

# **Focus on Women and Community Central Newfoundland Women Speak**

**Report on Roundtable  
Facilitated by  
Provincial Advisory Council on the  
Status of Women**

**October 14, 2005  
Grand Falls - Windsor, NL**

## Foreword

In mid October, with the autumn colours glowing majestically against a bright sunlit sky, women from throughout Central Newfoundland communities gathered in Grand Falls-Windsor. They came at the invitation of the Central Newfoundland Status of Women Council and the Gender Status of Women Council to discuss a number of issues affecting women, families and communities. In 2005, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, this organization has been working with local equality-seeking women's organizations to facilitate similar sessions in other regions of the province, and we were pleased to be able to have meetings with women in this region of Newfoundland and Labrador.

To enable women from Central Newfoundland to discuss the issues and outline strategies in dealing with the many challenges, the Board and Staff of the Advisory Council played a facilitation role throughout the day-long event. This allowed local participants and leaders to debate and discuss local, regional, provincial and national concerns. Participants at the *Focus on Women and Community: Central Newfoundland Women Speak* roundtable spent the day examining the state of women's equality through discussing issues and concerns on women and poverty, women and violence, women's health and well-being, and women and work. It is obvious to women involved in equality and anti-violence work that strategies which improve the lives of women, improve the lives of families and communities.

In this report we have attempted to capture the main themes of the panel presentations and the four-roundtable discussions. We have also drawn out the major recommendations and situated them at the beginning of the report while ensuring that other suggestions, strategies and recommendations are embedded in the full report.

A very warm thank you to the Coordinator of the Central Newfoundland Status of Women Council, Myra Reid, who handled all aspects of the promotion and logistics of the *Central Newfoundland Women Speak* forum. Thank you as well to the women who attended; your words and wisdom enriched the dialogue with your experience and insights. To the panellists, thank you for your analysis, and thank you as well for your candour. We trust you will find this report useful in our mutual quest to advance women's equality while improving the lives of women, families and communities.

In Sisterhood,

Joyce M. Hancock  
President

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## **Reflections**

*On behalf of the Central Status of Women Council / Women's Centre, the opportunity to come together with other women in our region to discuss the issues that are important to us, and share strategies to move our agenda for women's equality forward, was fantastic!*

*It was wonderful to work with the Advisory Council Board. Their willingness to share their knowledge, experience in facilitation and organization of the roundtable discussions allowed us the opportunity to fully participate in the discussions and celebrate being in the company of women from all over Central.*

*To feel the strength coming from a room full of women who are driven by a shared quest for equality was amazing – what an experience!*

**Myra Reid**  
**Coordinator, Status of Women Council**

## Summary of Key Recommendations

### Women's Health and Well-being

- A provincial patient advocate should be implemented to assist women in navigating the health care system.
- A collaborative community-government approach must be developed for health care. This could mean involving women in the design of health systems.
- Additional funding should be allocated to human resources needs in the health care system. This would allow for adequate recruiting and retention of health care professionals in both rural and urban areas.
- Funding should be provided to community and women's equality-seeking groups in order to promote women's health and wellness at the community level.
- It is more cost effective to utilize the Nurse Practitioners program to provide a full complement of health care services to women and families.

### Women and Violence

- Provincial Family Violence Legislation should be implemented.
- Government needs to initiate and resource more support groups and services for victims of violence, as well as more support and rehabilitative services for abusers and violent offenders.
- Stronger sentencing laws need to be implemented for perpetrators of violence against women.
- The Department of Education should move forward on anti-violence education and awareness programs by utilizing the Violence Prevention Program.
- Women's equality-seeking organizations need to sensitize the media on how women's equality concerns and violence against women are portrayed to the public.
- Women's equality-seeking groups need to encourage the media to challenge politicians and decision makers on addressing issues of violence against women and women's inequality.
- Police should involve women's equality-seeking and anti-violence organizations in their violence prevention efforts.

- Women's organizations should support police in their efforts to secure more resources to work in the area of violence prevention.

## **Women and Poverty**

- The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador needs to immediately provide the pay equity settlement owing to health care workers.
- The provincial minimum wage needs to be increased to a reasonable living wage (e.g., \$10 per hour).
- The provincial government needs to measure progress and develop specific targets and long-term solutions to eliminate poverty through this Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- The federal government should implement a national drug program that reflects the principle of universality (e.g., accessible, affordable, high quality).
- Federal and provincial governments need to implement pay equity legislation for both the public and private sectors.
- The federal government needs to remove the current Employment Insurance waiting period and implement a guaranteed annual income (income supplementation).
- The federal government should extend the Employment Insurance program to include parental / maternal / sick leave benefits for self-employed women.
- Governments at all levels need to implement employment equity programs (affirmative action programs) to increase women's wages and participation in secure / standard employment situations with access to benefits and pensions.
- Businesses and community groups need to ensure that community food banks offer healthy and nutritious foods to women and families.
- All levels of government must work together to develop concrete strategies to implement the recommendations of the United Nations CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Committee around eliminating women's poverty.

