



# Year in Review 2009

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses

## 20 years since the December 6<sup>th</sup> 'Montreal Massacre'

### Annual remembrance of women and children murdered in Ontario

When women and children are murdered by abusive partners, we face a grim truth: Our work to end violence against women is far from over.

It is sometimes a hard truth to absorb. Yet periodically it is still important to measure not only the distance we have come, but also the journey ahead of us, however difficult.

Each year, OAITH's list of women and children murdered in incidents where intimate partners are charged or commit suicide continues to grow. And each year, we continue to name women and children to send a strong message: We do not, will not accept this ongoing killing of our sisters. And we won't forget them.

At Queen's Park this year, members of OAITH marked the 20th year since the shooting of 14 women at l'Ecole Polytechnique. We named the event "For the 500" because, including the 14 and all of the women and children we have on our Ontario list following that December 6th, the number of women and children totalled 500 in 20 years.

The Social Justice and Action/Anti-Racism Anti-Oppression Committee and the Survivor Advisory Committee of OAITH did amazing work to prepare for and present the event.

### Political parties attend

As always we invited provincial political parties from the Legislature to send a representative to our event. The Liberal Party was represented by Minister Laurel Broten, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. New Democrat women's issues critic, Cheri DiNovo,



At our Queen's Park presentation, a security officer checks in with the event and is moved to arrange our t-shirt display so that women and children's names could be better seen.

represented the NDP. The Progressive Conservative Party failed to send a representative. Again. (See "Women deliver the message" on page 6 for more on this.)

Both Minister Broten and Cheri DiNovo spoke to the assembly. Minister Broten spoke about her own reactions to the Montreal Massacre as a young lawyer and her commitment to women's equality. She promised on behalf of the government to continue the agenda already outlined in the Domestic Violence Action Plan.

Cheri DiNovo spoke to NDP positions on the issues and the need to provide not only services for women and children experiencing violence, but responses to core equality issues for women, such as poverty, lack of housing and child care.

Each party was presented with a scroll of the women's names and asked to sign a promise to commit themselves to on-

going action to end violence against women and children in Ontario. Both Minister Broten and Cheri DiNovo signed on behalf of their party.

Survivors and other women present at the event participated in a rose ceremony to honour lost women and children. We also played an updated video of the names of women and children murdered over the past 20 years, with a focus on women and children lost in 2009. The video of names was still playing as the event ended an hour later.

We know, of course, that there are women missing from our list whose stories we've never heard or names we never saw in media reports. Our event honours them as well.

Through our efforts and those of many others over time the numbers have dropped. We can't stop until there are no more names for the list. ■

## OAITH receives grant for resources; training

A proposal to the Ontario Women's Directorate has been successful in bringing much-needed funding to our training and resource development.

The \$600,000 in funding will be used to create training tools and resources for use by all shelters across Ontario.

In the fall, the OAITH Board applied to the OWD for funds to initiate a number of new resources and to develop training for shelter workers, including:

- A new multi-layered website for OAITH that will feature both public, professional and member-only areas and provide additional resources for research, online training and updated information. The new site will also create blog information and interactive areas for shelters.
- Two training videos to support shelter workers giving improved service to women with 'mental health' and addiction challenges. Survivor voices will be highlighted in these videos.
- Video resources for 'core competency' training in frontline areas identified by shelter agencies.
- An online resource library featuring both current and historical information from OAITH.
- Policy template development for shelters based on member input from the 2009 AGM and other member contacts.
- Development of training for shelters on 'risk assessment' issues for women.

Training areas were chosen based on issues of mutual interest to OAITH and OWD as well as results of training needs as identified by shelters in the province-wide survey of agencies by the ministry of Community and Social Services.

We hope to unveil the first phase of the new website before summer and to launch some of the video resources in early fall.

At this point, video, website and resource indexing professionals have been contracted to complete technical aspects of the project under the supervision of the Project Coordinator.

Because OAITH has been severely financially constrained since funding cuts by both the Harris and Harper governments, funding was also provided to create a workspace and equipment for project staff. As a result, OAITH has been able to upgrade the office phone system so that more than one staff person can work effectively in our space.

