

Exploring Common Ground - Recommendations

Forward

In January of 2000 the women who make up the board of the Newfoundland and Labrador Advisory Council on the Status of Women met to discuss a number of special concerns regarding women in their communities. This board which includes ten women from equality seeking women's organizations and a president who worked for more than a decade for a Women's Council in Western Newfoundland, quickly came to agreement that there was a need to coordinate efforts which would reach beyond the organized feminist community. Our province was involved in a period of government restructuring. Many rural and remote communities had barely survived the collapse of the fishery and much of the pro-active work on women's equality was becoming fragmented as women scrambled to deal with the everyday issues of poverty, out-migration, and the seeming disintegration of rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Although there had been many concentrated efforts to involve women in decision-making, the role of women in community and regional decision-making remains unbalanced and disproportionate. Women working within organizations and institutions (i.e.: church, boards, unions, government structures) often worked in isolation. There was little time to discuss the common agenda of equality and equity that women in leadership positions shared.

The Advisory Council board took a decision at the January meeting. The decision was to direct the work of the Council President and staff during the year 2000 to reaching women in as many communities and regions of our province as possible. We decided to seek basic funding from the provincial government and to use this funding to leverage monies from the federal Women's Program as well as any corporate, business and organizational donations that we could solicit.

The integrity of this project was based on two goals; that of reaching women in many communities and regions of our province, and validating all of the work women were doing as important in working toward women's social and economic equality. The process would include community forums leading to a pan-provincial conference. The work to reach women would be guided by a "lens of inclusion" approach, incorporating the many different realities of women's lives.

More than seven hundred women participated in the community forums. Four hundred and fifty-eight women from seventy-eight communities attended the October "Exploring Common Ground," provincial conference. The recommendations from this project are a clear indication that women want to be involved in an active way in decision making and leadership to improve the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Major Recommendations

Violence remains one of the great limiting obstacles to gender equality and any equality or equity agendas must acknowledge this fact.

The work to include women's perspective and experience should be resourced by all levels of

government (municipal, provincial, federal).

A lens of inclusion is the foundation for understanding women's issues: awareness of culture, ethnicity, ability, class, sexuality, geography and life experiences is essential in discussing agendas for women's equality.

The reality of women's lives in Labrador and the rural/remote communities of Newfoundland must be acknowledged in any work on women's social and economic equality.

There is a need for a pro-active approach to including women in decision-making at a community, regional, provincial and national level. Women need a range of options to learn participation and leadership skills: from kitchen table discussions, community meetings, and written materials to provincial conferences and workshops.

Young women desire to participate in equality seeking work. They need opportunities to learn the history of the women's movement, to participate in feminist activism and to have a young woman's perspective included in strategies which address inequality.

The state of women's equality, inclusion and participation must be continuously analyzed and highlighted in the media.

Women need opportunities to meet at conferences. These should be biennial events organized in different regions of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Acknowledgments

Exploring Common Ground Project Staff

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Joyce Aylward
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Ad Hoc Committee of Equality Seeking Organizations:

Bay St. George Women's Council	Central Newfoundland Women's Council
Corner Brook Women's Council	Gander Women's Council
Gateway Women's Council	Labrador West Women's Council
Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women	
Provincial Association Against Family Violence	

Reference Committee Members:

Phyllis Artiss	Ruth Flowers	Dorothy Inglis	Pam Peckford
Joyce Aylward	Delores Hall	Lorraine Michael	Linda Ross
Kathy Dunderdale	Joyce Hancock	Helen Murphy	Marie Ryan
Frances Ennis	Susan Hollett	Lana Payne	Connie Snow

Provincial Consultation Group:

Bay St. George Status of Women
Burin Peninsula Women
Central Newfoundland Steering Committee
Corner Brook Women's Council
Discovery Women's Network
Gander Women's Council
Ferryland Women's Group
Labrador West Women's Council
Gateway Women's Council
Northern Peninsula Women
Mokami Women's Council
Public Service Alliance of Canada
Provincial Association Against Family Violence The Lantern
St. John's Women's Centre
Trepassey Women's Group
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Theresa Pittman, Shoal Harbour
Valerie Anderson, Happy Valley-Goose Bay
Priscellia Drew, Conne River
Anne Mackey, Grand Falls-Windsor
Charlotte Woolfrey, Rigolet

Project Goals and Objectives

The conference organizers sought financial assistance from the provincial government through the Strategic Social Plan and the Status of Women Ministry and the federal government through the Status of Women Canada Program funding. In submitting project objectives the following were highlighted in submissions to both funders:

To find common ground with women and their organizations working on aspects of social and economic equality.

To establish "community networks" and communication toward the broader goal of influencing government consultations and increasing women's participation in community capacity building and public policy making.

To coordinate a pan-provincial meeting bringing together women from a variety of communities, agencies and organizations to share experiences, challenges and strategies in sustaining families, communities and regions.

To foster a fuller understanding of the initiatives and strategies undertaken by women and feminist organizations in working toward women's equality.

To provide a number of community forums to facilitate a common understanding of gender issues, analysis and inclusion.

To increase women's participation in decision-making structures at all levels.

To provide opportunities for women to link with organizations sharing an equality agenda in their region and province.

To explore common ground with individual women and women's groups working to improve the quality of life for families and communities throughout the province.

To enhance and increase women's understanding of systemic and institutional discrimination.

To connect women working throughout Newfoundland and Labrador with the broad concerns of poverty and violence as global gender issues.

The Practice of Inclusion

The organizers began this project with a number of goals. None of these were more important than the notion of inclusion, which we defined as using practices of community development which were comfortable to women throughout the province.

1. The conference organizers began the work by bringing grassroots equality seeking organizations on side. Special meetings and discussions were arranged with aboriginal women, women with disabilities, union women, academic women, multi-cultural and francophone women, volunteers and staff from Women's Centres and Shelters, youth groups, the faith community, senior women, politicians, and politically involved women, senior bureaucrats and front line workers. We initiated meetings with educators, nurses, community activists, volunteers, business women, community developers, students and social workers. We invited the participation and experiences of women as mothers, workers, volunteers and activists as we set about reaching women where they lived and worked.

2. Community forums were organized to reach out to women unconnected to organized groups. The organized groups in different communities were enlisted to assist with these meetings as a means of connecting the conference organizers to the local women. A variety of methods were used to accomplish this:

Telephone calls to organizations, e.g.: church women's groups, union women, women involved in service organizations (i.e. Lioness Club), Women's Institutes, women involved in boards (school, zonal, health, municipal), women involved in political parties, and front line workers in the following provincial government departments: Health and Community Services, Human Resources and

Employment, and Justice.

Flyers and announcements on local radio and TV. These announcements were strategically placed in locations where women were likely to see them, e.g.: doctor's offices, tourism offices, and stores. The flyers were welcoming (see pg. 12 and 13) and simply invited women to dialogue about their issues and community concerns.

