

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY MARCH 8



Planting the seeds for a more equitable future

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High school students in rural Nova Scotia are taking the lead in building a more equitable future.

Through the Healthy Relationships for Youth (HRY) program, developed and administered through the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association, students in grades 11 and 12 are given the unique opportunity to act as peer-facilitators and role-models for Grade 9 students.

The goal of the program is to foster youth development through peer support, critical thinking, open dialogue and experiential learning. What this looks like in practice is upper-year students leading and facilitating a series of 12 interactive learning modules for their younger peers. The sessions cover topics such as healthy communication and boundaries, conflict resolution, relationship with the self, consent, alcohol and drugs, gender and sexuality, social media and stereotypes and pop culture.

HRy, which launched in 2006, is running in all 10 schools in the Strait Area, and an additional nine schools provincially.

In the past, much of society's progress towards gender equality was fought for by the women's movement. HRY's inclusive model of youth engagement is built upon the idea that people of all gender identities have a role to play in creating a more equitable future.

The impact of the program, over the past 12 years, has been to empower youth to assert their boundaries and their rights, to work towards positive change in their communities and to foster more inclusive spaces for gay, lesbian and transgender youth in rural Nova Scotia.

As one Grade 9 student wrote about the program, "[In HRY] I learned what to look for in an unhealthy relationship and it taught me that I can take control to stop the abuse. It helped me get myself out of a very unhealthy relationship."

Another youth facilitator for HRY, aged 17, wrote, "Being a facilitator is super rewarding because I know I am making an impact in my community."

These youth are truly leading the change for a more equitable future in our province and ensuring the next generation of leaders is one that embraces diversity.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association employees Jubanti Toppo (left), Faye Fraser, Johannah Black, Arwen Sweet and Lucille Harper are some of the organizers for local International Women's Week activities which will be taking place March 5 to 10.

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Feminist tradition in rural N.S.

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From March 5 to 10 the Antigonish community will be celebrating International Women's Week (IWW).

The local organizing committee for IWW has declared the theme of this year's events to be, 'Claiming Our Space, Claiming Our Rights.'

International Women's Day has been celebrated around the world for a century as a way for women to claim their political, economic and social rights, as well as to protest against injustices that affect women and their families. The very first Women's Day was a national holiday declared by The Socialist Party of America in 1909 to honour the garment workers strike in New York City, where more than 20,000 women workers, many of them immigrants, went on strike for fair wages and safer working conditions.

In the early years of First World War, socialist women across Europe held marches and protests on, or around, March 8 to publicly declare their opposition to the war that was claiming the lives of so many.

In 1917, against the backdrop of a vicious world war, Russian women held a protest for 'Bread and Peace.' This Russian women's march was held on the last Sunday of February which fell on March 8 in the Gregorian calendar. Four days later, the Russian government became one of the first in the world to grant women full suffrage.

The Canadian federal govern-

ment granted women over the age of 21 the right to vote one year later, in 1918. However, they continued to deny this right to most Inuit and Aboriginal women and men until decades later.

During the 1930s, International Women's Day was an important political holiday in the coal mining regions (Pictou County, Cape Breton, and Cumberland County) of Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia Miner, a socialist and pro-labour newspaper published and circulated in these regions of the province at the time included articles and announcements of these events.

In March of 1930, The Nova Scotia Miner announced that a local miner's wife, Mrs. Whitefield from New Aberdeen, had been nominated to join a Canadian 'Working Women's Delegation' to the Soviet Union. In the midst of the great depression and a plague of strikes and labour unrest, several of the coal mining unions raised the \$200 needed to send Mrs. Whitefield on this trip.

In March of 1933, the same newspaper announced, 'International Women's Day - March 12,' and details of that article stated that the 'Glace Bay Women's Day Meeting' would be held that

Sunday at 7:30 p.m. at Rukasin Block. The same article appeals to the women leading the march to adopt a resolution calling for the release of feminist and labour organizer Annie Buller of Montreal who was on trial in Estevan, Saskatchewan for allegedly "inciting a riot" during a coal miners' strike.

The same edition of the paper ran an article by famous Montreal-based labour organizer Becky Buhay who wrote, "International Women's Day in Canada comes at a time this year when the misery and poverty of working class women has reached the stage where life in the thousands is absolutely unbearable and their hopeless lot under capitalism stands in all its true colours."

Given the realities of the great depression and the waves of labour unrest across the country, her words were likely not an exaggeration.

The Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association (AWRCSASA) is just one of many local organizations that continue to carry the banner first hoisted by our grandmothers and great-grandmothers. The AWRCSASA continues to fight for women's

political, social and economic rights, including the right to be free from all forms of gender-based violence.

Like the women of past generations, the AWRCSASA also works to address women's poverty working in partnership with initiatives such as the Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund, a charitable and volunteer run organization providing relief to families struggling with heating costs.

Over the winter months an organizing committee made up of the AWRCSASA and various members of the St. F.X. community, including the Coady International Institute, the Department of Women's and Gender Studies, the offices for Human Rights and equity, for Students of African Descent and Gender and Sexual Diversity as well as Maritime-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network, has met to plan a number of events both political and celebratory for this year's International Women's Week.

The week will be filled with a variety of different events celebrating women's achievements and mobilizing for the changes that still need to happen locally and around the world.