

DATES & DATA

Ontario Council Newsletter
Vol. V, Issue 4 (Electronic)

January 2007
Standing Committee Reports

JANUARY 13TH, 2007
CFUW ONTARIO COUNCIL STANDING COMMITTEES

Joint Morning Session

The theme of the program was **Creating Healthy Communities Through Education**. The two guest speakers were **Lucy Di Carlo** from *Roots of Empathy* and **Sue Sigurdson** from *Pathways to Education*.

Lucy DiCarlo is the Ontario Program Coordinator for *Roots of Empathy* (ROE). This organization develops empathy by teaching students about their feelings and the feelings of others. It is an evidence and research based classroom program. A certified ROE instructor visits a classroom every week during the year. Once a month, from October to June, a parent and baby from the community come with the Instructor for a Family Visit. Over the course of nine months the students observe the development of the baby and the interaction between parent and baby.

Part of Ms. Di Carlo's presentation was a video about the program which showed the classroom experience and interaction of the young children and the baby. The students had the opportunity to observe and interact with a baby when it was upset, grumpy, or sleepy, as well as happy and playful. When the baby's visit was over, the instructor would then discuss with the class how they felt about what they had experienced.

Ms. Di Carlo related the story, about a young student – a real troublemaker – who asked to hold the baby in the Snuggli. The baby who had been fussing, calmed down and was comfortable with the boy. He later turned to the instructor to ask if he would be able to be a good father since he had not been loved. This was an anecdotal indication of the impact of the program, which research has also shown.

The goals of *Roots of Empathy* are:

- To foster the development of empathy
- To develop emotional literacy
- To reduce levels of bullying, aggression and violence and promote children's pro-social behaviours
- To increase knowledge of human development, learning, and infant safety

For more information see www.rootsofempathy.org

The second speaker was Sue Sigurdson, Programme Director, *Pathways to Education*. The Pathways programme was started in Regent Park, the oldest and largest public housing project in Canada. The issues to be addressed being the high drop out rate (56%) from high school and the resulting low paying jobs, crime and/or homelessness. The mission of the *Pathways to Education* programme is to reduce poverty and its effects by supporting the development of youth from economically disadvantaged communities.

Pathways identifies vulnerable children and offers the following four pillars of support:

- Academic – There are 225 volunteer tutors that offer assistance 4 nights/week.
- Social Support – Mentoring is available every 2 weeks.
- Financial Support – Unbelievably, there are no high schools within walking distance of Regent Park! This was identified as a risk factor in preventing students from getting to school. Pathways give two weeks worth of TTC tickets to students to help get them to school. Attendance is taken to ensure that they are being used properly. Upon graduation, these students have earned \$4000 toward any post secondary education.
- Student Advocates – Pathways volunteers provide a connection between home and school. It should be

noted that most of these students come from homes where English is not the first language and the parents often do not understand the education system.

How do they know that the programme works? The students are closely monitored and the statistics tell the tale. Absenteeism has been cut in half. The Pathways students are doing as well or better than their peers. There is a reduction in the use of health and welfare services. It is interesting to note that there is almost no government funding in the Pathways programme. RBC and Bell Canada are major corporate sponsors. The Regent Park model has been so successful that an effort is being made to expand the programme across the country. The first extensions are in Montreal – in Verdun and in Little Burgundy. In Toronto, Rexdale and Lawrence Heights are communities targeted for development. For more information see: www.pathwaystoeducation.ca

STATUS OF WOMEN & HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE - Afternoon Session

Funding Cuts: Federal Department of the Status of Women

Linda MacGregor and Judie Arrowood joined others on a bus trip to Ottawa on December 10th to attend a rally and march for International Human Rights Day. They joined with Ottawa CFUW members and women from other organizations to protest the cuts to the Status of Women department.

Edeltraud Neal provided some background on the Status of Women Canada (SWC) cuts and the implications. These cuts were made under the Harper government last September. The cuts are to the federal department, which oversees all legislation and programs to ensure women's interests are taken into account. The department also provides funding to women's groups for research and programs. Their former role of advocacy has been disabled i.e., organizations that advocate will not be funded. In summary, the changes result in the silencing of women, taking away women's power to influence in such key areas as family law and pay equity.

The Hon. Bev Oda, the minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, was dismissive of the issue when she met with her provincial cohorts recently in Moncton. The provincial ministers with this portfolio now plan to meet without the federal minister. Unfortunately, the effects of the cuts will filter down to the provincial arena. Our job is to let our MPs know how we feel about the impact of these cuts on issues such as childcare, literacy, pay equity and advocacy work.

