

Forward

Yes, gender is an election issue! Gender will continue to be an election issue while the numbers of women in leadership and decision making lag behind that of men, while the issues important to women are relegated to minor importance, and while successive governments provide too little resourcing to promote issues of gender equality and inclusion.

The Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place In Canada recently stated:

Stronger policies must be implemented by the provincial government to facilitate the inclusion of women in decision-making, improve women's access to training and education and improve gender equality in the workplace. Governments at all levels must work more diligently to ensure that women's values, experiences, knowledge and skills are better reflected in policy formulation. (P.25, Our Place in Canada Summary Report)

These sentiments are shared by the women's community in this province. Our philosophy is simple: women and men live in our communities, province and country. . . women and men should share equally in the decision making which guides the direction of our communities, province and country. The democratic process of a provincial election will not adequately address the multifaceted needs of women, family and communities, nor will it give our province equal numbers of women and men in the House of Assembly. Therefore, it is crucial that male-led provincial parties make every effort to include the voice and experience of women both in the pre-election process and following the autumn 2003 election. This way of examining issues, this "lens of inclusion," must also move beyond gender to include differences in geography, ability, sexual orientation, age, income, social status and culture. If, at the end of this election process we do not have critical numbers of women in leadership positions, it will be important for political parties to address this inadequacy. How you intend to address this speaks volumes about the vision and values of your party on gender inclusion, and your party's approach to government and leadership in the months and years following Election 2003.

The issues presented here are certainly not a definitive list. There are hundreds of issues in our communities, regions and province which are important and need to be addressed. As women, we know what concerns are important to us, our families, our organizations and our communities. This election guide is simply a tool to use as a means of profiling issues important to women in Newfoundland and Labrador. Feel free to use this guide to inform yourself and your organization. Make your voice heard. Make your vote count!

Joyce M. Hancock
President

“For women to participate fully in society as equal partners with men, changes must occur in all sectors. Women need to be free from violence, be healthy and be active in the political and decision-making circles of society.”

Setting the Stage for the Next Century

Table of Contents

<i>How to Use this Guide</i>	<i>Page 4</i>
<i>Women Seeking Equality</i>	<i>Page 5</i>
<i>Women and Justice</i>	<i>Page 9</i>
<i>Women's Economic Security and Independence</i>	<i>Page 14</i>
<i>Women and Health</i>	<i>Page 18</i>
<i>Women and Education</i>	<i>Page 28</i>
<i>Women and the Environment</i>	<i>Page 31</i>

How To Use This Guide

There are many ways of becoming involved in the political process of an election. As women we have power: to run in an election, to assist women and men (who share our vision for equality and inclusion) to get elected, to attend candidate's debates, to coordinate candidate forums and to vote. Yes, **vote** ~ in an informed, aware and knowledgeable manner. This election guide is informed by dozens of women in dozens of communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. We would like to suggest that you make use of this in any way you wish to raise issues of concern to women, families and communities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

- T **Meet your candidate** ~ Take this election guide to your candidate's headquarters, meet her/him when they visit your area. Find a question relevant to you, your family, community, organization or province. Ask the questions. Raise the issues. Expect the answers.
- T **Plan a candidates forum** ~ Get together with women in your community or organization. Get together with individuals in other communities or organizations and plan a "meet the candidate evening." Take a leadership role in ensuring that issues important to women are highlighted.
- T **Attend leadership meetings** ~ When party leaders visit your community take time to attend. Put a question forward. Bring a friend. Take time to shake hands with party leaders/candidates. Make your presence known, and your issue known. Speak as a voter, yes, but speak as a woman as well.
- T **Listen to the debates** ~ Take the time to listen to candidates or leaders as they speak about provincial and community issues. Notice how often gender issues are profiled and how often women's concerns are given serious discussion. Challenge party leaders and candidates on their commitment to gender issues.
- T **Take time to vote** ~ We cannot allow apathy and indifference to keep us from voting. Instead women must make it known that we are voting for the party or the candidate that has the better policies for dealing with issues important to women, families and communities.

Women Seeking Equality

Since 1996 Newfoundland and Labrador has seen the highest numbers of women in elected office, and the highest number ever in Cabinet. We would like to think that each of the three parties aims to surpass this level of participation by women. In the past decade, as well, we have seen both provincial and federal governments erroneously claim to be addressing women's issues by using gender-based analysis, and claim that government departments are using this tool to inform policies, programs and legislation. The inadequate resourcing and constant underfunding of equality-seeking work is obvious, as well as the lip service being paid to women's social, economic, legal, political and cultural equality. Women and women's organizations are doing more and more of the work of government departments and filling the gaps in services to women, families and communities while the pro-active work of education and advocacy is being left behind.