We set out to communicate with women who were considered formal and informal leaders and women who knew the particular dynamics of their communities. We wanted to be aware of "pulse and power already at play" to build on what existed to help us shape an agenda which allowed women to discuss their common concerns through a gender lens.

Using technology ~ Although face-to-face meetings worked best, we relied as well on telephoning, conference calls and electronic mail as methods of communication throughout this project. Both our reference committee and our advisory committee met by conference call and we relied on phone and email as we coordinated our community forums and shaped our pan-provincial conference.

The Provincial Women's Conference (see attached agenda, pg. 25) was organized to continue practicing inclusion. Feminist principals were demonstrated, not by words, but by the manner in which the total conference was organized. The conference weekend in Gander began with a presentation by Innu women, and every attempt was made to reflect the diversity of women's lives and experiences. Following the formal part of our opening ceremony a festive atmosphere was created featuring traditional Newfoundland music, food (including Labrador bakeapples) made into a wonderful desert by a woman from the town of Gander. Women from different areas of the province greeted one another and organizers set about introducing new women and connecting communities and regions.

Participation - Four hundred and fifty-eight women attended the conference from seventy-eight different communities. Sixty-three women called the Labrador region home. It was noted by several aboriginal women and women who lived on the Island region of Newfoundland that this level of participation (both aboriginal and Labradorian) was unprecedented.

Demonstrating Inclusion - Rather than speeches about feminist practice we demonstrated this in providing through the panel presentations opportunities for women to speak of their experiences, strengths and challenges in the context of community as they define it. Women listened at roundtables of twelve, selected by numbers to allow women to meet a broader cross-section of participants. It became apparent that the women attending the conference identified with the issues outlined by the panelists. This identification with common concerns while sitting with women sharing similar sentiments had become the catalyst that allowed women who were mostly strangers to now feel at home. The rapt attention given in the large plenaries and the respect and validation at the roundtable discussions had removed shyness and uncertainty and made it possible for deeper discussions. We had become friends.

Challenging the concept of leadership - Although many women at the community forums and the Thanksgiving weekend conference are considered leaders, all women were encouraged to speak of themselves as leaders in their communities, organizations and public life. The "Women in Leadership" panelists labeled themselves as feminists and placed their personal and community work in the context of their understanding of leadership, thus illustrating the difference in approach between theirs

and the more familiar hierarchal styles.

Challenging our divisions - The project leaders were clear at the outset that all of the activities would be constructed along the theme of "Exploring Common Ground." Although we are all aware of divisions within the organized women's community, we were committed to the practice of building inclusive processes. Women told us repeatedly that they would prefer not to be divided by age, class, religion, politics, sexuality, or region. Although women often identified and located themselves and their experiences along those lines, they were not grouped according to those descriptions.

Making the meetings enjoyable - Throughout the weekend conference and at each of the community forums, the organizers used the time honored tradition of awarding prizes. Simple gifts of a \$5.00 World March Pin or flowers were awarded for lucky tickets or chairs. Even while listening and learning from one another a simple gift could be won for recalling the first woman provincial cabinet minister, naming a woman leader in a region of the province, or holding the winning number. Amid much laughter and trading of prizes women were meeting women from communities and regions that they had not known. Exploring Common Ground was an easy process within this environment.

A spiritual Sunday morning program entitled Bread and Roses took place in a local church hall. We did not assume that women would participate in the Provincial World March, rather the keynote address during the program linked our community lives with the lives of women throughout the world. Following this program women were free to return to the conference site at a local hotel or participate in the march. Everyone chose to march noting that the theme of the march calling for an end to poverty and violence was easy to endorse as our communities are dealing with these same issues.

Continuing the Connections - Following the October Women's Conference the project organizers have continued to network and involve women who have either participated in a community forum or the October conference. A video, compact disc of photographs, a collection of women's writings and this conference report are being distributed. Follow-up conference calls, community visits to emerging women's groups and funding proposals for post-conference work have been submitted to the provincial and federal governments.

Community Focus Sessions: "Women and Community A Reality Check"

More than seven hundred women participated in forty-two community forums from February-October 2000.

Women and Community; Focus Session Agenda

Introductions

Connecting ourselves to our community concerns

Women and decision-making / Women and leadership

Provincial Women's Conference / World March of Women

How can local women get involved?

Women and Community; A Reality Check

What do you consider as "community?"

What things have happened in your community which have brought people together?

What things have happened in your community which have divided people?

What issues have impacted your community / region?

What do you like about your community / region?

What would you like to change about your community / region?

What values do women bring to decision making? To leadership?

Are there any differences for men?

Do you agree with the quote, " women and men live in communities, women and men should make the decisions which guide the direction of community."

Is this the reality in your community (consider school board, municipal council, health board, zone board) at present?

How can women change the way community decisions are made?

Trepassey Focus Session

Women and Community;A Reality Check June 2000

Facilitators:

Joyce M. Hancock / Kathy Dunderdale

Community Defined:

Women were asked to define community. They named the following as the "meaning of community":

A place where people are supportive.

A place and a people who have a uniqueness of culture and shared history.

A feeling of "being home."

A place where you know your neighbors and people approach one another in a friendly, inviting way.

Community Strengths:

An openness and a closeness

Mutual concern for individuals and the social and economic situation of the area.

A sense of safety and freedom to move about.

Strong family and relationship ties with compassion and support.

A sense of connectedness.

Opportunities for involvement in decision-making.

Community Challenges:

The difficulty in finding a balance between openness and personal and family privacy.

The need for basic community forums to discuss into a vision for sustaining and growing as a community.

The existence of patriarchal structures within the community.

The lack of opportunity for youth to see a future within the community and region.

Out-migration, including men leaving to find employment and the effect this is having on family and children. Where are the role models for young men?

The need to regain a feeling of control of one's life and the economic future of the community.

The loss and the lack of volunteers.

The apathy and loss of faith in the future.

The need to embrace personal values of respect and self-esteem.

Break down the sense of isolation and the sense that politicians are not interested in rural communities.

Women and Community: Leadership and Decision-Making:

The discussion moved to an examination of women's needs and roles with family, organizations and decision-making structures. Participants noted the following:

The existence of patriarchal structures which do not include women's values and vision and often silences their participation.

The need for women to support other women in leadership and decision making positions.

The need for women to organize themselves to continue to discuss community, women's and family issues.

The need for women to connect with other established organizations to deepen their understanding of women's equality issues.

Conclusion:

Women from the Southern shore of the Avalon Peninsula certainly felt that women had played a significant role in community life. There existed a sense that women had a unique perspective as demonstrated by their work in families and as volunteers. There was a comfort in working with government employees (i.e.: this meeting was coordinated by employees of Community Health) but there were concerns voiced about apathy and fear for the survival of their communities.

The participants at this focus session felt that there was a definite need to organize a women's group to discuss and influence social and economic issues. Women also felt a need to connect with women's organizations in other areas of the province. Many of those present were eager to attend the Exploring Common Ground Provincial Women's Conference in Gander in October 2000.

