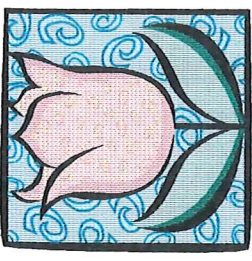


Antigonish Women's Resource Centre Summer Update 2001



End of Summer Greetings from the AWRC Staff....

The summer has gone and a busy time of year has come. Children are going back to school, the garden is being harvested and the wool sweaters are being pulled from under the bed. It can be all too easy, in the hustle and bustle, to forget to do things for ourselves, so remember to keep space on your calendar for the AWRC fall program that interests you...and if you get a minute drop in for tea.

— Amanda, Christine,
Katherine, Lucille, and Vangie



Forestell who is returning after a one year leave of absence.

End of Summer Greetings from the Board.....

The Board of Directors would like to welcome everyone back to the Centre for an exciting new season! A special welcome goes out to our new board members:

Elsa
Arbuthnot,
Ronalda
Doyle,
Juanita
Ohrling and
Mary Turay.

Welcome

In this issue...

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*Women are
repeatedly accused
of taking things
personally. I
cannot see any
other honest way
of taking them.*

*-Marya Mannes
(1904-1990) American
writer*

✿ Vangie wishes to remind everyone to save space on their December calendar to sell **tickets** for the 2001 Christmas draw.

✿ New books have been added to our library, including:

The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends
by Helen Fitzgerald; and
Something to Tell You: The Road Families Travel When a
Child Is Gay, written by Gilbert Herdt and Bruce Koff.

Come check them out!

✿ AWRC staff wish to extend their thanks to **Charlie ten Brinke** for formatting the summer update.

Custody and Access: Proposed Changes to the Divorce Act

Amanda Workman, AWRC staff member,

writes on proposed changes to the Divorce Act

In March 2001, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Consultation entitled "Custody, Access and Child Support in Canada: Putting Children's Interests First" was launched by the Department of Justice Canada. The consultation process, designed to get public input on proposed changes to the Divorce Act, included public discussion groups and the distribution of paper and electronic feedback booklets

(www.canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/cc/a/index.html). However, the process used in the consultation proved lacking in an understanding of women's reality. Funding was not available for childcare or travel, and rural and poor women and their advocates could not afford to attend the public discussions. The feedback booklet, offered as an alternative to public discussions, was not "user friendly". Completing the booklet required strong analytical ability, high literacy skills, and significant period of uninterrupted time; time that is rare for most single parents. Women's experiences were not reflected in the alternatives listed in the feedback book-

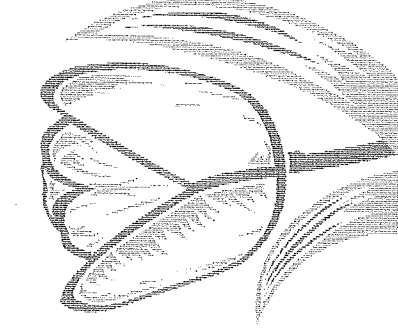
lets. For example, suggestions included replacing the terms "custody" and "access" with the concept of "shared parenting", defined as "decision making ... shared equally or nearly equally between the parents". This seems reasonable, but the reality is that children live with one parent, usually the mother, and that parent assumes basic responsibility for the children. Giving a parent with fewer responsibilities, equal decision making control creates opportunity for manipulation and abuse, especially in relationships where abuse was a preexisting factor. Many couples do make agreements without court intervention and "share parent" successfully. It is unlikely that a court order will create safe "shared parenting" where none existed before.

Some of the suggestions listed in the feedback booklet did, however, have great potential. One proposal included the establishment of child access and exchange centres, which would provide a safe space for exchange of children and information, while

facilitating a "cooling off" of high conflict relationships. The process of providing access has proven problematic for some couples and this suggestion would ease the problem. A full analysis of this consultation developed by Women's Centres CONNECT is available from Amanda at the AWRC or from the Ontario Women's Justice Network website, www.owjn.org

At this time the formal consultation has been completed, but results have yet to be released. This means that it is important for women to continue to voice their opinions about the consultation process and the options presented. Women need to remind government that the consultation did not include their voices and that changes in the Divorce Act must be taken into account women's reality. To voice your opinion contact the Department of Justice Canada website, your MLA Angus MacIsaac and your MP Peter MacKay.