Women Decision Making and Leadership

Women have much to offer to leadership and decision making, yet our experience and education are not often included in the decisions, policies and legislation formulated by governments.

- N** If women do not make up fifty percent of your elected members following this election, how does your party/government intend to include the voice and experience of women in social and economic decision making?
- N** Would your government undertake a policy or directive whereby every government appointment to boards or commissions will be a woman until women make up fifty percent of all decision-making bodies?
- N** Would your party support a move toward proportional representation as a mechanism for increasing women's political participation?
- N** What is your party's stand on affirmative action / employment equity?

Advocacy / Advising / Education

Newfoundland and Labrador is recognized throughout the country for having a funded, autonomous Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Few are aware of the simple truth that this organization is expected to fulfill a provincially-legislated mandate while struggling to survive financially:

- N** What is your / your party's vision for the role and resourcing needs of the Status of Women portfolio?
- N** Would you commit to providing funding for the Provincial Advisory Council parallel to that provided to the internal arm of the Status of Women department?
- N** How would you/your government ensure that every department uses gender inclusive analysis when making decisions on policy, programs and legislation?

Women's Councils / Centres

Women's Councils / Centres provide services, advocacy and support to women and families in eight communities/regions of our province. They receive a mere \$50,000.00 from the provincial government:

- N** Will you/your government work to establish adequate, long-term funding for the eight existing Women's Councils / Centres?
- N** Would your government provide resourcing to allow new and emerging Women's Councils/Centres to educate themselves and women in their communities as they develop into feminist equality-seeking organizations?
- N** Would your government resource Women's Councils / Centres to allow the staff to have benefits such as health, paid leave and pension?

Transition Houses and Shelters

Since the late 1990's government has been devolving the Transition Houses to be encompassed by the Regional Health Boards. The Provincial Association Against Family Violence, the umbrella organization for the Transition Houses, continues to beg for annual funding although government departments (Justice, Health, Human Resources and Employment and the Women's Policy Office) constantly look to the Association for advice and consultation:

- N** Would your government assist the Provincial Association Against Family Violence by providing adequate resourcing for this organization to fulfill its work?
- N** Would your government make resourcing to the Provincial Association Against Family Violence a line item in the annual budget?
- N** Would your government recognize the dual role of the Transition Houses to provide services to women and children in crisis and to provide education and awareness regarding the issues of family violence? Would your government provide adequate resourcing to Transition Houses to fulfill both of these roles?

Sexual Abuse

The Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Assault Crisis Centre is the only organization directly serving the needs of sexually abused women in all of Newfoundland and Labrador. It receives a mere \$50,000.00 from the provincial government to provide education, counselling, advocacy and a crisis line, as well as providing consultation to government departments:

- N** How would your government address the multifaceted needs of sexually abused women in this province?
- N** How would your government deal with the resourcing issues constantly facing the Newfoundland and Labrador Sexual Assault Crisis Centre?

Additional

- N** Would your party support and resource annual meetings for feminist equality-seeking organizations as a mechanism to share ideas and strategies toward women's equality and inclusion?

- N** Would your government support and resource a biennial provincial women's conference organized by women's equality-seeking organizations?

“In order to achieve the goals of prosperity and self-reliance, we need to broaden our vision and recognize that these goals will not be realized if half the population is left behind. To that end, policies need to be developed that (1) facilitate the inclusion of women in decision-making, (2) improve women's access to education and training, (3) improve gender equity at work, (4) encourage women as entrepreneurs, and (5) support women as they age.”

Joanne Hussey
The Changing Role of Women
In Newfoundland and Labrador

Women and Justice

For decades the organized women's movement has been lobbying, advising and advocating to bring attention to the injustices in the justice system. Inequality is the root cause of violence, yet organizations dealing with violence and inequality continue to struggle for respect and resourcing. Women and women's organizations have been consulted for years, and have provided knowledge, experience, expertise and analysis. Yet, little has changed. Whether we use terms like "domestic violence" or "spousal assault," we are still talking about violence and abuse toward women and children. The lack of legal aid services, conditional sentencing for heinous crimes against women and children, inadequate resourcing for the Victim Services program, and the murders of women at the hands of men who were known by police and justice officials to be abusive continue to be the issues important to women and equality-seeking groups.

Murder

Since 1985, more than two women per year have been killed by men already known to justice officials as being violent and abusive. Many of these murdered women had taken out peace bonds and restraining orders because they feared the violence would continue. In this province our justice system is involved in an inquiry into the wrongful convictions of men. We have never seen any investigation or inquiry into the "wrongful murders" of women killed by abusive men.

