



Newsletter of DAWN CANADA:  
DisAbled Women's Network Canada

# THRIVING

Vol. 1 No. 1

Fall 1988

## \$22 M For Transition Houses – But Can We Use Them?

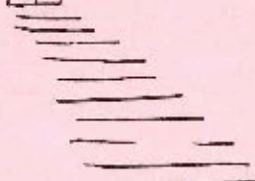
- Shirley Masuda  
DAWN CANADA Researcher

The federal government has allocated \$40,000,000 to six federal departments and agencies to expand and modify their activities in addressing the causes and effects of family violence. The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp (CMHC) will be spending \$22.2 million over the next 1 1/2 years to create new shelters for battered women and their children. The operating costs of these shelters will continue to be administered as they are now - through the cost-shared Canada Assistance Plan.

The new transition house project that will be administered through CMHC is called Project Haven. Community Groups will be applying to CMHC for funding to set up new shelters by

building or buying new structures and buying and converting existing space. These houses will provide shelter for women and their children for up to six weeks.

ANYTOWN  
WOMEN'S  
SHELTER



(Con't on p. 4)



## Editorial: IWD 1988

- Joan Meister  
Vancouver

I was asked to speak at IWD this year about my experiences with the Crab Park human rights complaint. I agreed and then learned that the dance was being held in an inaccessible location. A dilemma arose: Do I refuse to take part in an inaccessible event or do I go and raise their consciousness??? After careful consultation with trusted advisors, I decided to go for the consciousness raising. ("How will they ever know they screwed up if you don't go and tell them?")

The day was incredibly rainy and cold and me and Sherman (my 9 month old puppy attending his first political event) got soaked and freezing cold. Everything was late. The rally site got changed to a church instead of the soggy park and although there was a ramp, I couldn't use the can.

Was I crabby? Was Sherman ready to become an apolitical pup? Did it feel horrible to do what I had to do? Did I raise their consciousness? Do bears shit in the woods?

As I was leaving to go home to my very late and well-deserved

nap, a girl, the daughter of one of the organizers, came up to me and handed me the following story. Just when I was about to give up on the women's movement, Vancouver weather and consciousness raising in general, a wish came true for me...it's going to take a while but it's going to be okay. Really.

### HOLLY'S WISH

- Kristina Foulds  
(age 13)

Even though we are very wrapped up in our own busyness, let us take time to watch this girl named Holly.

Holly was sitting in her wheelchair watching the girls playing softball. As she watched it made her remember when she was able to play softball. She remembered all the home runs she hit, all the people cheering for her. The thought brought tears to her eyes.

Holly was 13 years old when she was riding her bike home and she was hit by a car. Before this happened, she was a very quiet girl but now she hardly talks at all. Holly is afraid to talk her feelings over with anyone. Holly wishes every day that she will have a friend to talk to.

Holly's mother thinks that Holly has locked her feelings deep inside and thrown the key away.

When Holly looked up with tears in her eyes and running down her cheeks, there, there in front of her was a girl. The girl was very tall and very well tanned. Her hair was bleached by the sun. The girl's eyes were bright blue, her outfit was white.

The girl said, "What is wrong? Do you want to talk?" Holly said "Yes, I'd like to talk." The girl started to turn the wheelchair.

I think the girl has found the key to Holly's feelings and is going to open them.

So as we turn to go back to our busy days, we see a smile on Holly's face. So Holly got her wish.

(Kristina says of her story: I sat down and started to write. I had to write a story for school. I am not very loud and when I had read my story in front of my class I was very shy. I like to write alot. I like soccer and riding my horse. When I moved to Vancouver, I had to give up my horse.)

## To The Readers:



The views and opinions expressed within the pages of THRIVING are not necessarily those held by the total membership or Board of Directors of DAWN CANADA. We invite your comments and criticisms related to any material found in these pages. We also invite your contributions - your stories, letters, poetry, graphics, etc.

Please write to:

THRIVING,  
776 E. Georgia St.,  
Vancouver, B.C.  
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## Transition Houses

(Con't from p. 1)

As women with disabilities, we have special concerns about how these dollars are to be spent. We want all of these new houses to be fully accessible to us, both attitudinally and physically. Furthermore, we want every presently existing house to be accessible to us. It is very traumatic for a woman and her children to have to go to a transition house. To have to leave one's community, lose support services and change the children's school because the house in her community is not accessible is yet another assault.

Women with disabilities need more than the six weeks limit to stay at the shelters. Finding accessible low income housing in six weeks is a nightmare. Pressure to leave and fear of losing her children because of the lack of community support services will force women to return to abusive and unsafe homes - or never to leave them.

DAWN BC has already written to the Honourable Jake Epp asking him to ensure that no money be given to establish any new transition houses that are not fully accessible to women with

disabilities, and that monies be made available to existing houses to make them accessible. Our letter was forwarded to the Honourable Stewart McInnes, who assured us by letter that CMHC will give priority to new houses that serve the special needs of disabled women, and native, immigrant and rural women. There was no mention of existing houses.

DAWN CANADA encourages all DAWN groups and individual women to write to the above mentioned ministers expressing your concerns about this project. Demand that the needs of women with disabilities be met.

We encourage you to contact the transition houses in your area and ask about accessibility. If possible, visit the house to see for yourself. Many houses that profess to be accessible are not. You can offer your expertise and your support as well as the support of DAWN CANADA. Remember that even if the physical space is not accessible, the services can be made to be if the will is there. Our goal, of course, is to make all services and spaces accessible. Be adamant!



## Action Des Femmes Handicapées De Montréal

- Maria Barile  
DAWN CANADA Board

Action des Femmes Handicappées de Montreal is a group composed of and run by women from all walks of life and representing a cross disability perspective. The group's main objective is to help women with disabilities to promote and defend the rights, projects and interests that they hold in common.