Clarenville Focus Session

Women and Community; "A Reality Check" - June, 2000

Facilitators:

Joyce Hancock / Kathy Dunderdale

Community Defined

Women in Clarenville described community as:

a place where there was an acceptance and welcoming of diversity.
a place where family and friends were important.
there exists some shared interests and values.
anonymity because of the movement of people in and out of this region.

Community Challenges:

the layout of the town (no real centre or downtown).
apathy and individual thinking and concerns.
male dominated structures and bureaucracies.
lack of women leaders for role models.
no community gathering place.
women did not seem to have common ground on feminist issues i.e.: poverty and violence.

Women and Leadership:

women bring a more holistic approach to decision-making.
women had a better style of communication.
women brought family concerns as community concerns.

Conclusion:

Women attending from the Clarendville area were quick to acknowledge the challenges to building a women centred (feminist) perspective to community (political) issues. There was agreement on the need to connect with women in communities throughout the Bonavista Peninsula. In addition, women who were involved in the Discovery Women's Network agreed to work on encouraging the participation of women from this region in the pan-provincial Women's Conference set for Gander in October.

Corner Brook Focus Session

Women and Community; "A Reality Check" - June 2000

Facilitators:

Joyce M. Hancock

Community Defined:

Sense of identity
Sense of comfort and belonging
Connections from babies to seniors

Community Strengths:

People care about those who are hurting (i.e.: food drive, support for transition house)
There is a good network of friends, family, co-workers and volunteers.
Even within the city there are neighborhoods where people know one another and are ready to provide support.
Neighbors take some responsibility for other people's children.
There are plenty of activities open to the participation of everyone.

There are still many extended families.

Fear of violence is not pervasive.

Community Challenges:

A lack of youth focused activities.

Unemployment and low wages.

Women's concerns are not high profile within the city.

Not enough linking of economic, social and environmental concerns.

Minimal services for people experiencing personal difficulties.

Need for parenting courses relevant to today's family realities.

The isolation of seniors.

The abuse of health care workers and the unrealistic expectations place on nurses.

Women Defined Challenges:

Low wages for child care workers

Lack of employment and underemployment of women and youth.

Unpaid work of women as child care and elder care workers as well as providing volunteer services.

Barriers to training and post secondary education for young women, especially single mothers.

Stigma of feminist activities and the misperception about the Women's Centre/Council.

The lack of connection to older and younger women.

Fragmentation of the work accomplished by Women's Centres (i.e.: project to project).

Women and Leadership:

Women have a grassroots connection with their personal, family and community lives.

Women need to support one another in leadership and decision-making.

Women in leadership need to be role models and bring forward social issues.

Women take a more holistic approach to decision-making and this way of working is important to all communities and governments.

Conclusion:

This meeting was attended by women who had past involvements with the Corner Brook Status of Women Council. Present Council members and women who simply attended to listen and discuss issues as women have lived in Corner Brook for most of their lives. Those present had many concerns for the future of their city but there was a strong sentiment expressed about a desire to live, work and raise families in Western Newfoundland and that Corner Brook was well situated to this.

Those present were desiring a stronger, more vocal presence for the Corner Brook Women's Council. There was a recognition of the nearly quarter of a century existence of this feminist organization and women were unanimous in their endorsement of the Council's work.

Women very much wanted to connect on a provincial scale. The Provincial Women's Conference 2000 and the World March of Women was seen as a way to accomplish this. The activists at the Women's Centre will begin looking for funding to assist women in attending these events.

Conne River Focus Session

Women and Community; "A Reality Check" - July, 2000

Facilitators:

Kathy Dunderdale / Anne Mackey

Community Defined:

Women were asked to define community. They named the following as the "meaning of community":

Feeling like a member of a larger family.

That community is not so much a defined space but rather a sense of belonging.

Where everyone knows everyone else in the community.

A place of family and friends.

A place where people feel at "home" and comfortable.

Community Strengths:

A place where people care about each other and help one another.

There is a sense of peace and safety.

There are shared values and goals on which the community works together.

People cooperate to deal with crisis in the community.

A sense of shared responsibility for the community and its people, especially the children.

People celebrate together.

Women and Community: Leadership and Decision-making:

Women were asked to discuss women's roles in family, organizations and governance.

Women are the caregivers in the community and shoulder most of the responsibility for the children, the aged and infirm.

Women do not participate in decision-making structures as they feel they do much of the carrying out of the work in community and don't have the time or energy for more responsibility.

It was felt that women were better organizers and were able to work on a number of tasks simultaneously.

It was felt women were more patient and more apt to ask for help if they did not know how to do something.

Conclusion:

Women of Conne River felt that women played a significant role in community. Their sense was that they were responsible for the grassroots work that made the community function. Women are rarely represented in decision-making structures in their community and women engaged in a basic examination of why this was so and if there is a need for change.

Women in Conne River are anxious to continue the discussions begun at this gathering and are exploring ways for a number of them to attend the Provincial Women's Conference in Gander in October 2000.

The meeting concluded with a presentation by Anne Mackey on the World March of Women.

Focus discussions were held throughout the project (February - December 2000) with the following organizations, communities and/or constituencies. These sessions were a combination of face to face meetings and/or conference calls. The numbers attending each focus session ranged from 6 - 80 women.

Grand Falls-Windsor
Conne River
Trepassey
Burin
Gander
Port Aux Basques
Bonavista
Makkovik
Clarenville
Bay St. George
Happy Valley - Goose Bay
St. John's
St. Anthony
Harbour Breton
Marystown
Wabush
West St. Modeste
Fogo Island
Appleton
Nain
Burgeo
Labrador City

Anglican Church Women's Group, St. John's
Bay St. George Community Education Committee
Newfoundland and Labrador Nurses Union, St. John's
Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association, St. John's
Presentation Sisters, The Lantern, St. John's
Strategic Social Plan Staff, St. John's
United Church Women, St. John's
Women's Institute, St. Georges, Appleton
Family Resource Centre, Stephenville
Coalition of Persons With Disabilities, St. John's
Association for Community Living, Corner Brook
Sociology Classes, Memorial University, Corner Brook and St. John's
Newfoundland and Labrador Correctional Centre for Women, Clarenville
Tongamiut Inuit Annait, Labrador
Long Range Regional Economic Board, Stephenville
Humber Economic Development Board, Corner Brook

Women members of the House of Assembly and Cabinet Ministers, St. John's
Premiers Council on Social Policy Development, St. John's
Union Organizations including Federation of Labor, Public Service Alliance of Canada, St. John's
Futures In Newfoundland and Labrador Youth (FINALY), St. John's
Provincial government bureaucrats, St. John's
Memorial University Women's Studies Program, (students and staff), St. John's

Evaluation : Community Focus Sessions

Although there was no formal evaluation process used during the community forums the conference organizers provided an opportunity for the participants to comment and give feedback on their experience of the forums as both a stand-alone activity and as a strategy for encouraging the participation of women at the October Women's Conference: Exploring Common Ground. All participants expressed appreciation for being included in this activity. Comments from the women include:

" "I wasn't sure I would have anything to say, but it was so easy . . . just being asked what I thought about my community. I knew how to answer that!"

