

## **Communities Working Together To End Violence Against Women Feb. 25 – 27, 2008**

This conference, sponsored by the Ontario Government, was held in Kitchener-Waterloo Feb.25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>,2008. The conference brought together, leaders, front-line workers and professionals from the community in health, education, and justice sectors. The common goal of sharing knowledge, discussing innovative methods and programs gives us the confidence to build a better community. This opportunity to build networks is vital to the exchange of ideas and information. It is also a link for CFUW to explore if it is our intention to help our communities end violence to women.

The **Honourable Deb Matthews**, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, opened the conference on Tuesday morning.

She was followed by a **keynote speaker, Carolyn Thomas**, a young woman from Texas who survived an attack, shot at point blank range in the face by her boyfriend of 8 years. She suffered catastrophic facial injuries and has endured years of reconstructive surgery. Today, Carolyn is a powerful domestic violence survivor and advocate. She has dedicated her life to ensuring other women be saved.

Carolyn Thomas spoke about the profile of many women who attract abusers. Often they themselves witnessed abuse while growing up. They have poor self esteem. They see a controlling man as "strong" and even "protective".

**Abuse has many forms: physical, emotional, financial, sexual, and spiritual.** Going to the emergency, women are often accompanied by their abuser. The abuser is looking for pamphlets or cards that may be available to his victim to help her get away. Carolyn Thomas suggested the easiest thing was to have the number of a shelter on the underside of the hospital bracelet. She also said that 75% of women receive battery to their face and neck.

### **Why did she stay?**

She loved him. He promised to change. She thought she could change him. She feared him. All too common comments heard by shelter workers.

### **What lessons are to be learned from her experience?**

The most difficult thing for an abused woman, even when she has supportive family and friends, is to **admit** and to **tell** them that she is being abused. That is the first step. Abused women lead secretive lives especially from close friends, family and neighbours. The issue of domestic violence must be moved from the private to the public domain.

Our next guest, **Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean**, is an articulate and passionate speaker . She spoke of the need for everyone to be a compassionate listener. However, Ms.Jean said we all have a responsibility to act when an injustice is being done. Ms. Jean worked for 8 years with battered women in Quebec. She helped establish a network of emergency shelters throughout Quebec and Canada. Ms. Jean encouraged the conference members to continue their important work.

## **SESSIONS Attended:**

*The Role of Systemic Advocacy in Ending Violence Against Women.* - Our speaker at this session was Pamela Cross, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy, YWCA Canada. Pamela highlighted the role of systemic advocacy in addressing violence against women.

**Where is the Advocacy?** We are so focused on service delivery and frontline workers are overburdened with their own caseloads that political action is waning. **We need political action!** We need a reradicalization campaign.

**Overprofessionalism** muffles the type and quantity of advocacy. Insistence on the part of government for "certification" and "qualifications" has redirected the energies and muffled the workers demands because it is now the government who pays their salary and acknowledges their qualifications. Frontline service workers had to stop the advocacy because there was also no longer time and energy. They are overburdened themselves. Nevertheless, whoever does the advocacy, it must be with frontline workers and their clients.

There is a **Step it Up** campaign which is an election scorecard. It has questions one should ask candidates. Pamela suggested we look it up. [www.stepitupontario.ca](http://www.stepitupontario.ca)

Another suggestion Pamela Cross made was that frontline workers at shelters, in particular, should not have to do fundraising. They need stable, long term funding so that their focus is on their clients' needs and not on whether their doors will remain open.

### **Conclusion**

Pamela Cross was the only person I met that day who knew about CFUW. She was encouraging about suggestions to contact her and work with her. She is goal/issue oriented and a fabulous speaker. Her call for advocacy mirrors our own call within the Status of Women at Ontario Council.

*Working From The Inside to End Violence Against Women* - This session was led by two women who work in the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, in Toronto. This agency serves a high number of Muslim women who are living in situations of violence.

**Mandeep K.Mucina** and **Habiba Abowath** spoke about the difficulties of the women, who are in the majority, South Asian, trying to maintain their social, cultural and familial ties while also trying to leave their partners. These women do not want to leave their neighbourhood, their familiar shops, their childrens' schools etc to go live somewhere else "in the dominant culture". Thorncliffe area is small but very crowded. The elementary school has 13 Kindergarten classes! There are 36,000 people living in this area. The abused women do not want to leave the area because it is where they feel safe. It is important to them to maintain cultural and community ties.