- N Would you/your party support a call for a high level inquiry into the "wrongful deaths" of women in Newfoundland and Labrador?
- N Following this inquiry, would your government provide an opportunity for grassroots women's organizations and women with knowledge and expertise on issues of violence and abuse to make recommendations for dealing with the victimization of women by offenders and the justice system?
- N Further to the inquiry and recommendations, would your government construct a **Premier's Council on Violence Against Women** to deal with the inadequacies within the justice system and to advise on the implementation of these recommendations?
- N Would your government ensure that a Premier's Council on Violence Against Women includes women's equality-seeking organizations who have a grassroots knowledge of violence and its impacts on women, families and communities?

Legal Aid

The legal aid system fails to meet the needs of women. The program gives priority to criminal offences, and assisting women to escape abusive relationships by providing legal representation is not a priority.

- N** Will your government begin a process to re-examine the gender bias in legal aid and adequately resource family law, which women need to deal with violence and poverty?
- N** Would your government remove the requirement that the family home is considered a disposable property for women seeking legal representation for family law matters?
- N** Given that legal aid represents individuals charged with domestic assault, would your government ensure that women choosing peace bonds/restraining orders to deal with violence are also provided legal representation?
- N** How will you/your party deal with the serious shortage of legal aid lawyers in the province, especially in the Labrador region?

Violence Prevention Initiative

The provincial government has a minimally resourced government-community program to address issues of violence. This program has many positive aspects. However, it is understaffed, under-resourced and does not have sufficient profile within the partner departments (Justice, Health and Community Services, Human Resources and Employment, Education, Youth and Post Secondary Education).

- N** Describe your party's vision of a government-community partnership focussing on violence prevention?
- N** How would you/your government use the information and analysis from eight years of government-community collaboration to provide a province-wide program dealing with violence as a community issue?
- N** There is a lack of gender-based analysis in school-based programs aimed at dealing with violence. Bullying programs do not acknowledge or address the inequality or gender issues implicit in violence. How does your party intend to deal with this issue?

Royal Newfoundland Constabulary Public Complaints Commission

A recent complaint of sexual and gender harassment against the Chief of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary was not dealt with adequately by the Public Complaints Commission.

- N** Given that the Public Complaints Commission is not able to deal effectively with issues of sexual harassment against civilian employees, what mechanism would you/your government implement to provide a safe process to address gender and sexual harassment within the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary?
- N** Would your government's policy include a request for officers in a position of power and authority over witnesses and victims to remove themselves until the issue has been investigated?
- N** Would you/your party support the design and implementation of gender and sexual harassment prevention programs rather than the neutral respectful workplace programs which give minimal attention to issues of gender-based violence and abuse?

Incarcerated Women

Women in the Newfoundland and Labrador Correctional Centre for Women are not having their needs adequately met. Many have severe mental health issues and others are in need of counselling to deal with abuse and personal violation. The Department of Justice chose not to replace the Classification position there for an entire year, exacerbating the situation. There is also a lack of supports at the facility to assist inmates in employment and basic life skills. This institution does not reflect a women-centred approach to corrections as currently the management and supervisory positions are occupied by male staff.

- N** What services, supports could/should the Justice Department put in place to address the needs of women at the Correctional Centre?
- N** What pro-active measures would you/your government put in place to create a more women-centred, women-led environment at the Correctional Centre?
- N** What alternatives would you/your party suggest to dealing with the inappropriate sentencing of women with serious psychiatric illnesses?

- N** The Corrections and Community Services Division of the Department of Justice has a pregnancy accommodation policy. For women who work at the Clarenville Correctional Centre, other than relocating to St. John's, what would your government do to address this profound disrespect to women Correctional Officers?

Same-Sex Marriage

The federal government is poised to make changes to marriage legislation to provide the same marriage rights and responsibilities to opposite and same-sex couples. British Columbia and Ontario already provide opportunities for same-sex marriage.

- N** Would you/your government support writing or amending current legislation to enable same sex couples to marry?
- N** How would you/your government deal with the homophobia and backlash this issue has evoked in politicians and the general public?

Victim Services

Victim Services was originally implemented to deal with the needs of victims of violence (mainly women) to reduce their re-victimization through the court process. The caseloads of Victim Services workers are enormous, and changes in the program mean that workers spend less time with victims.

- N** How would you/your government deal with the needs of women victims of violence who seek redress through the justice system?
- N** Describe your approach to dealing with the issue and concerns within the Victim Services program?
- N** Due to legislative changes in the Criminal Code in 1999, Victim Services experienced an explosion of referrals (104% increase), yet front line staff increased a minimal 20%. What commitment can you give to address the needs of the Victim Services program?
- N** Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province in Canada that has no dedicated program for children who must testify in court. What will your government do to ensure this vulnerable group are properly prepared for court?