The Ottawa Club hosted a local forum to which MPs were invited. (Maria Minna and Marlene Jennings attended.) There were House of Commons hearings held December 6th and 13th.

Andrea Levan reminded us that the Mulroney government cut funding to the NAC in 1988. Andrea, as a new NAC Board member, wondered if women should be getting funding. The answer was that funding for women's groups was especially difficult for small groups in small towns. The creative programs for women and children are the basis for many of the advancements for women.

Linda MacGregor reported that Carolyn Day, CFUW Southport, on a visit to her local MPP, was advised that the Liberal Women's Caucus is not prepared to deal with the Status of Women cuts as it is a federal issue. Linda advised that, when dealing with our MPPs, we must be prepared for this reaction with solid arguments. The cuts will affect volunteer organizations working at provincial and local levels. Ontario Council members should be pressuring our women MPPs to speak out against SWC cuts and guideline changes to Minister Oda and their counterparts in the Women's Federal Caucus.

Early Learning and Childcare was discussed. The Harper government has not come through with the promised funding of \$10,000 per space tax credit or payment to employers or community organizations to create up to 125,000 childcare spaces over five years.

Further discussion on the topic raised other important points:

- The government should be funding organizations that have no voice.
- Grants didn't go to just high profile organizations like the NAC, but to many smaller grassroots organizations.
- The grants provided strength by supporting a diverse range of organizations.
- This emphasizes the strength and autonomy that self-funding brings to our organization.

Violence Against Women Project, Andrea Levan

Andrea provided a handout with a summary of responses from the survey, categorized under nine headings. The aim is to provide a comprehensive picture of problems encountered in policy and services to women who are victims of violence. The final report will include statistics reflecting the extent of the problem, a history of policy, and systemic problems. It will not provide recommendations. Andrea would like to show the document to the respondents for feedback. She emphasized that the responses about CFUW and our interest in services to women were very positive. To "listen" is so important, as many of these workers feel silenced. The original goal was to make contacts and hear the concerns.

The final question "What can groups like CFUW do?" was discussed. The issue of violence against refugee and immigrant women was raised. Do these women know their rights? Perhaps we can collaborate with other groups. Judie Arrowood mentioned a project in Thorncliffe Park, Toronto. Edeltraud Neal mentioned a \$1.3 million project that has involved the development of public information materials on women's rights. CFUW will be requested to help with the dissemination and placement of the literature. Our effectiveness is a result of our presence in all types of communities as well as our independence.

It was mentioned that MPs/MPPs might be interested in the report. In terms of being used for the development of resolutions, it was pointed out that many past resolutions should be examined because many of the elements within the data collected could possibly relate to previous resolutions.

Andrea prefers that the draft report go back to the respondents before going to the executive for final approval, as she wants their approval before it is publicized. She would like to have a draft ready for the Executive for March, but realistically, it will probably be May 2007.

Registered Nurses Association of Ontario Response to the SARS Report. Margaret McGovern highlighted the issue of better communication, such as ministry to ministry (the Ministry of Labour was not in the loop) and between Public Health and hospitals. Also, include other organizations, such as school boards, in the communication plan. One positive outcome since the SARS outbreak is the increase in full time nurses to 60%, as part time and contract nurses moving from institution to institution increased the risk of spreading the virus. There will undoubtedly be a pandemic. Margaret's advice is:

- Get a flu shot
- Look after yourself
- Wash your hands more often, rub while you sing *Row, Row, Row your boat* . . .
- Use the Health Information Line rather than visiting medical centres and hospital emergency services.

Fairness For Us All: Income Security for the 21st Century

There was discussion of the North York UWC forum last fall: *Fairness For Us All: Income Security for the 21st Century*. See the *Issues* page of the Ontario Council website (www.cfuwontcouncil.ca/issues.html) for a report. It will be found under *Family Poverty*. Joanne Jamieson alerted us to a *Toronto Star* editorial on the topic.

CFUW Women in Action was available as a handout. This special issue entitled **CFUW Policy and Action – Advocacy is not a Spectator Sport** is a detailed primer prepared by the CFUW Advocacy Directors for CFUW members to use to effectively take action on specific CFUW policy priorities.

Judie Arrowood, Chair
Status of Women & Human Rights Committee

EDUCATION COMMITTEE - Afternoon Session

At the afternoon session of the Standing Committee 23 members were in attendance. Members from as far away as North Bay, Ottawa, Kanata, and London attended.

The first topic on the agenda was an evaluation of the morning program. *Pathways to Education* was spoken of very highly with emphasis on the accomplishment of keeping at-risk students motivated, in school and moving onto post-secondary education. Some members expressed concern of how the program will do when Regent Park is no longer an enclosed community.