## **Women and Work**

- Governments at all levels need to develop and implement progressive labour market policies that respond to the inequities women experience in the workforce.
- The Province should adopt the Netherlands policy of portability in order to give workers the ability to transfer benefits from one employment situation to another.
- The federal government should follow the Norway example of providing a guaranteed level of income (i.e., Guaranteed Annual income) to all citizens.
- The federal government should implement a national, universal pharmacare program, as well as universal health and dental care programs.
- Provincial government strategies to address the gendered wage gap should include providing pay equity, increasing the minimum wage to a liveable wage, and implementing employment equity policies and programs.
- Government should implement and resource publicly funded, accessible, community-based programs for early childhood development, child care, seniors' care and care of other dependants.
- Funding for the K-12 education system should be restored in order to provide all children with essential academic and social education. This includes physical education, the arts, cultural outings and field trips, as well as ensuring students have access to nutritious food and healthy school environments.
- To deal with the overwhelming levels of student debt, funding should be increased for post-secondary education, including graduate studies.
- The federal government should exempt low-income families, the working poor and indebted graduates from paying income tax.
- The Province should immediately provide the \$80 million pay equity settlement owing to NAPE women health care workers. Pay equity was among the key recommendations to Canada and the provinces in the UN CEDAW Committee Report.

**Focus on Women and Community  
Central Newfoundland Women Speak  
Friday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005  
Time: 8:30 – 2:30 (Lunch Provided)  
Location: Mount Peyton Hotel**

The Status of Women Central Council, the Gender Status of Women Council and the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women are bringing together women who live and work in Central Newfoundland communities who are concerned about issues which affect women, families, communities and our province. Participants will spend the day examining the state of women's equality through discussions on women and poverty / women and violence / women's health and well-being / women and work.

8:30 a.m.	Coffee and Registration
8:50 a.m.	Welcome: Gender Status of Women Council Status of Women Central Council
9:00 a.m.	Introductions and expectations
9:30 a.m.	Opening Panel: Local women provide a "reality check" on women's equality through the four focus areas outlined above,
10:15 a.m.	Questions and observations
10:30 a.m.	Nutrition break
10:45 a.m.	Poverty Reduction Strategy: What government has learned
11:10 a.m.	Questions and observations
11:30 a.m.	Facilitated roundtable discussions: Poverty / Violence / Health and well-being / Women and work
12:30 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m.	Roundtables continued
1:30 p.m.	Feedback from roundtables
2:15 p.m.	Closing Panel – Where to from here?
2:30 p.m.	Wrap up / Closing comments

## **Guidelines for Panellists**

### **Opening Panel**

#### **Local women provide a “reality check” on women’s equality**

Thank you for agreeing to be a panelist. We would like you to speak for 5-7 minutes. When you have reached the six-minute mark we will gently remind you to conclude your remarks. We ask that you consider the following:

- Thinking about women within families, communities and regions, what are the most critical issues facing us?
- Are women’s concerns being heard by decision makers locally, provincially or nationally?
- Any examples of successes and challenges in women’s concerns being heard and acted upon by decision makers?
- Any ideas / advice to women’s equality seeking organizations in our work for the social, economic and political equality of women?

### **Closing Panel**

#### **Where to from here?**

Considering what you have heard today, please take 3-4 minutes to reflect upon the following:

- How will women’s organizations use these strategies to advance the equality and inclusion of women?
- Advice to politicians / policy makers on how to include women’s perspective and experience in all social and economic decisions which so profoundly affect the lives of women, families and communities?

## **Roundtable Facilitators’ Guide**

Facilitators should start with a quick round of re/introductions. Depending on your focus area, women and poverty / women and violence/ women’s health and well-being / women and work, participants are encouraged to think about the challenges women face in dealing with these concerns. In other words think about them through a women’s equality lens.

- Make a list of these challenges (for about thirty minutes)
- Next: begin to discuss some strategies to dealing with these challenges.
- Think outside the box, “imagine a community / province / society where women’s voices count, where women’s experiences are used to shape policy and guide the direction of politicians and decision makers.
- Strategies / suggestions should be named and flip-charted.

Note: There is no need of a long discussion on who will report back. Inquire as to whether a local woman would do this; otherwise take that responsibility as a team of facilitators.

## Opening Panel

### Local women provide a “reality check” on women’s equality

Each panellist was asked to speak on one of the focused areas of women’s health and well-being, women and violence, and women and work and address the following questions:

- Thinking about women within families, communities and regions, what are the most critical issues facing us?
- Are women’s concerns being heard by decision makers locally, provincially or nationally?
- Any examples of successes and challenges in women’s concerns being heard and acted upon by decision makers?
- Any ideas / advice to women’s equality seeking organizations in our work for the social, economic and political equality of women?

#### Panellists:

Heather Brown, Department of Health and Community Services

Lorraine Hearn, Central Regional Coordinating Committee Against Violence

Elaine Price, Newfoundland Association of Public and Private Employees

The following is a summary of the key points from each of the panel presentations:

#### **Heather Brown**

##### **Women’s Health and Well-being**

- Health and well-being has traditionally been defined as the absence of disease. Today it includes a much more holistic view that encompasses our mental, social, spiritual and physical health.
- The status of our health is often determined by who we are, and where and how we live. Determinants of our health include gender, education, employment, socio-economic status, child development, personal health practices, social support services and the physical environment.
- Our ability to maintain good health is also influenced by a number of factors, such as individual life style, active living and access to community-based recreational services and facilities.
- A critical challenge facing women in maintaining good health is the lack of access to information and education about health promotion.
- Many women do not have access to information and networks to know what services, programs and resources are available in communities.
- Another challenge for women accessing health services is the lack of community-based, complementary services. For example, the lack of childcare programs prevents women from attending medical appointments.
- An example of a successful initiative in health care is the Wellness Coalitions, which emphasize health promotion and wellness, including education on maintaining overall health. Another example is the Care Givers Networks.