- N** The Victim Services program has two front-line workers in Labrador to service a vast geography with many isolated communities. What is your government's plan to improve service to this region?

Justice Issues (General)

These questions/concerns were raised by women who feel that violence, abuse and harassment are not effectively addressed by government departments:

- N** Women who seek redress for violence or attempt to deal with family law matters through court processes experience a lack of sensitivity and a lack of proper services from police, lawyers, and judges. What initiatives would you/your party develop to ensure that police, court officials and judges are properly trained to deal with women and families who have experienced violence?
- N** There are inadequate supports and services in place for immigrant and new Canadian women, children and families. The exclusion faced by this population due to language, gender, culture, religion and the racism in our schools and communities has escalated since September 11, 2001. What approach would your government take to dealing with the needs of immigrant and new Canadian families?
- N** There are many communities in Newfoundland and Labrador like Churchill Falls where women experiencing violence either have to leave their homes and communities or live with the abuse. How would your government resource community safe houses and community based violence prevention programs?
- N** Men who abuse women and children receive little or no programming while incarcerated or upon release. How would you/your government deal with the need for programs for men who abuse women?
- N** Currently, 911 services are not available to most regions of the province. In order to obtain emergency assistance, individuals must dial the 7-digit number of their nearest police detachment. This has serious implications for victims of violence, as well as for other emergency situations. What steps would your government take to create an effective accessible emergency response initiative throughout the province?

Women's Economic Security and Independence

Many women are living far below the poverty level. Single mothers, senior women, women on fixed incomes and women living with disabilities are going without the basic necessities of life. The provincial government has been redesigning social services and women, especially in rural and remote areas of Newfoundland and Labrador, are concerned that there are no human services available to deal with poverty issues. The issues of housing, childcare and transportation costs are problems for women throughout the province, but especially so in coastal Labrador communities.

Dealing With Poverty

- N Do you support the call for a guaranteed annual income (GAI) which is indexed to the cost of living? How would your party implement this?
- N How would you/your party address the inadequate income support levels and the needs of women and families on fixed incomes or struggling in low waged jobs?
- N How would you/your party deal with the needs of people and families on low income who need insurance on property and household effects?
- N How would you/your government deal with the high cost of products/services on the North Coast of Labrador (transportation, food, hydro, postal)?
- N Three quarters of women working in Newfoundland and Labrador earn under \$35,000 and thirty percent of these earn less than \$7.00 per hour according to government's *From the Ground Up Report*. How would your party deal with this growing disparity in the working wages of women?

Redesign of Social Services

Since 1996, government has set about redesigning the delivery of social services to meet the needs of Newfoundland and Labrador people and families. Many are now “falling through the cracks” with needs which are no longer met either by Human Resources and Employment or Health and Community Services.

- N** The removal of social workers from the Human Resources and Employment (HRE) department has brought a businesslike approach to the delivery of human services. Would you/your government undertake a review of the HRE changes with a view to restoring social work positions to this department which deals with social services?
- N** How would you/your government resource this department with staff who provide proactive prevention and early intervention social services to clients who are unemployed and living in poverty?
- N** Do you support the implementation of a program whereby people on income support or fixed income could have appropriate dentistry services? How would this program work?
- N** How would you/your party deal with the intrusive actions of “welfare cops” and the control these interventions and investigations have on single mothers?
- N** Would you/your party remove the Human Resources and Employment income support clawback for single parents receiving student aid?
- N** Would you/your government support a policy of allowing individuals/families on income support to share accommodations without reducing benefits?
- N** What steps would you/your party take to adjust income support rates to adequately provide women and families with the basic necessities of life such as rent, food, fuel, transportation, medical treatment/care and dentistry?

- N What plans/programs/initiatives would your party implement to support the transition to work of individuals receiving income support?

Labrador

Residents of Labrador, particularly on the north coast, are subject to higher cost of living rates than the island portion of the province. Residents of Nain pay nearly double the cost of food as residents of St. John's, as well as higher rental and housing costs.

- N What steps would your government take to address the high poverty rates and reduce the cost of living on the north coast of Labrador?

Childcare

One of the factors inhibiting women from taking part in skills training that would prepare them for well-paying jobs is the lack of a childcare program. Some provinces, such as Quebec, have made great strides in dealing with women's need for adequate childcare. Newfoundland and Labrador does not have an effective childcare policy. There is a lack of respect for the profession of Early Childhood Educators and a lack of support for parents to access skills training and employment opportunities.

