

# NAC HOUSING NEWS

Volume 3, no. 1  
Summer '91

## LETS MAKE THE HOUSING NETWORK GROW !!

In December of this year, the NAC Housing Committee responded to internal pressure from committee members and ongoing pressure from women across the country to produce the NAC Newsletter with more articles and news from the other nine provinces. The focus of the committee has always attempted to address the concerns and issues of women from a national perspective but we do need help from groups across the country to ensure that the Newsletter does not focus on the issues and concerns of Ontario. With this in mind we looked for achievable ways to produce a Housing Newsletter that would reflect the issues of women from across Canada.

Using the successful HIC Women and Shelter Newsletter as our model we propose to structure the Newsletter in such a way the each province (and the NWT) have control over one page of copy. The most practical way to accomplish this is to request that women's housing groups or organizations commit to gather and coordinate their respective provinces copy and content and forward the material to the Committee on the appropriate deadlines.

see page 9



### Table of Contents:

Examining the Gender in Tenant Issues , Lynne Pearlman	2
Women Collaborating on Gender -Specific Housing Solutions, Trish Crema	5
Women and Housing - Dominant and Subdominant Images and Forms, Frances de Grace	6
Housing for Single Mothers, Single Mothers; Network	8
Native Women's Housing in Regina, Phyllis Bellegard	9

# EXAMINING THE GENDER IN TENANT ISSUES

By Lynne Pearlman

We're pretty excited about the TAG Gender Subcommittee, so we wanted women across Canada in to know about it! Hopefully, we can benefit from each other's thoughts, energy and resources.

## WHAT IS TAG? WHAT IS THE TAG GENDER SUBCOMMITTEE?

One of the advantages of working in a legal clinic in the Metropolitan Toronto area is the ability to network with other clinics about common concerns. There are several inter-clinic workgroups which meet to share information, formulate policy, and strategize about issues of importance to legal clinic clients. One such group is TAG - the Tenant Advocacy Group.

Recently, some feminist members of TAG formed a sub-committee to examine the "gender" in tenant issues. While it is true that women and men share a common sphere of tenant problems, it is also true that there are important tenant concerns that are experienced predominantly by women. Tenant issues have traditionally been approached from a gender neutral perspective which, more often than not, reflects the priorities of a white male perspective and renders invisible the experiences of women. The project of the TAG gender sub-committee is first, to make these gender issues visible and second, to develop an action plan for correcting them.

## ANALYSING THE "GENDER" IN LANDLORD & TENANT LAW

Looking for the "gender" in tenant law means analysing the way laws and policies impact on women. To do this, one must bring to the law an awareness of the reality of women's lives - realities of pervasive violence against women, economic deprivation, lack of reproductive control, and disproportionate distribution of work in the home, particularly child-rearing work.

Here are a couple of examples of the gendered impact of L. & T. law that our group has discussed:

### *a) Evictions*

A common problem faced by clinic clients is evictions. Part IV of Ontario's Landlord and Tenant Act sets out explicit circumstances under which a landlord is entitled to evict a tenant. Examples include: 1) a tenant or his [sic] guests damage the rental premises, 2) conduct of a tenant or his [sic] guests "substantially interferes with the reasonable enjoyment" of other tenants, 3) a tenant is in arrears of rent.

Applying a gender analysis to the grounds for eviction listed above, reveals that women find themselves in eviction situations for reasons that have a lot to do with their status as

women - situations which are not generally shared by male tenants, and would not have been taken into account when the legislation was drafted. For example, not only do assaulted women endure abuse by their partners, but if they are tenants, their partners' abusive behaviour also puts them at risk of being evicted. This is true for women who are still living with their partners as well as for women who are living separate from partners. Even after a woman has moved away, her former partner may show up at her home because of access visits with children, or because an aspect of the abuse is the continued pursuit, harassment and threats to her.

Assaultive men throw and break things when they are being physically abusive. This could result in the rental premises being damaged, which as explained above, constitutes cause for eviction. Despite the fact that a diminished sense of self, and a "disabled" resistance are consequences of abuse, and despite the fact that there is good reason for an abused woman to believe she risks further abuse by ordering her partner away from the premises, women are assumed to have "permitted" their partners there as guests. Sometimes women are forced to "permit" their partners into their apartments because of the way a court order deals with access arrangements.

Similarly, an eviction notice based on interference with the enjoyment of other tenants is often based on complaints of noise. As one might expect, abuse is less than quiet: a woman and her children may be screaming; objects may be flying, crashing and breaking; and a man might be yelling streams of abusive threats. At the best of times, children are generally noisy. We are aware of at least one

reported case where the court allowed a landlord to evict tenants on the basis that their crying baby disturbed other tenants. Because women assume a disproportionate share of child-rearing work in our society, we believe that this interpretation of the law has a sex discriminatory impact.

