

OAITH 2007

YEAR IN REVIEW

30 YEARS OF ACTION FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Over 30 years ago, grassroots women in Ontario began to build their own women-controlled services in communities across the province.

They created rape crisis centres, local women's centres and emergency shelters for women and their children escaping intimate violence, then called "wife battering."

The work they did was—and is—unique, but they also made mistakes. They took wrong turns, excluded sisters doing the same work in marginalized communities and supported some changes that narrowed their vision or created the now familiar "unintended negative consequences" for women and children.

At the same time, they helped ignite an understanding and response to woman abuse that has evolved with time from simplistic ideas of personal dysfunction to an analysis of women's equity and human rights with the potential to end violence against all women.

They were builders. They were brave and rebellious. They were part of a women's liberation movement.

Collective action

In 1977, when there were about 10 groups of women who had created or wanted to build a local shelter, they started to meet and talk about advocating together for public funding, educating local communities and expanding services for women and children.

So began the beginnings of the Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, one of only a few women's networks built by women, for women, to end violence against women in Ontario.

Staying power

Many women working frontline in shelters all over Ontario have moved in and

out of OAITH since it began.

Through and with OAITH, they've advocated and won annual public funding for shelters, creation of funded child advocate programs, shelter outreach and crisis line services, second stage housing programs, education and change within systems, massive public education, social policy development for women's equity and much, much more.

OAITH continues to learn and evolve, to sharpen its analysis of, and action on, violence against women and the ways it continues to be reinforced.

At times OAITH has paid a high price for staying true to a social change and public advocacy mandate to end violence against women.

First the provincial Tories eliminated money for groups like OAITH. Then we lost federal government support in the Conservative ban against funding for advocacy by Status of Women Canada.

We're still here because our members and allies still believe in woman-built, women-controlled political analysis and activism on violence against women.

And we're staying. ■

Oshawa women learn about the Interval House idea

By Ray Bourgeois

Battered wives living with their children are finding friendship and security in a Woman's Interval House in Toronto.

Trudy Don, co-director of the house, told a group of women at the Oshawa YWCA Monday. "our services are aimed to those women who can no longer cope with marital problems and have nowhere else to go."

Approximately 66 percent of the women in the eight-family building are there after being beaten by their husbands, said Mrs. Don. The remainder find residence there because of a communication problem or housing accommodation.

Mrs. Don pointed out that nine out of ten men who beat their wives suffer from a drinking problem. These women then become society's underdogs and find little

help from social services, she said.

The Interval House, funded by the United Appeal and government agencies, has eight fulltime staff members willing to help mothers cope with the hardships of life. The house has been in operation for over three years and last year alone it helped 1,000 families.

Many of the recipients are referred from family court, social agencies or the community at large. Most of them are between the ages of 26 and 32 and stay from one day to eight weeks.

The Toronto Interval House, the only such residence in the greater Toronto area, including Oshawa, has a long waiting list, but priority is given to those in violent or desperate situations.

"The woman must take the first step," said Mrs. Don. "They have to contact us personally or on the phone.

"After they've contacted us we first find them a place to live and then a job. We also direct them to the proper services if they need legal help."

The woman must have children to be admitted she can't have a drug problem.

Of the women who came to the Interval House, 54 percent are married, 28 percent live in a common law relationship and the remainder are women alone with children.

Of those who leave, 21 percent go back to their husbands, 64 percent go out on their own, and 4 percent remarry.

Anyone wanting further information may phone or write to Huron St., Toronto.

Looking back, moving on at AGM 2007

There was no gala entertainment or sumptuous dinner to mark the OAITH 2007 AGM. But for all that, women were able to celebrate our years of struggle and enormous success since 1977.

Gloria Harris of Marjorie House in Marathon again honoured us with an opening ceremony to ground our work together. Because our meeting also coincided with the beginning of Diwali, AGM participants also received information about the meaning of the five day "festival of lights."

SJAC 30

Day 1 then moved right into action with an afternoon gathering of shelter representatives on the lawn of Queen's Park. Members also took part in a "picture yourself making a difference" activity for the Step it Up Campaign (More on the rally at page 4.) To view the photos from the "picture yourself" activity visit the photo gallery at www.stepitupontario.ca.)

