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# NewsBulletin

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Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women

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## Newfoundland and Labrador Women @yahoogroups. ca

Do you feel isolated in your work as a feminist? Want to share your thoughts on equality/equity issues with other Newfoundland/Labrador Women? Sign up by sending a message to [nflabwomen-subscribe@yahoogroups.ca](mailto:nflabwomen-subscribe@yahoogroups.ca).

The Advisory Council's Community Liaison, Michelle Smith, is moderating the list to ensure that we are not inundated with cross-postings, advertisements and attachments. This is a great way of initiating feminist discussion, sharing strategies, and of course our joys and frustrations in pursuit of social and economic inclusion.

### **Social Assistance Act Legislation Changes**

Advocacy groups, individuals on income support and clients and staff of the Department of Human Resources and Employment (HRE) are being invited to participate in a consultation process to review and make recommendations for new Social Assistance Legislation. The Minister Responsible for HRE, Gerald Smith, stated that, "It is important that our legislation reflect our new direction." Although advocacy groups had often pointed out the numerous difficulties with the former Department of Social Services, there are also problems with this new "two lines of business" approach (income support and employment) under the redesigned HRE.

Since the Department of Health and the Department of Social Services metamorphosed into HRE and HCS, clients can no longer expect to discuss the issues of poverty and inadequate income in a holistic manner with workers in either of these departments.

Minister Smith has promised "no workfare," yet we have to wonder how far we are away from this possibility when for so many in our province the only employment available is at mega stores, call centres and the fast food businesses. How far away are we when the cost of university education is steadily climbing, employment in the volunteer sector is under resourced and access to entry level training is restricted.

This consultation offers a questionnaire which does not invite us to address the need for a government department which vulnerable people can access at difficult times. We must take every opportunity to name our concerns with the direction of this legislation. Regardless of the focus of the consultation we must name the reality of individuals who are socially and economically disadvantaged, and recommend appropriate and respectful interventions by a government department which has a mandate to provide services and programs for this population.

Perhaps the real question should be: Will the new legislation reflect

the needs of people vis-a-vis the HRE department, or can we expect the legislation to mirror the redesigned mandate of HRE regardless of the needs identified in this consultation process?

To have your say call toll free: 1-800-563-6600.

### **Violence Prevention Month Our February Challenge**

In late January, the Advisory Council was invited to a photo opportunity during which government Ministers proclaimed February as *Violence Prevention Month*. Nice photo, neat idea, blending community organizations and Cabinet Ministers as a show of solidarity in our quest toward violence free communities. Then women's groups began to wonder just how much our elected officials know about the initiatives and services ongoing in community and regions throughout our province. So we offered a challenge ~ each of our forty-eight MHA's has been given a letter requesting that they provide current information from their district on any services, advocacy or education regarding violence prevention. We have asked that this exercise be completed in February so that our network of women's groups can have a report by International Women's Day. Check our Newfoundland and Labrador Women list serve to see if we have heard from your MHA.

## Where we are Today

International Women's Day is fast approaching and we often use that time to recognize our achievements as a women's movement globally. But let us consider women's lives in our own country and the thirty years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

In 1972 there were key recommendations made to the Canadian government of the day. Four of these were:

" That a Status of Women Ministry be established with legislation and resources to affect changes in the social/economic and legal status of Canadian women.

" That an independent arms length Advisory Council be established to provide research, critique and advice on the social, economic and legal conditions of women in Canada: the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW).

" That support and resourcing be provided for the development of a national feminist lobby group ~ NAC.

" That a special fund be established for the development and sustaining presence of community based equality seeking organizations.

Since 1990 our federal government began to erode the support to the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Across the country Women's Councils and Centres staged protests to keep the minuscule dollars from the Women's Program funding. Now funding has been turned into project dollars with direction determined by bureaucrats within the Status of Women offices. The Status of Women ministry is buried within three major portfolios (Labour, Homelessness,

Multiculturalism). The CACSW has been eliminated. Some provinces have lost their Advisory Councils, while others have lost their Council's independence and arms length status. Our national lobby group, NAC, is forced to survive on projects and donations from women and our beleaguered equality seeking organizations.

Perhaps we can hope that our new federal Status of Women Minister, Claudette Bradshaw, will want to see her portfolio not merely survive, but *thrive*. But to do that she will need to find mechanisms to hear the voices and experiences of grassroots women's organizations. Advisory Councils will need strong links to the women's community to provide information on women's social and economic reality.

This is not to say that some individual women have not done well for themselves, but as a movement concerned with equality and equity we need to be vigilant. Vigilant to an agenda of globalization which would make us believe that women are doing great and that we no longer need organizations and resources specifically targeted at equality seeking work. Perhaps it is time for another Royal Commission on the Status of Women. In today's reality, what would be our key recommendations?

## **Government-Business-Labour Huh!**

Following four years of believing that the Strategic Social Plan was a new way of engaging government, business, union and community we are now being told that the real partnership will drop community with the launching of a "Strategic Partnership to Foster a Collaborative Consensus - Building Approach to Advancing the Socio-economic Initiatives of Newfoundland and Labrador." Go figure . . . as community, advocacy and volunteer groups, which of these three partners represents your interests?

### **Labrador Women, Let's Chat!**

A series of discussions by women/for women/about women are taking place in Nain and Hopedale. Facilitators for these "women's chats" include Ruth Flowers, TIA, Frances Murphy, Board member with the Nain Safe House and Joyce Hancock with the Provincial Advisory Council. Women who live in these communities are coming together to talk about their place in decision making within community organizations, issues of self esteem and healthy relationships, as well as concerns regarding gender, culture and geography. The organizers of this exercise are hoping to strengthen the existing women's organizations and to examine ways to include the voices and experiences of women who are not presently involved.