- Child care services have also improved as they have expanded over the years and become governed by legislation.
- Another major challenge is the lack of access to basic health services. It is important to engage in lobbying to ensure that women's voices are being heard if we are to move forward on women's health care services.
- We must be vigilant to move beyond the traditional definition of health, and adopt a more holistic approach that links women's overall well-being to health.

**Lorraine Hearn**  
**Women and Violence**

- The denial of violence is very prevalent in our community. Unless the physical effects of violence are clearly visible, the community tends to believe that violence doesn't exist. This challenge is further compounded when community leaders deny that violence is an issue.
- People are not inclined to become involved in cases of family violence. They believe this is a "family issue" and outsiders should not become involved. This perception lends to an overall lack of awareness of the nature and prevalence of family violence.
- Members of our community do not have a clear understanding of the dynamics of violence as including verbal, emotional, financial and sexual forms of abuse. This lack of understanding often leads to victim-blaming, particularly in cases of sexual violence (e.g., date rape).
- Most of our organizations and programs are fairly well prepared to deal with physical injuries and family violence crises. However, there is often little in the way of longer-term support and follow-up for victims (e.g., long waiting lists for counselling).
- Bullying is a major issue in our communities; we need to become aware of this issue in order to assist both victims and bullies.
- The safety of victims who leave violent situations is a major concern. During the transition period, the wait time for emergency housing is approximately one week. This does not help women who need to escape immediately. It is not always feasible for women to travel to transition houses outside their communities when they have jobs, children in school, etc.
- There is no solid legislation that would protect victims of violence. Victims of violence need their own legislation so that women will not be under pressure to stay in violent relationships for the sake of their children or because they have no other options. For example, why should the victims have to leave their homes at all - why can't the abusers be removed instead? Women leaving abusive relationships often have to settle for unsuitable housing accommodations.
- More accountability needs to be taken by perpetrators of violence.

- The justice system does not adequately respond to victims of violence. Most victims cannot afford a lawyer and are referred to legal aid, which has an extremely long waiting list. Often the legal aspects of a violent relationship break-up are crucial, as most victims have nowhere to live and cannot access their personal possessions once they leave their homes.
- A major gap in violence prevention lies in efforts to deal with victims of violence, their children, and/or the perpetrators themselves in an effective and timely manner. More focus needs to be on preventing violence than responding to violence after it happens. Simply identifying problems and responding to crises will not solve the problem.
- Municipal politicians have been reluctant to acknowledge their role in violence prevention. We need to ensure municipal counsellors become more educated and involved in violence issues.
- We have made great strides with Government in addressing violence, such as the development of provincial programs and initiatives aimed at violence prevention (e.g., Violence Prevention Initiative, Seniors' Abuse Strategy and Family Violence Legislation). While programs such as VPI are helpful, we need to be vigilant that we are continuously discussing violence, the effects of violence and the fact that violence is rooted in women's inequality.
- Equality-seeking organizations need to continue our work on education and awareness, lobbying government and collaborating with other organizations to address violence and inequality.
- Community efforts to address violence will only come with the realization that violence is not only a personal problem but a community problem, and that violence prevention is everyone's responsibility.

## **Elaine Price**

### **Women and Work**

- The majority of women who work typically have additional responsibilities of caring for children and ageing parents. Women still bear the majority of responsibility for domestic work and work outside the home.
- The way in which society deals with women's work (e.g., clustering in traditionally female-dominated sectors, gendered wage gap, pay inequity) leads to women's deepened economic inequality.
- The nature of women's paid work has changed over time to increasingly non-standard, non-secure arrangements, such part-time jobs with low pay, no benefits, little control of working conditions and not enough paid hours.
- The decades of women working in secure, well-paying jobs in the public sector has ended due to government restructuring. In those public sector jobs where women predominate, men generally hold more senior, higher paying positions.
- Due to the gendered wage gap, women are earning approximately 80% of their male counterparts' earnings.

- The 2004 Supreme Court decision to withhold pay equity from NAPE women health care workers based on the provincial economy, which at the time was said to be in “fiscal crisis,” contributes to women’s economic inequality. Although the province is no longer experiencing an economic crisis, the pay equity settlement has still not been provided.
- Another barrier preventing women from accessing employment is the lack of publicly funded, community-based child and senior care programs.
- Positions that pay women \$6.50 per hour without benefits such as paid family leave do not meet basic needs and standards of living. This is even more problematic when women collect Employment Insurance, which provides only 55% of their earnings.

### **Participants’ Questions and Observations**

Following the presentations, participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions of the three panellists:

Heather Brown, Department of Health and Community Services  
 Lorraine Hearn, Central Regional Coordinating Committee Against Violence  
 Elaine Price, Newfoundland Association of Public and Private Employees

The following is a summary of the key points of the discussion:

#### **Q- How much has violence increased in Central Newfoundland?**

We are hearing about it more often because we are out there actively working to promote violence prevention. School violence has doubled in the past ten years, but this may be largely because our awareness of violence has increased.

