



Year in Review 2008

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses



Call to action: Survivors and shelters remember women and children

On December 3rd, survivors and women's shelter workers joined together to remember women and children murdered in Ontario and to mark the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

Over 20 women travelled on a bus from Eastern OAITH Region to participate in the event. They were there to see the launch of the *Survivor Voices* report and to add their voices to the launch as they had as survivors to the project itself. Shelter advocates from OAITH member shelters were also there to support the event.

The OAITH Social Justice and Action/Anti-racism-Anti-Oppression

Committee filled the room with T-shirts of women and children's names. The women and children 'took' chairs at Queen's Park while participants stood to honour them.

Two survivor advocates spoke about their experiences and their desire to be involved in the work of ending violence against women for other women. OAITH representatives provided an overview of the Survivor Voices project.

A video of the names of women and children murdered in Ontario since 1995--284 women and 43 children--was played during the presentation.

MPPs from all three parties at Queen's

Park were invited to attend. Women had hoped to talk with them about their experiences.

Unfortunately, it appears that all MPPs had other priorities that day.

Undaunted, the survivors took their voices to the Main Legislature building where they called MPP offices to deliver the reports or have them picked up from the office of Sheila White, assistant to NDP MPP Andrea Horwath, who had graciously provided her space for the women.

Assistants to Ministers Madeleine Meilleur and Deb Matthews did attend and spoke with the women after the event was over. ■



Top left: Facilitator and trainer, Naomi Binder Wall outlines history of mental health view of women over the years.

Top right: Heather Cunningham won a Courage to Come Back award and now works for the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health facilitating the Beyond the Label program.



Bottom: Linda Chamberlain, a founding member of the Dream Team. She also facilitates the Beyond the Label program and has won the Courage to Come Back award.

Beyond pathology: a 'Dream' workshop day

Women's experiences of mental health treatment and violence are linked. A number of expert speakers brought that message to OAITH's annual anti-oppression training in a number of ways.

Les Marple, a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) spoke of the need to rethink stigmatizing psychiatric notions of mental health as illness and the efforts of anti-psychiatry advocates to challenge traditional mental health perceptions of women's lived experiences of violence.

Naomi Binder Wall spoke of the damage that has been done to women during the evolution of psychiatry and mental health responses in Canada. She urged participants to take an anti-racist/anti-oppression perspective on the ways in which women's experiences of oppression have been psychiatrized and used to further support marginalization of women in Canada.

Heather Cunningham and Linda Chamberlain shared their personal story of inaction within the mental health system and its impacts on their lives.

They are part of the Dream Team, a group of psychiatric survivors and family members who are advocating for more supportive housing in Ontario for psychiatrized people.

Linda is a founding member of the group. She spoke of the life-changing impact of safe, supportive housing on her and other survivors. She also outlined the political action goal of the group to advocate for supportive housing for psychiatric survivors.

Heather is a new member of the Dream Team. She shared her experiences as a survivor and her goals to provide support for other survivors as well as to educate service providers and the public about the need to stop stigmatizing and marginalizing survivors.

She also spoke of the increased vulnerability of women to violence against women experienced when they have no stable housing and when community services follow oppressive responses to survivors: refusing admission to services, not believing survivors and so on.

Visit the Dream Team website at: www.thedreamteam.ca.

ARAO project trains shelter workers/trainers

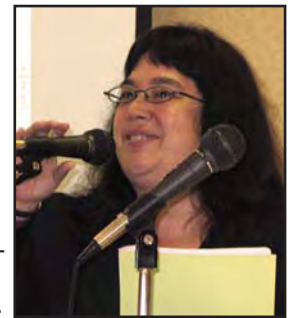
OAITH was very pleased to welcome May Lui to the Association this year to deliver our ongoing ARAO membership training. May also organized the training day at the AGM.

May is an experienced trainer and also participated in the development of the advanced ARAO curriculum that OAITH uses in trainings.

