CHAIRPERSON’S MESSAGE

A great deal of my time over the past many months has been focused on the upcoming Plebiscite on electoral reform. In addition to putting out a policy guide on electoral reform, the Advisory Council has joined a number of other organizations and individuals to work on a “YES” campaign. As we’ve stated in our policy guide, we feel strongly that a move to the proposed Mixed Member Proportional system could have very important benefits for Island women and families. For more information about why we feel this way, please access our plebiscite guide at www.gov.pe.ca/acsw. Please consider voting “YES” on November 28.

Other bits of my time have been focused on representing the Advisory Council on a committee which has just completed research on the needs of women offenders and ex-offenders as they reintegrate into the community after or while serving a sentence. The results of the research were revealing — the majority of the needs identified by PEI women and their support providers are issues that the Advisory Council has identified as issues concerning many Island women - family violence, addictions programs specifically focused on women’s needs, access to family law legal aid, and access to affordable child care and transportation. I am looking forward to continuing my involvement with this group and to moving the work into the next steps of developing options for addressing the identified needs.

Finally, while sad to see some wonderful Council members depart, I am excited to welcome four new Council members, all with personal and professional experiences that will contribute greatly to the work of the Council. I’m looking forward to including their perspectives in the development of priorities for the Council’s work over the next few years.

Kirstin Lund

WELCOME TO NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

In September, Minister Responsible, Hon. Gail Shea, and her colleagues in Cabinet finalized the appointment of Sister Norma Gallant of Wellington, Sadie MacKenzie of Montague, Catherine Meade of Morell, and Roseanne Sark of Lennox Island to three-year terms on the nine-member Advisory Council. These four women bring real depth and diversity of experience to the Advisory Council’s work.

Sister Norma Gallant of Wellington works with the Evangeline Community Consultative Group doing, among other things, crime prevention work. She has been involved in issues related to equality at local, regional, provincial, and national levels for 30 years. She serves on the PEI Justice Options Committee and is a member of its administrative Steering Group.

Sadie MacKenzie of Montague worked in a nursing home for 22 years as a nursing attendant and activities coordinator. She was a volunteer with Meals on Wheels and spent a term on Montague Town Council. She has three grown children.

Catherine Meade of Morell works with Employment Pathways in Souris, where she helps people determine both career and life paths. Through training, she helps them develop work skills and life skills. She is a parent of four teenagers.

Roseanne Sark, a member of the Lennox Island First Nation, is Mi’kmaq Confederacy of PEI Community Liaison Officer for Lennox Island First Nation. Roseanne is a mother of two and has worked in the fields of family violence prevention, research, recreation, cultural promotion, and facilitation for various organizations including the Native Women’s Association of Canada.

HEARTFELT THANKS

During this past year, Council has also said fond farewells and offered heartfelt thanks to Wendy MacLaren, Joan Savage, and Kim Bailey. At the end of 2004, we also said farewell to Jackie MacNeill-Doiron and June Sencabaugh. All of these women continue to work tirelessly in our communities to help women and their families thrive in equality. We are fortunate that they were all willing to serve on the Advisory Council.
On September 30, Council held its regular meeting in Summerside. Members old and new used the meeting to "bang the drum" for women’s equality.

During the meeting the Council reviewed its recently released Policy Guide on Women and Electoral Reform. Members noted they were hearing concerns in their communities that people who are dependent on a patronage system are worried about where they will go for jobs under a new system. The Council recognized that under the proposed system, people would have more than one person to speak to about those economic concerns: their district MLA as well as the ten list MLAs their second-ballot votes would elect. Over time, the hope is that a fairer electoral system will result in fairer economic policy for PEI workers.

As well, it was noted that rural Islanders are voicing concern about their influence in the Legislature. The Council discussed how the proposed system will actually benefit rural Islanders, because the influence of votes will be more equal across the Island. Rural Islanders can insist that party lists have strong rural representation to reflect traditional industries, even when rural depopulation might otherwise mean decreasing representation in the current geography- and population-based system.

