

AWRC Maintains Justice Focus

by Monica MacKinnon

Board members and friends of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and the Antigonish Women's Association recently gathered for a double annual general meeting to highlight the initiatives of both the centre and the association during the past year.

Included in the meeting was the presentation of the Peace Cup to Sue Adams, librarian at the Marie Michael Library of the Coady International Institute. The Peace Cup is an award "to honour women in our community who continue to work for peace with vision and hope." Adams has been involved in local and international efforts to promote peace and justice.

AWRC director Lucille Harper characterized the people working and volunteering with the centre as "an incredible group of women who are inspiring and supportive." She said they are women of "vision, clarity and determination with an ongoing desire to create a world that is safe and equitable and just for everyone."

The work of the AWRC over the past year has included efforts in raising awareness around issues of sexual violence and the prevention of sexual violence, studies on women living in poverty, and health initiatives that included discussions with young high school women and the issues they face in the contemporary world.

Katherine Reed, coordinator of women's programs, presented highlights of the study on women and poverty. She noted that the basic needs of affordable, adequate housing, transportation for grocery shopping, and access to education are unmet in the lives of women living in poverty. Reed said that Community Services Minister Francene Cosman said she would look at the document in the process of restructuring social policy.

The AWRC was involved in the steering committee for an Antigonish Community Health Board.

Although celebrating its achievements over the last year, members said the AWRC is uncertain about the source of its core funding in the upcoming year. Traditionally, AWRC received \$37,000 in core funding from Status of Women Canada. However Status of Women Canada is now only funding short-term projects and no longer allocates funds for operational fees. Other core funding came from the provincial government and the Liberal government promised to

increase its funding to help cover the lost funding. At \$100,000, the government's donation would not cover the \$130,000 operational costs, but it would ensure that the centre could remain open. However, with the recent defeat of the Liberal budget, the AWRC has only enough resources to remain open until September. Planning beyond that point depends on the next government's budget.

Harper said that both the Conservatives and the NDP have lobbied on behalf of the centre in the past. Board member Caroline O'Connell

said "this election is an opportunity to renew the spotlight that should surround women and children."

The Sister Mary MacLeod Bursary was awarded to three women who will be returning to school in the fall. Jennifer Connors, Rachel Bailey and Glenda Williams were this year's recipients of the awards.

Harper said that the key work of the AWRC is in "addressing poverty at the community level and calling for public policy change that will begin to address barriers to women getting out of poverty."