It is not uncommon for abusive men to steal their partner's money; it is not uncommon for men to default on their support payments. A woman who is counting on the regularity of this money to pay her rent will be put in an impossible situation through no fault of her own. In other words, that which looks like a run of the mill "rent arrears" or "persistent late payment" eviction on its surface, may be based on gender specific facts.

#### *b) Changing Locks*

Ontario's provisions relating to the changing of locks, making it illegal for a landlord or a tenant to change locks on the rented premises without mutual consent, are another example of tenant law with a gendered impact. There is growing awareness of the frequency with which women tenants are being sexually harassed/assaulted by their landlords or landlords' agents (eg. superintendents). Clearly it is impossible to feel safe and secure in one's own home under these circumstances; yet under the law as it currently stands, it is illegal for a woman to protect herself by changing the locks, unless she has her abuser's consent (a less than likely scenario).

### What Is The TAG Gender Sub-Committee Doing About These Problems?

The Tag Gender committee is reviewing Part IV of the Landlord & Tenant Act to document any gender problems we come across. We are gathering resources such as articles and caselaw which provide examples of these issues. We also consider it important to educate ourselves and others about the development of the law on sex discrimination. This is useful in assessing how far we can use existing caselaw in our advocacy (inside and outside the courtroom). The material also provides insight into the potential for translating the realities of the women's lives into creative sex equality arguments.

As longer term goals, we hope to produce resource materials and precedents which will be helpful for tenant advocates in identifying and addressing sex equality problems in landlord and tenant law. We also see organizing and law reform as critical components of our work.

We welcome the input of women throughout Canada. If there are tenant problems you are aware of, which are specific to women, please let us know about them. We also welcome your ideas/success stories about strategies for eliminating these problems. Please forward any thoughts, suggestions etc. to the TAG Gender Sub-Committee, c/o Lynne Pearlman, Metro Tenants Legal Services, 720 Spadina Ave., Suite 410, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2T9.

FAX: 1-416-926-9726

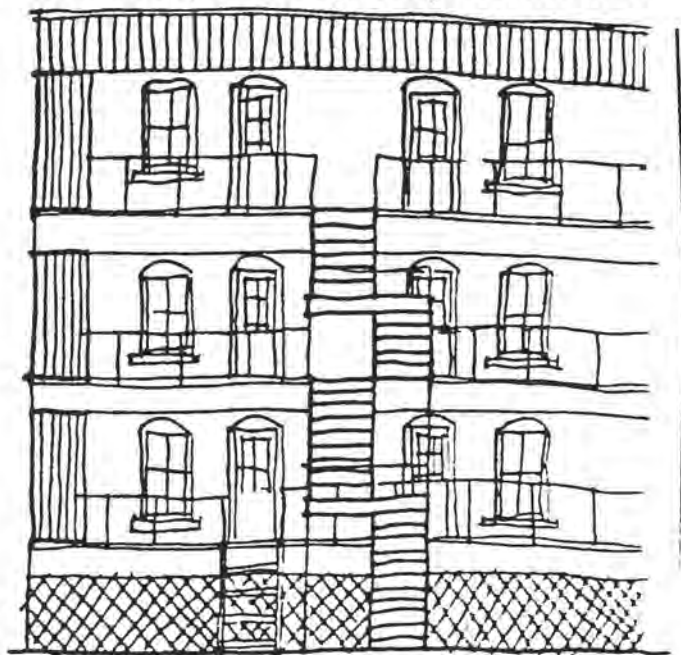
*The following women have participated in the work of the NAC Housing Committee:*

Joanna Tie Ten Quee	Chair 1991/92
Leslie Robinson	Past Chair
Marnie Hayes	Past Chair
Eileen McConnell	
Ronny Yaron	
Pam Sayne	
Lynne Pearlman	
Kim Shpak	
Evelyn Turner	
Bea Levis	
Jude Zutz	
Jane Brackley	

#### **Acknowledgements:**

Eileen McConnell :  
for coordination , production and layout of newsletter

Leslie Robinson :  
for Desk Top Publishing and layout of newsletter





# Women Collaborating on Gender-Specific Housing Solutions

Trish Crema

"Social Planning Council of Metro Toronto  
Working on Women and Housing"

As a new program director at the Social Planning Council of Metro Toronto (SPC), I will be integrating housing with "family" (read women's) issues. To this I bring my memories of experience as a single parent living in a new housing coop along with my work in community organizations and planning bodies doing community health development, advocacy, action research and policy analysis.

Coming from Northern Ontario (Sudbury) and moving around the province, I have seen and shared the shelter problems women face. For example, working as an outreach worker in a women's shelter in a rural community, I learned about the critical housing needs of women trying to leave violent relationships. As I grow older and wiser, I am more and more committed to the issue of safety, security, accessibility and affordability in housing.