In addition to the Queen's Park action, the Social Justice and Action Committee also prepared a short video of interviews with women involved with OAITH over the years. The video focussed on the social justice agenda that OAITH has followed over its herstory.

Members provided valuable feedback on the "short" that will guide future plans to expand the video into a comprehensive look at shelter work in Ontario and the evolution of the Association. We are very grateful to the women who did the first few interviews and to filmmaker Chelsea McMullan, who shot and edited the tape for us.



Making time for action: SJAC member, Leighann Burns, reports on the work of the Social Justice and Action Committee in 2007.

ARAO 30

The Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression Committee presented the film *Juarez: The City Where Women are Disposable*, a documentary by Alex Flores and Lorena Vassolo. The film examines the murders and disappearances of women in Mexico through the experiences and comments of their families and friends.

After the screening, OAITH members engaged in discussion about globalization and its impact on women around the world, including on the links between local and global forms of violence against women and what we can do to work in solidarity.

New directions

At the business portion of the AGM, members discussed and voted on policy and structure motions for OAITH.

Structurally, the Association members agreed to merge the work of the Anti-racism/Anti-oppression and the Social Justice and Action Committees. This

change will concretely reflect the OAITH commitment to an integrated approach. New Terms of Reference for the committee were also tabled.

To ensure that the mandate of training for members is continued, membership also supported a motion to create a new permanent committee of OAITH: Membership Training and Education. This committee will respond to member training issues and continue the ongoing member training for Anti-racism/Anti-oppression practice.

New policy

After a year of review and revision by the OAITH ARAO

Committee and Board, the revised OAITH ARAO policy was debated and passed by membership. The policy updates and expands upon OAITH's former Anti-Racism policy, which was approved in 1994.

Also debated was the motion on fees for membership in OAITH. As a result of the ongoing lack of public funding support for social justice and advocacy work, OAITH has experienced serious constraints that prevent it from fully carrying out its Strategic Planning work and ongoing operations.

After consultation and much agonizing, the Board proposed a significant fee increase based on agency budgets. At the same time, OAITH strongly assured members that we don't want to lose any members as a result of financial issues. As always, members can negotiate lower fees when finances are an issue.

Members supported the need for OAITH to ensure operational stability and the motion was passed. ■



The finish line: Jehan Chaudhry, OAITH Co-Chair, and Laverne Blake, Co-Chair ARAO, happy their AGM tasks are completed.



Techno queen: Along with her duties co-chairing the OAITH Business Meeting, Liz Westcott keeps an eye on the multimedia gear.



Take note: Paula Valois, Secretary of the Board, keeps careful record of decisions during the business portion of the Annual Meeting.

Shelter advocates hear women still blamed for impacts of oppression

Criminalization of women was the theme of the November training day this year. The theme had been chosen by OAITH members earlier in 2007 when the Anti-racism/Anti-oppression Committee surveyed members on a number of options for the day.

Links to systemic oppressions

An excellent panel of speakers made the links to oppression and the ways that women are punished by systems instead of being recognized as survivors of violence and oppression.

- **Kara Gillies**, an education and support centre for sex workers, spoke about criminalization of sex workers and lack of accessibility of women and Transwomen to shelters, as well as the ways in which criminalization of sex workers makes them more vulnerable to violence.
- **Sherry Lewis**, Director of the Native Women's Association of Canada, talked about ways that the legacy of colonialism and racism continues to punish Aboriginal women. Participants heard about the ongoing attempts of the Sisters in Spirit campaign to make visible the murdered and disappeared Aboriginal women across Canada and to hold accountable both men who target Aboriginal women and the systems that ignore violence against Aboriginal women or collude with men who murder them.
- **Clara Ho**, from the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), focussed on trafficking of women and children. Clara drew the links for participants between global issues of poverty, racism, sexism and other roots of trafficking. She outlined the ways that trafficked women are denied support and punished when they are trafficked, and the need for communities and women's advocates to support undocumented women survivors. For anti-violence women's advocates, it is especially important to recognize the increased vulnerability to violence that undocumented women face who cannot call police and often

cannot access community support and services. At the same time, Clara outlined that not all trafficked women and children are without status, and that trafficking happens within borders as well as across them.