Roots of Empathy was also viewed as a positive program in our schools because of the high emotional content. We felt the program was doing well in building compassion in children, therefore targeting anti-bullying.

Further discussion centred on mentoring and the benefits of working in particular with young girls not only in education but also healthy eating and living habits. In the Region of Halton, the Community Kitchen mentors young girls about the benefits of good nutrition. The Peterborough Club continues to support the School for Young Mom's. They are working towards obtaining their high school diplomas and also receive help with parenting skills, nutrition and cooking. Other programs mentioned were arts in the schools. This includes dancers, kite making, art appreciation and music. It was mentioned that students who study music do better in basic courses.

Mentoring was discussed as not only getting to know the child but the entire family. Discussion revolved around the visits that teachers were able to make in the past to a child's family before school started. Also mentioned was the staggered entry of kindergarten children and the interviews between, teacher, child and parent. Both methods do not exist because of safety issues and the funding formula.

The issue of culture and language was considered to be a concern and a barrier to education for populations where students from the Asian communities attempt to fit into the education environment. Young girls are very vulnerable to wanting to achieve their education and please the customs of their family.

Student Success programs were discussed. The goal of the Ministry of Education is to have an 85% graduation rate by 2010. Bill 52, keeping kids in school until 18 has passed and 1400 new teachers have been hired. Other programs mentioned were a Technical and Academic school in Halton Region. It was felt that schools are dealing with their own way of coping with high -risk students.

Wendy Taylor gave feedback on the *People for Education* conference she attended in November. Mention was made to the evaluation of the Funding Formula, the positives in education in Ontario, issues in Northern Ontario schools, the importance of librarians and are the new methods of keeping secondary school students in school working.

Members were encouraged to review the CFUW and IFUW policies and take action; **Improving the Lives of Adolescents, Poverty, Violence at School, and Violence-Free Family Life.**

Good books mentioned for reading:

The Mind of Boys, by Michael Gurian & Kathy Stevens

The Other Side of the Bridge, by Mary Lawson

Roots of Empathy, by Mary Gordon

Wendy Taylor, Chair
Education Committee

LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - Afternoon Session

The Legislation Standing Committee afternoon meeting was attended by 27 members from 21 Clubs. The following minutes of the meeting were prepared by Peggy Pinkerton:

Legislation Chair Elaine Harvey introduced speaker Natalie Mehra, director of the *Ontario Health Coalition*, who outlined the dangers besetting public health care.

Ms. Mehra's topic was *Maintaining Public Health Care*, and she began by using members in a graphic demonstration to show how permitting private health treatment neither shortens the line for those waiting for public treatment nor does anything to add to the number of providers. She went on to an impassioned defence of the public health care system, and ominous warnings of a campaign to privatize care, well funded by health and insurance corporations. In addition, although government funding of health care represents what she claims is the largest transfer of wealth ever, she sees attacks coming from within governments: both Nova Scotia and Quebec are taking legislative measures to introduce private health care measures, and she expressed concern that measures that Health Minister Tony Clement is proposing may dismantle the public system. On top of this, the new head of the Canadian Medical Association is the owner of a private clinic, and there is a proliferation of right-wing think tanks formulating policy in favour of privatization.

The Ontario Health Coalition, representing 78 health agencies, claims some victories in its fight against privatization: it stopped a private cancer treatment facility at Sunnybrook Hospital, forced the refunding of hospital cuts made by the previous government, stopped the Copeman Clinic, which would have utilized a two-tier system, and worked to call off P3 hospitals. Ms. Mehra says, however, that a "partial win is a loss", and efforts to privatize continue, as do their efforts in opposition.

She is wary of the new LHINS, expressing concerns about problems in the quality of care caused by forcing hospitals to compete, and worrying that the consolidation of hospitals will damage the "fabric of communities" by removing a community resource - its hospital - and forcing patients to travel longer distances for treatment.

For the remainder of the afternoon Elaine asked members to introduce themselves and advise of their Clubs' advocacy initiatives. Most Clubs reported activities, including advocacy, especially on Bill 303 and funding cuts to women's groups, scholarships, support of women's shelters, and working with other Clubs on projects. Elaine asked to be advised of Clubs' further activities, if possible by the end of January, and promised to disseminate the ideas as widely as possible. She stressed the value and importance of co-operating with other Clubs.

Discussion on planning an all-candidates' meeting was deferred to the March meeting.

We are very grateful to Peggy Pinkerton for again providing us with a carefully recorded and beautifully expressed record of the meeting.

Elaine Harvey, Chair
Legislation Committee