Our first conerence was held last May 20 - 22. Entitled, "Exchange Between Women" it was attended by about 80 women with disabilities from various regions of Quebec and by our non-disabled sisters.

In the various workshops, these women were able to exchange the experiences of "double jeopardy" in our lives. In the workshop on "Living Conditions", women spoke of the lack of equality in the delivery of social services, day care, etc...for women with disabilities.

In the "Socio-Economic" workshop, women agreed that double discrimination keeps us at the bottom of the poverty scale. They said that the Quebec government's new welare

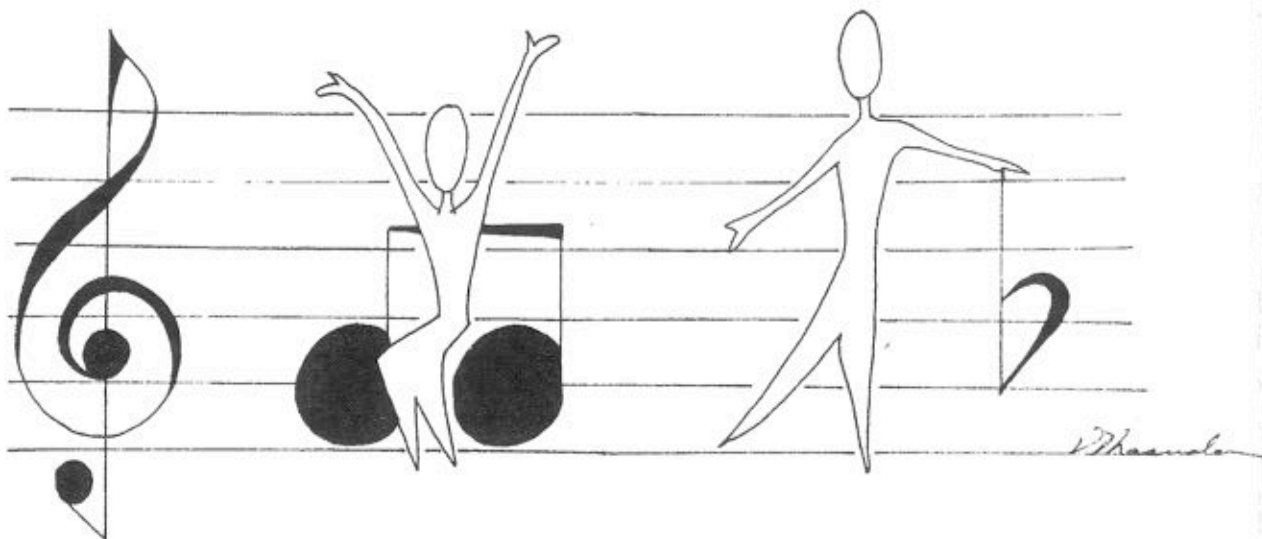
reforms will worsen their economic situation.

Discussions in the "Health and Sexuality" workshop raised the issue of the medical profession's paternalism and lack of sensitivity to the needs of women in general and disabled women in particular. It was said that disabled women are often refused adequate information and used as guinea pigs. Due to the media's portrayal of the model female image, women with disabilities are not seen as sexual beings.

The organizing group received a mandate to continue to advocate positions promoting our common interests and rights.

Together with our non-disabled sisters, we will continue to pursue goals that will help to create a more just and inclusive society.





## Dance With DAWN

- Linda Evans  
Prince Edward Island

Throughout the Spring of 1988, a dance class with a difference was held on Tuesday and Friday afternoons. The participants in Room 108 of the Basilica Recreation Center in Charlottetown, PEI are nine women who would find it difficult to join an everyday dance or exercise group or to follow along with a Jane Fonda video tape. Each one has a physical disability effecting her ability to move but not her desire.

The class is the brainchild of Estelle Reddin, a woman in a wheelchair who is one of the founding members of DAWN CANADA and her daughter Peggy,

a qualified dance instructor. They offer disabled women a way to get out of the house, stretch their muscles and talk. With assistance from the Secretary of State, the PEI Council of the Disabled and qualified personnel, DANCE with DAWN came into being.

Each session lasts about two hours and includes warm-up exercises in which the individual works to improve herself according to her own physical limitation. A rest period devoted to sharing ideas, experiences and views of life is followed by group dancing focusing on square dancing. It is educational, fun and informal.

The women involved in the

classes are learning to express themselves through creative movement as well as sharing ideas and concerns. Discussions have ranged from how well family and friends accept a person's disability to where the night life can be found in Charlottetown. Guest speakers have been invited to inform the dancers about things such as assertiveness training and aids to better living.

A video tape is made of a class early in the course and one later in the course so that the participants and the instructors can see how much improvement occurs during the length of the course. Since this is a pilot project for PEI, close records of the course are being kept so that other groups can use the information module developed.

DANCE with DAWN lasted for 10 weeks. During that time exercises were changed if the group found one exercise too hard or a physiotherapist decided that it was beyond the group's physical limitations. Ten weeks also allowed group members to become accustomed to each other and develop friendships.

The music used to accompany each exercise was chosen to accentuate the movements. A class member might not be able

to move a part of her body or keep time to the music. The instructor would tell her how to move a different part of her body instead, or how to follow a different rhythm. In DANCE with DAWN, it's the individual who matters the most.

DANCE with DAWN is a wonderful idea that could be used by a lot of people and groups. The training module developed and the documented results of the first group may be used by many to improve the quality of life for women with a disability.