#### **Q - What can we do about women’s double workday? Do you think there will be a time when women are paid for domestic labour?**

No. Unfortunately, women’s economic contributions are not recognized. We have to start looking at public policy. Europe has done this; they have funded childcare, and supported women by enabling them to receive benefits for temporary employment. There is a big disconnect in this country between policy makers and politicians.

#### **Q - Do you think our provincial budget should be geared towards health?**

Our budget is currently focused on hospitals and health care. It also needs to focus on health trends with children, including activity, food, and the impact of heart disease. That is not to say we don’t need money for technology. We need to focus on illness prevention, and look at prevention measures within schools. School health consultants are needed, along with “active school projects” where children have daily activities. We need to realize that health starts with us. It takes more than \$500 per month for a family to eat healthily. This figure does not include high quality foods, simply the basics.

**Q – What programs or resources exist in our region to deal with bullying? Should bullying programs start at the adult level?**

Many people are bullied but the acknowledgment that bullying happens is low. We make presentations on bullying to three groups: parents, children and teachers. There is, however, still a real unwillingness to accept that our treatment of people can impact them negatively. We need to feel that we will be treated equally and safely. Equally as important as educating children is educating parents, as parents need the necessary skills to cope with the effects of bullying. It is also important to remember that adults are bullied too.

**Q - Why is it the victims are the ones who have to be removed from the violent situations?**

This is still somewhat of a grey area. However, it is hoped that the upcoming Family Violence Legislation and the Family Youth Act will address this issue.

**Q - What is the key to addressing violence issues?**

It is important that we are all working together, collaboratively. We need to continue to address violence, and get the message out that it's everyone's responsibility. We really need to continue to educate people about the roots of violence being based in inequality; we need to be vocal and continue to network. We also need to remember that health is important and pull away from the traditional definition and look holistically; link every issue including violence back to health.

**Q - What can we do about the double workday / women's unpaid work?**

We need to see adequate pay for women's work; it is doubtful that women's unpaid work such as domestic, childcare and senior care will ever be paid. There have been positive and progressive policies in European countries towards this but, unfortunately, there is no commitment to women's equality in this country. We need to continually push women's equality issues forward on government agendas.

**Q - In terms of legal aid for single moms, what facilities / agencies can women access for assistance?**

Nothing new has been implemented. Second stage housing exists in Gander through Cara House. When women leave abusive relationships, they usually leave with nothing. Legal aid can help with this process such that women can access their personal belongings. Due to the lack of available services for these women, and the fact that they are generally only available outside of women's own communities, victims of violence have a tendency to return to the abusive home.

## **Presentation on the Poverty Reduction Strategy What Government has Learned Aisling Gogan**

The following are key highlights from the presentation on the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

### **Poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador: Who Lives in Poverty?**

- 11.9 percent of the population, or 61,000 individuals living in 33,000 families
- Older adults, particularly those aged 55-64 (about 20% or 12,000 individuals)
- Children (15.5% or 16,000 children)
- Single-parent families (44% or 5,000 families including 9,000 children)
- Single people (38% or 19,000 individuals)

### **Poverty in Newfoundland Labrador: What is the Depth and Persistence?**

- More than 20% of poor families have a poverty gap of over \$6,000.
- Single women aged 18-64 are the poorest.
- 26% of the population experienced poverty at some time between 1996 and 2001.
- Of those who experienced poverty, 30% experienced only one year in the six year period; almost 12% were poor the entire six years.

### **Background: Sources of input**

- Workbook and other submissions.
- Toll free feedback line and e-mail.
- Twelve workshop sessions held in June & July.
- Sessions with groups focused on poverty on with particular expertise/knowledge.
- Focus groups with individuals living in poverty or vulnerable to poverty.
- Internal government - front line (e.g. HRLE staff survey) and policy and program.

### **Poverty Reduction Strategy: Workshop Sessions**

- 12 sessions with community-based groups, business and labour.
- Turnout was high from community-based groups, but low for business and labour.
- Generally very positive, particularly about integrated, comprehensive approach.
- Summary report will be available in the next few weeks.

### **Poverty Reduction Strategy: Other forms of Input**

- Sessions with organizations focused on poverty or with particular expertise or knowledge and with individuals living in poverty.
- About 200 phone calls and e-mail submissions.
- About 60 written submissions from individuals and organizations.
- Feedback from a wide range of people, including many Income Support clients.
- Individuals working for low wages, and people in the community who advocate on behalf of or provide services for those in poverty.

### **Preliminary Summary of Input: Key Themes**

#### **Coordination and Awareness**

- Need for better coordination - within government, between government and community groups, between community groups.
- Need to increase awareness and make access easier to current government programs.
- Need to support community-based groups to better coordinate, network and share information.
- Need for mechanisms to involve community in an ongoing way.

#### **Education Issues**

- Importance of early learning & childcare.
- Concern about the K-12 system and its ability to meet the needs of less academically-inclined students.
- Need for career development activities.
- Issues around student debt as creating poverty and deterring those already in poverty from pursuing post-secondary.

#### **Income Support**

- Disincentives and barriers for Income Support clients who want to work.
- Issues for Income Support clients who want to access post-secondary education.
- Rates too low and not reflective of cost of living increases, particularly housing and energy.

#### **Health Related Issues**

- Link between addictions and poverty, including VLTs.
- Nutrition, including the cost of eating well and the need for education on how to eat well.
- High costs of prescription drugs as a barrier to work and stress for families.
- Mental health issues as a cause and consequence of poverty.

