

Activities Update

PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Winter 2008

ABOUT ISABELLE CHRISTIAN



“My background is in community development and education. I have served on projects focused on women and families - employment outreach, family life education, and family violence prevention. As an educator I have been instrumental in preparing women for leadership roles, through the UPEI Management Development Program for Women, and variations of this program. Currently I work mainly with adults, in continuing education programs at the UPEI Centre for Life-Long Learning. I love to celebrate victories with adult learners!”

WELCOME NEW PEIACSW CHAIRPERSON!

It is with anticipation and trepidation that I have taken on the role of Chairperson of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women. The anticipation grows from my affinity for new challenges in which I feel I can make a contribution, in my own way. The trepidation grows from realizing the scope of public affairs for which this Council is called to be a voice for women. Kirstin Lund, outgoing Chair has done an admirable job of describing this scope, in her reflections in this newsletter.

The Council was created in 1975, born into a different environment than we find today. The issues were much the same - not a positive sign for women - but women's advocacy organizations were strong and active at the local and national level. Eventually, public funding supported some significant initiatives, and we can identify real gains for women and children in the areas such as funding court challenges (no longer funded since 2006), pension drop-out clauses, early childhood policy, and employment preparation programs.

The environment has changed and women's advocacy has evolved with the times. We are seeing withdrawal of funding from many national initiatives. We are unlikely to see third-wave women organize in the same ways as in the past. Women's equality-seeking organizations were different two or three decades ago, when Betty Friedan's questions unleashed 2nd wave feminism. Women's equality was on the public radar then, whether or not the public was sympathetic. Today one of the greatest challenges that I perceive is the widespread assumption that as a province and country we can put equality efforts

to rest. Women have arrived! The playing field is level!

Not so. Some women have arrived, because they had access to resources such as good health, an education, self-esteem, social supports, and perhaps even freedom from violence in their own homes. As Kirstin points out, we should continue to care because as a country “we are only as strong as the most vulnerable among us... and that definitely includes women.”

The distinction, *some* women, not *all* women is important. The ACSW has never claimed to speak for all women; rather, it has focused on speaking for the most unequal women. The ACSW has claimed through word and deed to act as an agent of change for equality. I approach this role with great respect. I am aware that some women will not feel the need of the Council's voice. And that is OK. Perhaps you could then be a voice for others in need of advocacy and caring. There are many ways to do that within our communities, and every helping hand counts.

Given my experience in my community life and my work I want during my term as Chair to maintain a focus on women in decision-making, and on women's economic status. Under Kirstin's leadership, the PEIACSW has focused on developing a collaborative relationship with government. I am hopeful that government will continue to receive and consider the Council's input, as the Council strives to “work for equality and to support women's full and active participation in social, legal, cultural, economic, and political spheres of life.” This is our mandate, after all.

- Isabelle Christian, February 2008



Outgoing Chairperson Kirstin Lund receives an appreciation award from the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, presented by Isabelle Christian.



Outgoing Vice-Chairperson Elaine Rabinowitz receives an appreciation award from the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, presented by Sadie MacKenzie.

Outgoing Chairperson's Reflections

This month, as I complete my five-year term as Chairperson of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women and look back on what I've worked to accomplish, I see that the issues we have focused on during my tenure are the same issues that past chairs have dealt with since 1975, including women in politics, poverty, child care, violence, access to justice, and choice. Change has been slow.

As Chairperson, I've learned that many Islanders, including many elected to govern us, believe that women's equality has already been achieved, and that improving the status of women need not be a priority. How I wish that were so. But just because some individual women have been able to achieve the highest positions in academics, business, and politics does not mean all women are equal. On the contrary, statistics prove that women remain more vulnerable than men to poverty, abuse, and a general inability to access opportunities.

It is past time for us to stop imagining that the status of women is just fine, when the absolute facts of women's economic disadvantage, under-representation in decision-making, experience of violence, and unequal access to justice, show us so clearly that women are treated unequally.

We are only as strong as the most vulnerable among us. For PEI to be a healthy and prosperous place to live, our government and all Islanders must concern themselves with improving the status of the most vulnerable, and that definitely includes women.

Why does action to improve the status of the most vulnerable have to focus on gender? It is not enough to improve the status of say, recent immigrants or Aboriginal peoples as a group. Since women in general have disadvantage, improving the status of vulnerable groups will improve the status of the men of those groups disproportionately to that of the women. That means we need actions that ensure women are treated equally AND that improve the status of vulnerable groups.

Some good short-term solutions have been delivered by government over the years, including a decent focus on family violence prevention and some funding for women's shelters, for minimal services for abuse victims, and for the most vulnerable of family law legal aid clients. There has been an occasional acknowledgment that women need different services than men, for example, in the area of addictions.

What has been missing, however, is a true and concentrated focus on the root of the problems: that is, women's inequality.

My experience as volunteer Chairperson of the Advisory Council tells me that equality issues require long-term commitment, not short-term fixes. For this reason, hearing that Premier Ghiz's State of the Province address to Rotary highlighted his desire to look beyond the four-year election cycles that many governments focus on was good news. Hearing that the Province's long-term planning includes enhancing equality to ensure a province that is democratic, inclusive, and equitable far into the future, will be even better news.

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This kind of focus on equality requires political will - unfortunately, this will has been lacking, perhaps because when MLAs' constituents talk “in the coffee shops” and “on the doorstep” about issues of poverty, lack of accessible or affordable child care, or a need for legal aid, many politicians are hearing them as personal or individual stories and are not recognizing that these individual stories are part of a pattern of systematic discrimination.