- **Rai Reece**, from Prisoners' HIV/AIDS Support Action Network, a grassroots network responding to the HIV/AIDS crisis in Canadian prisons, presented on the systemic oppression that women—and especially women with HIV, women of colour, black women, Aboriginal women and Transwomen—experience in prison. She outlined the root reasons why women end up in prison: poverty, violence and addictions, and provided participants with information about the work of PASAN in support of prisoners with HIV/AIDS.

Valuable learning

All information provided by the speakers, as well as the written information in registration packages for the day, was very well received by members.

Participants reported feeling more confident and informed by the information and better able to support criminalized women. One said: "*Knowing these facts will enable me to advocate much better.*" Another reported: "*I feel I have a better understanding of women who have been and continue to be criminalized in order to make their shelter experience more inclusive and accessible.*"

Sound off

The day was not without some frustration for participants, however. The sound system presented problems in the morning and many women had difficulty hearing the first speaker, which was disappointing. These were corrected and OAITH took over control of the system for the rest



Penal-ized: Rai Reece provides a compelling picture of how women in prison are oppressed. She also showed *Life Inside Out*, a film featuring the voices and experiences of three women at the Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener, one of five women's prisons in Canada.

of the time.

A number of participants also suggested that it would have been good to have more time for discussion and strategizing about how to better incorporate the learning into shelter practices.

OAITH poster available

As usual in recent years, OAITH created a poster to mark November Woman Abuse Prevention Month and focussed the theme this year on criminalization.

The poster, *Stop Blaming Women*, also makes the links between systemic oppressions and current criminalization of women: incarceration, charges against women experiencing violence, child welfare action and so on.

The poster is available in English and French on the OAITH website at www.oaith.ca and can also be ordered by calling the OAITH office at 416-977-6619. ■



No status: Clara Ho outlines the reasons for trafficking of women and the barriers they and other undocumented women face that make them vulnerable to more violence.

Election action gets results for Ontario women

This year, women's advocates working in solidarity ran one of the most successful campaigns on violence against women in Ontario memory.

Step it Up! Campaign members were very active and visible in the spring and fall of 2007 as political parties ramped up their own campaigns for power.

Grassroots activism

There were too many actions and events to list them all here, but women from Ottawa, the Greater Toronto Area, London, Niagara, Lanark County, Woodstock, Picton, Wawa, Mattawa, Red Lake and Northwest Ontario, Thunder Bay, Sudbury/Algoma District, Parry Sound, Owen Sound, Hamilton, North Bay, Mississauga, Kincardine, Halton/Oakville, Guelph, Timmins, Dryden, North York, Sarnia, Kitchener, Markham, and many other communities organized *Step it Up!* election actions.

Here are only a few examples of actions:

- In April, the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres invited political parties to an all-party debate in Toronto. Only the Green Party and the Liberals sent representatives.
- Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes (AOcVF) translated the 10 Steps and the Platform for Parties and other *Step it Up!* documents into French and posted them on their website.
- *Step it Up!* issued press releases, information and suggested actions to highlight social justice calendar days for Mother's Day, International Day for the Eradication of Racial Discrimination, the proposed June week for acknowledging Sexual Harassment, Pride Week and National Aboriginal Solidarity Day, all of which fell within the pre-election campaign period. Women in Ottawa produced a Mother's Day public service announcement and *Step it Up!* activists created a Mother's Day card and E-cards for Pride Week and National Aboriginal Day to send to party leaders.
- In June, women in London launched a "10 Months/10 Steps" campaign called *Step it Up/Women are Missing*, in collaboration with Aboriginal women in the community.
- In September, many rape crisis centres and shelters across Ontario dedicated Take Back the Night actions to

raise violence against women as an election issue using *Step it Up!* as the focus. They held candidates meetings and invited candidates to events. Local grassroots women took part in election activities all across Ontario.

- Women in Lanark County toured their rural region, visiting Town Halls and distributing *Step it Up!* material. They also created a window display on *Step it Up!* campaign issues.
- *Step it Up!* created a video using the "Step it Up" song and visuals showing some of the issues covered in the Platform for Parties. Groups used the video and song in their activities.
- Unions—especially Ontario Federation of Labour affiliates and the OFL central office—worked in solidarity with *Step it Up!* to bring violence against women issues to the parties. Unions posted *Step it Up!* links on their websites, distributed materials and supported *Step it Up!* measures with candidates.