The Member Education and Training Committee of OAITH has primary responsibility for oversight of this project and facilitated job postings and interviews for two project staff positions.

We are very excited about the new materials and training that OAITH will be able to provide as a result of this funding and thank the Ontario Women's Directorate for support of this important work.

The project got underway in early February and will end in March of 2011. ■

## Project staff welcomed

OAITH has hired Margaret Alexander as Project Coordinator for the training and resource grant.

Many of you know Margaret from her previous involvement with OAITH as a former Board and Committee member.

She has been an activist and educator in the women's anti-violence move-

ment for over 16 years with experience working in both rape crisis and women's shelters. She has served two terms as an OAITH Board member as VP Lobby and VP of ARAO.



Her most recent work was as Program Manager/Developer for Springtide Resources (formerly Education Wife Assault) where she managed community development programs as well as a number of projects related to violence against women training for various sectors. Margaret also teaches in the Assaulted Women and Children's Counsellor/Advocate Program at George Brown College in Toronto.

We have also hired Natalia Maharaj as Project Assistant for the grant.



Natalia comes to us with a keen in-

terest in the anti-violence movement. She has completed her Master's in Sociology and plans to return to school this summer to continue her studies with a focus on HR management. Her goal is to pursue a career as a Diversity Advisor. Natalia will be assisting Margaret in research and administration activities of the project.

We are very pleased to bring the considerable knowledge and skills of both Margaret and Natalia to OAITH. ■

Before



After



## A message from the new Chair of the OAITH Board...

Well, it has been a whirlwind of activity since the AGM. The Board, OAITH Committees and staff have been very busy over the last few months.

It was very encouraging to see a number of women stepping forward to become part of the OAITH Board this year. It was wonderful to welcome back Cindy Cowan and Erin Lee-Todd, who were part of the Board in prior years, and to welcome new members: Catherine Fox, Michelle Reis-Amores, Lisa Medeiros and Trysh Smith. Unfortunately, Cindy had to step down in January for personal reasons, but we are grateful for the time and contribution that she has made to OAITH over the years and wish her all the best.

Currently, our Board has 12 members, with all but two regions represented by a Regional Representative. The Regional Representatives form the Membership Committee, with Michelle

Reis-Amores as Chair. This committee is currently busy planning the next OAITH Annual Meeting.

One promising development this year has been revitalization of regular meetings with the Ministry of Community and Social Services. Our first meeting took place in late March, and there are plans to make these meetings quarterly. OAITH was able to give some feedback on the Ministry's VAW Policy Framework recently completed.

We have always led the way and pushed ourselves to do better. As we have challenged systems that affect women and their children, we have also challenged ourselves. It is our ability to be self-reflective that has helped us move forward and it is the ability of OAITH to risk and constantly evolve that has earned us the respect of colleagues, sister organizations and government.

The work OAITH is doing to engage women in this work who have lived experience of abuse is especially important. As the Canadian Women's Foundation grant for Survivor Voices wraps up, the Board will continue to seek support for this important part of our work. We will ensure the voices of women and their children are heard and that their participation is welcomed and encouraged in OAITH.

OAITH members are privileged to have a very dedicated Board of Directors. The women who sit at the Board table are wonderful, amazing, intelligent and hardworking and I thank them all.



*In tune: Paula Valois, new Chair of the OAITH Board has been working to end violence for almost 25 years.*

Of course, our work cannot be done without the commitment of women within member organizations who give of their time, energy and creativity on OAITH committees. Thank you to all of you!

As always, I also want to thank our Coordinator, Eileen Morrow for her consistently excellent work on behalf of the organization and on behalf of the women and children of Ontario.

I encourage all members to participate actively in their Regional meetings or on a committee of OAITH. It is through your participation and engagement that our organization will continue to be a loud and influential voice in our joint work to end violence against women. ■

**Plan to be there!**  
**OAITH Annual meeting 2010**  
**London, Ontario**  
**October 21st to 23rd, 2010**  
**More information coming soon!**

## Committees contribute hours of work to support Association goals

Two permanent committees of OAITH take on much of our education and social justice work—the Member Education and Training Committee (MET) and the Social Justice and Action/ Anti-Racism Anti-Oppression Committee (SJAC/ARAO). Both of these committees always welcome new members from the general membership.