Congratulations go out to Barbara Hayes on the completion of her book entitled "This Small Life: A Woman's Healing Journey". Watch for posters at the AWRC for details concerning publication and book launch date.



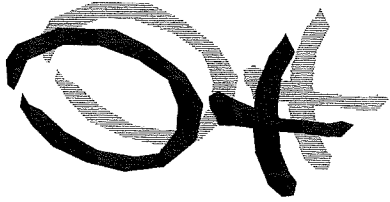
*Advice is what we ask for
when we already know
the answer, but wish we
didn't.*

—Erica Jong (b. 1934)

American writer

Young Women Write

by Jessica Mahoney
& Caitlin Hughes



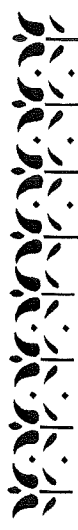
Last year an exciting program began at the AWRC. Led first by Flora Murphy and later by Christie Dyer, the **Youth Social Justice** group, youth

aged 14 to 18, began meeting to discuss issues affecting their lives. Each week they shared opinions and ideas on such topics as sexism, racism and the environment. The group focussed on the clean up of the Sydney Tar ponds and after discussion and research, wrote letters to government to share their thoughts. Although the youth focussed on outside concerns, they felt the affects of their participation on other aspects of their lives, becoming more socially aware. Group members told of being better able to understand and form opinions on media topics and personal experiences. Perhaps the program can best be summed up by one of the participants. In the words of Marian Turniawan, "I would definitely be interested in joining the group again. There's just so much left to talk about."

The **Teens Take Action: A Peer Education Approach to Dating Violence and Sexual Assault** was a program developed by the AWRC to teach youth about sexual violence and its prevention. Sixteen grade 11 and 12 students received training which helped them teach other youth through the use of skits and classroom presentations. These presentations illustrated situations teens often face. The **Teens** travelled to St. Andrew Junior School and the East Antigonish Academy to present to younger students and they found that the program not only benefited the audiences, but themselves as well. Friendships were strengthened and self-awareness was developed. Caitlin Mulcahy, who participated in the group described it as "an incredible program with incredible counsellors". Caitlin noted that on the last day the group presented together, they received a standing ovation from the students at The East, it is a memory she says will last forever.

The AWRC was filled with many fresh ideas and opinions along with much laughter as it held two consecutive **Exploring Our Lives** groups. The groups, comprised of 14 to 18 year-old young women, met once a week and were facilitated

first by Maureen Ryan and later by Pamela Fry. The groups flexible and comfortable atmosphere allowed the girls to talk about any subject they pleased. Although it may seem strange to have a discussion group with no particular topic, the girls found this format quite welcoming. Laura MacLellan, an **EOL** member, may best describe this sentiment, "If you had something to discuss but weren't sure if you were ready to share it, the **EOL** was great. It was different then say... an eating disorder group, because at **EOL** you weren't there for a specific problem, so there was no pressure for you to talk, you could wait until you were comfortable."



Young Women at Risk: by Meaghan MacIntyre

Young Women at Risk was a research project undertaken by AWRC summer student Meaghan MacIntyre. The project was designed to identify life issues facing young women and gather resources to facilitate future program development for young women at risk.



Community Support Groups

Depression Support Group

Contact: Duffy MacDonald

863-1362 or 863-1776

Anxiety Support Group

Contact: Brenda Harrop

863-4511

Schizophrenic Society

Contact: 863-0716

Women's Divorce and Separation Support Group

Contact: Katherine Meery

863-3734

If you have a community support group that you would like listed in future newsletters and updates, please contact Amanda at 863-6221.

The initial challenge involved defining what it means to be "at-risk". Human Resources and Development Canada has identified race/ethnicity, poverty, and being from a single parent family as crucial factors used to designate a young person as "at-risk." As these descriptors are somewhat ambiguous, our goal was to generate a definition of "at-risk" which would include issues of gender, race, and class. This definition needed to be broad enough to allow support for and understanding of these young women. Ultimately, the research had three main branches: general research on young women; research on young women's mental and physical health; and young women in conflict with the law, deemed to be the group at greatest "risk".

