

O.S.S.O.M.M.

Box 26, MYNARSKI PARK, ALBERTA T0M 1N0
REPRESENTING CANADIAN MILITARY FAMILIES

OSSOMM
NEWSLETTER
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We have just completed an eventful year for OSSOMM. Eight months of preparation in 1985 led us to the presentation of our brief to the Commission on Equality Rights, presented in Calgary in September. One week later, we held a simultaneous news conference in Calgary and Toronto. Everything exploded as the media presented our case to the Canadian public. We were immersed into the media circuit; television, radio and newspapers, as our executive struggled to meet with journalists, maintain family life, and answer the telephone non-stop. National T.V. programs like "Canada A.M.", "Fifth Estate", and "Lifeline", projected us into homes across the country. Considerable interest was raised and we received numerous letters of support, and doubled our membership. We have also received numerous comments about people not knowing how to reach us. So, we have started a national advertising campaign to reach out to those who are looking for us. Ads were placed in twenty national newspapers, and an information package is being assembled to let people know what we represent.

The last four months of 1985 were a whirlwind of meetings, interviews, making telephone calls to the Secretary of State, consulting with national support groups, and going to our members of parliament for help, etc., etc.. For our members who have not been able to follow the media reports, these are some quotes from newspaper articles.

OSSOMM GAINS GROUND - Calgary Herald Nov. 18, 1985

"If it happens (referring to the rent reviews in Calgary), it will be proof that, far from being a dangerously subversive element, OSSOMM is helping to sustain military morale by getting soldiers a fair deal and keeping them happy in the service."

ANDRE YIELDS TO MILITARY WIVES:- Red Deer Advocate Oct. 5, 1985
STUDY REQUESTED

"A Red Deer based group calling for more freedom for the wives of military men has scored a victory of sorts over the Department of National Defence. Associate Defence Minister Harvie Andre, who had earlier ridiculed the group's claim that military wives were being suppressed, said, Friday, he has asked the Defence Department to examine what degree of political activity may be acceptable on military bases."

WINNIPEG FREE PRESS - Oct. 5, 1985

"Wives should not be governed by the Code of Service Discipline, or deprived of the rights they would have if only their addresses were changed."

EMILY CATO - Pres. National Military Family Assoc. U.S.A.

"We find our military is very open to making improvements in the family program because there's a direct correlation between retention (staying in the military) and the family. It's in the military's best interest to have programs that will make life easier for military families."

DORIS ANDERSON - Toronto Star - June 1985

"These women are not trying to stage a "Riel Rebellion" on the banks of the Red Deer River. They are just trying to improve life for their families."

MILITARY WIVES FIGHTING BACK - Calgary Herald Oct. 7, 1985

"It took them a whole year to work up enough courage to do it, and a world that idolizes male courage doesn't even recognize female courage when it sees it." - Suzanne Zwarum

LUCIE RICHARDSON - The Globe & Mail - Nov. 16, 1985

"Our choice is; do we go for social events, or do we go for our rights? Some people say we should just take what they give us, but me, I say we go for our rights."

JOE CLARK - Calgary Herald Nov. 24, 1985

"External Affairs Minister Joe Clark says he will discuss with Defence Minister Eric Nielsen and Associate Defence Minister Harvie Andre the possible appointment of a commission to study the problems encountered by the spouses of Canadian soldiers."

NEWSLETTER DELAY: The staff of the OSSOMM newsletter would like to apologize to our membership for being so late in publishing this newsletter. Delays in funding requests, demands of journalists and reporters, and the holiday season, took their toll on us and resulted in this delay. Anyone who would like to help the staff in editing this newsletter is welcome to join our staff.

DENTAL PLAN STATUS: We are getting closer to achieving a government sponsored dental plan. In a letter to Mr. Gordon Towers, M.P. for Red Deer, Minister of Defence Eric Nielsen stated, "As you are aware, the president of the Treasury Board announced on 17 April, 1985, an agreement in principle with the Public Service Union for government participation in a Public Service dental plan. If the agreement results in a viable dental plan for the Public Service, it can be anticipated that the same benefit will become available to the Canadian Forces as a normal development."