The Advanced Feminist Anti-Racist Anti-Oppression Organizational Change and Service Delivery Training Curriculum will be delivered in eight shelter staff/manager trainings and four board trainings during the months of April, May and June.

The project is going very well. There was a Train the Trainer session held in January from which eight trainers

emerged in the OAITH membership. These women will accompany May on her provincial trainings.



May Lui, OAITH Project Coordinator, will be lead facilitator in training.

The Ontario Trillium Foundation, our funder, mandates that shelters from the North are

prioritized. We are pleased that we have the funds in our grant that cover travel costs to ensure access to Northern region shelters.

May will be the lead trainer and one volunteer trainer will assist and learn. The training has been scheduled to take advantage of the best travel conditions for women, especially in Northern regions. May is looking forward to the trainings and is very supportive of shelters doing this important work.

If you have questions about trainings after this project ends, please contact the Education and Training Committee Co-Chairs, Valeska Gomez and Lee-Anne Lee.

Shelter, Sanctuary, Status campaign aims to support 'non-status' women

Isabel Garcia and her two children left Mexico to escape a life-threatening abusive situation but found little support from the government of Canada. Despite claims it is a world leader in addressing violence against women, Canada rejected Isabel's appeal to stay and ordered her deported. She has not reported to go.

Supporters of Isabel and many other women who seek refuge from gender-based violence have been organizing to change the way community services and government treats women without "status."

The Shelter, Sanctuary, Status campaign, which is a part of the No One Is Illegal movement, has been working to develop policies within community agencies, including women's shelters, to support women who need services but fear deportation if they reach out for help.

OAITH has endorsed the campaign.

Political actions

In addition to the Toronto-based community support efforts, the campaign has also organized political ac-

tion to raise public awareness of the issues for 'non-status' women and the need for changes to federal immigration policy and practices.

There are five demands to federal authorities:

- End orders to deport women whose cases involve violence against women.
- Direct immigration authorities that all community services supporting women experiencing violence be sanctuary services free from surveillance and enforcement.
- Implement the promised Refugee Appeal Division.
- Implement a process for temporary foreign workers to receive permanent status on entry, especially live-in care givers who are particu-



Marchers gather at Ryerson University in Toronto and walk to Immigration Department offices to protest deportation from Canada of Isabel Garcia and other violence survivors without immigration status.

larly vulnerable to violence.

- Working with women's advocates, ensure Immigration Department decisions are based on information and process founded on an understanding of race, class, gender and sexuality issues.

For more information, visit the No One Is Illegal website at: <http://toronto.nooneisillegal.org>. ■

Congolese Women's Campaign Against Sexual Violence seeks global support

Every day, 40 women are raped in the Eastern Congo, according to women's activists seeking international action to end the use of sexual violence in war.

According to one report, aid workers from Oxfam label the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) "one of the worst places in the world to be a woman." In one 6-month period, upwards of 5000 rapes took place in the eastern part of the Congo during armed conflict.

The Congolese Women's Campaign Against Sexual Violence is an initiative of women's groups in Eastern Congo established to fight rampant sexual violence against women.

They are raising an alarm against the use of rape, torture and sexual violence against women as weapons of

So that bodies of women cease being a battlefield, so that sexual violence ceases to be an arm of war, so that Congolese, both women and men, may take back their dignity and finally have the hope of living in peace...

Congolese Women's Campaign Against Sexual Violence

conflict and war in the DRC and say:

"As activists and workers working with the victims, we have for many years repeatedly denounced the systematic use of sexual violence by all of the armed groups present in the DRC, including the regular forces of

the Congolese army."

The campaign website lists nine demands for all the parties in conflicts, the Congolese State, United Nations bodies and the International Criminal Court.

It asks that individuals and groups across the international community sign on to a petition in support of the demands in this ongoing campaign to end violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

As part of our global support work, OAITH has signed the petition.