In the past there has been a general lack of information available for and about young women, however, a body of work is now emerging that focuses on young women's lives. Within this emerging field there is an emphasis on body image and self esteem. So, while the AWRG research project intended to examine risk factors for young women, the initial stages of this work consisted of gathering crucial, but more general information on young women and their lives.

From this exploration, several

areas of concern emerged, of which body image was only the beginning. Sexuality, violence, poverty, drug and alcohol use and abuse, depression, physical and sexual abuse, health and relationships were just some of the areas of concern uncovered in the research process.

While nearly all young women find adolescence difficult, some young women have issues with deeper roots (i.e. abuse). Therefore, working with these women requires a more profound and conscious understanding of their lives. However, there seems to be a general reluctance in the literature to deeply explore young women's issues and until this exploration occurs, little can and will be done. What is clear is that the problems facing young women are multifaceted and interconnected and as such, dealing with these issues is a complex undertaking. The general determinants of at-risk as being poor, a minority, and/or from a single parent family are too limiting and too simple. This definition does not address the complexity and seriousness of the issues that young women face today. While programs may be developed to deal with specific issues facing young women, the multifaceted nature of young women's lives must be appreciated to be appropriately addressed.



Fall 2001 Programs

Stage II Therapy Group for Adult

Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Stage II Therapy Group, a continuation of the spring Stage I Group is set to begin their 10- week program in September. Barbara Hayes and Amanda Workman are facilitating the program once again.

Embracing Ourselves:

Women and Self-Esteem (7 sessions)

Date: Tuesday, September 18, 2001

Time: 9:30 – 11:30 a.m

Facilitator: Barbara Hayes

Young Women: Exploring Our Lives

(Open to women ages 14 – 18)

Date: Wednesday, September 25, 2001

Time: 3:30 – 5:00 p.m

Facilitator: To be Announced

Assertiveness Training (3 Successive Sessions)

Date: Thursday, November 8 – November 22, 2001

Time: 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

Facilitator: Barbara Hayes

Women and Financial Planning

Date: Thursday, October 18, 2001

Time: 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Facilitator: Leonard and Betty MacDonald

Uncommon Sense For Parents with Teens

Facilitator and Dates TBA. For more information, contact the Centre.

Income Tax Preparation Training for

Women with Taxable Income

Date: November 14th and 15th , 2001

Time: 6:00 – 8:00 p.m

Facilitator: Carmel Galagher

Income Tax Preparation Training for

Women with Low Income

Date: November 7th and 8th , 2001

Time: 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Facilitator: Carmel Galagher

Breast Self-

Examination

Presentation

Date: September 24

Time: 12:00 – 1:30 a.m.

Bring a Lunch

Facilitators: Marian

MacNeil and Cathy

Novak

Youth Social Justice Group

Date: September 25th, 2001 every second week

Time: 3:30-5 pm

Facilitator: Christie Dyer and Robin Verneste

Teens Take Action

Teens Take Action, a peer education approach to dating violence and sexual assault will begin training in September. Youth interested in participating should contact their guidance counsellor or Amanda at the AWRC

All programs are to be held at the AWRC and you may register by dropping in to the AWRC or by calling Vangie at 863-6221.



The AWRC wishes to extend its most sincere appreciation to the organizations which have supported our programming with their donations. Without the support of the following sponsors, some of the programming listed on this page would not be possible:

*The Canadian Auto Workers for their donation in support of anti-violence /prevention work.

*Harlequin Enterprises Ltd. for their support of the Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse Programs

*Sable Offshore Energy Ltd. for their continued support of the Teens Take Action: A Peer Education Approach to Dating Violence and Sexual Assault program.

Women affected by changes to Nova Scotia's social assistance program

by Katherine Reed

The Government of Nova Scotia has recently overhauled our social assistance system. The changes are touted by government as being progressive, humane, and fiscally responsible. Unfortunately, the new system is rife with the same defects of the ones that preceded it. This article will explore the changes and analyze some of their effects.