#### **Employment/Economic Development**

- “Non-standard” work issues, particularly for women (Income levels and benefits).
- Need for more full year/full time employment.
- Need to stay focused on the link between social and economic development.

- Social economy needs to be explored.
- Need to raise minimum wage.
- Need to work with federal government to fix EI system.

### **Other points**

- Link between poverty and violence must be kept in mind, particularly as it relates to women's equality.
- Particular challenges for persons with disabilities and need for adequate supports.
- Need a community-driven focus in areas with a high concentration of people living in poverty.

### **Challenges**

- Working together in a coordinated manner.
- Finding the right policy mix.
- Assessing the combined impact of programs, and ensuring the elements work together, including marginal effective tax rates.
- Devising long-term solutions and incremental steps for 2006-2012.
- Measuring progress and developing targets.

### **Next Steps: Highlights of Workplan**

- Phase 2 – detailed jurisdictional and best practices review, further consultation, focused interdepartmental work (complete November 2005).
- Phase 3 – detailed goals and key early elements of the strategy (complete March 2006).

### **Participants' Comments and Observations**

The following observations and comments were raised by participants following the presentation on the Poverty Reduction Strategy:

- Government should consider reducing or exempting income tax for low-income families as well as the working poor.
- Many women over the age of 50 are widowed and poor. Seasonal work constitutes a large part of their income, and Employment Insurance is often supplemented. They are also faced with a two-week waiting period to receive Employment Insurance. This is a significant amount of time to be without any source of income.
- The minimum wage needs to be increased to reflect a reasonable "living wage" (e.g., \$10 per hour). In January of 2007 it will be increased to \$7.00, which is insufficient.
- The Province should undertake a jurisdictional comparison of our social programs in European countries (e.g., Norway, Netherlands) instead making comparisons to more conservative countries such as Ireland.

- The UN CEDAW Committee made specific recommendations regarding women's poverty in Canada. Government needs to develop a concrete strategy to implement these recommendations; this could include exempting low-income families, the working poor and indebted graduates from paying income tax.
- Government needs to provide the \$80 million pay equity settlement to NAPE health care workers. Pay equity was also highlighted as a key recommendation to Canada and the provinces in the UN CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Committee Report.
- Government needs to look at the family as a whole in developing strategies to reduce poverty, and recognize that children are poor because their mothers and families are poor.
- Government should also look at taxation in terms of the types of initiatives or programs that could help reduce income tax.

## **Facilitated Roundtable Discussions: Women and Poverty / Women and Violence / Women's Health and Well-Being / Women and Work**

During the afternoon roundtables, women participated in discussions on the focused areas of women and poverty, women and violence, women's health and well-being and women and work. Participants were encouraged to think about the challenges and strategies women face in dealing with these concerns. During the discussions participants were asked to think outside the box, and imagine a community / province / society where women's voices count, where women's experiences are used to shape policy and guide the direction of politicians and decision makers.

### **Women's Health and Well-being**

#### **Challenges:**

- Many financial challenges exist to women's health and well-being. The overall expense of accessing basic health care services is a barrier for many women, whether it is an eye exam, a dental appointment or simply maintaining a healthy diet.
- Those who can afford health care still face a number of other barriers, such as long wait lists, a lack of available services in communities, transportation, and the high turnover rate of health care professionals, particularly in rural areas of the province.
- As women are the primary caregivers of their households, oftentimes the well-being of their dependents takes precedence over their own health. Women are further challenged by the lack of available community-based supports.

- A major challenge to women's health and well-being is the stress of balancing the care of young children and aging parents with employment outside the home. This can negatively affect women's mental health and adversely affect relationships with partners and children.
- The lack of confidentiality around personal medical records is a concern for women. Many are concerned that medical personnel now have access to their computerized records and full medical history of clients, regardless of the reason they are seeking medical care. This is inappropriate in many situations, and also creates a potential for abuse of access to privileged information and medical files.
- The privatization of health care services creates further barriers because of affordability.

## **Women's Health and Well-being**

### **Strategies:**

- A collaborative community-government approach must be developed for health care. This could involve having community groups informing women about health and wellness, as well as governments involving women in the design of health systems.
- In order to address high turnover rates in the health system, more money needs to be dedicated to human resources to allow for adequate recruiting and retention of personnel in both rural and urban areas.
- It is more cost effective to utilize the Nurse Practitioners program to provide a full complement of health care services to women and families. This will maximize the knowledge potential in dealing with women's health concerns.
- A provincial patient advocate should be implemented to help women navigate the health care system, and provide assistance to women who are falling through the cracks.
- Government needs to initiate more education and awareness programs regarding health and wellness so that women know what services are available and how to access them. For example, women need access to information about how to feed their children, including foods they should eat and what affordable, nutritious alternatives exist to expensive foods.
- Funding should be provided to community and women's equality-seeking groups to promote women's health and wellness at the community level. The present lack of funding for, and low number of, these organizations mean only the most basic needs are being met. Issues such as senior women's concerns, care giving, access to health services in rural areas, long-term care, and healthy aging are never discussed or dealt with due to lack of time and funding.
- Women need to utilize strategies to maintain their individual health on a continuous basis. These could include taking a break and practicing self-care as well as teaching self-wellness techniques to their daughters.

