

AWRC Initiates Sexual Assault Crisis Line

The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre has announced the start-up of "The Sexual Assault Crisis Line" which will begin operating this weekend, August 4.

It will be offered on weekends only between the hours of 8 p.m. Friday, and 8 p.m. Sunday. The calls will be received by the emergency department of St. Martha's Hospital.

Volunteers will be contacted by the hospital and will then call the person requesting help. Volunteers will be equipped with referral information, protocols and a back-up system.

Volunteers who staff the crisis line have been trained to assist survivors experiencing the immediate and long-term effects of sexual assault, and with the medical and legal procedures associated with it. They will offer peer-counseling, information, referral and, if a caller requests, police and/or medical service; volunteers may go with the caller to the police detachment and/or the hospital.

Callers will decide for themselves whether they will take legal action or receive medical services. Confidentiality will be strictly guarded, but where a child has been assaulted or is in danger, authorities will be notified. If there is a threat to the life or safety of the caller or someone they know, volunteers will take necessary steps to protect anyone who is in danger.

The volunteers in this program have been trained to assist survivors of sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse, and non-offending parents of sexually abused children. Topics covered in the training include childhood sexual abuse, sexual assault, medical and legal procedures after sexual assault, communication skills, and self-injury. In all aspects of the training protection of

confidentiality and respect for the individual requesting help were stressed.

Staff of the AWRC says it has recognized for some time that a crisis service such as this is needed in the Antigonish area to serve women who have been sexually abused in childhood, sexually assaulted as adults, or who are non-offending parents of sexually abused children.

In the fall of 1993 the Antigonish Women's Association's "Sexual Assault Project" began to research the needs of survivors of sexual violence in the Antigonish area and to develop a community model to respond to those needs. The creation of the Sexual Assault Crisis Line is in response to this research which found that service providers, referring agencies, and survivor respondents stressed the need for a sexual assault crisis service/center in Antigonish.

"We hope that this service, limited as it is, will be the beginning of working toward meeting the needs that have been identified," the AWRC says.

"The AWRC has no budget for some of the costs related to this service," the centre continues. We will be using taxis when no other transportation is available, and we must provide volunteers with training materials. There are also administration costs associated with this new area of service."

"We would welcome donations to support this work, and have already received some support from the community," the AWRC says. "We welcome inquiries from women who are interested in becoming volunteers to work with us in meeting this need."

For more information, call Barbara Hayes or Katherine Reed at 863-6221.



ANTIGONISH WOMEN'S Resource Center co-director Barbara Hayes (left) presented Paula Teasdale with the Sister Mary MacLeod Memorial Bursary. The bursary has been awarded annually since 1988 to a mature female student, in support of her involvement with issues that affect women. Other bursary award winners this year were Alexina MacNeil and Debbie Sampson. (Charlie Rogers photo)