The original group hopes to have another series of meetings this fall. They believe that DANCE with DAWN provided Island women with a unique opportunity to fill a void in their lives and to gain a greater level of public awareness. With increased support, information and resources, PEI women with disabilities will grow stronger together in safety. With increased public awareness, we will come to have the same opportunities as everyone else.

Any woman interested in joining DAWN, whether disabled or just interested in disabled women, is welcome. Contact Linda at 569-4933.

## DAWN Alberta? Looking Good!

- Shirley Masuda &  
Jillian Riddington  
DAWN CANADA Researchers

Since there is no DAWN group in Alberta, we decided to do a short tour of the province. We had a dual purpose in mind. We wanted to contact the women participated in our research study by filling out our questionnaire. We wanted to promote the idea of starting a DAWN group in Alberta.

Before leaving Vancouver, we phoned Irene Feika who lives in Edmonton. Irene is the president of the Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPOH), a wonderful person to give us contacts. Irene immediately invited us to come to the Alberta Committee of Disabled Citizens (ACDC) conference that was happening on the very weekend that we planned to be in Edmonton.

We were excited about the conference from the beginning. We knew that we would meet women with disabilities. The focus of the conference, "Families in Transition: Dealing with Disabilities", was of great interest to us as our next project will be on parenting and family violence.

We were warmly received by Muriel Keeling, president of ACDC, by the entire board and by the general membership. We met many wonderful women with disabilities, interviewed several women, handed out our questionnaire to everyone, set up meetings for Calgary and had a good time socializing.

Several issues of concern to DAWN were being discussed. There were workshops on parenting, children, violence, and caregivers. However, as always, we were acutely aware that these issues are different for women. For example, the panel in the parenting workshop consisted of 5 men and 2 women. The fathers were concerned that they couldn't play hockey with their sons. The single mother spoke of her concerns about providing the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter, and the community support necessary in raising children alone as a mother with a disability

We learned that two studies on violence towards persons with disabilities are currently in progress in Alberta. Pierre Hebert, a disabled person and a survivor of sexual abuse, is the director of the Disabled Victims of Violence Program, and is doing an ongoing study on violence against persons with disabilities.



Dick Sobsey, associate professor in the Educational Psychology Department at the University of Alberta, is doing research on "Factors in the Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of People with Mental Retardation". Both men again confirmed that persons with disabilities run higher risks of sexual and physical abuse than the general population. They will be sending us the results of their research.

In Calgary, we met with several women as individuals, and with persons representing groups of disabled consumers. Our first stop was at the Calgary Rehabilitation Society. This is a non-profit self-help group for disabled citizens. The building houses several other non-profit societies. We were given a tour of the post-polio society. Vivian Gonzales, publisher of The Triumph, a newspaper for and entirely produced by persons with disabilities, was delighted to show us the paper in production and to have us meet the staff.

We visited several women's groups located on the 3rd floor of the old YWCA. Our visit gave us the opportunity to make them aware of DAWN and to increase (we hope) their

awareness of the inaccessibility of their offices. Again, we brought to women's attention that they would never rent space where women of colour were not welcome, but that their physical barriers make a strong statement that women with disabilities are not allowed.

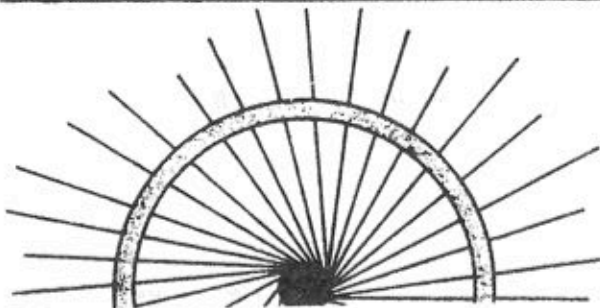
It is not possible to mention personally all of the women that we met and talked with. We had a very successful trip and we were impressed with the amount and the quality of work that is happening in Alberta. We feel very strongly that a DAWN group in Alberta would give a woman's perspective on issues of importance to all persons with disabilities that are the same issues which are different for women, as well as on issues that are specifically women's issues.

NO ONE BUGS CHARLOTTE  
SINCE BUTCH ATE  
THE HANDI TRANS  
DRIVER.



For example, several sexual assaults of women with disabilities by custom transit drivers have been reported. Disability groups are confused as to how to deal with this problem. They want to protect their transportation service and to ensure that good drivers are not damned without fair trial. A DAWN group could be useful in acting as a voice of support for the assaulted women.

Each woman who gave us her name, address and phone number will receive a list of all of the other women. Many women are interested in seeing a DAWN group begin in Alberta. However, they are often overly committed to other work and there is very little energy left over. But as you know, when women come together, we find a way. Alberta women hold the potential for a strong and active DAWN ALBERTA and we feel that it is going to happen.



## DAWN Toronto

- Pat Israel  
DAWN Canada Board

In June, a well-attended workshop was held on sexual assault at the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre. The emphasis was on how to avoid sexual assault and what to do if it does happen.

Instructor Marilyn Walsh demonstrated domain, a self defense technique especially designed for women.

DAWN Toronto did not meet during the summer months. It is difficult enough to get together without having to consider summer holiday schedules! This didn't stop all activities, however. DAWN Toronto was active in helping to make Gay Pride Day accessible and a number of members attended.

September was the month for the annual general meeting and the election of the new board and executive. In October, DAWN Toronto will attend an information day with the Ontario Women's Directorate on Violence and Disabled Women.

Currently DAWN Toronto is applying for funding from the Ontario Office of Disabled Persons for the purpose of group development and outreach work to new members.

## Pictures From A Dark Room – Mary

(The following is reprinted from Disabled Women's International Newsletter 2, July 1987.)