Party lobbying action

Along with local grassroots activism, women's advocates lobbied the four major political parties in meetings set up members of the *Step it Up!* planning



Going Green: Eileen Morrow, OAITH Coordinator, ponders a response from the Green Party candidate at OCRCC sponsored debate in spring 2007.



Stepping it Up with the Liberals: Kathleen Murphy (Office of the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues), Alexandra Johnston and Joanna Furse (both from the Office of the Premier) with Lenore Lukasik-Foss, Erin Lee-Todd (on the phone) and Eileen Morrow (behind camera) for *Step it Up!*

group. In the meetings, they sought party commitments to specific measures outlined in the Platform for Parties.

Getting results

In terms of commitments made by the Liberal Party, we were very pleased to have an impact on Liberal Party platform promises on the issue of frontline services for women.

The Liberals promised to restore the funding cut to women's shelters and second stage housing programs made by the Tories in 1995/96. In addition, they promised to increase funding to sexual assault centres and create a sexual violence action plan for Ontario.

In addition, the Liberal government is working on some improvements to child care and income security, provision of low-income housing and the work to create a poverty reduction strategy for Ontario. Success on the larger issues is the work of many other activists as well as women's advocates, of course, but we have played an important part in it.

The Liberals have also promised to look at a provincial "don't ask, don't tell" policy on immigration status and to meet with us to continue discussions on the *Step it Up!* platform. The Liberal Party platform and the commitments of Premier Dalton McGuinty to the campaign can be read on the *Step it Up!* website at: www.stepitupontario.ca. It will be our responsibility together to hold the Liberal Party to their promises. ■

Welcome to Queen's Park

OAITH shelters bring message to newly elected MPPs: We're 'counting' on you!

The provincial election may be over, but for women's activists the work is only beginning. It's time to hold political parties accountable for their words.

To make the point, OAITH member shelters assembled on November 8th on the lawn of the Ontario Legislature. We arrived even before the newly elected government—women and children first.

As part of our commitment to the *Step it Up!* Campaign, members held a rally emphasizing the *Step it Up! Platform for Parties*.

Tracking tools

A short 'flyer' version of the *Platform* was distributed to MPPs or to their representatives. Prior to the event MPPs were contacted and asked to receive the materials. Many of them said they were not available, but some did meet with OAITH reps that day.

The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres (OCRCC) also provided its *Election Scorecard* for our packages.

The *Scorecard* is intended to evaluate the progress of the Liberal Party on its election promises to women.

NDP leader, Howard Hampton was the only party leader who attended to receive our materials on behalf of his caucus. A representative of the Liberal Minister Responsible for Women's Issues also attended.

Along with written materials, we also distributed small egg timers with an attached message: "There's no time like the present to *Step it Up!* We're counting on you!"

The OAITH "Counting on You" flyer and the OCRCC Election Scorecard have both been adopted for the *Step it Up!* Campaign as short, handy guides to monitor and analyze government attention to the needs of women in Ontario.

Speakers share

Women from different regions of Ontario told of their support for the campaign and about some of the activities in their areas.

We also heard messages of support and action from allies in the campaign. Thanks to Michelle Smith from OCRCC and Marianne Park from the Disabled Women's Network (DAWN) for their



Greetings from Red Lake: Kathy Campbell of New Starts for Women tells the crowd about support for the Step it Up Campaign in the Northwestern Region of Ontario.

words of solidarity. Darlene Ritchie, from At^lohosa Native Family Healing Services was also scheduled to speak about London's *Step it Up/Women are Missing* monthly activities but unfortunately was unable to attend.

Pauline Kajiura led the group in singing the *Step it Up!* song and Erin Lee-Todd emceed the event. We are grateful to all of our speakers and singers. Thank you.

Clocking Liberal progress

To emphasize plans to count down the work and commitment of MPPs—and in particular the Liberal Government of Dalton McGuinty—on the demands of the campaign, we created an 8-foot high working clock that ticked throughout the event.