For more information and to sign the petition, visit the campaign website at: www.rdcviolencesexuelle.org. ■

OAITH Annual meeting provides chance for organizational review

Association members gathered in Thunder Bay this year for the annual general meeting. Nestled by trees and mountainous vistas, we avoided the snow falling in central and southern Ontario and were treated to sunshine and balmy temperatures.

What is OAITH?

The first day began with a light-hearted review of OAITH's herstory of action and achievement.

Members of the SJA/ARAO Committee played "OAITH Jeopardy" with participants, asking questions about Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression work, political action campaigns, women who have participated in OAITH's journey, and a lot more.

Although membership were quite well-versed on the answers, and maybe knew way too much about the Jeopardy theme music, nobody won any money.

Fortunately, shelter workers are fairly familiar with not winning the money, and were able to laugh in spite of it.

Serious stuff

With the herstory of OAITH in mind, members entered into a facilitated organizational development discussion.

OAITH's Board of Directors networked throughout the year with its current members and with those whose membership had lapsed over the past few years to invite their partici-



Leighann Burns, Kathy Campbell and Trysh Smith tested members' knowledge of Ontario shelter herstory with a game of "OAITH Jeopardy". Members passed with flying colours.

pation in an open discussion on OAITH's future, its structure, its mandate and membership's commitment to its work. Ruth Armstrong facilitated the discussion on the day before opening the business meeting.

Participants engaged in candid discussion throughout the day on issues of governance and structure, the disconnect between and among members, the role regions have to inform the work of OAITH, why some members have not renewed membership, the role of men in the anti-violence movement, and what members want from the Association.

At the end of the day, a funding task force was created, a commitment made to investigate how OAITH's website might be updated to enhance communication with membership and an agreement to audit the existing Strategic Plan that ends in 2009.

Notes were gathered from all of the group discussions and have been reviewed by the Board of Directors for further action during 2009/2010.

Day 2

On the second day, members conducted Association business and participated in some political action.

Members of the SJA/ARAO Committee reviewed the work of the Survivor Voices project in which many members of OAITH had participated.

In support of plans to launch the report of the project in December, members faxed and emailed from the meeting room to their MPPs with an invitation to join OAITH for the report launch and remembrance of women murdered in Ontario in the past year. Local media were invited to interview a member of the SJA/ARAO Committee about the action.

The Committee also unveiled a new video presentation of the names of women and children murdered in Ontario since 1995. Copies of the video were available for members to use in November Woman Abuse Prevention Month and December 6 activities.

A word from our sponsors...

The Annual Meeting activities are planned and coordinated by the Membership Committee in partnership with the Board of Directors and OAITH permanent committees.

The Membership Committee includes the Regional Reps, a Co-Chair and Chair. The Committee meets through our Board meetings and has been attempting to follow through



Organizational development leader, Ruth Armstrong, reviews areas for discussion groups at OAITH development session.

with the recommendations that came out of the meeting.

We're still searching for Regional Representatives from some of our regions. If you are from the East Central, West Central or Southwest Regions we need your input and voice on the Board of Directors.

Regional Reps are named by the members of the Region and act as links between regional member shelters and OAITH. Having a Regional Representative is an effective way to ensure that your agency is aware of OAITH decisions and has a way to communicate important ideas and concerns with the provincial membership on an ongoing basis.

Your new Membership Chair is Patti Lessard, from Mattawa Women's Resource Centre in Mattawa. Liz Westcott will support Patti in her position while passing on all the membership information and tasks.

Contact Patti at: 705-744-5567 at Mattawa Women's Resource Centre, or email her at: aneault@bellnet.ca



See you next year! ■ Gloria Harris from Marjorie House, second from left, leads members in song to close the AGM and send us safely on our way.

Campaigns for equity and justice supported by OAITH members

Shelters across Ontario this year gave time and voice to equity issues for women.