Sometimes those affected by equality issues themselves don't see what they are experiencing as part of a pattern. It's hard for vulnerable people experiencing discrimination to mobilize and get their message out in a way that business people or industries can. They very often need equality-seeking organizations to help identify the patterns and help them to get the message out.

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As my term comes to a close, I leave Islanders and our government with these recommendations to ensure a more healthy and equitable balance for PEI. (See sidebar.)

Studies show that if you live in a society that has a great deal of gender and income inequality, both women and, particularly, men are less healthy and have a lower life expectancy. There is something about inequality in societies that harms people. Studies show that improving women's equality also improves life for children and men.

If Premier Ghiz wants to look beyond four-year election cycles, there is no better long-term strategy for making life better for vulnerable Islanders and giving all Islanders a healthy, sustainable and equal society than enhancing the status of unequal women.

- Kirstin Lund, January 2008

Kirstin Lund's Recommendations for a More Healthy, Equitable Balance for PEI

- To avoid a deepening of women's inequality in the long term, government needs to include in its planning an awareness of how decision-making and policies impact women and men differently.
- Women's organizations need to be well supported to get information out about patterns of inequality in society.
- Islanders need to start talking to politicians about how their individual circumstances fit into a larger pattern of issues that demand our government's attention and resources.
- Supportive men and Islanders who are not living with poverty and abuse can help by telling decision-makers and fellow Islanders that increasing the status of vulnerable groups, including women, should be a priority.
- Politicians - along with helping individual constituents with issues such as poverty, legal aid, child care, and abuse - need to put priority on solving the root causes of these issues, in recognition that they are part of larger societal patterns.

International Women's Day 2008

TOGETHER IN COURAGE



♀ Building
♀ Visioning
♀ Organizing
♀ Celebrating

International Women's Day celebration of women champions for the environment.

Saturday, March 8

7:00 p.m.

Georgian Room, Charlottetown Hotel

Music and song by Gaia Singers

Panel conversation among honoured women

Keynote presentation by Susan Howatt

Special guest presenters

Environmentally friendly door prizes

Reception to follow

“Leaders Among Us” 2008

Bethany Doyle and Joan Doyle: Spirituality & Earth Advocates

Gaia Singers: “O Beautiful Gaia” Singers, Advocates

Betty Howatt: Farmer, Storyteller, Earth Protector

Susan Howatt: National Water Campaigner, Council of Canadians

Sharon Labchuk: Green Party Leader, Activist, Earth Action Founder

Irené Novaczek: Scientist, Marine Products Entrepreneur, Advocate

Sara Roach-Lewis: Women for Environmental Sustainability Founder

Jackie Waddell: Island Nature Trust Director, Environmentalist

All Welcome! No Fee for Admission

For info: Marian, CU50 892-2610/Lisa, ACSW 368-4510

GOVERNMENT APPOINTS NEW MEMBERS

The Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, the Honourable Valerie Docherty, today announced the appointment of five new members to the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Executive Council recently finalized the appointments of Jane Boyd of Summerside, Gwyn Davies of Gairloch, Sue Connolly of Charlottetown, Pauline Thomson of Canoe Cove and Andie Bulman of Charlottetown.



Jane Boyd maintains a busy consulting practice that develops solutions related to employee management, work-life balance, child care and human resource issues. For more than 20 years, Jane has been actively involved in the child care field. She has 12 years direct experience supporting the development of Montessori programs and their related child care services for families. Currently, Jane is managing the development of two new Montessori private school programs in Summerside and Charlottetown.



Gwyn Davies is dedicated to working for women and children experiencing violence and fear of violence. Gwyn is the Outreach worker for Eastern PEI Family Violence Prevention Services. Gwyn is a mother of three grown daughters. She lives with her husband in Gairloch where they have a home-based business raising turkeys.



Sue Connolly is a member of the Canadian Bar Association and the Law Society of Prince Edward Island. She practices Corporate and Commercial Law at Stewart McKelvey in Charlottetown. She is on the Boards of Women's Network PEI and Pat and the Elephant.



Pauline Thomson has worked as a child care specialist at the Anderson House Emergency Shelter and as a Kindergarten Program Supervisor at the Y.M.C.A. in Charlottetown. She was the International Volunteer of the Year, (PEI) recipient (2001), and currently volunteers at the Hospice Palliative Care Unit - Prince Edward Home. She is a member of the Canoe Cove Women's Institute.



Andie Bulman has been actively involved in equality work at the UPEI campus including involvement at the UPEI Women's Centre, coordination of the PEIACSW Purple Ribbon Pinning Bee at UPEI, and had organized an International Women's Day Concert Fundraiser where a female cast entertained and raised funds for the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Crisis Centre.

"I am pleased to welcome Jane, Gwyn, Susan, Pauline and Andie to their role as members of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women," said Minister Docherty. "Their qualifications clearly demonstrate a strong commitment to helping women and their families. I also welcome Isabelle as the new Chair. I have great faith that these women, together with the other Council members, will make a difference in the lives of Island women."



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
Advisory Council on the Status of

WOMEN

COUNCIL

Isabelle Christian, Chairperson, Stratford
Jane Boyd, Vice-Chairperson, Summerside
Roseanne Sark, Summerside
Sadie MacKenzie, Montague
Sister Norma Gallant, Wellington
Gwyn Davies, Gairloch
Sue Connolly, Charlottetown
Pauline Thomson, Canoe Cove
Andie Bulman, Charlottetown

STAFF

Lisa Murphy, Executive Director
Jane Ledwell, Researcher/Policy Analyst
Becky Tramley, Administrative Assistant (part-time)
Sandy Kowalik, Projects Coordinator (contract)

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