Hopedale

" "Some of the women in my group knew lots of information that I hadn't even thought about. I had my eyes opened today."

Port Aux Basques

" "I still think that violence is the most important issue . . . it's still hidden in families though."

Burin

" "I know I'm going to the Gander conference this October . . . I've never been to a conference just for women, but today's workshop was great and made me want to do this again."

Labrador West

" "I've never called myself a feminist but the way Joyce and Kathy were talking about women and community made me realize that women have to speak up and organize themselves."

Trepassey

" "As a woman in my twenties I wasn't sure about coming to this forum, but I realize that young women have a lot to learn about equality and women's history."

Grand Falls-Windsor

" "I'm eighty-three years old and I was dragged here by my daughter, but talking and listening to these women (some only half my age) made me excited about the women's conference and especially the World March."

Corner Brook

" "I saw a flyer about a women's meeting today and I only came because I recognized Sister Marie's name and I figured it would be enjoyable."

Trepassey

" "They (the facilitators) were asking us about women and leadership, I had never thought about leadership like that . . . men were always the leaders ~ until the cod moratorium men seemed to run

everything."

Burgeo

" "These forums are great but I don't think the union women will participate at a conference where government people are also attending."

St. John's

" "As a woman in a wheelchair, I have enjoyed this small forum, but the larger conference should pay attention to 'special needs' especially if they get three or four hundred women to come out."

Gander

" "I've worked in government for nearly twenty years and I've noticed that the women's community often blames bureaucrats for government decisions and they forget that we often feel powerless too. I'm looking forward to the conference in the fall to see for myself if this kind of respect and validation will continue."

St. John's

" "I am a part of a religious order and I came to this forum more out of curiosity. It was great to participate in a meeting where every woman was respected and validated for their experiences."

Grand Falls-Windsor

Exploring Common Ground

Provincial Women's Conference 2000

Provincial Women's Conference 2000

Exploring Common Ground

Agenda

Friday, October 6

Hotel Gander

3:00 to 6:45 PM Registration

7:00 PM Opening Ceremony

 Susan Hollett / Theresa Pittman / Kathy Dunderdale

 Greetings from the Town of Gander

 Greetings from the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

 Greetings from Status of Women Canada

 The Road to the Conference - Joyce M. Hancock

 Book Launch

 It's Like the Legend - Innu Women's Voices

 Nympha Byrne and Camille Fouillard

 Reception and Refreshments

 Special Thanks to

 Alma Rowsell of Gander

 Fishery Products International

Saturday, October 7

- 7:30 AM Late Registration
- 7:45 AM Facilitator's Meeting
- 8:30 AM Explanation of the Day - Kathy Dunderdale / Joyce Aylward
Opening Comments - Honorable Julie Bettney
Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
- 9:00 Am Panel I - Women's Experiences in Community - Moderator, Beverly Kirby
A panel of women from different communities will present their experiences in relation to community. They will focus on their role in building community capacity; challenges, success and the values and concerns women bring to community development.
- 10:15 AM Nutrition Break
- 10:30 AM Roundtable Discussion
Facilitators will guide roundtable discussions providing participants an opportunity to exchange information and discuss women's experience in community.
- 12:00 PM Lunch - St. Martin's Hall
- 1:50 PM Regroup for afternoon session - Hotel Gander
- 2:00 PM Synopsis of Saturday AM Roundtables
Karen Hackett / Sharon Whalen
- 2:15 PM Opening Comments - Mayor Aneitha Sheaves, Channel/Port Aux Basques
Panel II - Women's Experience in Leadership and Decision-making
Moderator: Connie Snow
A panel of women who are involved in leadership will present their experiences in bringing "women centered" vision and values to the decision-making process. They will discuss the importance of having women at the table in community, business, and governance.
- 3:00 PM Roundtable Discussions
Facilitators will guide discussions on the challenges, strategies and successes in impacting decision-making at community, organizational and policy-making levels.
- 4:30 PM "A little piece of time for you"
- 7:00 PM Gathering
- 7:30 PM Welcome - Shirley Squires
Banquet: Thanksgiving Dinner
Opening Remarks - Dorothy Inglis
Introduction of Keynote Speaker - Lorraine Michael
Keynote Address - Judy Rebick
- 9:30 PM Celebrating our Province
Entertainment, music and dance

Sunday, October 8

- 8:00 AM St. Martin's Hall
World March of Women - Anne Mackey
Breakfast Program - Bread and Roses Celebration
Keynote Address - "Poverty and Violence" Helen Murphy
- 8:45 AM Introduction of the Provincial World March of Women - Pam Peckford
World March of Women - St. Martin's Hall to Gander Hotel
- 10:00 AM Nutrition Break
- 10:15 AM Synopsis of Saturday PM Roundtables
Bobby Boland and Dorothy Fewer
- 11:00 AM Keynote
"Staying Connected / Meeting the Challenges" - Joyce Hancock
- 11:30 AM Open Forum - Susan Hollett / Kathy Dunderdale
An opportunity for women to offer strategies on staying connected,
working together, challenging and mobilizing as we continue to ensure that women's experience and
values are reflected.
- 12:00 PM Evaluation and feedback
- 12:15 PM Closing Remarks - Michelle Skinner / Geri Devereaux
- 12:30 PM Closing Ceremony

A Process and A Product

The conference you are attending is both a process and a product. The product of course is the conference. The process started at the beginning of the year and will continue as an integral part of the work of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women in the years to come.

Women in Newfoundland and Labrador have much to say about community. In many regions of our province, women connect with and contribute to the capacity of their community in a variety of ways. Many are connected through regional boards, and women are often the backbone of service organizations, church groups, youth groups, equality-seeking feminist groups, provincial and federal public servants, unions and family resource centres. Many women own businesses and play leadership roles in governments. Some have worked behind the scenes at a food bank or community kitchen, while others are vocal and visible in insisting on the need for a woman's experience as a critical component in all decision-making processes.

In early February, the conference team began a series of telephone and electronic mail conversations, community forums, conference calls, individual discussions and face-to-face meetings. We have met with women in communities, women in unions, women who work in business, students, youth groups, academic women, aboriginal women, francophone women, women with disabilities, advocates and

activists, victims and survivors, leaders and women who work behind the scenes. The focus of our discussion has been women's experiences in decision-making and leadership. We have asked women to define community, to talk about community strengths and challenges and to tell us what values women bring to community decision-making and leadership.

At our community forums, we attempted to bring together a variety of women who did not often find themselves involved in the same discussion. Whether women worked to provide services through a food bank or community kitchen, or as activists insisting on the kind of social and economic policy which will eliminate the need for food banks, we have recognized that women have much in common. In each of these circumstances women are working both for the survival of communities and to increase the capacity of communities.