In addition to supporting the Shelter, Sanctuary, Status campaign, OAITH members were active in campaigns for pay equity and for justice for murdered Aboriginal women.

Pay equity still issue for shelters

It has been 20 years since the passage of the *Pay Equity Act* in Ontario. Yet women in Ontario still earn only 71% of the wages for men.

The Equal Pay Coalition, of which OAITH is a member, is campaigning for the Ontario government to move on this human rights issue as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, but so far, the government has not included pay equity for women in its plans.

Pay equity is especially problematic for women in "proxy comparator" workplaces, including child care centres, women's shelters and other workplaces that employ a majority of women workers.



Among other women, shelter workers will benefit from the success of this campaign, so we urge all shelters to support the Equal Pay Coalition in its efforts.

Learn more about the campaign at the Equal Pay Coalition website: www.equalpaycoalition.org where you can download the Coalition's up-to-date, informative report on pay equity: *A Framework for Action on Pay Equity in Ontario*, and other action materials to support this vital work.

Walking women await justice

Last summer, a number of OAITH shelters actively organized support for the Walk4Justice2008 campaign to raise awareness and demand action on the murders of Aboriginal women in Canada.

From Vancouver to Ottawa, walkers headed out on June 21st, Aboriginal Day, and ended with a huge rally on Parliament Hill on September 15th.

Gladys Radek, whose niece was murdered on the Highway of Tears, a notorious stretch of highway where many other women have also been killed, was one of the founding organizers of the walk.

Many communities in Ontario warmly

greeted the walkers and signed their petition seeking a public inquiry into the murders of Aboriginal women.



Gladys Radek, an organizer of the Walk4Justice2008 campaign, with her granddaughter.

Despite his widely touted apology to Aboriginal people last year, Prime Minister Harper didn't meet with the walkers, nor did his Minister of Indian Affairs, Chuck Stahl.

Please continue to support the Walk4Justice campaign with letters to the Prime Minister, addressed to the House of Commons, Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, K1A 0A6.

No stamp (or walking) required. ■

New OAITH Education and Training Committee off to a great start

Hello from the Member Education and Training Committee! Our current members are Jennifer Hannah, Ginette Demers, Charlene Brown, Parveen Bhardwa, Rachel Evangelho, Valeska Gomez and Lee-Anne Lee. We would like to inform you all of what has been going on within our committee. After the AGM in Thunder Bay, the Committee came together with passion and dedication to contribute to OAITH's work.

Valeska Gomez and Lee-Anne Lee are the new Co-Chairs. Valeska works at Sandgate in Central Region and Lee-Anne works at Harmony House in the Eastern Region and the remaining Committee members are made up of women who come from the membership of OAITH.

This is our first time at the OAITH Board table and we are excited to have the opportunity to work with women from across the province, learning and gathering wisdom, skills, dedication and experiences from this incredible group of women.

We thought it would be good idea to let the membership know what the Education and Training Committee

has been working on.

We had our first meeting on December 2nd to coincide with the day of action at Queen's Park in Toronto. It was a powerful moment as we placed the T-Shirts of all the women and children who had been murdered at the hands of their abusers on the chairs.

From there, Valeska and Lee-Anne met with May, the staff person hired by OAITH to deliver the provincial Advanced ARAO training to shelters in Ontario (emphasis was to be placed on northern shelters to meet criteria for the Trillium grant funding.) In order to make this happen, we had eight members of OAITH participate in the Train the Trainer 2-day workshop in Toronto in January 2009.

From that training date, May has been busy organizing and scheduling dates for the shelters to receive the training. In the next few weeks she will be contacting the facilitators to set up actual dates to travel to the shelters and provide the Advanced ARAO training. This will be no small undertaking, as all this must be completed by June, when terms of the grant will end.

We had our first teleconference meeting in February 2009. At this meeting we worked on a number of items and set ourselves some tasks and activities. We are reviewing the OAITH Strategic Plan in order for us to develop the Committee's work plans for the upcoming year.

