. We hope to see you there!

The NYWC would like to extend a warm welcome to all of our new volunteers: **Jessie Andre**, **Nadya Grubaya**, and **Frances Danis** who will be joining us in the office, **Esmine Tonnellier** who will be helping out with the legal clinic, as well as **Shannon Persaud Tolnay** and **Anila Ashfaq** who have joined the Fundraising Committee. We look forward to having you all as members of the NYWC team!

The NYWC would also like to welcome back past volunteers **Takako Nomura** and **Lisa Guluzian** who have returned to the Centre after a small break. Best wishes to **Monica Ruiz** who will be taking some time off from volunteering at the NYWC for an exciting opportunity!

We would like to send our farewells to **Elise Hannan** and **Kameela Mahadeo**, our placement students since September who will be finishing their practicum at the NYWC in April. Thank you for all your hard work and contributions to the Centre. We are happy to announce that Kameela will be sticking around for the summer, as a co-facilitator for a few groups while she is completing a certificate program in "Understanding Family, Immigration and Refugee Law". Best of luck to Elise, who will be returning in the fall for her last year of the Ryerson University Bachelor of Social Work program.

On a related note, special congratulations go out to **Kameela**, who was admitted to the Masters of Social Work (MSW) program at York University for fall, 2008. The same well wishes go out to NYWC staff member, **Maribeth Christensen**, who will be entering the MSW program at the University of Toronto in the fall, after finishing her Masters in Political Science and Women's Studies.

On some more personal notes...

Congratulations to former volunteer **Hira Bokharee** for the birth of her first child, a beautiful little girl named **Sherry Bano**, on December 25, 2007.

With more baby news, the NYWC would like to send its congratulations to our current Acting Executive Director, **Melissa Wong**, who became an aunt for the first time recently. Her sister and friend of the Centre, **Marianne Williams**, welcomed her first son **Isaiah Alexander Williams** into the world on February 8, 2008.

Last but not least, congratulations to long time office volunteer **Cheryl Wilkinson**, for her engagement to **Gerald**. We can't wait for the special day!