- N Will publicly-funded, universally accessible, high quality affordable daycare be a priority for your government?
- N What steps would your government take to introduce a provincial childcare program?
- N What are you/your party willing to do to promote and support the profession of Early Childhood Educators?
- N Family Resource Centres exist in many communities and regions throughout the province. What would your government do to ensure that women and children have transportation to Family Resource Centres?
- N How would your party expand the services of Family Resource Centres to provide programs for women and children?

Housing and Homelessness

There is a serious shortage of rental housing in St. John's and other regions of Newfoundland and Labrador. Single mothers, low income families and women with disabilities have identified the serious shortage of safe and affordable housing. The new federal-provincial affordable housing initiative will provide lower rent market housing, which is not social housing, and may not remain affordable after a set period.

- N** What would your party do to ensure safe, affordable housing is available for women living on low incomes, including single mothers, women with disabilities, single women, and senior women in the province?

- N** Would your party support the development of a province-wide housing strategy to address the housing barriers faced by women and other marginalized groups?

- N** What would your party do to ensure there is adequate inspection and enforcement of provincial and municipal regulations regarding building conditions, fire safety, public health and residential tenancies across the province?

In order to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development, women and men must participate fully and equally in the formulation of macroeconomic and social policies and strategies for the eradication of poverty. The eradication of poverty cannot be accomplished through anti-poverty programmes alone but will require democratic participation and changes in economic structures in order to ensure access for all women to resources, opportunities and public services.

United Nations
Fourth World Conference for Women
Platform for Action

Women and Health

Health is affected by many factors, including gender, income, education level, where we live, the state of our environment and our social support networks. These and other factors are the key determinants of health. Recent trends in healthcare in this province have meant a shift in focus from acute care to community caregiving, prevention and early intervention and healthy and active living strategies. This has meant an increase in women's responsibilities for the care of children and seniors without financial compensation or adequate community supports. Despite the obvious links between gender and health, and the different needs of women and men within the healthcare system, women in this province continue to lack adequate access to services such as cervical and breast screening programs, midwifery, postnatal support and followup, abortion services, reproductive and sexual health education and diagnostic testing.

Key Determinants of Health

Health Canada has identified twelve key determinants of health: **gender; income and social status; social support networks; education and literacy; employment and working conditions; social environments; physical environments; personal health practices and coping skills; healthy child development; biology and genetic endowment; health services; and culture.**

- N What steps would you / your government take to promote good health based on the key determinants of health?

- N How will your party ensure policies and programs are responsive to sex and gender differences and to women's health needs.

Midwifery

Newfoundland and Labrador has a surgical birth rate two to three times that recommended by the World Health Organization and higher than eighty percent of other Canadian hospitals. Women have no choice when it comes to pregnancy and delivery. Midwifery has been shown to safely reduce birth surgery, bring choice, control, continuity and is cost effect and women-centred.

- N Would you / your government include midwifery in its plan for the provision of primary health care?
- N How would you / your government support women in Labrador who must leave their communities to access medical care during childbirth?

HIV / AIDS

HIV infection rate for women is on the rise across Canada; Newfoundland currently has the second highest male to female ratio of HIV infection in the country. The provincial government does not provide any operational funding for the AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador.

- N What steps would you / your government take to address this women's health issue?
- N The Aids Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador, in partnership with Health and Community Services and other partners, is putting forward a Provincial Strategy on HIV/AIDS. Would your government be willing to support this strategy?
- N Pregnant women in Newfoundland and Labrador are being tested for HIV without their consent. Would you / your government support a program where all pregnant women are offered HIV testing as part of prenatal care following HIV / AIDS counselling with the informed consent of the women?

Privatization

The principles of universality, public administration, comprehensiveness, portability, and accessibility are the cornerstone of the Canadian healthcare system. In order for all citizens to receive adequate healthcare, the administration of this province's healthcare insurance plan must be carried out on a non-profit basis by a public authority, cover all medically necessary services, and be accessible to all citizens of the province.

- N What measures would you / your government implement to ensure healthcare services in this province remain publicly owned and delivered, in accordance with the principles of the Canada Health Act?

- N What is your party's position on the creation of public-private partnerships within healthcare and social services?

Women and Decision-Making

Though women make up the majority of healthcare workers, women are under-represented as policy makers, decision makers and educators in many segments of the health sector. Certain groups of women are doubly disadvantaged due to race, culture, class, sexual orientation, age, ability, etc. and are less likely to be included in key roles and areas of the health system.

- N What steps would you take to ensure women and women's health concerns are adequately and accurately represented in healthcare decision making processes, (i.e., representation on the regional health boards, etc.)?