It is precisely the universal humanity which I have tried to bring out in my photographs.

Take for example Mary who is one of my close friends. While working on this nude still, I felt that something unique was evolving. Mary showed herself as the complete woman she is and so this photograph became a homage to her sexuality and a praise of the body that she accepts and is pleased about. All this emerged from Mary.

One of Mary's girlfriends cried the first time she saw Mary's photograph. She told me that Mary usually dresses in loose, hanging blouses so the friend was terrified of the concealed body. Once she saw this photograph - feet, knees, thighs, head - all well-proportioned as herself, she finally realized that her own fear had barred an equal relationship between them.

Their relationship changed radically as a result of this photograph.





## Research Forum On Women With Disabilities

- Cynthea Topham  
DAWN CANADA Board  
Winnipeg

The Secretary of State Department sponsored a first-ever Research Forum on women with disabilities on June 2-4, 1988 in Ottawa. It was a wonderful opportunity for women with disabilities from across Canada to get together with academic women and women from the women's movement, and to share experiences about the realities of being women and being disabled.

At both the individual and DAWN CANADA level, we gained tremendously from this opportunity to network. Not only did we expand and strengthen the network with disabled and nondisabled women, we increased our credibility and visibility.

Marsha Saxton, co-editor of the anthology entitled, With Wings, started off the weekend with a thought-provoking discussion on the importance of telling our stories to each other and listening to each other. Marsha also stressed that we need to gain control over decisions made about our own lives. It was, like the rest of the weekend, so emotionally-charged that we all were able to relate well

to each other's experiences and feelings. We ended the first evening by singing songs which celebrated the strengths and support women with disabilities have.

We left each other that evening feeling strong, cared for, and less isolated. We know that we are not alone in struggling with the double barriers of being women and being disabled.

The second day consisted mainly of plenaries. Panel members brought forward interesting perspectives on how research about women with disabilities has been done and the direction we should take to effect significant social change through research.

The last day of the forum focused on prioritizing issues and deciding on who should carry through the research of the designated topics. Should it be women with disabilities, academics, the women's movement or the consumer's movement? It had become increasingly clear throughout the forum that women with disabilities must have the opportunity and authority to carry out research on disabled

(Con't on p. 26)

## DAWN Goes To The East Coast

-Jillian Ridington  
DAWN CANADA Researcher

Did I really try to cover four provinces, interview 50 women, and learn all there is to know about the needs of women with disabilities in Atlantic Canada in 12 days? I'm old enough to know it couldn't be done, but I did try to accomplish that. It was a wonderful experience -- often enriching, always enlightening, though sometimes overwhelming.

I come from a rich province where social services have been cut back for ideological reasons. I am used to community groups and agencies worrying about money, and to women with disabilities feeling "burnt out" and depressed because governments either do not hear them, or do not care about them. There is a difference in Atlantic Canada; governments are poor there, as well as people. Not that the needs of women with disabilities shouldn't be a priority for funding, however small the pot, but it is easier to maintain high energy, and to demand your rights, when you see money being spent on highways instead of ramps into transition houses. In the Atlantic provinces, there seemed so

much to do -- lack of jobs, lack of accessible housing, lack of money for anything. But many women are doing a lot, and I was proud and pleased to meet them.

One example is Estelle Reddin, in Charlottetown, who inspired "DANCE with DAWN". (See Linda Evans article on DANCE with DAWN) DAWN-PEI has been revitalized by the "DANCE with DAWN" programme. Contact Peggy Reddin, c/o Estelle Reddin, Home Economics Dept. University of P.E.I., Charlottetown, P.E.I. C1A 4P3 for more details.

Another spark-plug is Helen Morris, Chair of Women for Change in St. John's, Nfld. Talk about energy! This group has already completed a study of women with disabilities in Newfoundland, and is planning a symposium on sexuality soon. And they live in a city where transportation seems almost impossible -- all the streets are on the sides of steep hills, and the weather is a real problem most of the year. Even in June, the wind almost blew me flat on my back. But you don't say, "That's impossible" to a woman from Newfoundland -- they go ahead and do it while you are telling them why they can't.

(Con't on p. 27)

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**Special Election Feature:****Excerpts From "Shocking Pink Paper"**

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) was established in 1973 as an independent organization funded by the federal government. The Council's mandate is to advise the government and inform the public on matters of concern to women. The following are excerpts from an annual publication of the CACSW, "Shocking Pink Paper 1988".

According to the CACSW, more than 50% of one parent families headed by women in Canada are poor, compared to 9% of one parent families headed by men. One million children under age 16 and 50% of elderly women live in poverty.

The facts speak for themselves. Get commitments from candidates before you elect them. Go to an all-candidates meeting in your riding and ask questions. Demand that it be held in an accessible location! Here are some questions to ask:

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN** Despite measures taken to help battered women and their families each year one million women in Canada continue to be physically and sexually abused in their own homes. They are often subjected to emotional, psychological and economic abuse as well. Many women are unable to seek shelter because they are isolated by geography, language or disability.

**What measures will you take to help women and children who are the victims of abuse?**

**HOUSING** Some women, many of whom are sole-support mothers or elderly women, must spend up to 80% of their disposable income on housing. Lack of affordable housing is a major obstacle for women with disabilities and for women trying to regain control of their lives, such as widowed and divorced women, women leaving violent family situations, women just released from psychiatric institutions, and the homeless.