The Advisory Council supports the model proposed by the Commission on PEI’s Electoral Future and anticipates positive impacts of MMP on women.

Council also discussed other issues of concern to women in their communities. The Council is keeping an eye on the gender implications of the Province’s ongoing “Program Renewal” in terms of access to services for Islanders, worksite leadership for front-line workers in the public service, and meeting the needs of women and families.

Council is also looking forward to the Province signing an agreement on childcare with the Federal Government. Council hopes an agreement will strengthen the early childhood care and education sector in terms of quality, universality, financial accessibility to families, and focus on children’s development.

Prince Edward Island’s Advisory Council is part of a national Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women who work together for women’s equality, in absence of a Canadian Advisory Council.

Recently, representatives from the Coalition met with federal, provincial, and territorial officials on status of women issues in Regina. Earlier in the year, the Coalition had productive meetings with Hon. Liza Frulla, Federal Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, and with the new Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women, a dynamic group of MPs and a truly valuable addition to women’s equality work in Canada.

PEI’s Advisory Council has joined with other Coalition members from across the country in demanding action at the Federal level on gender-based equality, a national institutional mechanism for consulting with grassroots women and organizations, and a full-fledged federal ministry for women’s equality.

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY!

Have you seen folks wearing white bands in your community? These are the outward symbols of the Make Poverty History campaign across PEI and around the world. Organizations everywhere have joined in actions to make poverty history worldwide. The Make Poverty History Campaign in Canada is focused on achieving 1) More and better international aid; 2) Trade justice (fair trade, not free trade); 3) Cancellation of the developing (majority) world debt; and 4) The end of child poverty in Canada, which means the end of poverty for children’s families, too.

September 10 saw a local anti-poverty rally. October 17 saw a walking tour of poverty in Charlottetown. December 10 is the next day of action . . . Check your local listings for events and announcements.
MATERNITY & PARENTAL BENEFITS

To follow up on last year’s Policy Guide on Maternity and Parental Benefits, the Advisory Council has looked at the importance of improving access to maternity and parental benefits and job-protected leave in a truly hands-on way — through two moms with new babies!

Council Chairperson Kirstin Lund and her partner brought baby Eddie into the world on December 29, 2004. Kirstin is a self-employed worker (her work with the Advisory Council is volunteer work, reimbursed by a small honorarium), so she was not eligible for any of the 50 weeks of federal maternity or parental benefits. As a result, Kirstin returned to her work part-time after just four months and full-time after eight.

Council Director Lisa Murphy and her partner adopted baby girl Ava when she was born on February 25, 2005. As an adoptive parent, Lisa was not eligible for maternity benefits; only for 35 weeks of parental benefits. Fortunately, the Advisory Council was able to top up Lisa’s salary to allow her to enjoy the full 35 weeks to provide full-time care to Ava. Few Island parents have access to top-ups, but the Advisory Council believes in practising what it preaches and setting positive precedents!

The new moms, Kirstin and Lisa, looking fantastic.

Kirstin and Lisa’s experiences point to the value of access to maternity and parental leave and benefits. Research by Women’s Network shows that 41% of mothers remain ineligible for benefits. In Prince Edward Island, it is still harder for women to qualify for job protection than to qualify for benefits.

There is good news for Island women. Women’s Network PEI’s Atlantic-wide Parental Benefits project and recommendations have been receiving unprecedented welcome at the federal level and among federal, provincial, and territorial officials. (The research and recommendations are well worth a look, at www.wnpei.org). The Advisory Council is proud to be part of the steering committee for this locally led project that has set a national example for a principled and effective consensus-based process as well as for the strength of its recommendations! Hurrah for Women’s Network!

At the PEI level, Hon. Elmer MacFadyen, PEI’s Minister Responsible for Labour, invited recommendations from the Advisory Council for changes to PEI’s Employment Standards for maternity and parental leave. These will be presented during the review of the Employment Standards Act in the new year.