Access to Healthcare

There has been a recent shift within healthcare from acute care to community care. This has placed an increased burden on women to provide caregiving in their families and communities, such as care of seniors and homecare, often without financial compensation. Women as a group are less likely to be employed full-time and have access to uninsured services such as prescription drugs. Some groups of women encounter further barriers in accessing the healthcare system due to geographic location, transportation costs, disability, age and other factors. This negatively impacts upon women's mental and physical health.

- N What steps would you / your government take to provide adequate resourcing and supports for community caregiving?

- N The population of this province is aging; women tend to live longer than men, and the poorest group in society is senior women. What will your government do to ensure accessible and affordable healthcare for this vulnerable group?

- N What steps will your government take to ensure non-insured medical expenses, such as prescription medications and transportation costs, are available and affordable for vulnerable groups such as low income women and children and the working poor?
- N How will your government ensure that adequate healthcare is available to residents of rural and remote areas of the province, particularly within Labrador where transportation for medical purposes is extremely costly?
- N Would your government agree to create provincial funding of a disability related supports program which would be flexible, individualized, and not means tested?
- N Many communities in Newfoundland and Labrador have no mental health programs and services. What will your party do to expand services and ensure that people in rural and remote regions of our province have access to mental health programs?
- N How would you ensure that a full complement of addictions treatment and prevention services, including addictions to gambling, drugs and alcohol, are accessible and affordable for all women?
- N How do you see the role of nurse practitioners in the delivery of health services in all parts of the province?

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Although gender is a key determinant of health, women continue to lack adequate access to sexual and reproductive health services such as breast screening, mammography, cervical and pap exams and abortion services, especially in rural and geographically isolated areas.

- N Would your party support a provincial sexual health strategy to ensure consistency in services provided around the province?

- N** Would your party expand and adequately resource a provincial breast and cervical screening program that can be accessed by women in all parts of the province?
- N** What steps will your government take to ensure that women in all regions of the province have access to abortion services?
- N** What steps would you / your government take to ensure adequate prenatal and postnatal support and follow up services are available to women in all regions of the province?

“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Women’s health involves their emotional, social and physical well-being, and is determined by the social, political and economic contexts of their lives, as well as biology.”

U.N. Platform for Action
Beijing, 1995

Women and Education

Education is a human right. However, funding cuts and privatization agendas in past years have severely compromised public and post-secondary education. According to a poll conducted by the Canadian Federation of Students, almost half of lower income Canadians cite lack of money as the reason for not attending college or university. A survey conducted by Statistics Canada in 2000 found that over 70% of 18-20 year-old high school graduates cited financial barriers to participation in higher education. Though the average Canadian student has a debt load of \$25,000, federal legislation prevents students from accessing bankruptcy protection. Many students, particularly single mothers, cannot afford to return to school. Education for the public good is being undermined as governments allow profit-making enterprises to fund and deliver education programs and services.

Access to Post-Secondary Education

Access to post-secondary education has become increasingly difficult for students, particularly vulnerable groups such as single women, single mothers, low income families, persons with disabilities, persons living in geographically isolated or rural areas, and international students. Students from high income families are 2.5% more likely to have participated in university studies than students from low income families. When tuition fees are adjusted to inflation, undergraduate students are paying more than at any time in the past century. In addition, 43% of our province's residents live beyond commuting distance to a university program. High education-related expenses and inadequate student aid have pushed university education beyond the reach of low and moderate income people who need to relocate from outlying areas to attend university.

- N** How would your government ensure that all students in Newfoundland and Labrador have access to quality post-secondary education without financial, social, cultural, physical and geographical barriers?

- N** Would your party support the provision of non-repayable grants to students receiving disability pensions regardless of the program in which they are enrolled?

- N Would your government support the implementation of free, high quality daycare on all post-secondary campuses for students, faculty and staff?
- N What is your party's position on the elimination of tuition fees for all post-secondary studies?
- N Would your party make financial aid available to part-time students on the same basis it is available to full-time students?
- N Would your government advocate for the creation of a federal post-secondary education act that mirrors the principles of the Canada Health Act to ensure all citizens have access to high quality, affordable education?

Increasing Women's Participation

The majority of classroom teachers are women, yet women are largely under-represented in administrative and leadership positions. The majority of students entering into universities are women, yet women are under-represented in decision-making processes. These and other barriers to women's participation must be addressed if we are to pro-actively work toward women's equality and inclusion.