**What is your party prepared to do to address women's housing needs and to ensure that affordable, quality housing is available to all women across Canada?**

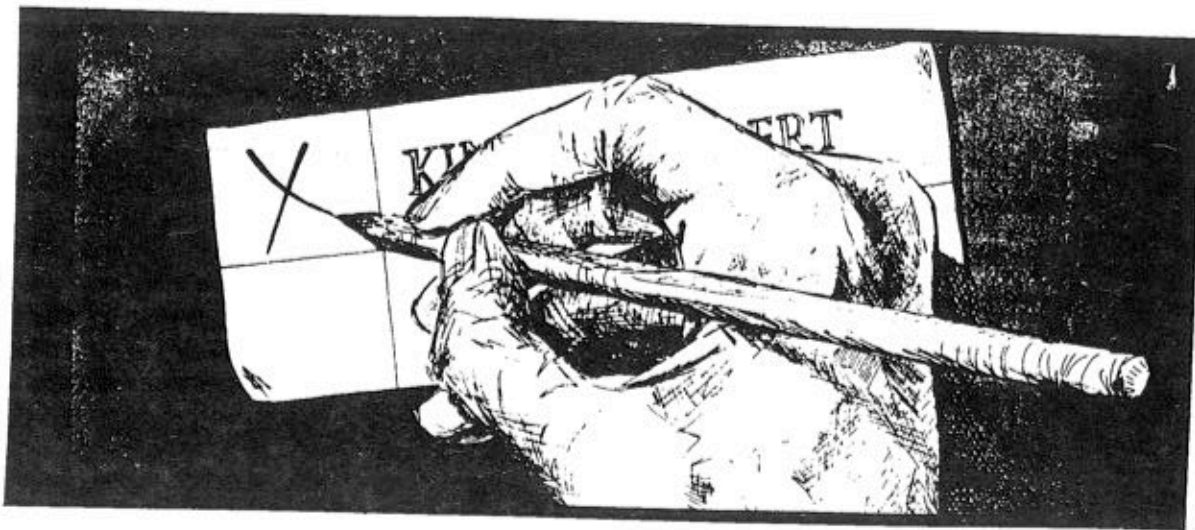
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**DOUBLE DISCRIMINATION** Many women in our society face additional discrimination because they are members of minority groups. Women with disabilities are often forgotten. Immigrant women are discriminated against. Many Native women are still not treated equally under the law. Racism affects the lives of these women and of women who are members of visible minorities. Women who face double discrimination often have difficulty getting access to employment, housing or transportation.

**REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH** In our society, women become pregnant and bear and raise children under conditions of inequality. Reproductive choice is an equality issue. Reproductive health services, including information on birth planning, contraception, sex education and abortion must be available [and accessible] to women in all parts of Canada and be fully funded by provincial health insurance plans. More research on contraception is needed. Legislation on abortion is neither necessary nor warranted.

What will your party do to ensure equitable access for all women in Canada to reproductive health services, including research on contraception, more sex education in schools, increased information on birth planning and access to abortion services?



## The Yukon Visit

### September 27-30, 1988

- Jillian Ridington  
DAWN CANADA Researcher

Tuesday: Northern hospitality -- it's the greatest! Where else would the local MP arrive on your doorstep within two hours of your arrival? And they hadn't even called the election when Audrey McLaughlin visited! It helped that I was staying at Betty Toews, because Betty, who is the Northern-B.C.-Yukon regional representative for DAWN-B.C., knows everyone in town. Betty and her husband Vern put me up, lent me their car, and provided all kinds of information on who's who and what's where in the Yukon. Thanks, Betty!

After telling Audrey all about DAWN, and getting the names of a number of contact people from her, Betty and I met with DAWN-Canada Board member Lona Hobbs. We discussed the obstacles they had encountered in trying to get a DAWN group going there. There is no disabled consumer's umbrella group in the Yukon, an NDP territorial government that provides relatively good services, and the fact that the majority of Yukoners are already over-committed.

Whitehorse, with 17,000 people, has 2/3 of the entire population of the Yukon. This small population means that people are reluctant to talk about their personal problems, as word tends to spread quickly in a small town. Lona has been attempting to develop interest in a consumer's group, which could provide a pool of prospective DAWN members.

Betty and Lona see public education and employment as the major unmet needs of Yukoners with disabilities. Accessibility is also a problem -- the majority of public buildings are difficult or impossible for the mobility impaired. Betty worked on Access Awareness Week, and got some good publicity which has stimulated awareness.

Wednesday: Betty and I visited Margaret McCallough at the Yukon Human Rights Commission. Their office is warm, inviting, and very accessible! We learned of more contact people, and got a good overview of the resources available in the Yukon. Then we went off to the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre -- or rather, I went to the centre, which is **not** accessible, while Betty waited in the office of the Yukon Association for Community Living. Lorene Robertson, the new staff

person of the Women's Centre, is lobbying for a move -- go for it, Lorenne! We talked about the upcoming (March 10,11,12, 1989) Yukon Women's Conference. The theme will be "Sex, Reproduction, and Intimacy in the 1990s", and agreed that a workshop on these issues from the perspective of women with disabilities was an essential addition to the agenda. Lorenne accompanied me down the stairs to meet Betty, who was chatting about DAWN with Sandra Secord of Yukon Special Olympics, and Jan Wood from the Yukon Association for Community Living. We hope that little bit of cross-fertilization bears fruit.

On again to visit Bobbie Smith, of the Yukon Women's Directorate. Bobbie is a former head of the Native Women's Association, and is now working under Margaret Joe, the Minister of Social Services. She is aware, energetic, and in a position to influence policy. We talked about how "people who need help the most get forgotten," and about the similarities between the experience of native women and women with disabilities, and the triple whammy for native women with disabilities.

