

YWCA TORONTO

SUMMER | 2016

TURNING POINTS



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*COVER ART | YWCA TORONTO BREAKTHROUGH PARTICIPANT



A TURNING POINT
FOR WOMEN



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YWCA Toronto | 87 Elm Street
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Chief Executive Officer **MESSAGE**

Last year, YWCA Toronto provided over 1,700 women and children fleeing violence with vital resources. We invested over \$3.5 million to help women rebuild their lives.

Women and children come to us in crisis – in need of shelter, safety and protection. We respond with on-site counselling, mental health supports, legal referrals and specialized programs for children who have witnessed violence. We work to create stability for children – helping them integrate into local schools and community programs. We offer employment counselling and help women find new permanent housing in the community.

All of our services use a trauma-informed approach that meets the complex needs of women and children who have experienced violence.

We also regularly meet with women to discuss the barriers that are holding them back. Not surprisingly, safe affordable housing and legal advice top the list. This is why our advocacy efforts are focused on increasing access to legal aid and supporting the development of permanent housing for women.

In this newsletter, you will hear about the need for investment to deal with the global pandemic of violence against women. You will meet one of YWCA Toronto's shelter support workers – recognized for a strong commitment to helping women. And most importantly, you will read the story of a woman who has rebuilt her life after violence.

No woman should be forced to stay in a violent relationship because she has no options. When you support YWCA Toronto, you not only help women live free from abuse – you help create the change needed to stop violence from occurring in the first place. ■

Heather M. McGregor,
Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Toronto

LEADERS IN ACTION

A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

The United Nations has classified violence against women as a global pandemic. Survivors of violence represent the dirty secret that is an open one: women are not equal, no matter what our laws say.

Are women's rights human rights? The answer is an obvious yes. Yet, when we think of human rights, we resort to an image of the heroic lone man of conscience, incarcerated for his beliefs by a coercive state. Why is this, when women remain the world's most populous human rights defenders? Women are unglamorously facing tyranny and violence for defending their dignity and beliefs every day in their homes and in their communities. They often do this under untenable conditions.

One in three Canadian women will experience violence in her lifetime. When a brave survivor reaches out to us for help, she must be made to feel that she is part of this worldwide movement. She must know that she joins millions who raise their voices to say: enough.

Alongside YWCA Toronto, my organization works for the ideals of feminism in various women's movements, including those struggling against colonialism, racism and other forms of oppression. What we do serves as a link between those who society would rather forget about and the wheels of power - no matter how disempowered we ourselves often feel.

That is why we fought to maintain gun control laws. That is why we fought to

protect the right of a Muslim woman to testify about sexual assault while wearing a niqab. And that is why we fought to ensure our immigration laws considered what 'safe' means for women who experience violence, as well as, for lesbian and trans people. Any erosion of access to justice for a victim of violence makes all women more vulnerable to attack.

In the courts, there remains a deep reluctance to engage with the growing international consensus that prevention of violence against women is a state responsibility. Too often, women's stories are contained and constrained by the rules of the game that are stacked against them from the get-go.

If Canada is really back, as the Prime Minister says, then there is work to be done. The recent federal budget included welcome new infrastructure investments for shelters, but that is not enough. As we all know, addressing women's poverty, housing and homelessness, the legal climate, the conditions of life in northern Canada and barriers of discrimination are all crucial to building lives free from violence.

A global pandemic does not get pocket money: it gets investment. Together we must all demand action to end violence against women. ■

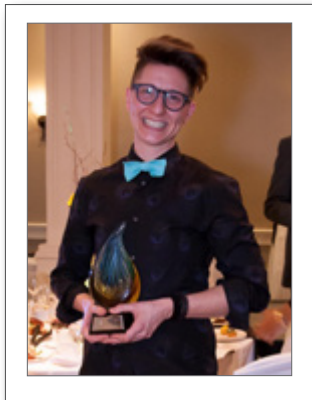
Excerpts from the Keynote Address at YWCA Toronto's Annual Members' Meeting, April 19, 2016: Amanda Dale is the Executive Director of the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic, a former YWCA Toronto staff member and a 2013 YWCA Toronto Woman of Distinction.



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**TRANSFORMING
LIVES**

THE SOUL OF A WARRIOR



This year, Chris Spiess, a Shelter Support Worker at the YWCA Toronto Women's Shelter, was the worthy recipient of the *Soul of a Warrior Award*.

This aptly named Award is presented by the Woman Abuse Council of Toronto and celebrates front-line workers in the violence against women sector.

“At first I was a bit embarrassed to learn that I had won,” said Chris, noting that shelter staff do the work because of passion and not for recognition. “That said, I work very hard to bring a feminist, client-led framework to all of my work at YWCA Toronto. For my colleagues to recognize my contributions felt really great.”

Chris joined the YWCA Toronto team in 2013. As a student at George Brown College, Chris met a professor who had worked at YWCA. She spoke often about the Association’s important programming for women who experience violence. This sparked Chris’ interest. Chris’ personal interactions with a counsellor also fostered a deep passion for helping and supporting others. This passion continues today.

“Resilient and strong” are descriptors Chris uses for the women that come through the doors at YWCA Toronto

Women’s Shelter. Last year, the shelter offered safe refuge to 162 women and children fleeing violence. Chris assists with intake, crisis therapy and organizes fun programming – yoga, karate and even tea and talk sessions on Saturday evenings. “I love the informal relationships that I have built with the women. One day, we sat together around the kitchen table and had a great discussion about consent and owning our own bodies – it lasted for two hours. I loved that.”

Chris identifies access to safe affordable housing as critical for women at the shelter. “Some of the women I work with are on Toronto’s waiting list for affordable housing for years and years. It is frustrating that I cannot do anything to help.”