We have asked all Committee members to review both the initial ARAO training (Creating Inclusive Spaces) and the Advanced Curriculum ARAO training and we hope to develop a modernized tool for use in shelters. Once this tool is developed, we hope to be able to offer the training to all member shelters of OAITH (I know, a very lofty goal given the resources available to OAITH).

We are looking into how we can ensure that women from diverse ethnic backgrounds and younger women can be part of the Committee; we are looking into developing an orientation package, and enhancing the opportunities for committee members to make meaningful contributions to the work of OAITH. And so much more... In sisterhood,

Member Education and Training Committee ■

SJA/ARAO Committee promotes survivor advocate voices on policy

The SJA/ARAO Committee is calling all feminists...

Are you a feminist? Yes, we said the "F" word. If you are, and you have a dream to see a world where womyn are free from violence and are treated with dignity and respect, where racism and oppression is no longer tolerated, then we need you!

We are the Social Justice and Action/Anti-Racism Anti-Oppression Committee (SJAC/ARAO). We have morphed ourselves together into an unstoppable force for womyn. The SJAC & ARAO Committees are permanent active committees of OAITH. These committees operate from an intersectional, anti-racist/anti-oppression feminist framework. These two committees were joined together in

2007 and are comprised of women within the OAITH membership, associate membership and friends of



Lee-Anne Lee checks the appliances before her 'shift' to iron the first of 327 T-shirts used in the Queen's Park event on December 2nd.

OAITH that support anti-racism/anti-oppression work and social justice action concerning women and children's issues.

As a committee, we are responsible for action on public policy issues affecting womyn and children who experience violence, for completing action plans on funded projects undertaken by OAITH in its public advocacy role, participating in government consultations, and meetings with government or political staff.

We also are responsible, along with OAITH staff, for developing reports, briefs and other documents that speak to public policy issues for womyn and children, and for coalition building and joint action with



Survivor advocates prepare for their presentation at the OAITH Queen's Park December launch of the Survivor Voices report.

- Audit the 2007 OAITH Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression Implementation Plan.
- Develop strong working partnership with provincial government representatives.
- Recruit new members and Co-Chair for the Committee.

Marking IWD 2009

In recognition of International Women's Day, members of the Committee, OAITH Board and women from the Survivor

Voices Project met with provincial Cabinet Ministers and members of their staff to discuss recommendations from the *Survivor Voices* report.

On March 3rd, we met with staff from the office of Jim Watson (Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing), Madeleine Meilleur (Minister of Community and Social Services, Minister Responsible for Ontarians with Disabilities and Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs), Chris Bentley (Attorney General of Ontario) and

Deb Matthews (Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues).

Our time was brief in each meeting, but we outlined some issues for women related to each Ministry and survivors shared their experiences and experiences of women they knew with the Ministers and their staff. We also provided brief written outlines of the issues.

Since those meetings took place, we have been continuing to arrange further opportunities for contact and information sharing with the Ontario government.

If you are interested in joining the SJA-ARAO Committee please contact Rebecca Rogers, our Co-Chair, at Rebecca@nellies.org.

Thanks to Cecelia Paul, Carmelia Agustin, Leighann Burns, Faiza Ahmad, Kathy Campbell, Trysh Smith and Liz Cook, the current members of the SJA-ARAO Committee, for their ongoing work and dedication to ending violence against women.

"Revolution is not a one-time event."
Audre Lorde

— Rebecca Rogers

our equality-seeking allies.

The Committee recognizes that all racism and oppression of womyn is a form of violence. Our aim is to ensure that the equal civil, human, social, economic, political, spiritual and sexual rights for the womyn and children we serve are guaranteed.