THE OLD SYSTEMS

Eligibility

For the past 23 years there have been two income support programs in this province: Family Benefits, a long-term program, and social assistance, which is short-term. Recipients of Family Benefits were either permanently disabled and unable to work, or they were single parents - overwhelmingly mothers. Short term social assistance was given to couples and single adults, with or without children, who were temporarily without income for various reasons.

Administration

Until 1996, short term social assistance was delivered by the municipal governments. Family Benefits has always been delivered by the Province through the Department of Community

Services. In 1996 the Department of Community Services took over responsibility for both programs.

Education and employability

Once a Family Benefits applicant was accepted and classified as disabled or unemployable, it was largely their decision to take steps to develop their prospects for economic self-reliance through education, training, or job search. There were some measures to assist with this. These measures were not adequate for many people, since only a maximum of \$200 per month was provided for needs such as child care, transportation, clothing, and educational materials. Most single mothers, for example, could use up more than \$200 per month on child care expenses alone if they enrolled in school. The support staff dedicated to assist clients with this were far too few in number, and had huge areas to cover.

Both categories of Family Benefits recipients (single parents and disabled) could work while on assistance, and keep a portion of their earnings. Many single mothers would take steps toward self-reliance as their children got older and became more independent. Some of them earned university degrees, while others took upgrading and various trades. Some re-married and either continued to work as stay-at-home moms, or worked outside the home

depending upon their family situations and their children's ages.

THE NEW SYSTEM

Eligibility

Under the new system, in order for a client to be eligible to receive benefits, they must participate in an "employability assessment." This process will involve developing a plan for finding employment or developing their skills and/or education. Assistance can be cut off if clients refuse to participate in this. Caseworkers and other staff will have more control over what a given person is allowed to pursue. A person can also be refused assistance if they have quit a job or been fired (not new). Some clients will be deemed unable to participate in the labour force due to a physical or medical disability or a combination of factors limiting their employability.

Education

Social assistance recipients will be allowed to participate only in certain, short-term educational programs if they are to continue receiving benefits. The Department of Community Services has made it clear that they will no longer provide income support to clients who enroll in university. As one department official put it, "social assistance is not student aid." Unfortunately, shortly after I heard that remark, I spoke with an official of the Department of Education who said "student aid is not social assistance." I would argue that

(Continued)

What Can I Do?

- Speak or write to your MLA about changes you feel are necessary
- Learn more about this issue
- Listen with compassion and understanding to women who are living in poverty
- Work toward addressing the causes of poverty

single parents and people with disabilities are not "just students." They have special needs and unique personal assets and they need supports to be tailored to them specifically. Sadly, some of the best university students have been single parents on social assistance, who bring a certain wisdom and maturity to their educational pursuits that comes from their difficult life experiences.

Many women will be locked into poverty for longer periods as a result of this new policy. Arguments have been made by the policy-makers that there is a need for more tradespeople in Nova Scotia, so it is really a progressive move for government to push social assistance recipients in that direction. Most people understand that the best way to support a person in their career planning and educational pursuits is to support them in the choices they freely make. While it certainly is true that university is not for everybody, neither is trade school.

Rates of assistance

Contrary to popular misconception, social assistance does not provide enough money to meet a person's basic daily needs for food, shelter, clothing, transportation, medications, dental

treatments, personal grooming and hygiene supplies, and the list goes on. Anyone who is on social assistance truly is poor. Pointing this out does not negate the fact that many working people are truly poor also. There is a strong relationship between the two social realities. When government policy impoverishes people who are on income support, the employed poor are forced work for substandard wages and to tolerate unfair and/or unhealthy and unsafe working conditions.

When people are impoverished there are high costs to society in the short and long term. Poverty makes children and adults vulnerable to a number of medical, social, and psychological problems which are expensive to deal with, and which inhibit their productivity and success. Furthermore, recent studies have shown that the greater the gap between the well-off and the poor in a society, the more ill health there is across all income levels. Ill health is a big drain on both the economy and social programs.