A February workshop on Women and Housing organized by NAC and other tenant and housing groups provided a welcome opportunity for followup. I have also "found" women working on this issue in many ways: gender and housing research needs, documenting providers

of women's housing experience, developing housing policies for women and children experiencing violence, following the "evolution" of women and housing policy, exploring barriers to women's networks and advocacy efforts on housing. I hope to continue to connect and possibly begin to develop a more coordinated effort.

One personal interest is to begin to change the SPC's approach to housing along with the planning process and organizational structures to include a socialist feminist analysis in housing policy. This will take time. I will need support and assistance from many.

To facilitate this, a "Housing for All" Task Force has been formed to set priorities and develop projects for SPC. It is different from the usual housing meeting dominated by older men in grey suits. With over 2/3 membership by women, issues are defined quite differently. Already, creative ideas are emerging from the collective energies of all participants (which include members of NAC).

We have acknowledged that Gender, Household, Employment and Culture must be considered in housing policy analysis. We hope to do some work on increasing Participation and Diversity in Housing and promoting Housing as A Right. We would rather act than talk. So we are already starting to develop projects.

A proposal has been developed about Inclusionary Housing Policy Development for Women and Racial/Cultural Groups. This could include Discrimination in Housing and the relationship between Lack of Adequate Income and Risk of Homelessness.

As part of this project, we are interested in future collaborative activities with NAC Housing Committee, Women Plan Toronto Housing Circle, and other groups working on women and housing. We might finally organize a conference on Women and Housing for Ontario.

Other possibilities include documenting and sharing the process of innovative projects (e.g. a coop housing project for older women developed by Sharing, Sistering, Older Women's Network, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, and Women in Toronto Creating Housing.)

Several other projects are being considered. We intend to organize a Local Municipal Strategy by developing a housing election agenda (which addresses Barriers in the Planning Process and the Need for innovative options such as Intensification). We hope to support tenants in Public Housing Reform efforts by creating facilitative management structures and improving the quality of social housing. Another project might look at how we can plan Safe, Healthy, Supportive, Environmentally Sustainable housing and communities with access to services over our lifespan.

Housing for us is not just about a roof over our heads. We want spaces and places to live our lives. We are just beginning.

I invite you to contact me (Trish Crema) at (416) 351-0095 to share your thoughts, possible interest or involvement. I welcome any assistance or support. Articles, activities or input of any kind will be much appreciated. We can work together on projects already identified and help each other out. Let me know what you are doing. We might develop other joint projects together.

## Women and Housing - Dominant and Subdominant Images and Forms

Frances de Grace,

Women have now been more and less successfully delivering housing to themselves through social housing programs for a number of years. To meet critical housing needs, women have focused on the pragmatic issues of housing delivery - availability of land, the designing and implementing of appropriate housing in appropriate locations with appropriate amenities, the delivery process itself, and the capitalization of the project (s).

Beyond the successful 'delivery' of housing, however, the womens' issues as the relate to housing, remain disconcertingly familiar and unchanged:

1. poverty and the increasing feminization of poverty -

-The National Council on Welfare newly released report on Women and Poverty finds that women make up 59 percent of adults living below the poverty line - a two percent increase from 1975.

2. Life style or societal status, the key aspect of which is motherhood; The National Council report also reaffirms motherhood as the leading factor in poverty among women.

3. inability to access market housing - lack of housing options dependency on the values of the purveyors of social housing programs.

What sets women apart relative to housing is the economic reality of having children in a non-traditional family setting. The parent family form, now a dominant societal form represents a major structural change in the society, the implications of which we have not begun to recognize or to design for. There is a poor fit between the single parent family and the physical form of the city, which reifies automobile, suburb, and the traditional single family, the values of the time when its major infrastructure was put in place.

The interrelationships between home and the work place, the school, the daycare, and essential services, still reflect the traditional family form which assumes a breadwinner in the work place and a care giver in the home, often in distant locations. The transit system routes, the shortest routes to and from the workplace, reflect the assumption that the breadwinner and the caregiver functions are performed by separate people.

That the single parent family form is still unrecognized by the larger society, or viewed as a transitional form that might go away, is evident in the dominant imagery. The image of the traditional nuclear family and that of the *new* nuclear family - the two working parent family with hired caregiver - remain the dominant image in the provision of family housing. The only conceptual shift that has occurred is a recognition of the need for increased densification.

Inherent conflict exists between values reified as design criteria by purveyors of

housing in non-market housing sector and the operational realities of the large number of single parent families. Acceptable housing criteria reflect not the "ideal home" for the single parent family but the current common notions surrounding the operational characteristics of the "new" family taken to be normative in the society.