This area is 90% South Asian, with Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran and Iraq and Africa comprising the cultures found here. The area is almost entirely made up of immigrants.

Abuse is not only from a husband but often from the extended family. Too often the women do not know that Sharia Law does not apply here. **Custody** issues are central to these women's concerns. **Forced marriages**, (different from arranged marriages) are not uncommon. Once here, that adds another complication to legal and social issues. **Honour/Izzat** is another layered complication in working with these women.

**Second generation** children often find themselves battling a cultural war between their families/community and the mainstream/dominant culture. **Why do they have to choose one or the other?** Life becomes complicated for these children, particularly in high school.

### **Conclusion**

Immigrant Women often face particular challenges in addition to those women from the dominant culture who are abused. They face isolation of a particular kind because of language, culture, religion and education. Second generation children often straddle the two cultures, that of home and family and that of school or the workplace. **Where do we begin to find a bridge?**

*After She Leaves: A Model for Supporting Woman Abuse Survivors and their Children during the Family Law Process* - Luke's Place Support and Resource Centre for Women and Children, in Oshawa is a unique service delivery model for women and their children during the Family Law process. It is a non-profit centre with a vision: to provide a safe environment throughout the Family Law process. Their services include: a Family Law Networking group with social workers, lawyers etc.

### **Family Law Process**

Statistics show that the average time to resolve a custody dispute is 3 1/2 years in Durham and that on average a woman will see four judges throughout the dispute.

The woman's experience of abuse is not acknowledged or accepted as fact. She is the "witness" in an adversarial forum. She is often pressured to accept joint mediation, joint custody and/shared parenting arrangements with her abuser when she herself does not feel safe and is not in an equal power situation.

There is a manual called "After She Leaves" funded by the Minister of the Attorney General. <http://www.cleonet.ca/resources/1515>

### **Conclusion**

The Family Law process is loaded against the abused woman . It is unsafe and does not provide her with any support during a long and difficult process. The men are better financed, usually they still have the prestige of a job or career which the process is keen to protect and the threat he represents is not diminished significantly. Judges lack understanding and knowledge of the issues.

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## **“Communities Working Together to End Violence Against Women”**

Provincial Conference – Wednesday, February 28, 2008

This was an amazing conference attended by 1,000 (90%+ women) from every possible agency helping abused women: shelters, crisis services, teachers, counselors, YWCA, community centres, provincial services, survivors assistance, John Howard & Elizabeth Fry Societies, college and university courses, witness assistance, victim services, immigration services, police, public safety, native women's services, training centres, family services, mental health support, hospital services, domestic violence death review committee and others.

I attended five talks/workshops:

1. *Making the Law Keep Its Promise – Building a Community Coordinated Response to Domestic Violence* – Mark Wynn, Nashville, Tennessee, policeman
2. *Neighbours, Friends and Families Campaign* – Barbara MacQuarrie, Community Director, Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, London, ON
3. *“Missed Opportunities”: Forum Theatre as a Powerful Tool for Public Engagement* – Dr. Peter Jaffe, Academic Director, Centre for Research on Violence Against Women & Children, The University of Western Ontario, London, ON and Toni Wilson, Safe School Coordinator, Thames Valley District School Board, London
4. *Helping Together Through Co-location: The Family Violence Project of Waterloo Region Shares Its Experience* – seven panelists
5. *Closing Keynote Presentation* by Brian Vallée, Author of *The War on Women and Life With Billy*

I talked to many interesting people; the following might make good speakers:

- I Elma Henry, Victim Services Officer, Correctional Service Canada, Kingston
- I Arianne M. Matte, Sr. Policy Analyst, Stakeholder Relations & Policy Development, Ontario Women's Directorate
- I Detective Deborah Vittie, (New) Domestic Violence Coordinator, Community Mobilization, Toronto Police Service
- I Mandy Bonisteel, Assaulted Women C.C.A. George Brown College

**Summary of talks:**

***Making the Law Keep Its Promise – Building a Community Coordinated Response to Domestic Violence*** by Mark Wynn a Nashville, Tennessee, policeman.