During the Employment Standards review, the Advisory Council will also share messages about the importance of livable income for Island workers and the importance to women of avoiding a two-tiered minimum wage system. A two-tiered system would disadvantage women who work in the service industry or who enter and re-enter the workforce during their working lives due to their caregiving responsibilities.

“PERSONS” AWARDS NOMINATIONS

Senator Catherine Callbeck has asked that we be on the lookout for potential PEI nominees for the Governor General’s Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case. These Awards honour outstanding contributions that have promoted the equality of girls and women in Canada, demonstrated by leadership and excellence in any field, in either a paid or unpaid capacity. If you have a name to put forward, please let Advisory Council members or staff know, so we may follow up to coordinate a nomination.

NEW FACES AT THE INTERMINISTERIAL WOMEN’S SECRETARIAT

The Interministerial Women’s Secretariat works within the provincial government and with status of women officials across Canada to support gender-based analysis and policy for women’s equality. Senior Policy Analyst Sandy Bentley retired this past summer, and her knowledge and dedication will be very much missed. The Advisory Council joins other women’s groups in welcoming Faye Martin as the new Senior Policy Analyst. Donna Reardon has also taken Margaret Creamer’s place as administrative support to the Secretariat. We look forward to continuing positive and collaborative work with Donna and Faye.

COMMUNITY EVENTS NOTICES

Are you receiving e-mail notices of community events from the Advisory Council on Thursdays? Would you like to be? Since last spring, Sandy Kowalik has been coordinating an electronic mailout of notices of community events of interest to women. If you aren’t receiving them but would like to be on the mailing list, or if you have events you would like us to publicize to our mailing list, please e-mail peiacsw@isn.net.
BOUQUETS

for collaborative work with women’s organizations

The Advisory Council on the Status of Women recognizes the following governmental organizations that have recently initiated projects to support women’s equality, responded to recommendations from women’s groups, or invited active participation and advice from women’s organizations in the community.

MAYOR’S PURPLE RIBBON TASK FORCE ON FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The City of Charlottetown is being recognized nationally and internationally for leadership in family violence prevention. Through a Mayor’s Task Force that includes representatives from women’s organizations, the City has sponsored training for all staff, public education, a safety audit, a fund-raising golf tournament, a roundtable for community opinion leaders, and a plan to restore an anti-violence mural, all with the theme “Peace Begins at Home.” As a result, Charlottetown has been selected as the #1 pilot site for a Women in Cities International project to look at how municipalities work with women’s groups around issues of violence.

PURPLE RIBBON 2005 CAMPAIGN

Again this year, the Advisory Council has coordinated pinning and distribution of over 30,000 purple ribbons and information cards. Thanks to all those across the Island who gave of their time to help with pinning these important information cards. Wear your purple ribbon in remembrance, and wear it in hope.

PEI LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION’S COMMITTEE ON PREDATORY DRUGS

The Liquor Control Commission of PEI initiated a public information campaign on predatory drugs (such as “date rape” drugs and club drugs) in collaboration with women’s organizations. Their campaign will include media messaging, posters, and coasters with a “Protect Yourself — Protect Your Drink” slogan. The PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Crisis Centre has worked especially hard on this with the Liquor Commission, with help and support from Women’s Network PEI, the RCMP, UPEI Security, Charlottetown and Summerside City Police, and the Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA and the PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA

Each of these federal agencies responded positively to calls from women’s organizations for community input into their planning and priority setting. Status of Women’s consultations focused on strategies and priorities for women’s equality. The Public Health Agency’s consultations focused on determinants of health. Women’s groups look forward to action on recommendations from public input.

Are there other governmental organizations that deserve a bouquet for collaboration with women’s organizations? Send your suggestions.

NATIONAL DAY OF REMEMBRANCE & ACTION of the Montreal Massacre & Violence Against Women

December 6, 2005 — 12 noon
Summerside — Trinity United Church
Charlottetown — Memorial Hall, Confed. Centre

THE ADVISORY COUNCIL & STAFF WISH YOU A SEASON OF PEACE & GOODWILL!