## Women and Violence

### Challenges

- There is a prevailing attitude in society that violence is acceptable; violence issues are not taken seriously and are often trivialized. This lack of public awareness contributes to the perception of violence as a “hidden” problem.
- We do not consider violence against women to be a “real” problem because it is often unreported. This adds to the difficulty of educating victims about the myths and stereotypes around violence and the stigma of victim blaming.
- Victims of violence are vulnerable due to the lack of available, appropriate emotional supports and intervention services.
- A challenge lies in how to teach parents about the initial causes of bullying, and what they can do to provide education, support and assistance to children.
- The lack of adequate community-based resources such as shelters, along with a lack of support, courage, and self-empowerment, act as barriers to women leaving violent situations.
- There is also a lack of awareness about the few resources that do exist to assist women leaving violent situations.
- The justice system has traditionally penalized the victims of violence rather than the offenders. For example, women have had to leave the family home with their children to escape violence instead of the abusive partner. Women and children would be at less of a risk if the violent offenders left the home instead of the victims (e.g., Family Violence Legislation).
- When violence is reported, there are oftentimes repercussions to victims and families, including: lack of safety due to lengthy police response time; lack of confidentiality; complaints being dismissed or trivialized by authorities; labelling and stigmatizing of victims; women reporting violence not being able to keep their children; and the lack of long-term community-based supports and services for women.
- There is a lack of community-based programs for abusers, including rehabilitative services in prisons and other available programs. Attendance and participation are not enforced in the existing programs for offenders.
- Additional challenges exist particular to rural and isolated areas of Newfoundland and Labrador, including the decrease in resources, the increasing inability to access education, and the increasing normalization and acceptance of violence.
- There is a lack of political accountability, support and leadership at municipal, provincial and federal levels in addressing violence against women.
- In general, there is a lack of acknowledgment and response by authorities to “hidden” forms of violence, such as emotional, psychological, financial and other types of abuse.
- Sentencing laws trivialize victims of violence and do not support women (e.g., conditional sentences) who seek assistance from courts.
- There is a lack of accountability by employers for workplace harassment. Oftentimes victims have nowhere to take their complaints or to seek redress without personal risk or repercussions.

- A major challenge is media bias and insufficient interest in reporting / raising awareness of violence against women.

## **Women and Violence**

### **Strategies**

- Counselling programs need to be available to assist victims of family violence who are still living in the home.
- Governments need to initiate and resource more support groups and services for victims of violence, as well as more support and rehabilitative services for abusers and violent offenders.
- Women's organizations need to be strategic and arrange meetings with political leaders in order to make them aware of the shocking reality of violence.
- We need to find ways to change public attitudes about violence beginning in schools. Teachers, administrators and principals must demonstrate their support and understanding of violence issues, and all students must take anti-violence courses and learn personal survival strategies. Even school buses need to develop plans to address violence and bullying.
- As women, we need to challenge, starting within our own families, the traditional stereotyped view of women as weaker, vulnerable, and less equal than men.
- The Department of Education should move forward on anti-violence education and awareness programs by utilizing the Violence Prevention Program.
- Schools need to provide education to help empower parents to become aware of the signs of violence, such as what bullying looks like, who to approach and what to expect from others. The education system needs to create opportunities for children and parents to learn together.
- Appropriate laws need to be put in place to address violence against women, i.e., Family Violence Legislation as well as stronger sentencing measures for violent offenders.
- Women's organizations need to work with the media to raise awareness on how media reports violence against women and women's equality issues.
- We also need to encourage the media to challenge politicians to address violence against women and women's inequality.
- The RCMP needs to be accountable for its response to violence against women, and expose the sense of futility about the ineffectiveness of anti-violence laws.
- We need to work with the police to prevent violence by facilitating anti-violence training, and supporting requests for additional resources and dedicated officers responsible for violence against women.

## **Women and Poverty**

### **Challenges**

- Poverty affects women as well as their children and families. The expense of childcare is such that women will terminate employment outside the home because their earnings will just cover childcare costs; incomes do not provide enough money for necessities such as food, clothing or fuel.

- Balancing work outside the home with family responsibilities is a challenge due to women's care giving role, particularly in the care of aging parents. This issue is also linked to the challenge of seniors trying to financially survive on inadequate pensions.
- Younger adults also face poverty barriers in accessing educational opportunities. Many students who are unable to qualify for students loan programs are prevented from accessing post-secondary education. When students are able to qualify, women experience greater student debt due to the gendered wage gap and the fact that women pay higher interest because it takes longer to earn the same incomes as their male counterparts.
- Rural students particularly face financial barriers in terms of accessing educational institutions in urban areas and the associated high costs of moving, rent, utilities and transportation in addition to tuition fees. During the school year, student loans do not provide enough money for students to travel to and from home communities.
- Poor health is linked to poverty, as many families cannot afford basic nutritional needs. High quality, nutritious foods are not affordable to many, while unhealthy foods are far less expensive.
- As reliance on our consumer-driven way of life has increased, people have lost the traditional skills that enabled them to live healthier, i.e., growing vegetable gardens, making bread and cooking skills. Communities need to be empowered to help themselves through developing shared resources such as community gardens and clothing banks.
- The overall price increase of most necessities, such as housing and heating oil, has contributed to increased poverty. As a result, we are seeing an increase in middle class poverty. The middle class is disappearing as the gap between the wealthy and the poor continues to increase.
- Women and families living in poverty lack adequate information and education about the available resources and supports they can access at the community level.
- Federal, provincial and territorial levels of government are not working collaboratively to implement and resource initiatives to reduce poverty from a structural / systemic level (e.g., national policy and program standards, changes to the Employment Insurance System, designations for the Canadian Social Transfer, changes in international trade policies, etc.).
- In some cases the application of the "universality" principle in program delivery works to the disadvantage of those who require assistance the most (e.g., the federal government's recent decision to divide the budget surplus in cheques distributed to all low-income Canadians rather than designating the funds to those living in deepest poverty).
- An ongoing and serious challenge is the link between poverty and violence, and the cyclical nature of social exclusion (i.e., poverty leads to poor health, unemployment, increased crime, violence, and therefore leads to further poverty and social exclusion).