Below are messages from the Chairs of these Committees.

### Member Education and Training

Greetings women and hello from the MET. The other MET. My name is Lee-Anne Lee I am the current Chair of the OAITH Member Education and Training Committee. I am the Chil-

dren's Advocate and Family Support worker at Harmony House in Ottawa, in the eastern Region of OAITH.

Last year, as you may recall, there we two of us in Co-Chair positions—unfortunately my Co-Chair has had to step down from the Board. A big 'thank you' to Valeska. This is my 2nd year on the Board and I remain excited to work with women from across the province, learning and gathering wisdom and experience from this incredible group of women.

As many of you have heard, OAITH was awarded a grant from the Ontario Women's Directorate for training and resource development. Initial talks with

OWD took place last September and we have been running ever since.

My sincerest thanks to Trysh Smith, Eastern Region Rep and Sharon Floyd, a member of SJAC/ARAO, who provided valuable support and expertise in the hiring process to bring Margaret and Natalia to our table. Hopefully many of you will get a chance to chat with these women as you, the membership, help inform the Committee's work.

(Some of you may be thinking, "Yippee, OAITH has money. Does that mean membership fees will decrease?" Unfortunately, no. The scope of the grant is project specific, time-limited and separate from our operating funds.) [over]

The grant will be the focus of much of the MET Committee's work this year.

Developing videos and training materials means writing scripts, filming and developing the materials. We are building a new and improved website, so if you have input please do not hesitate to contact the MET Committee. The website will also act as an online resource library—we are hoping to have OAITH herstory translated into a format that will allow us to post it on site.

As requested from the fall AGM in Barrie, we are gathering resources to assist in the development of policy templates and again we are looking for input from the membership.

Work on the development of a risk assessment resource for shelters is on our agenda for later in the project timeline. I was able to attend the forum in Hamilton, *Reducing the Risk of Lethal Violence*, in February and brought back materials for Committee review.

Based on feedback from our last training project, we are also going to develop an intermediate level practice guide for shelters to enhance our Anti-Racism/Anti- Oppression framework.

As you can see, there is lots of work to be done and we are getting it done. I am sure that in the next few months Margaret will be in touch with many of you as we move forward. In Sisterhood,  
Lee-Anne. ■

## Social Justice and Action

Hello sisters! The SJAC/ARAO committee of OAITH continues to be active. We are currently solidifying our work plan for the upcoming year. Here are some highlights:

We continue to work on the Survivor Voices Project specifically for survivor engagement and we have a strong core group of survivors working hard to pave the way for both their voices and others. The Committee submitted an application to Status of Women Canada to fur-



*Lee-ers: Lee-Anne Lee, Chair of the MET Committee and Erin Lee-Todd, Chair of the SJAC/ARAO.*

ther support the leadership of survivors but as you know, our application was rejected along with those of other feminist women's groups.

We had the opportunity to work in collaboration with the Member Education and Training committee to co-facilitate an ARAO two-day workshop in Sault Ste. Marie. A member of our committee actively participated in the hiring committee for the new OAITH training project. Working together has proven helpful as each committee brings its strength to the table.

This year we are eager to expand our media strategy for OAITH to enhance our media value and connections, including writing some Op Ed pieces and perhaps developing a clearer public relations role within committees.

With the new website for OAITH, we will be able to expand our opportunities to provide policy information and analysis and to promote more action on women's equity and human rights issues as they relate to violence against women and their children.

We also want to reconnect with and perhaps re-launch the Step it Up Ontario campaign as we anticipate the next

provincial election in 2011.

## Advocacy for equality still critical

Our country recently celebrated and hosted the Olympics in Vancouver; the theme was "believe". We heard it, wore it and sang it! We watched as Canadian athletes demonstrated their skills as well as the bravery, courage, and tenacity it takes to get there.

When will our governments believe and recognize women's bravery, courage and tenacity? When will they believe and understand their role and responsibility in ending violence against women?