Thursday: Our first stop was at the home Barb LeGault, a

dynamic MSeR who has made a wonderful recovery. A change in medication, away from fier-anol, accomplished the miracle. Barb is very interested in DAWN, and now she has her energy back, will be a dynamic addition to our network. Then we visited the local (and inaccessible) transition house. The workers were aware of the limitations of the house. They are applying for federal funding, and hope to get a new, accessible, larger house as well as more second-stage housing.

Over lunch, I met with an old friend, Joyce Hayden. She is now visually impaired. She is seeking an NDP nomination for the upcoming territorial elections. If she gets it, and wins, she'll be a fantastic contact. If she doesn't -- well, DAWN could sure use her energy and organizing skills.

Next stop was the Yukon Indian Centre, where Cheryl McLean of their Social and Human Services was most supportive. She took questionnaires to hand out to their regional workers, and gave me good insights to the problems of native women with disabilities. Currently, Native Bands in the Yukon are putting together proposals for dealing with family violence at the

(Con't on p. 27)





Thanks to the Secretary of State Department and the Attorney General of BC, last March DAWN BC hosted the first conference on Violence and the Disabled Woman ever to happen in Canada. Concurrently, DAWN CANADA held its board meeting, which gave us a wonderful opportunity to combine our resources for yet another herstoric DAWN project.

Joanne Doucette from DAWN Toronto and an original founding member of DAWN CANADA gave the keynote address for the BC conference. And what we expected was true - women with disabilities are victims of violence in the same way as all other women. In addition, women with disabilities face problems of care giver violence, institutional violence and the violence from a society that rejects anyone that is different. The truth is out. Now our role is to create a safe environment in which victims can speak out. We must also demand that support services are made accessible to us.

Following up on this conference, our regional coordinators participated in several training sessions for

victim support workers around the province. In the Vancouver area, we have visited transition houses to check on accessibility, make recommendations for changes, and offer suggestions for sources of funding for accessibility renovations.

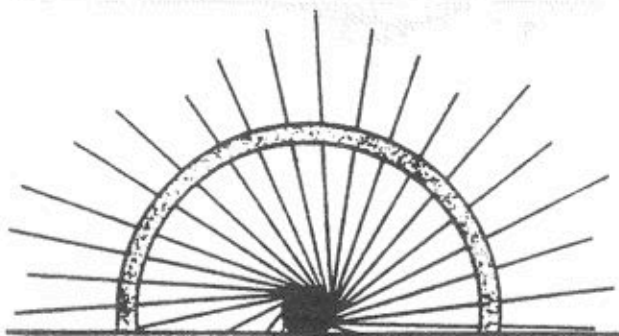
Plans are in progress to bring together prospective mothers, mothers and children, and other women interested in issues related to parenting for our next conference, "Family Life and the Disabled Woman".

Including children is not a new idea to us. In fact, we budget for it. It has proved to be a rewarding experience for both the moms and the kids. Some of the kids, for the first time, meet other kids whose mothers are different in the same sorts of ways that their moms are different. Peer support is as important for them as it is for us.

Kids will be more autonomous at the next conference. They will run their own workshops and build their own support networks. We are looking forward to a powerful weekend as we again break new ground.

On the DAWN BC agenda for the fall is an Anger Workshop. It

(Con't on p. 23)



## DAWN Saskatchewan

- Patricia Ortman  
Outreach Project Coordinator

DAWN Saskatchewan became registered on May 18, 1988 and incorporated as a non-profit organization on May 30, 1988.

DAWN Saskatchewan has a four month Outreach Project funded by the Secretary of State Department. It has two main goals: to build the organization by networking with other women with disabilities, and to determine the issues and needs which have been named as priorities by Saskatchewan women with disabilities. The priorities included rural woman and native women. An action plan for more grassroots and community outreach and education is being developed. Our first step is to establish regional meetings.

DAWN Saskatchewan participated in a press conference regarding a statement on affirmative action addressed to

the Regina Public Board of Education by the Regina Public School Teacher's Association. Media coverage is expected to help to promote DAWN in Saskatchewan.

Judith Ryan, the DAWN Saskatchewan representative on the DAWN CANADA board of directors attended a National Research Council of Women meeting. It considered the type of research required in Saskatchewan to address the concerns of other minority women such as lesbian, immigrant and native.

## No News Is Bad News

In order to receive your copy of No News is Bad News, a report from the Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons on the treatment by the media of issues concerning persons with a disability, write to:

Clerk of the Committee on  
the Status of Disabled  
Persons,  
House of Commons,  
Ottawa, Ontario.  
K1A 0A6

This report contains 27 recommendations which need our support and encouragement before they will gain implementation. Get yours today!

## Feature: Women With Mental Handicaps – Breaking Down The Barriers

- Miriam Ticoll  
The G. Allan Roeher Institute  
Toronto

Children are often heard hurling the epithet "retard" at one another, as part of the arsenal of insults they have at their disposal. Most of us can remember being the aggressor or the victim of this type of verbal skirmishing. The effect is to render the object totally ridiculous and less than human.

That this label should have such an impact is a reflection of our society's deep-seated antipathy towards and fear of people with mental handicaps. Regrettably, this is a starting point for understanding the particular issues affecting women who are mentally handicapped.

The struggle for rights, equality and access for women and men who are disabled involves challenging a number of basic values and norms so that full inclusion in the community becomes possible. It requires that disabled people demand dignity and rights while rejecting the old, paternalistic reflexes of charity and pity.

Disabled women face the consequences of living in a society dominated by able-bodied men, where they are doubly devalued – as disabled and as women. This means demanding recognition and equality on both fronts. The obstacles faced by women who are mentally handicapped include those encountered by disabled people generally, as well as those experienced by all women in a patriarchal society. But there is more.