## Women and Poverty

### Strategies

- Governments at all levels need to review the current benefits and policies in place to relieve the burden of poverty for low income families, and effectively communicate what programs and supports are in place for women and families living in poverty.
- Decision makers need to learn about and understand poverty issues, and work with communities to implement recommendations to reduce poverty. This also means our communities and the general public need to become better educated about the nature of poverty.
- We need to encourage groups that work on poverty issues from a service-delivery perspective to also develop an advocacy arm. Government should work to support our need for both better services and advocacy.
- The principle of universality should be equally applied to ensure all citizens are able to enjoy a reasonable and healthy standard of living (e.g., public programs, access to Education, Medicare). This means establishing standards such as affordable education (therefore contributing to the empowerment of women), better programs for seniors (e.g., access to medication and a national prescription drug program), raising the amount of seniors' pensions, and providing adequate tax breaks for low-income individuals and families.
- Governments need to listen to women and families living in poverty to understand the issues and identify what strategies will truly help. This means ensuring women have a strong voice in the development of all policies and programs.
- Businesses and community groups need to ensure that food banks have healthy and nutritious food available to women and families in need. Too often the food donated to the banks is unhealthy (processed, expired, refined, high sugar and saturated/trans fat content) with little or no nutritional value.
- The provincial government needs to increase the minimum wage to a reasonable living wage (e.g., \$10 per hour).
- The federal government needs to provide a national drug program that reflects the principle of universality (e.g., accessible, affordable, high quality).
- The federal government needs to implement pay equity legislation for both the public and private sectors.
- The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador needs to immediately provide the \$80 million pay equity settlement owing to NAPE women health care workers.
- The federal government should remove the current Employment Insurance waiting period and implement a guaranteed annual income (income supplementation).
- Governments at all levels need to implement employment equity programs (affirmative action programs) to increase women's wages and participation in secure / standard employment situations with access to benefits and pensions.
- The federal government should extend the Employment Insurance program to include parental / maternal / sick leave benefits for self-employed women.

- Governments at all levels need to support and increase the participation of women in decision-making positions. Communities need to encourage and support women when they get elected or appointed to positions.
- The K-12 educational system needs to be reformed in order to become more family-friendly. For example, some schools require in-house social workers to provide assistance and support to children and families experiencing difficulty.
- The K-12 education system needs improvement in terms of consistency in the level of students' achievement. For example, all grade 12 students should graduate high school with same level of knowledge regardless of where in the province they attended school.

## **Women and Work**

### **Challenges**

- Poverty presents a major challenge for women in particular. Women's incomes tend to be less than men's, and more women than men are unemployed. Too many women are working part-time, seasonally, for minimum wage, with no job security or benefits.
- Women's lack of access to secure, high-paying wages restricts their ability to participate in all aspects of community life.
- Income support does not adequately cover the cost of basic necessities for women and their families. The rising cost of food, heat, fuel and other needs is very challenging for those on fixed incomes, particularly women. Women's ability to obtain employment is very limited when their basic needs (e.g., rent, transportation, clothing, heat) are not being met.
- A challenge to women obtaining secure, well-paying employment is lack of access to post-secondary education. The accumulation of large student debts is a deterrent for both men and women, but since women's incomes are generally lower and family responsibilities often greater, the barriers are worse for women.
- Family responsibilities present a challenge to women's employment, as women still provide the majority of care giving for children, elderly parents and other dependents. This means that some women have to terminate or refuse employment when it becomes available.
- Many young adults have left rural communities to find work or get an education, leaving behind the elderly, the young, and other dependents who require care that is usually provided by women.
- A major challenge to women is that education is no longer 'free' at any level of the system. Too many add-on costs limit opportunities for students from low and mid-income families to access a decent education and develop self-esteem. Single parents, primarily women on low incomes, bear the brunt of this burden.

- Women often leave their own self-care until last, giving priority to other family members for time and money spent on recreational activities, fitness, cultural activities, medical services, social supports, political action and other activities necessary to participate fully in community life. Many of these activities are available only in some parts of the province. This lack of self-care means women often lose the self-confidence needed for successfully entering or re-entering the workforce or assuming leadership roles.
- Women form the majority of those who experience the precarious nature of work (e.g., part-time, seasonal, temporary, no pension plan or benefits).