From these meetings we have selected women to profile at this conference. Through listening to women's personal experience of community, we know that much of their reality will resonate with you as we listen and then discuss our personal experiences working to influence all of the structures which impact on our lives as women. The values women bring to leadership are also important. We have also provided an opportunity for women to tell us about working within these systems.

Exploring Common Ground is an attempt to validate, understand, and critique why we do what we do as women. It is also an opportunity to mobilize women, so that when we return to our communities we can continue to dialogue about women's social and economic reality.

A process and a product. Together we can make this conference an event. More importantly we can continue to build an inclusive process whereby gender thinking and analysis are reflected in our work as women in our community, region and province.

Communities represented

Aspen Cove

Avondale

Bay Bulls

Bay Roberts

Bell Island

Bishop's Falls

Burgeo

Burin Arm

Burin

Carbonear

Cartwright, Labrador

Chamberlains

Charlottetown, Labrador

Chilliwack, British Columbia

Churchill Falls, Labrador

Clarenville

Clarke's Beach

Conne River

Creston North

Creston South

Conche

Davis Inlet, Labrador

Dover

Flatrock

Fogo

Forteau, Labrador

Gambo

Gander

Gander Bay South

Goulds

Goose Bay, Labrador

Grand Falls-Windsor

Happy Valley, Labrador

Harbour Breton

Head of Bay D'Espoir

Holyrood

Hopedale, Labrador

Jackson's Cove

Labrador City, Labrador

L'Anse Au Claire, Labrador

L'Anse Au Loup, Labrador

Little Bay

Little Bay Islands

Lourdes

Makkovik, Labrador

Marystown

Middle Arm

Mount Pearl

Nain, Labrador

Norris Point

North West River, Labrador

Paradise

Parsons Pond

Pinware, Labrador

Port au Port

Port Aux Basques

Port au Port East

Port Hope-Simpson, Labrador

Portugal Cove

Postville, Labrador

Rigolet, Labrador

Rogers Cove

Rushoon

Sheshatshiu, Labrador

Shoal Harbour

St. Alban's

St. Anthony
St. John's
St. Lawrence
St. Lunaire-Griquet
Stephenville
Trepassey
Victoria
Wabush, Labrador
West St. Modeste, Labrador
Whitbourne
Windsor, Ontario
Witless Bay

Panel I

Women's Experiences in Community
Ten Minute Presentation
Five Presenters
Moderator: Beverly Kirby

Thank you for agreeing to be a panelist in the Saturday morning session. To assist you in preparing for your presentation we would like you to consider the following:

Introduce yourself in relation to your community; where it is in the province, its strengths and challenges. You might want to relate your personal experience which allows the audience to understand your role as mother, worker, volunteer or activist.

We would like to hear thoughts on the importance of having women involved in community decision-making and why women's values are necessary to community work.

Panel II

Women's Experience in Leadership and Decision-making
Ten Minute Presentation
Five Presenters
Moderator: Connie Snow

Thank you for agreeing to be a panelist at the Saturday afternoon session. To assist you in preparing your presentation we would like you to consider the following:

Introduce yourself in relation to your work, position and community. "Why you do what you do?"

Tell us about why you think it is important to have women's voices at the decision-making table.

Tell us about what values and experiences women bring to decision-making and leadership.

Perhaps you could relate some of the challenges and success you have had in bringing your women's

vision and values to leadership and decision-making.

Panel I

Women's Experience In Community

Moderator: Beverly Kirby, Stephenville

Panelists: Theresa Myrick, Trepassey

Michelle Mercer, Burgeo

Michelle Snow, Clarkes Beach

Kim Anderson, Makkovik

Louise Bennett, Conne River

Each of the panelists were provided ten to fifteen minutes to present their thoughts on women and community involvement. The presenters spoke about the geography, population, strengths and challenges of the communities and regions in which they lived. The women ranged in age from mid-twenties to mid-fifties. Four of the presenters had children and/or grandchildren and had spent most of their lives living, working and volunteering in their home communities.

Several of the panelists named as challenges the cod moratorium, out-migration (especially as it relates to young families), and the inaccessibility of government services (especially health care) in rural and remote regions of our province. Two of the panelists came from aboriginal communities and these women sited the particular concerns of Inuit, Innu, and Mi'kmaq women and families, in addition to living in the more rural/remote regions of the province.

Additional challenges noted by these women:

- " the issue of violence against women and children and the lack of education and services targeted to dealing with these concerns.
- " the loss of male role models with so many men working outside the province for extended periods of time.
- " the need for the voice of youth to be included in social and economic issues.
- " addictions and the links to violence.
- " the need to have more women involved in community economic and social development decisions.
- " the lack of employment and training opportunities for young people.
- " young women speaking on this panel had concerns that youth do not see a future for themselves in our province.

Panelists noted many strengths and possibilities through living and working in more rural areas of Newfoundland and Labrador:

- " a strong sense of community and connectiveness.
- " a sharing of common values.
- " less fear of random violence.
- " inter-generational and extended families provide support, culture and continuity.
- " tourism as an undeveloped industry.
- " a strong belief in the future of Newfoundland and Labrador communities.

The panelists agreed that women play vital roles in their communities. One woman noted that although women may not always be the organization's spokesperson they are playing key roles in volunteer organizations. These panelists were heavily involved in organizations which were providing services, support and advocacy to women and families throughout the province. Several panelists noted the absence of women's voice and experience in economic decision-making and that many of the concerns important to women would not always be given a priority by community leaders who controlled financial resourcing.

Roundtable Discussions

Following each panel presentation, conference participants attended one of the forty roundtable (10 - 12 participants each) discussion groups. Since the women participating ranged from "first timers" at a women's conference to "seasoned feminists" this presented a challenge to the organizers. The facilitators chosen for this work were women who were known in different parts of Newfoundland and Labrador for their work on women's issues. They were able to bring out the common experiences of women in community (see Facilitators Guide, pg. 38), and with the guidance of the facilitators the women discussed community strengths and challenges and brainstormed the values women bring to community involvement.

Values:

" Women bring a different perspective which comes from growing up female in Newfoundland and Labrador.

" Women are "risk takers" when it comes to placing concerns for children and community on the political agenda.

" Women bring a common sense approach to the problems of individuals, families and communities.

" Women work hard to be tolerant, respectful, and nurturing.

" Women have experience in balancing the multifaceted roles of work, family, volunteering.

" Women include a sense of spirituality in community work.

" Women have good organizational skills.

" Women are committed to community work regardless of individual recognition.

" Women bring a pride in their community/regional identity.

" Women bring forward the concerns for seniors, disabled, aboriginal, youth, etc. when they speak about women's issues.

" Women have emotional strength in difficult economic times.