The clock and the egg timers are a concrete reminder to MPPs that they need to implement the *Step it Up!* measures now. We will be following their progress as the days of their term in office wind down until the next election.

Weather woes

Whenever OAITH members rally at Queen's Park, the weather is less than welcoming. This time: cold and rainy.

The sound system served its purpose but eventually our action was cut short when the system had to be unplugged and taken out of the rain.

The terrible weather made us that much more appreciative of the women who came to represent OAITH, mark Woman Abuse Prevention Month and remember women and children murdered in Ontario.

We'll be back to report the results of our countdown on government action to end violence against women. But next year, we're moving inside. ■



Remembering with Action: OAITH shelter representatives from across Ontario hold a t-shirt "clothesline" naming women and children murdered since 1995 in situations where intimate partners were charged or committed suicide. There are, sadly, over 300 t-shirts so far.

When activism becomes the 'A-word'

At a national meeting of feminists not long ago, a young woman stood up and said she had come “looking for the women’s movement.”

Only she can say if she found it that day. But we know that when she does, she won’t get much government help to press for the equality she deserves.

In Ottawa, Harper has sabotaged the equality rights work of Canada’s most respected women’s groups. Money has shifted to local women desperate to fund equally important community work, taking from one deserving group of women to give to another. Divide and conquer.

In Ontario, almost 15 years later, the cuts and elimination of funds by the same men still affect services and public advocacy groups, and the Liberals still need to address this problem.

What is happening to us?

The Ontario Liberal Government approach to addressing violence against women was outlined in the *Domestic Violence Action Plan* in 2005.

That approach names five “sectors” relevant to the Plan: justice, health, education, child welfare and community services, of which women’s services are a part. These sectors are to find ‘common ground’ and ‘work together’ to deliver services at the local level to women, children and men.

They do this through various local coordination “service system tables” and mandatory “collaboration” agreements, joint projects and protocols. In terms of service coordination at a local level, this is helpful when it includes survivors and works well. Historically, it has often (if not usually) been women’s advocates that have initiated bringing community players together to better meet women needs—and they weren’t forced to do it.

As public funding becomes more out of line with true costs of service delivery, women’s shelters are now forced to spend more time competing for private funding and donations; even to competing with each other. In some communities, this is “doable,” as they say, in others, quite frankly impossible.



Out in the cold: Women at the snowy International Women’s Day March. More often now there is scant time and fewer resources available to organize political action with other women except for ‘marker’ days like IWD and December 6th.

Chills and fever

When OAITH talks to members about the capacity to do social justice action work in the midst of this reality, we hear troubling, but not surprising things.

Some shelters worry about being too publicly outspoken on issues, fearing it might jeopardize the partnerships they’ve worked hard to build with powerful community systems. Some have concerns about loss of fundraising potential, and even public funding, if they appear to be “too political” or seem critical of public policy, especially if there are few allies in their area.

Added to these pressures are the lack of time/resources to do their work. We hear about the frantic efforts of shelters to provide direct services, participate in coordination and collaborative community projects, as well as to organize fundraising and awareness events.

When it comes to social change activism, many shelters report that they count on “marker” days like annual International Women’s Day events, December 6th or the month of November (Woman Abuse Prevention Month) to bring together women in their community. They also work hard to support campaigns that other women’s and equity-seeking groups organize.

Many shelter activists agree, however, that they now spend more time educating and organizing with powerful systems than they do thinking, debating and strategizing with each other.

So what’s wrong with that? And why should government care?

‘Sector’ or movement?

Women’s services are not a ‘sector’ within the community services ‘envelope’ of government; they are still part of the larger women’s movement.

Shelters advance an equality rights agenda for women, focussing on one of the most extreme forms of patriarchal power and control: violence against women. What they do is important not only to the women and children they see individually, but to all other women, children and communities affected by violence against

women—that is to say, to *all* women. It is where we get our strength and our accountability as leaders.

It is the responsibility of the women’s movement to think about, debate and organize around issues affecting women’s equality rights and how all forms of violence—and public policy responses to them—fit within an anti-racist/anti-oppressive movement for the liberation of all women.