## **Women and Work**

### **Strategies**

- The provincial government needs to immediately provide the \$80 million pay equity settlement owing to NAPE health care workers.
- Governments at all levels need to develop and implement progressive labour market policies that respond to the inequities women experience in the workforce.
- The Province should adopt the Netherlands policy of portability in order to give women the ability to transfer benefits from one employment situation to another.
- The federal government should follow the Norway example by making available a guaranteed level of income for all citizens (i.e., Guaranteed Annual income).
- The federal government should implement a national, universal pharmacare program, as well as universal free health and dental care programs.
- Governments need to provide publicly funded, accessible programs in communities for early childhood development, elder care and care of other dependants.
- Funding for the K-12 education system should be restored in order to provide all children with essential academic and vocational education. This includes physical education, the arts, cultural outings and field trips, as well as ensuring students have access to nutritious food and healthy school environments.
- Provincial government strategies to address the gendered wage gap should include paying up on pay equity, increasing the minimum wage to a liveable wage and implementing employment equity policies and programs.
- Women need to develop individual strategies to balance home and work responsibilities with self-care.
- Funding for post-secondary education, including graduate education, must be increased so students are not carrying overwhelming debts.

## **Closing Panel - Where to from Here?**

Panellists were asked to consider what they heard during the day and reflect upon the following:

- How will women's organizations use these strategies to advance the equality and inclusion of women?
- Advice to politicians / policy makers on how to include women's perspective and experience in all social and economic decisions which so profoundly affect the lives of women, families and communities?

### Panellists:

Yvonne Gillingham, Gender Status of Women Council / Women's Centre  
Joyce Hancock, Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women  
Myra Reid, Status of Women Central Council / Women's Centre

The following is a summary of the concluding comments from each of the panel presentations:

### **Yvonne Gillingham, Gender Status of Women Council / Women's Centre**

- Women's organizations can use the strategies and recommendations from today's discussions to inform and guide the work we undertake in our communities.
- It is important that we seek out every opportunity to talk to Members of the House of Assembly, Members of Parliament and senior bureaucrats about women's issues.
- Local governments need to become more in tune with social issues. We need to ensure that our town officials are accountable to the women of our communities for moving women's equality forward.
- The perception exists that women have reached equal status in society. However, women do not have the equality many think we have achieved. Women want action; it is time to move forward with concrete actions to advance the status of women and to end violence against women.
- It is important to remember that social and economic issues are interrelated. We need to be vigilant in finding ways to understand and explain these links.
- As women's equality-seeking organizations, we need to be more vocal to ensure that our concerns are heard by governments and communities.

## **Joyce Hancock, Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women**

- The strategies and recommendations from this meeting will be compiled into a report and provided to the Central Newfoundland Women's Council, the Gender Women's Council and all of the participants here today.
- It is critical that women work collaboratively on issues: e.g., union women and women's equality-seeking community organizations need to continue to mobilize on issues such as pay equity.
- Women's equality-seeking organizations need to keep issues of violence and abuse on their agenda. Conversely, organizations that work on violence need to stay grounded in women's inequality as the root cause of violence.
- Women's organizations need to speak up when consultations yield no tangible results. Collaboration is more critical than mere consultation.
- The Poverty Reduction Strategy having finished a provincial consultation should now embark on a collaborative process with grassroots organizations to determine the best policies for eliminating poverty.
- Both the media and government's communication machine should be challenged when they claim that women's equality has been achieved or that having more women appointed will necessarily move forward a women's equality/equity agenda.
- We must always build bridges as grassroots women's organizations between other community organizations as well as between grassroots organizations and government politicians and decision makers.
- Regardless of provincial government funding for services or federal government funding projects, women's equality seeking and anti-violence organizations must always remain independent entities determining their own agenda.

## **Myra Reid, Status of Women Central Council / Women's Centre**

- As women and women's equality-seeking organizations, it is important that we continue to create opportunities to come together to share our experiences, analyze and strategize. We need to be continuously discussing the issues that affect us as women.
- As women's equality-seeking organizations, we need to work collaboratively with other organizations that share a common agenda for equality.
- We need to encourage and support women who take on leadership roles. As women, we need to feel that we can and should speak out. We should also feel that it is our responsibility to challenge our decision makers to improve the status of women.
- It is critical that women's equality-seeking organizations continuously seek out opportunities to work with women in rural communities to find out what is important to them (i.e., Status of Women Central Council's new project entitled *Mature Women Speak*).

- We need to think outside the box. Women's issues have generally not been given priority or viewed as important within our communities. However, if we shift our thinking and truly begin thinking about women's issues as community issues, we could make concrete progress toward equality.
- As advocates who speak independently, we sometimes disagree with government decisions or directions that negatively affect women, which may be challenging for decision makers. However, this is part of our work toward the goal of women's equality.

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***One Woman Singing***

One woman **singing (marching, laughing, crying, loving)**  
Won't make the mountain move.

Two women **singing**  
Won't make the mountain move.

All women **singing**  
Will make the mountain move.

So

**Let's move mountains together.**

# APPENDIX



## **Focus on Women and Community Central Newfoundland Women Speak**

- ✓ Are you interested in a discussion about the concerns facing women, families and communities in your region and province?
- ✓ Are you interested in hearing about the provincial government's Poverty Reduction Strategy?
- ✓ Are you interested in talking to other women and women's organizations about the many challenges to women's equality and inclusion?

**If you are interested then this forum is for you!**

**Date:** Friday, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005

**Place:** Mount Peyton Hotel

**Time:** 8:30 - 2:30 (Lunch Provided)

**For more information Call**

Status of Women Central - 489-8919

Gander Women's Centre - 256-4395

**Sponsored by:**

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Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women