" Women bring compassion, creativity, productive, enthusiasm, realism, flexibility, positive attitude, stamina, determination, loyalty, openness, acceptance, insightfulness, sensitivity, conviction, good listening skills, courage, intelligence, generous spirit, passion for justice, humanity and validation.

" Women often site their mothers and grandmothers as positive role models.

" Women bring a more holistic approach to decision-making in community organizations.

" Women bring concerns for the environment into discussions of social and economic justice.

" Women include and involve children in community decision-making.

These discussions were lively and informative. Women both validated and gently challenged one another on stereotyping and traditional women's experiences. Given the continuum of experience and voice at each of the roundtables, this was a valuable exercise in keeping with the theme of Exploring

Common Ground. Women were indeed exploring their common concerns within the context of community and community organizations. The exercise on brainstorming values provided the women an opportunity to put forward words and phrases without requiring defense or arguments regarding their personal experiences. Many of the more challenging discussions on stereotyping, diversity, gender, politics, etc., occurred during the nutrition breaks and at mealtimes. Generally feminist activists, academics and politically aware women allowed participants the comfort of basic gender discussions acknowledging the need and responsibility of creating comfort and safety for women who were new to these discussions.

Panel II

"Women's Experience in Leadership and Decision Making"

Moderator Connie Snow, Mount Pearl

Panelists Yvonne Jones, Mary's Harbour

Frances Ennis, St. John's

Marie Ryan, Calvert

Debbie Armstrong, Grand Falls - Windsor

Lana Payne, Deer Lake

This panel featured women who are considered leaders by themselves and their organizations. Marie Ryan, a Presentation Sister from The Lantern: A Christian Life Centre, with more than fifty years involvement in community and social justice issues. Debbie Armstrong is the only female director of one of the provinces ten school boards. Lana Payne works as a researcher with the Fish Food and Allied Workers Union, as well as being a free-lance columnist with a provincial newspaper. Yvonne Jones is the member of the House of Assembly for Cartwright/Lanse au Clair, Labrador. Frances Ennis is a long time community development worker. The moderator for this panel is the only woman to achieve the rank of Inspector in the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary.

Each of these panelists was asked to present her understanding of feminist leadership. They talked about the values women bring to leadership and some of the experiences which are often in conflict with these feminist values. (see Appendix I, Learning From the Centre: Women's Ways of Leadership, by Debbie Armstrong, pg. 50). Several of the women of this panel talked about providing leadership within hierarchal structures and staying true to feminist processes in decision making. During this panel there was a subtle but definite shift from the morning panel of simply exploring common ground to having women name the obstacles to women's leadership and challenging women's leadership styles. Many women acknowledged successes in following men's style of leadership and the difficulty in staying true to a more woman centered inclusive process of decision making and leadership.

Following this panel, the facilitated roundtable discussions were reconvened. The roundtable participants who had previously been dialoguing about community were now talking about strategies and challenges in the pursuit of involving more women in leadership at all levels of government.

Strategies: Towards involving women in leadership and decision-making:

" The need to consider issues like child care and elder care and to accommodate the participation of women who provide these services to family.

" Challenge structures on the notion of an "inclusion" process. Ask simple questions such as "Are women at the table where decisions are taken which affect their lives?"

" The need for mentoring programs . . . experienced women to provide feminist leadership and organizing skills.

" The continuing need for affirmative action programs and equity legislation.

" Leadership courses for girls as a life-long process to challenge the historical role of girls and women in Newfoundland and Labrador society.

" Support women in community organizations to learn inclusive leadership styles.

" Women need to build solidarity as a gender and learn about the historical struggles of early feminists.

" Continue the discussion on values and insist that the values and experience women bring to the table become the foundation for decision making.

" Return to a time of the "conscious raising" forums of the 1960's and 1970's. Small kitchen table discussions where women feel safe to "make mistakes."

" Examine "men's styles" and methods of operating within bureaucracy and institutions. Take what is useful and challenge what is exclusive.

" Continue to network, connect and provide information throughout the province.

" take the time to extend personal invitations to women who may lack the self-esteem to see themselves as leaders.

" Celebrate women's global victories, participate in women's global struggles.

" Continue conferencing and providing participatory workshops in different regions of the province.

" Organize early for elections (school boards, municipal councils and economic boards).

" Workshops on feminist organizing.

" Recognize that women need financial support to participate.

" Target and involve men who share a feminist agenda for equality and equity.

" Remind ourselves that leaders need followers who feel valued and appreciated.

" Support women who are in leadership positions.

" Find common ground as a gender prior to challenging one another's philosophy and principles.

" Publicly question the absence of women in leadership and decision-making at all levels.

" Create a welcoming and supportive atmosphere within women's equality seeking organizations.

" Continue to share women's success stories of participation and leadership.

" Optimize the use of information technology in getting the feminist message out.

" Challenge our way of parenting male and female children.

" Use collective action to create safety for women to mobilize.

" Continue to use humor as a strategy when inequality appears to be so overwhelming.

" Continue to connect women of all ages in the work for social and economic equality.

" Women who are leaders need to continue mentoring other women to fill leadership roles.

" Create an understanding of systemic discrimination and use this to assist women in understanding feminism.

" Do not separate women's economic equality from our learnings and analysis on issues of violence.

" Women could undertake a "buddy system" so that they "share the load" in providing leadership.

" Challenge women who use personal violation to disrupt and disrespect consensus building processes.

" Redefine leadership to include "an inclusive process" as a measurement of best practice in leadership.

" Rather than inserting women into existing patriarchal structures, women need to challenge the

legitimacy of these exclusive structures.

" Be alert to women who will not support women in leadership and who may damage feminist process.

" Highlight women's achievements in community/leadership.

Facilitators Guide

Thank you for your assistance in facilitating this conference roundtable. Participants at your table are not grouped according to any particular preselection or self-selection. We have mixed women from different communities, regions, and organizations. At your table you may have first timers, seasoned feminists, as well as women who are leaders in communities and organizations. Your task for these roundtables is to make women comfortable with each other, guide discussion and to ensure that all women have an opportunity to participate.

Things to consider:

1. Introduce yourself by telling the women at your table who you are, why you do what you do and what your task will be. This is the time to provide "ground rules."

" One woman speaks at a time.

" Women need to be invited to do "self care." Women leaving the table should do so without interrupting the discussion, knowing that an "attentive ear" can be found in the conference room if needed.

" Women should be encouraged to listen to each speaker. Regardless of her experiences, every woman's story is significant to the discussion.

2. Invite women to introduce/reintroduce themselves to the table: name, community, a little about herself (if she chooses), and any community involvement she has. It is important for facilitators to validate every woman, "draw out the shy ones, reign in the egos." Participants will need to feel that whomever they are, wherever they are from, their experiences are significant.

3. Following a round of introductions, you might wish to tell your table your personal thoughts about the panel presentation. What resonated with you / your community / organization? Keep it simple and then do a round at your table asking women what 'stood out' for them in the stories and reflections of the panelists.