Government’s role

In a democracy where not all groups have equal privilege, access or resources to influence government decisions that affect their lives, it is the duty of government to ‘level the playing field’ even if opposition is fierce.

Activists that provide critique of government policy on violence against women are not “complainers.” While it is nicer to receive only compliments and gentle reminders, it is also vital for policy makers to receive constructive critical feedback—and even occasional resistance—in order to “get it right.”

Governments state that they want the best possible advice. That advice comes from women’s advocates, survivors and equity activists within the women’s anti-violence movement, working together with accountability to each other.

The Liberal government of Ontario can support work to end violence against women more effectively if it realizes, respects and, yes, *resources* local and provincial women’s activists who work with each other to end violence against women and their children. ■

OAITH listens to survivor voices

Survivors are the experts on their own lives. And many have had to become experts in negotiating an increasingly complex systemic response to woman abuse that, while it should be effective for women and children, still fails them on a daily basis.

As the “domestic violence” system has expanded, others have assumed leadership while women themselves have too often been sidelined as “victims”.

Thirty years ago, when a coordinated continuum of systemic response was undreamed of, feminist activists and survivors first created the analysis and response to a social justice issue almost no one else acknowledged, much less claimed as their area of expertise.

Leadership

There are many roles to fill in the struggle to end violence against all women. We can use all the help we can get. The proper role of leadership, however, still belongs to survivors and women’s advocates. That much has not changed.

The OAITH Social Justice and Action Committee had discussed movement

evolution and the desire to revitalize women’s leadership, especially in public advocacy for systemic change.

Last year, OAITH received \$75,000 from the Ontario Victims’ Services Secretariat to begin this work.

The Survivor Voices project

Most OAITH members know that this project is organizing to create a guide for communities—from the advice and ideas of woman abuse survivors themselves—on how to include them in making change to end violence against women.

At the OAITH Annual Meeting the SJAC outlined the project and asked for the support of member shelters. Members have also received information about the project by regular correspondence.

Working with a survivor advisory group, OAITH will be collecting input of survivors



Talking to the Experts: On International Women’s Day, women from the Voices of Women Organizing Project in New York spoke in Toronto about their work, and the need for women’s shelters and all community systems to involve current survivors in changing policy and practice.

into the guide. So far, 18 OAITH members have agreed to hold meetings or otherwise involve women in their area in the project. Other groups working with survivors are also becoming involved.

The OAITH website (www.oaith.ca) has more information and a survey that survivors can answer in English or French to contribute their voice to the process.

We expect to finish this project before summer ends and to distribute the results across the province.

If you or your agency are interested in becoming involved, contact us at 419-977-6619 or by email to sjac@oaith.ca. ■

Building on our ARAO training commitment

In 2005, OAITH received funding to create an advanced anti-racist/anti-oppression training curriculum tailored to women’s shelter services.

The curriculum, created by Beth Jordan of Adobe Consulting, further develops workshops delivered by the OAITH ARAO Committee with our *Creating Inclusive Spaces* practical guide.

The advanced curriculum was successfully piloted in the Toronto area, and OAITH has taken note of the learnings and suggested improvements for further training on the curriculum.

Trillium Foundation funding

We are thrilled and grateful to say that OAITH has now received much-needed funding from the Trillium Foundation of Ontario to take the advanced curriculum to shelters around the province and to a develop “train the trainer” program to ensure that when the funding activities are finished, OAITH has a trained group of shelter advocates ready to continue this exciting work.

Advanced training activities begin very soon—OAITH already has a list of shelters interested in taking the training. All Ontario shelters will be contacted by our project coordinator and trainer.

Member education

Membership oversight of the project will

lie with the Board of Directors of OAITH and the new Member Education and Training Committee. This is a year-long project.


ARAO commitment

Membership in OAITH requires an integrated, anti-racism/anti-oppression, feminist perspective on violence against women and a commitment to work towards inclusive service delivery on an ongoing basis.

Inclusive service delivery takes place when agencies and advocates reflect the different experiences and equity analysis of all women. It welcomes new solutions and recognizes that the social locations of women will determine the solutions that work for them.

This enriching project will expand our capacity to respond to women and children who use shelter services.