How many women and children need to die? How many survivors must tell their stories, how many vigils must we attend before government applies the same energy and resources to "believe-ing" in ending violence against women?

When will governments believe in the need to support women and children to live free from violence? Believe in women's right to be heard and valued? Believe *and invest in* making changes in policies and laws to provide for and protect women and their children? Believe in the need for justice and accountability of abusers? Believe in supporting and adequately funding women's equality-seeking groups?

We, sisters, must continue to demonstrate our determination and tenacity as we act, demand, advocate and speak out against the inequalities and injustice that women experience. We must continue to ensure that the voices of all women are heard and believed. We must continue to believe and practice unity! As an election year approaches, we must be engaged and active in it.

As we continue to navigate this journey, we must believe and do it in solidarity! Being a part of the movement is critical and being a member of the Social Justice and Action/ARAO committee is an opportunity to do that! We welcome any interest or questions so please feel encouraged to contact me, Erin Lee-Todd, at erin.lee-todd@lcih.com. ■

# Survivor advocates strengthen OAITH work

**W**ith the completion of the Survivor Voices project in 2008, OAITH has continued to support survivor involvement in our provincial work.

At the fall AGM, our Survivor Advisory Committee took on the task of presenting their perspectives on including women in service and systemic policy development. With very little time and resources five women created a day of presentations that was one of the most powerful ever delivered at the fall conference.

That was just the beginning.

The following piece outlines how the project continues and the impact it has. It was written by 'Believe', a member of the OAITH advisory group on behalf of the Committee.

*"I learned more from that workshop and was more deeply impacted than any training I have received in my 25 years of providing support and advocacy to end violence against women."*

—OAITH AGM participant —

## Violence does not define us

Presentations show survivors as being VOICES of—but not defined by—their experiences, emphasizing the fullness of their life experiences from a number of perspectives: Geographic and social location (income level, race, culture, language, ability, age, etc.) Experiences they went through or they are still living

today. All of them have left abusive situations and are still facing challenges as they rebuild their own lives. They be-

lieve sharing their experiences will change, educate and create more effective service providers and community systems.

In 2009-2010, the Survivor Voices Project is continuing the campaign: "We've been there; we belong here," in different areas of Ontario. The Project is having a major successful impact on those who attend presentations.

Since the OAITH AGM, over 600 people have attended events (including the November event at Queen's Park) where shelter workers, politicians, students and service providers in the community have heard from survivors who are members of the Project.

## Challenging for change

The Project is challenging services and systems while providing a sense of possibility and solidarity for other survivors who have perhaps not yet found a "voice" in their own community or a way or place to come forward.

Equally important, members of the Survivor Voices Project are bringing the issue of violence against women into presentations across the province of Ontario focusing on collaborative work, policymakers and the public at large.

They seek to create a culture in which those in power must encounter the



**Reaching out:** Board member, Dale Kenney (Northeast Region Rep) gets a hug from a presenter after the Annual Meeting survivor voices workshop day.

women and children affected by public services that too often are poorly considered, uncompassionate and ineffective.

The Survivor Voices Project goal is to raise awareness of the impact of violence for women, families and even

*"Through the Survivor Voices Project, I found out that a lot of workers had good intentions to do the job properly. They just didn't know how to do better or the impact they can cause in people's lives."*

—Survivor (Eastern Ontario)—

communities while calling the culture to a more compassionate and effective response.

Including the survivor's voice for a positive change, first and foremost, creates an advocacy organization, one in which the voices, faces and testimony of survivors are the driving force for creating lasting social, cultural and political change with the goal of "ending violence against women and children." ■

## We've been there We belong here

In a world which tends to blame, isolate and silence women who experience violence, the overarching goal of the Survivor Voices Project is to create a culture where those who have survived the violence have a more powerful voice.

Survivor Voices provides a space, format and confidentiality in which survivors can choose to "become visible," a process that is both healing and equally importantly, culture- and system-changing. Their advocacy goals are being realized through various initiatives, including a series of presentations across Ontario.

Presentations of Survivor Voices are made with the support of OAITH and public testimonials of courageous survivors sharing their own stories of living through violence with their concerns and suggestions to improve the system.

These are women and children whose words have the power to change minds and hearts.



## Feds use woman abuse for anti-woman agenda

This year the Harper government continued to use issues of violence against women as a shield to counter criticism of its policies while advancing anti-choice and anti-feminist agendas.

While we work primarily on provincial issues, OAITH also participates in work on issues at the federal level in coalition with other women's equity-seeking groups.

### Anti-choice bills

A Conservative MP has followed up on the attempt to bring anti-abortion legislation in through Bill C-484 (on dual charges of murder for a pregnant woman citing increased violence against pregnant women by partners).

The new Bill C-510, introduced on April 15th, would amend the Criminal Code to prohibit 'coercion' against a woman to have an abortion. The Bill was introduced as "Roxanne's Law" based on a case where a woman was murdered after she refused her boyfriend's order to have an abortion.

Along with these attempts to open the

abortion debate comes the now high-profile decision to exclude abortion from international maternal health support from Canada. Anti-choice groups are now feeling confident that they can re-open the debate on abortion.



### Cuts to feminist women's groups

Most recently, a number of women's groups who had received Status of Women funding from the feds for years have had their funding cut.

OAITH had its funding cut by Status of Women in 2006. Since then we have received rejection letters for two proposals that would have included survivors in our work, the most recent in April.

The new Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, Rona Ambrose,

counters criticism of the cuts by saying that what women really want is to have rapists and murderers off the streets so that women "can feel safe in their communities and homes."

### What's in a name

Immediately upon her remarks comes the suggestion from federal public safety minister, Vic Toews, that government consider putting the term "rape" back into the Criminal Code.

Never mind that he isn't the minister responsible for making changes to the Criminal Code, or that government is doing nothing to change the abysmally low percentage of sexual assaults that are charged and convicted in Canada. Or providing the equality based supports for women that would truly address the roots of violence against women.

Although some women's anti-violence groups may receive federal funding for projects responding to violence against women, and that our focus remains largely provincial, it is critical that women's advocates are aware of how anti-women governments can use violence against women to undermine women's advances for equality. ■

## Women sought at women's shelters by Canada border enforcement agents

Safety for undocumented women is a federally-based issue for OAITH that continues to create challenges for services that support women and children, including shelters.

The Canada Border Services Agency has visited shelters in Ontario looking for women who are under deportation order, whether or not they are seeking shelter from violence.



A woman demonstrates outside immigration office in Toronto.

Recently in Toronto, the Shelter, Sanctuary Status Campaign highlighted the CBSA searches with a public call for federal

agents to stop looking for women at women's shelters and other anti-violence services. OAITH participated in and supported the call.

### Searches hurt all non-status women

Some shelters have received calls from women seeking refuge from violence who have asked about how safe the shelter might be for them as 'non-status' women. The worry among shelters is that women may not seek shelter safety when needed if they believe they will be found there by immigration officers.

The impact of CBSA calls on shelters then becomes a safety issue not only for the woman they seek, but for other women experiencing violence who fear detection if they use public services.

Ontario shelters are familiar with the kind of impacts that can happen as a re-

sult of enforcement policy since experiencing reaction to new reporting policy in child welfare and subpoenas for our confidential counselling records.

### Safety for all women

Shelters want to remain safe spaces for all women who need to escape abusive situations. Our work will be cut out for us as we challenge immigration officers to change, as we have other system players, in ways that support undocumented women in violent situations, rather than intimidating women and the services they need.

This year, we hope to develop some ways to explore the extent of the issues facing undocumented women needing shelter services and the responses that shelters can use to be more supportive of women and children, regardless of their immigration status. ■

## Haitian women's rights groups fight to rebuild after earthquake devastation

Excerpt from *Holding Up Haiti: Women Respond to Nightmare Earthquake*. Anne-christine d'Adesky writes about her talk with Liliane Pierre-Paul, one of Haiti's leading feminist journalists.

"We've lost so many leaders, so many women leaders, and so many women at all levels that it's just... just... inestimable." She's trying to find her words. "It's an enormous loss."

In a breath, she ticks off the names of the famous and the lesser-known: "You've got Myriam Merlet, and Magalie Marcelin. There's Anne Marie Coriolan of SOFA, the Society of Haitian Women. They're right across the street. You've got Myrna Narcisse Theodore, who died and was with the Ministry of Women. She was really a presence at the Ministry. There's also Nicole Gregoire, who was in the public administration. She was an important woman who did a lot in the area of Haitian-Dominican affairs, who really did something..." Liliane pauses, looking around, her fingers counting. "There are more, there are more... We should name them, it's important."

She closes her eyes, concentrating. "You have Gina Dorcena, an ex-journalist who was with Radio Tropic. You have the woman who deals with geospatial issues..." She grabs my leg: "My God, of course there's Mireille Anglade—one grande femme—again, an immeasurable loss. We have two members of SOFA that died, Mirland Dorvilus and Bernardine Bourdeau...." Liliane stops, reflective. "There's also an enormous loss of women who were in the professional sectors, and young women—so

many young women who were our next generation of leaders. How can we even measure this?"

Liliane informs me that two days prior, at SOFA, surviving women leaders from across social sectors met to talk about the impact of the earthquake, which damaged SOFA and destroyed the office of Kay Fanm, a leading women's rights organization. There are a litany of community non-profits, microfinance organizations, rural centers, and other institutions serving women that have been destroyed or impacted by the quake.

What about how the earthquake affected ordinary women? In Haiti, there's a Kreyol word used for the central, fundamental role of women: Poto-Mitan, from the French word Poteau, as in 'the solid beam that holds up the house.' Haitian women are regarded as the brick and the engine of society—the mothers, the caregivers, the money-makers, and market-vendors, the ones who work tirelessly to care for their children and husbands and parents.

"Tu touche la femme, tu touche la famille," Liliane says, reciting another well-known fact: When you touch women, you touch the family. By now, we know that at least 140,000 lie dead in the rubble of the quake in Port-au-Prince, and that smaller cities like Jacmel, Petit Goave, and Jeremie suffered equally or even greater comparative destruction. Tens of thousands have been injured. Within these statistics are women and girls, including snapshots that reflect a terrible loss: 300 nurses in one institution, the collapse of schools with many girls, and more...

...There is also the additional vulnerability and threat of sexual violence and violence to women and girls that is a common feature during catastrophe and social instability. Without

shelter or safety, there is real reason to worry about the period ahead. Haitian groups and UN agencies have gone public about their fear that sex traffickers will target Haitian children and orphans, especially girls. As a leading orphan's advocate stressed this week, "This is a serious preoccupation for us right now. We have to be vigilant and proactive to confront this threat."

Yet, as Liliane Pierre-Paul stresses, Haitians have long proven unbelievably strong and resilient, and women have demonstrated this in spades since the nightmare of January 12.

*"I look at things through the eyes of women, very conscious of the roles, limitations, and stereotypes imposed on us. Everything I do is informed by that consciousness. So I want to get to a different concept and application of power than the one that keeps women from attaining their full potential."*

—Myriam Merlet—

"It's important for us to recognize how strong women have been in this; how much leadership we have shown," she says. "As of now we haven't been able to really tell that story, the story of ordinary women, because we lost our voice—the radio—for that critical first week. And we've been in a state of complete survival and shock. But let me tell you, they have been incredible. The Haitian women are mobilizing. Even with everything that's been lost, with all their own injuries and pain, they are brave. It has to be said..."

...Looking ahead, Liliane is confident that women leaders will rally, and a new generation will rise to the extreme challenges that lie ahead. That includes creating fresh avenues for women to not only lead but to have a voice in the rebuilding of Haiti that is being envisioned now. And it means reaching out to other women, men, and groups around the world to ask for support and partnership.

"We need many partners, but we are ready to lead. That's the message that needs to be broadcast." ■



Myriam Merlet, Magalie Marcelin and Anne Marie Coriolan were three leaders of the anti-violence and women's equality rights movement in Haiti who lost their lives in the recent earthquake.