4. When your round is completed, you could take your table into a discussion on the questions posed to the panelists. "Why are women's vision, values and voices necessary to community work?" Use your skills as a facilitator to draw out women on the particular and peculiar dynamics in their community / organization / board.

5. Fifteen minutes before your roundtable ends, take your flip chart paper and invite women to brainstorm quick phrases / sentences / words as to what values women bring to community work. List these on the flip-chart.

6. Remember to thank your participants. Remind them they will be returning to this table for the afternoon session.

PM Session (Reintroduce yourself and any new participants)

Now these women know you and each other a little better. We can "nibble at the discussion" more,

draw out the negative and positive experiences women have had in leadership and decision-making.

1. Start with a description of your own experience (in doing this be aware of your table, it is not our intention to frighten the newcomers or invalidate the women who have been playing leadership roles). Perhaps you could relate an experience whereby having women with like-minded agendas supporting you was a positive experience in getting a more woman friendly decision. Invite your table to give their stories and reflections on the panelists.

2. Now we could go a little deeper and talk about the challenges to women in leadership. Do women really do this differently? Should women be expected to take responsibility for more than their own lives and that of their families? You may need to stimulate this a little with your own thoughts, but perhaps this discussion is already happening. Be sure to encourage many voices.

3. Fifteen minutes before your roundtable ends take your flip-chart paper and invite women to brainstorm (minimum 3) strategies for getting women involved in leadership and decision-making.

4. Remind your table that they will have additional opportunities to add their thoughts to these roundtable discussions in the closing session, as well as the evaluation form.

Thank you for sharing your facilitation skills and contributing to the Provincial Women's Conference: Exploring Common Ground.

Evaluations and Recommendations

Provincial Women's Conference

The conference evaluation used a simple form to gauge women's reaction to the weekend program. The intention of the evaluation was to compile information on the issues of women in leadership and decision making, major concerns for women in Newfoundland and Labrador communities and an opportunity for conference participants to give the Provincial Advisory Council (as the major conference organizers) some direction on future equality issues they should attempt to address.

Four hundred and fifty-eight (458) women attended the conference. There were a total of three hundred and twenty-nine (329) evaluation forms returned from seventy-two percent (72%) of the conference participants. The responses from participants have been summarized and paraphrased, using the sentences and phrases from evaluation forms. The numbers and percentages have been placed to indicate the number of times this action and/or sentiment was expressed.

1. Conference Speakers:

Very Relevant 281

Somewhat Relevant 48

2. Panel Presentations:

Women's Experience in Community Leadership

Very Relevant 246

Somewhat Relevant 56

Relevant 24

Not Relevant 3

Women's Experience in Leadership and Decision-making

Very Relevant 297

Somewhat Relevant 30

Relevant 2

3. Other Conference Activities:

Roundtable discussion on Women's Experience in Community

Very Relevant 302

Somewhat Relevant 24

Relevant 2

Not Relevant 1

Roundtable discussion on Women's Experience in Leadership and Decision Making

Very Relevant 241

Somewhat Relevant 19

Open Forum on Future Strategies:

Very Relevant 197

Somewhat Relevant 46

Bread and Roses Program

Very Relevant 301

World March of Women

Very Relevant 301

4. The Provincial Advisory Council as the major conference organizers are interested in continuing the work of involving women in community decision-making and leadership. Can you give us your thoughts on how to accomplish this?

Number - Percentage - Response

290 - 88% The Advisory Council needs to continue to speak up and speak out on women's issues, keep a strong media presence.

260 - 79% Personal contact works best . . . continue to meet one on one and in small groups.

219 - 67% We need more media attention paid to the need for and the absence of women in key decision-making positions.

214 - 65% Continue to validate all women's stories and experiences.

213 - 65% Women need workshops which help with self-esteem, build leadership and organize women to take action.

209 - 64% Young women need opportunities to meet to understand feminism and the women's movement.

202 - 61% We need to pay attention to the place of women in community decision-making in rural and remote regions in Newfoundland and Labrador.

196 - 60% Communicate, network and share all information.

180 - 55% Yearly conferences for women in different regions of our province. These should be held in Labrador as well as on the island.

180 - 55% Small kitchen table discussions work best, women feel safer and more comfortable to talk and disagree.

176 - 44% The Women's Centres need support because they are bogged down with dealing with poverty and violence in communities.

167 - 51% Recognize leadership qualities in women and support their running for political office regardless of political party.

165 - 39% Keep connecting church, union, activists, and young women. Our province is too small (population) for women to be divided.

141 - 43% Facilitated women's meetings (community to community) to enable women to exchange ideas, mentor one another and understand feminism.

126 - 38% Prior to municipal and school board elections there should be special forums for women to learn how to organize both on getting the concerns of women highlighted and getting elected.

106 - 32% Pay attention to the situation of aboriginal women, their voices are being lost.

106 - 32% Men and some women who think the way men do, are making decisions for women and their families without including women's experiences.

70 - 21% Be aware of the special needs of women when it comes to participating in forums and conferences, i.e.,: accessibility, child care, travel costs.

60 - 18% Encourage schools to teach girls leadership and organizational skills.

46 - 14% Please do not assume that all women are email and internet savvy, or have access to computers.

17 - 1% Innu and Inuit women could learn a lot from the successes of Mi'Kmaq women in Conne River. The organizers could help make this discussion happen.

5. What are the major issues of concern to women in your community / region?

Number - Percentage - Response

290 - 88% The loss of community and sense of community.

243 - 74% Violence and the fear of violence.

226 - 69% The need for more women's centers and safe places where women can be supported in dealing with personal issues.

204 - 62% The treatment of women in the justice system.

204 - 62% The need for more women in governments (school boards, zonal boards, health boards and municipal governments).

203 - 62% High cost of training and education for young people.

203 - 62% The lack of legal aid and court services, especially in rural and remote parts of our province.

201 - 61% Poverty and the increasing gap between rich and poor.

194 - 59% The need for girls and young women to have opportunities to learn about feminism and equality issues.

187 - 57% The need for social workers in communities to assist women and families before the problems become too severe.

179 - 54% Women's equality groups should be spending more time working on the goals of the women's movement.

156 - 47% The state of health care in our province and the large number of women caring for family members who are discharged too early from hospitals.

144 - 44% Good, affordable child care options.

134 - 41% Unemployment, especially in rural/remote areas.

123 - 37% The low wages, long hours and insecurity of women providing home care services.

120 - 36% Equality between men and women.

116 - 35% The lack of mental health services for women dealing with stress, family break down, and severe mental health issues.

106 - 32% The bias affecting women and seasonal workers in the EI system.

103 - 31% The Federal Women's Program should provide appropriate funding for the everyday equality work provided by women's centres and emerging women's groups.

101 - 31% More women are forced to live in abusive relationships because there is little financial help or emotional support from the Department of Human Resources and Employment.

84 - 26% The lack of decent housing options for women, especially single mothers and older women leaving abusive relationships.