Included in this newsletter is a dental plan postcard. If you have not already signed one, please do so. If you have already signed one, ask a friend or relative to sign it and drop it in the mail. No postage is necessary. We are trying to help the "normal development" along.

ROYAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION: In a registered letter to Joe Clark, OSSOMM has requested that a Royal Government Commission investigating the concerns of military families be appointed. In a cautious, but optimistic reply to our Calgary representatives, Leslie Taylor and Marnie Draper, Minister of External Affairs Joe Clark said that a commission would be worth looking into.

Mr. Clark had a Royal Government Commission (The McDougal Report) appointed to investigate the discontent of Foreign Service spouses and families. The McDougal Report resulted in a satisfactory solution to the problem. The lifestyles of Foreign Service members are similar to those of the Canadian military in that they are transferred often and provide a service to our country. The measures taken to address the problems are also similar to those OSSOMM is requesting. An office, printing facilities, and funds are provided at the expense of the government to ensure a community newsletter and advocacy group to support the needs of the Foreign Service family communities.

The Foreign Service Community Association has now publicly thrown their support behind OSSOMM. We are grateful that organizations such as this recognize our needs.

RESEARCH AND STUDIES: Probably one of the most important issues that OSSOMM addresses is the requirement for research into the needs of the military community. Professional studies could be provided to help those in authority and ourselves, to better understand the stresses and trauma undergone by those within this unique community.

Studies should be conducted into topics such as these:

- (A) The effects of moving on children within the military community
- (B) The effects of long absences of a parent on children in the military community
- (C) The effects of changing schools on children in the military community
- (D) The problem of alcohol
- (E) Family violence
- (F) DND schools
- (G) Attitudes of being second and third class citizens
- (H) Adjusting to retirement and unemployment, etc. etc.

There are many areas that can be investigated. If there are policies within the military system that can't be changed, then perhaps we can help families to better understand their own chosen way of life, and enable them to cope with problems they encounter. If prepared and given the tools to cope, we can make it easier to solve common problems.

RENT REVIEWS: OSSOMM has been informed that, due to the determined efforts of our Calgary representatives, Leslie Taylor and Marnie Draper, the government has requested a more efficient review by CMHC. The base shelter values that have been determined in the past by CMHC may not have been determined by acceptable criteria. Book reviews of the condition of a PMQ do not indicate problems with drafty windows, ice build-ups on electrical outlets, flooding basements, poor insulation in certain areas of the home, etc.. "In demanding this review in Calgary, the door has been opened to benefit those living in other military communities in Canada."

COMMUNITY AND FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES: Due to the success of Centres established on some bases in Canada, the DND has decided that this is a good idea and is looking at establishing Resource Centres on other bases. If you are interested in helping to get one started in your community, approach your community council, or your Base Commander, and volunteer your services.

DAYCARE CENTRES: The need for daycare centres in DND communities have not yet become a DND priority. However, they are being initiated on some bases in Canada. Perhaps making the DND more aware of the need for daycare in military communities will result in the provision of more self-supporting professional daycare facilities.

DND RESPONSIVENESS: There has been a noted increase in the DND's responsiveness to the needs of the community and the family. Although the DND is very careful not to give OSSOMM any credit for this increased responsiveness, OSSOMM believes that this is a direct result of our advocacy. We can make a difference. Some examples of this increased responsiveness are:

- (1) Mr. Andre's decision to conduct a review of political activity.
- (2) The decision to allow a review of the rents in Calgary.
- (3) The decision by DND to allow the creation of more Resource Centres.
- (4) A survey done by 1 Canadian Brigade Group, asking the servicemen for their opinions on conditions of service. The two most important considerations noted in this survey were housing and dental plans.