- N What steps would your government take to create educational programs within schools and post-secondary institutions to raise awareness of gender and diversity, and reduce inequality and violence?
- N What type of career counselling programs would your party suggest for secondary and post-secondary students to increase the representation of women and other marginalized groups in non-traditional, male-dominated fields of study (e.g., engineering, technology, natural resource development)?
- N How will you ensure that women are included in administrative and decision-making processes at all levels of education?

- N What steps would your government take to provide more bridging programs, such as Women Interested in Successful Employment, Orientation to Trades and Technology and Techsploration, which provide opportunities for women to access nontraditional employment and training and enter the workforce.

- N How would your government deal with the resourcing needs of organizations such as Women in Resource Development Committee which exist to provide holistic programs for women seeking training and employment in the resource based sector?

Decreasing Student Debt

According to the Canadian Banker' Association, debt should not exceed more than 10-15% of our income. In 1982, the average female student debt for an undergraduate degree program was 17% of her earnings after graduation. By 1995, this figure had risen to 51% of female graduates' earnings. Students today face higher levels of debt and poverty than any other generation. Working women still experience a wage gap; women with a college diploma earn 65% of men's incomes, and women with a university degree earn 70% of men's incomes. Women are also less likely than men to obtain full-time, full year employment with non-insurable benefits. This continued persistence in the wage gap means that men can repay student loans more quickly with less interest. Student loan repayments further widen the gender gap between men and women.

- N What is your government's plan to reduce and/or eliminate student debt load for post-secondary studies?

- N How would your party address the deepened poverty women face as a result of having obtained student loans to access post-secondary education?

- N The current loan remission program does not acknowledge single parents and the higher debts they have accumulated. How would your government work to improve financial aid and access to single parents wanting to return to school?

Privatization and “P3's”

We have seen a recent trend within Canada to privatization and/or the creation of public-private partnerships (P3s) in the public education system, as well as other public service sectors. These trends are dangerous, leading in many cases to staff pay cuts and layoffs, service cuts, user fees, and a lower quality of service. They also cost taxpayers more money in the long run, as the public assumes the risk and pays for the service, often through long-term 20-30 year leases with buy-back clauses, while the profits are payed to shareholders. Because of higher interest rates, projects involving private sector borrowing costs more than with public financing. According to New Brunswick's Auditor General, that province's first P3 school would have cost \$775,000 less if it had been built by the province; interest rates alone were \$400,000 than if the province had borrowed the money. In Nova Scotia, 30+ P3 schools will cost taxpayers \$32 million more than if built in the traditional manner. This wasted money could have been injected into educational spending instead.

- N** Public schools exist to serve the public good, not the corporate good. What is your government's commitment to publicly owned and delivered education?

- N** What is your government's position on the privatization of post-secondary colleges and universities?

- N** What would your government put in place to ensure that diplomas and certificates granted by private, for profit, post-secondary institutions are regulated to ensure good quality and meet appropriate industry standards?

K-12 Public Education

Education is the right of every child in Newfoundland and Labrador. In 2000, more than one in four (26%) of this province's children were found to live in poverty. Yet, women and families are forced to supplement their children's public education by paying for transportation, books, materials, lunches, field trips, sports equipment, extracurricular activities and other needs. These costs must be provided for each and every child, placing additional stress on low income families and single mothers and creating a two-tier education system between the wealthy and the poor.

- N** The delivery of quality education focuses on healthy child development in intellectual, physical and emotional areas. How will your government remove financial barriers, such as extracurricular fees, to ensure that all children in the province have equal access to quality education?
- N** Despite the current focus on healthy and active living, low income families and single mothers are struggling to afford healthy, nutritious foods. In addition, many schools provide or promote unhealthy foods, such as fast food, soft drinks and potato chips, to students. Would your government consider implementing a province-wide nutrition policy for primary, elementary, intermediate and secondary schools?
- N** Would your party expand the school lunch program into a provincial initiative that can be universally accessed by schoolchildren?
- N** Transportation to school remains an issue for many parents in Newfoundland and Labrador. What is your party's position on the provision of busing services for school children?

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”

Article 13.1

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Training and Employment

Many inequities still exist for women within the areas of employment and training. In this province in 2002, 53.4% of women over the age of 15 were involved in the labour force, compared with 64.1% of men. This is lower than the national rate of 60.7% for women and 73.3% for men. According to Statistics Canada, women have accounted for about seven in ten of all part-time employees since the late 1970's. Though it is often assumed that women obtain part-time work to balance their work lives with family responsibilities, many women simply cannot access full-time, full year positions, nor the training they need to obtain better employment. This disparity has implications for women in areas such as employment insurance, where women need to work more weeks than men in order to qualify for benefits. In addition, the wage gap between men and women is still pervasive. In 2000, Newfoundland and Labrador women earned an average income of \$18,341, compared to \$29,267 for men. Provincially, women's earnings are only 63% of men's. Women are still generally clustered in lower-paid jobs in lower paying sectors of society, such as service work and homecare, while men tend to occupy higher paying, administrative and upper managerial positions.