67 - 20% The arbitrary move of public servants from their permanent jobs in St. John's.

56 - 17% The need for child care options and good parenting programs which do not stigmatize women on income support.

6. What issue would you like to see the Provincial Advisory Council address in the coming years?

Number - Percentage - Response

277 - 84% Organize provincial conferences with opportunities for women to listen and learn from one another.

266 - 81% Women and Decision Making: work to have more women involved in decision-making and leadership at all levels of community and government.

261 - 79% Rural / Remote - continue to spend time in rural and remote regions of Newfoundland and Labrador. Assist organizations which are not feminist to understand the feminist movement and that every woman can be included.

256 - 78% Mobilizing / Organizing - continue to help women to organize in the rural communities, but organize in ways which emphasize a women's perspective and experience.

241 - 74% Continue speaking out and providing workshops and information sessions on all aspects of discrimination, equality and violence.

213 - 65% Poverty - focus on poverty as a women's issue especially the long term effects on children. Continue to highlight to government that many government policies and practices which keep women and families poor.

210 - 64% Youth - Focus on involving young women in the active women's movement. Provide opportunities for young women to be heard as well as opportunities for young women to attend conferences and workshops where they learn from older feminists.

205 - 62% Continue to provide networking and assistance to women's councils, women centres, transition houses and any womens groups working on equality issues.

203 - 62% Continue to link social, economic, environment, violence and health with women's equality work.

200 - 61% Listen to the voice of Innu and Inuit women, provide opportunities for them to speak their reality.

187 - 57% Aboriginal Issues - take advantage of every opportunity to highlight the situation of aboriginal women and their families especially in Labrador.

186 - 57% Insist that government appoint at least fifty percent women to all boards (zonal, health, commissions and advisory boards to government.)

155 - 47% Continue to involve women who are less educated about women's equality issues to assist them in understanding just how gender affects society and personal choices.

116 - 35% Insist that the provincial and federal governments provide proper funding to women centres and women shelters.

114 - 35% Profile the positive aspects of womens equality and educate the public on the negative impacts of exclusion.

113 - 34% Build partnerships and collaborate with men who care about women's equality.

94 - 29% Continue to point out to the federal government, especially the Status of Women Minister, that Canadian women are not equal. Newfoundland and Labrador women especially are not equal and we require sufficient resourcing to do equality seeking work.

79 - 24% Encourage the provincial Status of Women Minister to spend some time in Aboriginal communities in Northern Coast of Labrador.

76 - 23% The Advisory Council and women's groups need to remember all aspects of Labrador women lives, both aboriginal and white women.

10 - 3% Encourage MUN to provide decent money to the groups and individuals who are becoming research subjects.

9 - 3% Encourage the provincial government to implement midwifery services.

General Comments ~ Conference

"This was a fantastic conference . . . what a great nonthreatening agenda."

"I have never been with four hundred women and felt so comfortable ~ thank you to the organizers."

"I have never participated in a march before but building the World March of Women into this Provincial Women's Conference was a great idea. I'm glad I came."

"As a seventeen year old and my first time at a women's meeting, now I know how important it is to have women's ideas expressed."

"I had hoped to meet more lesbian women, but the organizers did provide a place for separate meetings. I guess I got caught up in 'exploring common ground' rather than my own agenda as a lesbian feminist."

"I went to a focus meeting, a community World March event, an International Women's Day banquet, and this provincial conference and provincial world march....what a year this has been for someone who would describe herself as just a mother of two small kids."

"There is something amusing about my first 'act of activism' hanging a t-shirt on a clothesline. I've done that for thirty years and the symbolism of a women's revolution being led by clothes hanging on a line is wonderful!"

"We need Newfoundland women to come to Labrador for a Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Women's Conference."

"I didn't think there would be so many young women here and I didn't think that what these women were talking about had anything to do with me. This was great."

"This was the only conference I was ever at where I was afraid of missing something if I left the room even for a minute."

Project Reflections

By: Joyce M. Hancock

President

Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women

One of the challenges undertaken by the Provincial Advisory Council in 2000, has been around the issue of feminism and feminist activism. I have been reflecting upon whether the activities . . . the Community Forums and the Provincial Women's Conference 2000 set in the theme of "Exploring Common Ground" have moved forward our equality seeking feminist agenda.

The smaller community discussions and the larger coming together of women at the Exploring Common Ground provincial women's conference were very much a part of regular feminist activism. Participants ranged from "first timers" at a women's meeting to seasoned feminists with decades of involvement. By any count the undertaking was a great success. The reasons were embedded in respect for the contributions women make to their various communities and legitimated the fact that women's special knowledge of their place was what we should hear. Organizers were confident that concepts like gender analysis could better be understood as it relates to individual experience and reason dictates that this is where feminism begins, by speaking and listening to one another in a comfortable forum with mutual respect.

Putting together a feminist conference would have been easy. . . putting together a women's conference was much more challenging. Since the early 1970's some women have been naming their activities as feminist. Many more women were active but were not naming this activism as anything to do with feminism. How could we as organizers (all feminists) construct a process which would speak to women whether they were homemakers, union activists, women of the faith community, public servants, seniors, youth, volunteers and activists? How would we invite the perspective of women whose experience was primarily focused on identity (i.e. aboriginal, disabled, lesbian, francophone) with women who used as a primary lens concerns for social justice and gender equality.

Feminists who are also conscious strategists would have quickly understood the sensible strategy of Exploring Common Ground. One only need review the conference agenda to see a process which brought women through a validation of women's community based experiences, the challenges facing women in leadership, the acknowledgment of women's diversity, the analysis of the broader social/economic influences and the mobilization on gender issues as global concerns. The anecdotal evidence of these lessons is the individual and collective mobilization seen numerous times as women who had never held a protest sign, never marched, never attended a rally . . . proudly marched through the streets of Gander in solidarity with women throughout the world calling for an end to poverty and violence.

In many ways the Provincial Advisory Council, as organizers of these activities, reached beyond our individual and organizational agendas in the Exploring Common Ground project. We stretched to where the vast majority of women locate themselves ~ in community. We took a calculated risk, based on respect for the knowledge that exists outside the organized feminist movement. And women

responded ~ they responded by participating. In fact, of the nearly twelve hundred women who have participated in some way in these project activities approximately seventy-five percent had never considered feminism as relevant to their lives before attending the community forums or the Provincial Women's Conference 2000.

I am personally proud of the past year of work undertaken by the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Proud of the organization that coordinated this work. Proud of my feminist friends who put aside their need to debate, theorize, and strategize for the greater good of meeting new women, and understanding, validating and influencing more women to the common goals of social/economic equality and inclusion. And proud of the women who came in dozens from throughout this vast province to participate when so many were not quite sure just what would transpire.

This effort of Exploring Common Ground captured one small piece of the women's movement in Newfoundland and Labrador. It has moved forward our equality agenda, but it must be nurtured, challenged and continued if it is to improve the social and economic status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador.