

Mother and four children

Women's resource centre helps them escape cycle of poverty

by Monica MacKinnon

The province may be millions of dollars in debt to community programs like the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre.

Catherine MacDonald says the support and resources she received at the local women's centre helped her break the cycle of poverty in which she and her children lived.

"My family may have been costing the Nova Scotia government...\$50,000 a year," she says.

Multiplied by 18 years, this makes for a \$900,000 price tag.

"These are the types of numbers that the Antigonish [women's] centre has saved the Nova Scotia Government for just one family," MacDonald says.

MacDonald, who currently lives in Judique, Inverness County, says the support she received at the centre is key to her success, as a mother, university graduate and full-time employee.

"I walked through the doors [of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre] soon after they opened, a very troubled young woman with four small children, on social assistance and absolutely no self-worth.

"Within a week I recognized that I was a very loving and good mom."

Beginning with the simple affirmation of her own goodness and worth as a woman and mother, MacDonald went on to participate in self-esteem workshops and to deal with many issues about abuse.

She says these experiences led her to

attend the Nova Scotia Community College to complete the community service worker program.

MacDonald was able to extend similar support and encouragement to other women through her work at the AWRC where she co-facilitated self-esteem workshops and worked as a trainer and volunteer for the sexual assault crisis line for a short time.

She says her experiences at the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre were what led her to university.

She has since completed a bachelor of arts in community studies at University College Cape Breton and will receive her bachelor of social work from Dalhousie University next month.

MacDonald has been working full-

time for the past four years.

Recent threats to funding for women's centres have prompted MacDonald to share her success story.

"It was a great relief to hear that our transition houses are safe from closure," she says. "However this gives me even greater concern for the women's resource centres."

The women's centre not only brought MacDonald out of a cycle of poverty and government subsidy, it offered a new life for her children.

Her three oldest children are high school graduates and her youngest graduates in June.

They are "basically self-reliant," she points out.

"The cycle of dependency has been broken in our family. The most influencing factor that made this possible was the services and support provided at the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre."

MacDonald is an advocate of women's centres because of the preventative nature of their services.

Women's centres are a safe place where women can find direction before life situations escalate to major health problems, financial problems, child care problems, family violence and extreme poverty, she says.

"I cannot stress strongly enough the desperate need there is in our province for the resources that are provided through the centres."