If your agency is interested in learning more about the project, contact us at 419-977-6619 or by email to arao@oaith.ca. ■



Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

**Advanced Feminist
Anti-Racist Anti-Oppression
Organizational Change and Service
Delivery Training Curriculum**

March 2006

We have chosen each other
and the edge of each others battles
the war is the same
if we lose
someday women’s blood will congeal
upon a dead planet
if we win
there is no telling
we seek beyond history
for a new and more possible meeting
Audre Lorde

Public policy, coalition work moves forward

No one wins the war on women alone. And in a political climate cool to activism, women's advocates doing social change work know this reality for a certainty. We need strong allies.

This year, OAITH has been honoured to work in coalition with many committed activists in the struggle for women's equity rights and an end to violence against all women and their children.

Coalitions build strength

Our work in *Step it Up!* has seen us working closely with provincial coalitions and independent activists all over



Equal pay, equal place: OAITH attended the pay equity campaign launch in January and actively supports the campaign by distributing materials and promoting shelter involvement.

Ontario, especially in the rape crisis, shelters, women's centres and labour organizations. OAITH is also a member of the Equal Pay Coalition and is actively supporting the current campaign to move forward pay equity in Ontario.

We are also members of the federal Women's Ad Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and actively promote this campaign, although we are not often able to participate in meetings.

OAITH supports the No One is Illegal campaign, anti-poverty efforts and campaigns to stop big box child care and to support universal, publicly funded national and provincial child care plans.

This year we also actively supported the Toronto Women Against Poverty Collective in their actions to create housing for women, by women.

OAITH attended the two summits organized by the Ontario Native Women's Association and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres and has endorsed their *Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*.

OAITH is also a member of FAFIA (Feminist Alliance for International Action) and NAC.

Policy work

OAITH participates in government social policy development as a representative of the membership, whenever and wherever possible.

We continue to meet on a regular basis with other policy advocates, staff and political level officials at the Ministry of the Attorney General.

In addition, OAITH welcomes all opportunities to consult with government staff and political representatives on issues related to violence against women and has fairly regular contact with specific representatives of provincial ministries.

In addition, of course, OAITH responds to policy and legislation that has an impact on women and children who experience violence. Since the election, OAITH has responded to the Ontario budget consultations and the federal proposed legislation on *Bill C484: the Unborn Victims of Crime Act*. (This Act frames the murder of pregnant women as double murder and has the potential to endanger women's hard won reproductive choice in Canada.)

OAITH continues to sit on the Family Law Advisory Committee and the Domestic Violence Training Steering Committee of Legal Aid Ontario. We also participate on the National Judicial Council Advisory Committee for judicial education on 'domestic violence.' ■

We appreciate our allies and supporters

With the loss of federal support for women's equality rights advocacy work, the past year has been a struggle.

Without the help of our allies and the support of project funding for specific activities, we would have been unable to carry out much of the important advocacy work of OAITH.

Thanks to Movement sisters

First and foremost, it is our members who ensure that OAITH continues. Each year, member shelters make a decision to renew their membership. Their decision to continue supporting a provincial coalition of sister agencies working on public policy issues is truly appreciated, because as we often quite rightly say: "You *are* OAITH."

Many thanks to our friends at the Assaulted Women's Helpline, who have so generously shared their annual gala

fundraising proceeds with OAITH.

AWHL has also provided free space to OAITH for Board meetings and free telephone access for Directors who join the meetings by teleconference. This year, the Helpline also provided free space to OAITH for a day-long meeting of our survivor Advisory Committee on the *Survivor Voices* project.

Thanks to Labour sisters

This year, our Labour allies have been important contributors to our work, especially in support of our social change work on *Step it Up*.

The Ontario Federation of Labour has been an outstanding support to us as we experienced, like many other advocacy groups, the abandonment of federal government responsibility for women's equality rights research and advocacy. In particular, the OFL has encouraged

union financial support for OAITH, the Equal Pay Coalition of Ontario and the Coalition for Better Child Care as a way to reduce the impact of federal cuts.

We have received support from a number of OFL affiliates: the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) have been especially supportive, as has been the OFL office itself.

Thanks to our funders

This year we thank the Canadian Women's Foundation for support of *Step it Up* through a grant to OAITH and the Assaulted Women's Helpline.

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