Any government that says it must cut social assistance costs and keep minimum wages low, because it is too expensive to raise poor people's standard of living is being extremely short-sighted, and I would argue, garnering political support by reinforcing negative stereotypes. They are in effect saying "We're going to save you money by making social assistance very painful so those people will get jobs and get off the public purse." It's an easy sell, it's convincing, and it's not true.

Adults on social assistance will receive \$180 per month now for "personal allowances" -- food, clothing, and personal care needs. This constitutes and increase of \$3 per month for former Family Benefits clients. This is the first increase in Family Benefits personal allowances in seven years. The last increase, in 1994 was \$3 per month. The cost of living, as measured by the Consumer Price Index has increased 15% since 1991. For people on social assistance, which has always provided less money for basic needs, the increase amounts to \$27

(Continued on page 8)

What's New?

- ♦ restrictions on educational opportunities
- ♦ new system for deducting earnings
- ♦ minor increases in personal allowances and decreases in shelter allowances
- ♦ increase in co-pay for prescriptions from \$3 to \$5; some prescription drug coverage continued up to 1 year after leaving social assistance
- ♦ \$100 per year school allowance for children
- ♦ appeals process slightly different

What's NOT New?

- ♦ allowances not adequate to meet basic needs
- ♦ transportation considered a "special need"
- ♦ costs for many medicines not covered
- ♦ quit or fired from job = no social assistance
- ♦ few, if any, former or current social assistance recipients on appeal boards
- ♦ stereotyped attitudes towards clients on the part of policy makers and delivery agents

(Continued from page 7)

per month. There will now be no regular transportation allowance. Transportation is considered "an item of special need" and my guess is that it will be hard to make the case that a return trip from say, Havre Boucher into Antigonish to buy groceries and visit the laundromat and family doctor is in any way "special."

Work (Dis)Incentives

Adults who earn money while on social assistance will now have to forfeit 70% of their net earnings beginning with the first dollar earned. This creates a disincentive to work for people who have been on Family Benefits, since many of them were able to earn \$200 per month (gross) before there were deductions, so they opted to work part-time (a sensible choice for many of those with health problems and/or small children), earn approximately \$200 per month, and felt good about being rewarded for taking some initiative, while not having to forfeit any of their earnings. With assistance being deducted from whatever amount they may earn, there is some reduced willingness to make the effort. It's hard enough already.

For more information, references, or to get involved in AWRC efforts to address poverty, contact Katherine.



The PATH Project

by Susan L. Eaton
Project Coordinator

What makes and keeps us healthy? Is health only a matter of individual well being or can we talk about healthy *communities*? Is health the result of personal choices or are there other factors that play a role? Who should make decisions about the kinds of health programs and services that are available?

These are some of the questions at the heart of what we call the PATH Project.

PATH (*People Assessing Their Health*) is a health promotion project based on the idea that people know a lot about what makes them healthy and that people at the community level should be involved in planning and decision-making about the policies and programs that will affect them.

The current PATH Project is co-sponsored by the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (AWRC), the Extension Department of St. Francis Xavier University (StFX Ext.), Public Health Services Eastern Region (PHS) and the Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board (ATCCHB). The 18-month project, which concludes in March 2002, is funded by Health Canada's Remote and Rural Health Fund.

The PATH Project is made up of several distinct but over-lapping activities, each one designed to

encourage greater community participation in health related planning and decision-making.

One part of the project involves working with the Antigonish Town and County Community Health Board to develop a *Community Health Impact Assessment Tool* (CHIAT). A CHIAT is a resource to assist the Board in assessing the effect that various policies or programs will have on the health of the community. It looks at the broad spectrum of factors that determine health (including things like income, education and physical environment, in addition to health care services) and is based on the priorities identified by the community.

A second aspect is doing research on "health indicators"; the information that can be used by the community to measure changes in health status. This part of the project also involves finding ways to present the information in a simple, easy to use fashion, using language that reflects the community's understanding of health.

The third part of the project focuses on communicating what we have learned. This includes sharing information through presentations, preparing a resource that will outline the processes used, and developing a PATH web site.

The Path Project aims to provide opportunities for the public and policy makers to come together to build healthy communities. It is an exciting project and anyone interested is encouraged to drop by to learn more about the people and the processes involved.