Officer Wynn was the first of many speakers who took the 'domestic' out of domestic violence and instead called it 'woman violence' or 'crimes against women'. He feels domestic violence is the original homeland security issue. 88% of victims are stalked; police should stalk abusers if they are released. Homicide is the leading cause of death

of women in the workplace. Leaving a violent relationship is a process, not an event. Victims are expert witnesses, but police are not trained to interview victims. In Nashville their special program got police, sheriffs, judges and advocates on board and have made a significant difference in the numbers of woman assaults.

***Neighbours, Friends and Families Campaign*** – Barbara MacQuarrie, Community Director, Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, London, Ontario.

This campaign is a partnership between the Ontario government, Ontario Women's Directorate and the Expert Panel on Neighbours, Friends and Families, through the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children at the University of Western Ontario. The education campaign promotes community education, targets educators and fosters coalitions and networks. There is much material available; a DVD presentation, brochures to help friends and co-workers to recognize signs of abuse and what they might do. CFUW clubs could get involved by learning what is available in their community, reading materials for themselves, finding out what they can do to help those serving abused women and children in their home area. Although this talk was aimed at professionals, they were urged to use community groups to help them.

The objective is to finally influence government and policymakers, and that CFUW does well.

***"Missed Opportunities": Forum Theatre as a Powerful Tool for Public Engagement*** – Dr. Peter Jaffe, Academic Director, Centre for Research on Violence Against Women & Children, The University of Western Ontario, London, ON and Toni Wilson, Safe School Coordinator, Thames Valley District School Board, London

This was a fascinating program in learning effective interventions through interactive theatre for friends, family and co-workers/supervisors. Toni Wilson is the playwright and director. We were able to see a video of her play that focussed on abuse of a woman and the reaction of her daughter, minister, boss and her husbands friends. When this play is produced it is run through once and then again in scenes with volunteers from the audience playing one part in a new way. Would you as the minister have been more insistent that the woman tell you what was going on, would you as the daughter tell your mother how much the fighting was affecting you, would you as the husband's friends talk him down when he told anti-female jokes, would you as any of the characters have intervened when a fight was happening? A debriefing follows the production.

The play is aimed at men and boys and has been produced a number of times in the workplace. Scotiabank and others have used it with employees in the London region. The play is available for \$5,000 with three months notice. [Toni.wilson@tvdsb.on.ca](mailto:Toni.wilson@tvdsb.on.ca) 519-452-2000 and [pjaffe@uwo.ca](mailto:pjaffe@uwo.ca) 519-661-2018.

***Helping Together Through Co-location: The Family Violence Project of Waterloo Region Shares Its Experience*** was presented by seven panelists from a hospital, family and children's services, police, shelter, crown attorney and a publisher.

This was a success story by this Kitchener-Waterloo project. Eleven services and agencies are housed in one location – a old house. It is a safe place, not labeled and includes counselling, police, shelter services, and most especially a crown attorney. If a woman comes to one service, it is easy for her to see others at the same place without hassle. We were urged to customize our approach, find out what works best in our agency and to use our voice to give women and children their own voices. I felt that this again was a place for CFUW clubs to find out what your local shelter was doing and help give voice to women and children.

*Closing Keynote Presentation by Brian Vallée, Author of *The War on Women and Life With Billy.**

Mr. Vallée said that his father worked in a paper mill and did the cooking, his mother shoveled snow off the roof and wrote letters to the prime minister. A woman after our own hearts.

*The War on Women* was published in the late fall of 2007. It is full of frightening statistics. Between 2000 and 2006 the total of military and law enforcement deaths was 101 while more than 500 women were killed by their intimate males. There are just tributes to the former and the latter are ignored. The book has a number of recommendations to change awareness and legislation.

- | Domestic violence laws must be gender specific (women)
- | Increase penalty for murder of an intimate partner to 25 years without parole
- | A batterer breaking the terms of bail or court orders against him should be arrested on a new and serious breach of trust charge
- | Halfway houses for batterers so women and children aren't the ones forced to leave the home
- | Universal daycare
- | Sustained funding for shelters and second-state housing
- | Restore full funding for the Status of Women Canada and other women's advocacy groups
- | Transfer jurisdiction for restraining and protection orders from civil to criminal courts
- | Full registration and licensing of all firearms

I recommend this book to everyone, not just women.

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