The notion of developing physical inter-relationships in the city or in the house that sustain the reality of the "single parent family" remains alien to the dominant societal image. Policy makers and decision makers must recognize single parent households as an enduring dominant societal form with a specific set of operational characteristics.

Without this recognition and a conceptual framework that distinguishes between the workable physical inter-relationships in the city for single parent families and those for two parent families, the form of both the house and the city will continue to be characterized by the dominant acceptable image.





# Housing for Single Mothers

Interview with Single-Mother's Housing Network

Home-sharing is an alternative, affordable housing option for low-income single mothers. As well as addressing economic needs, it also can provide companionship and childcare.

The program first began in Richmond B.C., a suburban community close to Vancouver, in 1986 as a response to the growing housing crisis in the lower mainland. Women, particularly single mothers being disadvantaged economically are increasingly shut out of the housing market including rental housing.

The concept behind the program is to share a home with another mother-led family. The service links women home-owners (or renters) with women searching for a home. This not only allows a single mother home-owner to cut house costs, but also provides accomodation for low income mothers that is more affordable than what is on the rental market. Homeowners and women looking for a place register with the program, which starts with an extensive application process. The staff at the network try to determine whether the program is appropriate for the needs of each individual applicant. After an interview, the women recieve names of potential home-sharers in their desired location. Bronwyn emphasized that the program is not for everyone so they encourage potential sharers to spend time together - to get to know one another and their children.

For women taking advantage of the program, home-sharing can go along way to fulfilling many needs of single mothers. The obvious

is economic need; sharing house costs such as maintenance, bills and rent. But women also can share emotional support and share childcare. This provides adult companionship as well as more time to themselves.

The program recieves funding from Social Services and Housing for two part-time staff positions. Due to the increasing housing shortage and availability of affordable rental accomadation, more people are turning to the network - last

For anyone interested in the program contact;

Single Mothers' Housing Network  
7080 Minoru Blvd.  
Richmond, B.C., V6Y 1Z4





# Native Women's Housing in Regina

from an interview with Phyllis Bellegard of the Regina Native Women's Centre

The Regina Native Women's Centre is involved with providing affordable, decent housing specifically for native women in the city.

According to Phyllis Bellegard, it is important to identify the problem at its roots. It is not lack of available housing but that the existing housing is unaffordable to many native women, particularly single mothers. There is a need to take the existing housing and make it affordable to low-income families. Large down payments needed to buy a house, make owning a house out of reach to single mothers on low incomes so they are forced to rent. Renting however, can be unstable, insecure, providing tenants with little control over their homes. This is particularly hard on single mothers due to their need to remain close to schools and daycare centres.

Through financing by CMHC, The Regina Native Women's Centre maintains forty seven units in the housing projects, Namarind, Silver Sage

and Gabriel Dumont. The centre has a staff of three who are responsible for finding housing for women, managing the project and overseeing the maintenance needs (although the tenants are responsible for most of the maintaining of their homes).

Long term goals are to expand in 1992 to ninety two units. They have also proposed a plan to obtain existing housing and up-grade the units in order to rent to low income families. The rent that a tenant pays for five or so years would be considered a down payment thus enabling her to own her home.

Regina Native Women's Centre  
1040 8th Ave. Regina, S4R 1C9

## Proposed Structure of the National NAC Newsletter.

1. One page or section of the Newsletter would be allocated for each province.
2. We would recruit a NAC housing member from each province, (more than one contact person would be welcome) who would be responsible for outreach, gathering, and forwarding their articles to the NAC Committee for publication. We would be happy to receive the articles by modem (using WP5.1), fax, mail, or hand written.
3. The articles collected should be grass roots .womens' stories, interviews with women, shelter issues, common themes across the province/country, have a global/national context, a list of upcoming events, articles on new housing initiatives, photographs, drawn from rural experiences, and any housing issue that is identified by

see page 10

the provincial contacts.

4. We would attempt to produce each newsletter on a particular housing theme.
5. The vision will be to share and network Womens Housing Issues in a national publication.

We need women across the country to agree to function as provincial coordinator and contribute to the production of the newsletter. It is essential that we recruit women from each province to guarantee a national perspective. We foresee the work to be minimal as we are hoping to recruit women who are already working on the issues of Women and Housing. If you cannot participate, please pass the word in your own community and circulate this Newsletter within the womens housing community. Please contact the NAC Housing Committee by calling 1-416-926-9822 (Toronto) or by writing:

*Chairperson, NAC Housing Committee  
c/o Metro Tenants Legal Services  
720 Spadina Avenue, Suite 410  
Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2T9.*

NAC Housing Committee  
c/o Metro Tenants Legal Services  
720 Spadina Avenue, Suite 410  
Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2T9