Our society has historically been so threatened by the "difference" of intellectual impairment that people have been physically removed from their communities and incarcerated in institutions. (There are over 20,000 people labelled mentally handicapped living in publicly funded institutions in Canada today, and another 10,000 in other institutional facilities.)

Rather than accommodate the differences and provide the appropriate supports for their full participation in our society, we have chosen by and large to banish people with mental handicaps.



While those who are intellectually impaired often eloquently express their needs, desires and interests, we have become skilled at ignoring and denying them for any number of reasons: their means of expression may not conform to the ideal of what we consider to be articulate verbal communication; they may communicate non-verbally; or, they may be both articulate and verbal but, having been labelled "mentally retarded", are dismissed out of hand.



In short, devalued as she is for being a woman, subject to deep prejudice due to her disability, and dismissed for the unaccepted manner in which she may articulate her needs and desires, the woman who is mentally handicapped is at enormous risk of being invisible and without a voice. Not surprisingly, this has profound consequences in terms of both the quality of life experienced by most women with intellectual impairments and the options which are open to them.

It is not possible in this space to deal with the many areas, such as institutionalization, employment, and education, in which women who are mentally handicapped are denied choices and access. I would, however, like to highlight a few issues of particular importance:

#### **Community Support and Services:**

Women in the community must be provided with the appropriate supports. There is no point in removing a woman from an institution only to have her living in isolation in the community. The structures and services must be in place to allow her to flourish. Women with intellectual impairments have been denied options and the opportunity to exercise choices. They have largely

been denied the opportunity to decide whether to live alone, to share a home, to marry, to have children, etc. The creation of appropriate support systems is essential to making these true options.

### **Reproductive Rights:**

Reproductive rights for women with mental handicaps continue to be fragile. In the landmark "Eve" decision of October, 1986, women with mental handicaps won a significant victory when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that no one, including doctors, guardians and judges, can order the non-therapeutic sterilization of a woman labelled mentally handicapped or legally incompetent.

In spite of this legislation, forced sterilization remains a reality for many women who are intellectually impaired. In fact, a report recently released by the Institute of Law Research and Reform of Alberta calls for the enactment of legislation in Alberta that would give the courts and guardians of women with mental handicaps the power to authorize sterilization. In the proposed legislation, the decision to sterilize rests with a judge of the Court of the Queen's Bench.

This judge would be given the power to order sterilization not only for necessary medical treatment, but also for optional medical treatment, birth control, and for eliminating menses "to facilitate the integration in the community of a mentally disabled woman who cannot manage menses".

### **Sexual Abuse:**

Young women with developmental disabilities are at even greater risk of being sexually abused than most women in our society. Conservative estimates indicate that between 39 and 68% of girls with developmental disabilities will be subjected to sexual abuse before they reach 18 years of age.

The services to deal with the needs of sexually assaulted children in general are woefully inadequate. No information has been compiled to suggest what services, if any, are accessible to victims of child sexual abuse with intellectual impairments. A detailed discussion of the problems of sexual abuse and the mentally handicapped can be found in Vulnerable: Sexual Abuse and People with an Intellectual Handicap, (The G. Allan Roeher Institute, 1988.)

There is a movement underway to improve the lives of people who are mentally handicapped in Canada. The movement includes self-advocates, many of whom are members of the People First organization. It also includes supporters, many of whom are members of the Associations for Community Living. The movement focuses on the integration of people labelled mentally handicapped into the community, with an emphasis on education, employment, legal and human rights.

As has largely been the case for women with disabilities generally, the women's movement has been slow to embrace the issues facing women with intellectual impairments. The reasons for this are complex. For an insightful discussion of this question, see Janice J. Tait's article, "Reproductive Technology and the Rights of Disabled Women" (Canadian Journal of Women and the Law, Vol. 1, 1986, pp. 446-455).

The extreme marginalization of women with mental handicaps both outside and within the women's movement cannot be ignored. Their right to and struggle for dignified lives as women is intrinsic to the struggle for all women in our society. We have much to learn from each other.

## DAWN BC

(Con't from p. 18)

will be funded by the Vandusen Foundation. The Prince George group is working with the Women's Secretariat of BC on the possibility of an interprovincial workshop for women with disabilities.

Debra Westdorp, DAWN BC Chairperson, has been attending planning meetings for a conference on Domestic Violence. ACT 2, a second stage transition house, has generated this event and it will be taking place in April or May 1989. It is intended for the front-line workers who deal with the victims of any kind of violence in the home.

Everytime we begin to discuss a new issue, we feel overwhelmed by the needs and by the work ahead of us. It is important to us to know what our sisters are doing in other provinces. It gives us a starting point and always, it lets us know that we are not alone behind the mountains. It's good to know that you are fighting the same frustrations and rejoicing in the same hard-won victories. By nurturing our growing network and sharing our experiences, we can make the seemingly small victories into big ones!



## Think Tank



A "Think Tank on Native Disabilities" was held on January 20-24, 1988 in Cornwall, Ontario. The following is the "Forward" to the Proceedings:

For disabled Natives, life is seldom easy. They struggle with being perceived as different. Yet, their aspirations do not differ substantially from those of neighbours, friends or other community members. Like everyone else, they have an essential and unique relationship with their community. The most basic and

determining needs are met only through this relationship.

To complicate matters, the ability of governments to influence community problems seems to be affected by a kind of "future blindness". Because of management through crisis, and legal and bureaucratic filters, programs would appear to be developed in isolation. Disabled individuals feel powerless in the shadow of overwhelming authorities.

Some say that they are frozen out of the decision-making process, and this inevitably contributes to mistrust, apprehension and skepticism.