REVIEW ON POLITICAL ACTIVITY: It is very interesting that this review granted by Associate Defence Minister Harvie Andre, and instigated by OSSOMM is only in its second draft in January 1986, when Mr. Andre said it would be ready in two weeks in October, 1985. It is also interesting that the very Canadian citizens whom this review will affect the most have not been asked for any input. Some families respect their children enough to ask them their opinions on issues directly affecting their lives. However, the DND does not see fit to ask the adult members of the military community what they think. Once again it looks like the "Old Boys Club" may simply seek to protect their own status quo and not seriously consider the needs of the families involved. What citizen does this government pretend to protect?

THE SCHOOL ISSUE: ATTENTION! Attention!! Policy is being made right now regarding the education of your children. Action must be taken immediately to ensure that the decision to educate your children is not taken away from you.

Were you aware that in the last four or five years, drastic changes in the education of your children have been brought about? According to the Director General of Dependent Education in Ottawa, the DND should not be involved in education. DND schools are at the bottom of a priority list whose main aim is to turn the school boards over to civilian boards in the local community. All this is being done without the knowledge of military families, for financial reasons. No one has bothered to even consider a study to see what the repercussions of all this will be to our children.

A case in point is the proposed closing of the schools at CFB Calgary. The original proposal called for a 20% increment into CFB schools by local children. Instead the local board decided to bus our children to their schools. DND did not foresee this. Some of us have valid concerns about the quality of education in DND schools. Some of us feel powerless to effect change in a DND School Board run by a senior officer appointed by the Base Commander. Some of us would like to see an efficient system of DND schools with paid trustees elected by the community and responsible to the people who elect them. Some believe

that this would improve the quality of education and take into consideration the unique needs of our children. Once this system is in place, we could work towards developing more standard core curriculum across Canada, and equal opportunity hiring of spouses in teaching and administrative positions.

If the current changes being made by the DND were really the best for our children, the DND would proceed in the open! This secret activity leads many of us to believe that the almighty dollar is once again taking precedence over the welfare of military families.

Please let us know now how you feel and write your local member of parliament concerning this. The change is almost in place, REMEMBER the French in Ottawa have fought for their own school board for nine years. They finally have it. We have our own school boards and they are being dismantled while we sit and watch! If you care about the quality of education for your children and about being involved in decisions of education for your children, and about being involved in decisions affecting their lives, DO SOMETHING NOW! Again it would be a good idea to ask your spouse to change his place of federal riding for elections, to your place of residence. We can make a difference!

FUNDING: Our application for funding to the Secretary of State has been put on hold. Although our application was approved at the local and regional levels, we are awaiting national approval. Write your M.P. and inform him that this application to the Women's Programme is being held up and ask him to see if he can help. The minister responsible for the Secretary of State, The Women's Programme, is now Mon. Bouchard.

Various individuals and groups have generously donated funds and we extend a very grateful "Thank you". Members of the National Advisory Council, the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee, and a women's group in Calgary have all contributed sizeable donations to OSSOMM. A sincere and heartfelt "Thank you."

CORRESPONDENCE: OSSOMM would like to share with its members some of the comments we have been receiving in our letters. Due to the length of this edition of the newsletter, we are not able to include as many as we would like. We will include a few of those comments now, and include more of these encouraging words in future newsletters. Please note that in the numerous letters we have received, not one has been negative.

"Thank you for the courage of your convictions and for your activity in transforming your convictions into reality." - Toronto, Ont.

"Go for it and good luck!" - Cold Lake, Alberta

"....Keep up the fight, it's worth it.... - Kingston, Ont.

"We endorse your struggle to become full members of your community."
-Women of Halton Action Movement, Oakville, Ont.

"Your goals are commendable, and I can only encourage you to continue in your efforts to represent military spouses for improved quality of life in the military." - Emily Cato, President of the National Military Family Association, U.S.A.

ONE LAST COMMENT: Contrary to what the DND thinks and says, OSSOMM is not a threat to the political neutrality of the Canadian Armed Forces. We are attempting to improve the quality of life for all members of the military community. If the DND could open its ancient eyes and see the value of a national self help support group, and not be so paranoid about its "traditional" policies, we could work together and make itNo life like it!.....