And when talking about YWCA Toronto colleagues, Chris had no trouble coming up with kind descriptors – “compassionate, strong and motivated.” Together, they are bound by an unrelenting and fierce commitment to improving the lives of women and children. ■

“Resilient and strong” are descriptors Chris uses for the women that come through the doors at YWCA Toronto Women’s Shelter.

Photo | Chris Spiess, Shelter and Community Engagement Support Worker at YWCA Toronto.

TRANSFORMING
LIVES

LEAVING VIOLENCE BEHIND



“For the first time in my life here in Canada, I felt free,” Dianne says of the day that she and her 18-month old son arrived at the YWCA Toronto Women’s Shelter.

Dianne learned about YWCA Toronto’s violence against women services after confiding in a friend, “I was living with my husband and I thought what he was doing to me was normal. I met with YWCA Toronto staff and they helped me to understand that it was not normal. That it was abuse. It triggered me more to see my son growing up in that kind of relationship.”

YWCA Toronto staff helped Dianne escape, calling emergency services to arrange safe transport for both her and her son to the shelter. Upon arrival, Dianne says: “When I saw the security cameras, it gave me peace of mind. I felt safe knowing that staff were in the office 24/7. There was a time that I could not sleep at night because I was afraid.”

At the shelter, staff provided Dianne with support, including on-site counselling and child care for her son right away.

“Everyone was very approachable. They let me know that they would not judge me or criticize me or look down on me. They try to lift all of us up every single day.” On her healing process, Dianne says: “Before, I was taking care of my husband and my son – so it was really tough. At the shelter I learned how to take care of myself.”

Today, Dianne has built a new life for herself and her son. YWCA Toronto helped Dianne find permanent housing. She is now working and plans to return to school. “The shelter awakened my passion to serve people. Staff were always smiling at me because I was moving forward. I want to be that smiling face for other women.” ■

Excerpts from an interview with Dianne, a survivor, mother and former resident at the YWCA Toronto Women’s Shelter.

Photo | YWCA Toronto shelter.

INSPIRING WOMEN



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2016 YWCA TORONTO WOMEN OF DISTINCTION

Elizabeth Shilton, Colleen Johnston, Reeta Roy, Georgia Quartaro, Tessa Hill, Lia Valente, Dr. Cheryl Wagner and Roberta L. Jamieson



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“The feeling that as women we make a huge difference, and to be in a room with so many champions of women’s issues was uplifting and rejuvenating. Every year when I attend, I feel like I have been plugged in and made ready for the next year.”
- 2016 Attendee



CREATING CHANGE

SPEAK OUT - CEO Heather McGregor signed an open letter opposing Ontario's proposed child care regulations because the impact would decrease spaces and raise fees. Public pressure forced the Province to change course.

STOP VIOLENCE - YWCA Toronto is supporting Bill 177, which provides survivors of violence with paid leave to access emergency services and supports. This bill passed second reading at Queen's Park with all-party support.

JOIN - 2,500 Canadians have pledged to read the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report starting on June 21, National Aboriginal Day.
Sign at: www.trcreadingchallenge.com

CELEBRATE - A victory for fairness and compassion. The federal government is restoring the refugee health care program. Permanent residency will also be given to sponsored spouses immediately on arrival in Canada, ending the two-year waiting period that puts women's safety at risk.

ENGAGE - On Facebook, we posted a sexual violence infographic that reached over 1.5 million people. You helped us highlight the need to strengthen protections and support for sexual assault survivors.

BUDGET WATCH - Federal Budget 2016 includes \$40 million for an inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, an issue close to our hearts. The new Canada Child Benefit will lift thousands of children and families out of poverty. It is a tremendous step forward - but we must now work to stop social assistance clawbacks of these benefits.

Ontario Budget 2016 includes a \$100 million strategy to end violence against Indigenous women and a new pilot aimed at helping women fleeing domestic violence, and find safe, affordable housing. Both are critical investments for women's safety.



Woodlawn Film Festival

IT'S A WRAP! The Woodlawn Film Festival, made possible by donors including Senator Nancy Ruth, will shutter for the summer. A special thank you to TIFF who launched two films at our shelter with casts and crews in attendance. The Festival runs every Friday night during the cooler months and, in the words of one of our shelter residents, "Before we came to the shelter, we took many things for granted, like a Friday night with friends and movie. This allows us to feel normal again and like we are part of society."

MFS Investment employees planted a beautiful new garden at our Pape apartments and we are looking forward to the blooms this summer. Thank you MFS for the gift of your time as well as the generous donation of \$10,000 to support our programs across the city.

ROYAL LEPAGE SHELTER FOUNDATION Royal LePage Signature Realty and Royal LePage Johnston and Daniel are longtime supporters who have contributed over \$265,000 to our Violence Against Women shelters. Unfailingly, these volunteers go the extra mile for our shelters by donating their time, holding fundraisers and donating goods to the homeless families in our care.

Winona's Place Safety Project continues to build momentum. To date, donations total \$230,000 which has completed Phase One of the Safety Project, directly increasing the safety of Aboriginal women and children. Phase Two has now begun and we continue to make capital improvements and increase support services with experienced community engagement workers.

YOUR FINISH LINE: completing the 5K B&O Yorkville Run

OUR FINISH LINE: a city without violence against women and girls

Toronto's Premier 5k Walk/Run
in support of YWCA Toronto's Shelters

Sunday, September 11, 2016

\$390,000 raised for YWCA Toronto since 2010!

Registration now open. Limited spaces available.

yorkvillerun.com/the-cause/ywca-toronto

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