In addressing the concerns of Natives in Canada, more questions emerged than answers. Just what is the nature of the problems facing disabled Natives? How serious are the problems of jurisdictional responsibility and accessibility to care and information? Are the services to disabled Natives relevant to their unique cultural, social and geographic needs? Do governments really suffer from hardening of the categories? Who is the best advocate or the disabled Native - Indian, Metis or Inuk?

This unique meeting in

Cornwall may have been the first step by disabled native persons in an effort to advance their cause or equality - equality of opportunity to participate, to risk, to fail and to grow as contributing members of their own communities.

For copies of the Proceedings of the Think Tank, please write to:

Disabled Persons Participation Program,  
Secretary of State Department,  
25 Eddy Street, Room 13A5,  
Hull, Quebec.  
K0A 0M5



### DISABLED CITIZENS AT THE POLLS

TRUE OR FALSE??

1. All Canadians have the right to vote?  
FALSE  
Disabled Canadians who reside in institutions are denied the vote?
2. Polling stations do not present any barriers to participation of voters?  
FALSE  
Many polling stations are inaccessible to persons who use a wheelchair, or who have visual impairments or require easily understood directions.
3. Returning officers must ensure that polling stations are accessible?  
FALSE  
Returning officers are not required by law to ensure accessibility, they are only encouraged to do so.
4. Denial of the right to vote is discriminatory?  
TRUE  
The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the ultimate law of the land guarantees equality of access to all persons regardless of sex, age, race, physical or mental disability.

We seek your support in determining how readily Canadians with a disability can participate in the next federal election. Please complete the following questionnaire after you have voted or attempted to vote and drop your response in the mailbox. It is not necessary to attach postage to this material. Thank you for your help.

1. What federal constituency do you reside in?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Did you vote? Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
3. Did you have difficulty getting transportation to the polling station?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_  
Explain \_\_\_\_\_
4. At the polling station did you find any barriers that hampered your access?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
5. Were the barriers related to:
 

Access to the building	Yes ___ No ___
Ballot in usable form	Yes ___ No ___
Returning Officers not helpful	Yes ___ No ___
Access re: the polling booth	Yes ___ No ___
Other (please explain) _____	
6. Have you launched a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
7. Did you draw media attention to the limited access?  
Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_
8. Additional comments!

## Research Forum

(Con't from p. 12)

women. We, after all, are the experts.

This is not to say, however, that academics and the women's and consumer's movements do not have a part in the research process. Rather, they can work together with us by providing the necessary resources and funding for us to carry out the research. Furthermore, they have a fundamental

responsibility to put into action what they have learned from women with disabilities concerning issues affecting us.

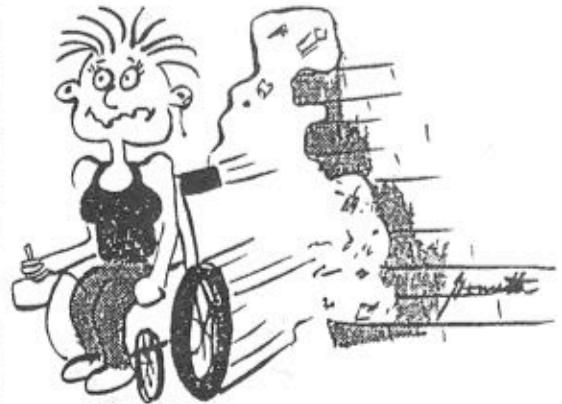
The Research Forum was empowering. It was a step forward in bridging the gap between the women's movement and the disabled consumer's movement. It also developed a more positive relationship between women with disabilities and the federal government.

### HELEN KELLER 1924

So long as I confine my activities to social service and the blind, the newspapers compliment me extravagantly, calling me "archpriestess of the sightless" and "a modern miracle", but when it comes to a discussion of poverty and I maintain that ... the industrial system under which we live is at the root of much of the physical deafness and blindness in the world - that is a different matter.

- excerpt from "The War on the Disabled: Adding Insult to Injury" by Heidi Durham available from Radical Women, 5018 Rainier Ave. S., Seattle, Washington. 98118 USA

MARY JANE BREAKS  
DOWN ANOTHER WALL





## To The East Coast

(Con't from p. 13)

I started and ended my tour in Halifax, with stops in Chatham, Moncton, Bathurst and Newcastle in New Brunswick before going on to Newfoundland. Then I drove around P.E.I., which doesn't take too long, except that there is so much beauty to see along the way, and so many wonderful, friendly people to talk to. Everywhere I went, women as individuals and as members of groups were warm and helpful, and full of information about their lives and their needs. Workers in government offices and disable consumer's groups, and women's shelters and centres were also very helpful and supportive of DAWN.

(Con't from p. 17)

reserve level, so it is a good time to initiate awareness of the particular problems of disabled women who are abused.

Friday: Time to pack up and go, catch my plane and reflect on my short but informative visit. Yukoners are wonderful, hospitable, caring. With the only NDP government in the country, services seem good, at least when compared with those in B.C. However,

My deep thanks to you all. I have written up a contact list, which I hope can assist you in developing DAWN in the region, or planning conferences. People I interviewed will be getting it without having to ask. If other women would like a copy, please contact Shirley Masuda, Co-ordinator of the DAWN-Canada project, at 10401 Fin layson, Richmond, B.C. V6X 1W8.

# VOTE!

there are problems; home care is insufficient, and at least one woman with a sever disability has no financial support of any kind. Women I interviewed agreed that self-image was the biggest problem for them. Parenting, and the effect of a mother's disability on her children, were other deep concerns. I would suggest that DAWN make it a priority to participate in the upcoming conference, and to give our DAWN representatives in the Yukon all the information and support we can.



**DAWN Canada:  
Disabled Women's Network Canada  
Réseau d'Action des Femmes  
Handicapées du Canada**

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