Minimum Wage

A large percentage of women in this province work in sectors such as the retail, service and tourist industries, which very often pay at or close to the minimum wage. Because the minimum wage is among the lowest in the country, this adds to the high level of poverty for women in Newfoundland and Labrador.

- N What steps are you / your party willing to put in place in order to raise the minimum wage in this province to a reasonable living wage?

Skills Training

Many women cannot enter into skills training because of lack of resources. Part of this problem stems from the fact that they cannot access adequate employment to make them eligible for federal training dollars.

- N What would you / your government do, if elected, to assist women who are new to or re-entering the work force in accessing support for skills training?
- N How would you make skills training available to women throughout the province, particularly in rural and remote areas?

- N** How would your party support and expand programs for women (i.e., Women Interested in Successful Employment, Women in Resource Development Committee) which provide holistic training for women re/entering the work force?

Employment Equity

There are many sectors of the workforce in which women and other equity seeking groups are not equally represented when compared to men. Some of these sectors are in science, engineering, trades and technology where these groups are grossly under-represented. Experience has proven that inequity does not change without programs designed to change such imbalance.

- N** What is your position, and the position of your party, on the issue of employment equity in the public and private sectors?
- N** Do you / your party believe that employment equity legislation is necessary? How could such legislation increase women's participation in nontraditional areas of employment?

The Fishery

Women have historically played a large role in the fishery. As the fishing industry changed over the years from family-based to factory-based production, women found work in the fish plants. For example, women made up 46% of the unionized workers at the Trepassey fish plant before its closure in the early nineties. Despite women's prevalence in this industry, gender was not considered in policies addressing plant closures, adjustment and retraining.

- N** Would your party support an early retirement program that is cost-shared by the federal government in the fishing industry?
- N** Would you / your government support the appointment of equal numbers of women and men to joint management councils to shape the future management of the fishery?

Pay Equity

The ratio of women's earnings to that of men is considerably less in this province than in other parts of the country.

- N What is your position and the position of your party on the issue of pay equity in the public and private sectors?

- N Currently there is no pay equity legislation in place for the private sector. Would your party support pay equity legislation and regulation for the private sector? How would you / your government go about implementing this?

“Even when they are able to overcome the perception that women aren’t suited for trades, women continue to face barriers to accessing the training they need in order to become qualified for higher paying jobs in trades and technology. Because women have traditionally been in the minority, if not entirely absent, from training programs in trades and technology the programs tend not to be structured to meet women’s training needs. Women need training that is flexible, respectful of their skills and experiences, takes into consideration their particular requirements for financial support and acknowledges their commitment to unpaid work, including childcare and eldercare. Women in rural areas face additional barriers to accessing training opportunities including the need to commute long distances or relocate. When policies to address these needs are not in place, women are prevented from accessing the training they need in order to benefit from the economic opportunities presented by the development of the oil and gas industry and mega-projects like Voisey’s Bay.” (P. 295).

Joanne Hussey
The Changing Role of Women In
Newfoundland and Labrador

Women and the Environment

Every resident of Newfoundland and Labrador is entitled to clean and safe air, water, food, and communities free from toxic chemicals. Government policies and regulatory standards must prevent pollution before it happens, expand citizens' right to know about toxins, and guarantee protection for citizens, particularly for the most vulnerable.

- N How would you ensure systems of accountability for businesses and corporations, and others responsible for polluting or depleting the environment and its natural resources and wildlife?
- N What steps would your government take to conserve the natural resources of Newfoundland and Labrador? E.g., controlling waste, protecting against overuse, encouraging sustainable technologies which meet human needs without destroying the environment.
- N What measures would your government adopt to reduce and restrict the unnecessary use of pesticides, chemicals and sprays into the environment and atmosphere?
- N Wildlife, forests, mountains, wetlands, rivers, lakes, historic sites, parks and green spaces, oceans and coastlines are all part of our provincial heritage. What steps would your government take to preserve our provincial heritage for our children and future generations?
- N Water is the basic necessity of life. It is a right, not a privilege, and should not be for sale nor for profit. How will your government ensure that residents of the province have universal, free access to clean, safe drinking water?

*This Women's Election Guide is dedicated to the memory of Ann Maria Lucas of Stephenville Crossing who was brutally murdered on September 21, 2003. The lives of women in Newfoundland and Labrador tragically taken by acts of violence is a reminder to all politicians that **violence against women is a political issue.***