We are currently working to:

- Continue to support the Step It Up Campaign.
- Raise the profile of social justice events and significant dates.
- Create and produce poster and materials for the Woman Abuse Prevention Month. The theme for 2009 will be Survivor Involvement.
- Work in collaboration with the Member Education and Training Committee to develop the one day training at the AGM on Survivor Involvement.
- Survivor Voices Project Follow Up Actions: We have submitted a grant application to the Canadian Women's Foundation to build a model for survivor involvement in OAITH social action activities.
- Continue to work in solidarity with federal and provincial campaigns on poverty, federal cuts and other emerging issues.



Survivors from the Survivor Voices project Advisory Committee and participants in the project, along with members of the OAITH Board of Directors met with a number of Ontario Government Cabinet Ministers, including Madeleine Meilleur (above left), to follow up on the Survivor Voices report and to mark International Women's Day.

Critical policy work will affect women and children in 2009/2010

Social policy decisions coming in 2009/10 must reflect a gender and equity perspective if they are to be effective, so more than ever, this year government will need the voices of women's advocates and survivors.

In other words, **your** voices.



creators of the report were troubled by the lack of inclusion of recommendations, gathered from women's advocates across Ontario, in the Poverty Reduction Strategy later released.

It will be vital that we persuade government that the poverty of women, and in particular of marginalized women, must be addressed in the coming poverty reduction measures and policy considerations, and that government must see poverty reduction through a gender and equity-based framework. We hope that all OAITH members will contribute to this review in the coming months.

Our hope is that this time, therefore, we will see more substance than study in this review, and that the housing crisis in Ontario will be taken more seriously than in the past. OAITH will need your support and input to put before government the needs and advice of women who experience violence.

Family law reform

As you know, the provincial government has tabled a bill to make restraining orders more effective and has moved progressively on other family law issues, such as consideration of 'domestic violence' in the *Children's Law Reform Act*, and religious arbitration in family law matters.

We understand that further reform will be considered by the Ministry of the Attorney General, and the (fairly new) Ontario Law Commission is also considering their own review of family law, although we don't know yet how extensive their work will be.

Needless to say, OAITH will want to participate in any new policy or legislation that changes the way the family law operates for (or against) women who experience violence in Ontario, so please look for this work in the coming months. ■

Poverty reduction measures

Legislation has now been read on poverty reduction in Ontario and the government has introduced its Poverty Reduction Strategy.

These initiatives are positive, especially in acknowledging the need for public policy intervention on poverty and the need for targets and timelines. But there is also disappointment: lack of funds for child care, pay equity, social assistance rates that meet the real costs of living and important changes to social assistance policies that have harmed women and children across the province.

Social assistance review

The Province of Ontario will be conducting a review of social assistance policy in the coming year that will need the benefit of women's guidance. OAITH will be following up on this process to ensure we are aware of member issues for women.

OAITH participated in the work of METRAC and the Toronto Woman Abuse Council resulting in the report, *No Cherries Grow on Our Trees*. The

Affordable housing review

This year, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing plans an affordable housing review. OAITH participated in such a review under the Tories, but of course the review didn't result in more low-income housing. We know that poverty and lack of housing go hand in hand for women and children escaping violence.

Appreciations...

Many thanks to all who supported OAITH in its work in 2008.

Above all, we appreciate the survivors who have worked with us this year to make Survivor Voices a success. You make it happen, women!

We also want to thank our members who keep the Association moving forward as it works to give voice to women who experience violence, despite continuing funding pressures. We are so grateful, not only for your financial support, but also for your contributions to work on the Board and Committees, in regional meetings and through one-to-one contacts throughout the year.

Once again we thank the women at the Assaulted Women's Helpline for their ongoing support of OAITH at the spring gala and fundraiser.

We thank our donors, especially our labour sisters, who support us financially and through their work for women who experience violence and inequality at home and at work.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the Government of Ontario for this year providing funding increases for women's shelters and second stage housing programs across the province. While there remain steps to take to meet shelter needs, restoration of funds cut by the Harris government is a significant commitment to women and children. ■