



# Women's Centres Connect

Annual Report 2019-2020

The Provincial Association of Women's Centres

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## Introduction

Organized in 1988, Women's Centres Connect is the collective voice of nine Women's Centres across Nova Scotia which invest in the activities, needs and concerns of women and adolescent girls by coordinating social advocacy work to change public policy. The leadership of the women of Women's Centres around the Connect table ensures that the voices of all women are heard and that record of the struggle for women's rights is public. Thank you for your service.

This report outlines the activities of Women's Centres Connect for the period April 1 2019 to March 31 2020. As a provincial association of women's resource centres, Connect members met nearly forty times this year, a combination of both in person and virtual meetings. The report highlights activities on a broad range of issues including engagement with community and government partners.

A significant event this year, was the retirement of the long-time Connect Coordinator, Georgia Barnwell. Georgia worked with Connect twice, that last time for nearly 8 years. While Georgia officially retired in November 2019, she stayed with us to work on the HIFIS contract until March 2020. Georgia's passion and commitment to women's health, will be sorely missed and her corporate memory irreplaceable. After a thorough and purposeful search, Cora Cole was hired as the new Connect Coordinator. Cora comes to us with a background in community health with a number of years working in rural Nova Scotia.

Another significant milestone in Connect's history that was completed this year was the completion of Connect's Policy and Procedure document. Much more than a procedural manual the Connect's Policy and Procedure document defines our beliefs, philosophy and our mission. This valuable document highlights our commitment to each other and to the client's Connect Member organizations serve.

## Collaborations/Partnerships

One of the key activities for Connect is the opportunity to collaborate and partner with organizations and agencies in our communities and around the province. Below is a list of partnerships that Connect maintained this past year.

**Affordable Energy Coalition (AEC)- attending meetings**

**Affordable Housing Association of NS (AHANS)** attended meetings

**Avalon Sexual Assault (SA) Centre** initiated a partnership and discussions.  
Domestic Violence Court Program- attending meetings

**Be The Peace Institute-** attended meetings

**Community Sector Council Pensions and Benefits Roundtable**

Presentation on health spending accounts that may increase accessibility of healthcare, specifically benefits. The Community Sector Council is currently conducting a provincial needs assessment.

**Community Society to End Poverty- Employment Support Income Assistance (CSEP ESIA)** -Initiated and maintained discussion about ESIA paying for bus passes, regular participated and support CSEP ESIA's work

**Dept of Community Services NS-** attended meetings when invited.

**Domestic Violence Court Program-** attended meetings

**Ending Violence Association Canada (EVA)-** stopped participating due to unresolved issue related to prostitution

**Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) database**

The WCC met with the ACSW to receive a demonstration on how to tailor the database for Centres' use. In March, the Centre received \$30,000 for computers and an additional \$30,000 for Centres to develop capacity to use HIFIS. Another training took place in September. There are short tutorials on HIFIS on YouTube under the channel "NS HIFIS Tube 4.0".

- A data dictionary is being developed to facilitate the use of HIFIS. It includes a list of reasons for service (to inform data collection) and contributing factors
- There's a plan to gather gender-related data to include a gender analysis and emphasize work in homelessness prevention
- **HIFIS Community of Practice** – standardizing data entry and data use within the HIFIS platform

**Housewarming Advisory Council-** connecting through email updates

**Metro Interagency/Restorative Conversations (MI/RJ)**

Over several months, WCC has participated in conversations about restorative justice and its impact and effect on women. Specifically, all participating individuals and organizations researched best practices, principles and models to devise a restorative approach to respond to gendered violence in Nova Scotia. Various issues and perspectives were shared, including a lack of resources, ineffective case assignment processes and the need for increased provincial engagement. WCC and MI/RJ released a joint statement in February about the continued commitment to this discussion.

**Nova Scotia (NS) Federation of Labour Women’s Group** -Introduced the Group to Women’s Centres’ work via a presentation

### **NS Action Coalition for Community Well Being (NSACCW)**

Quarterly meetings included these actions/discussion points:

- Examined the NSACSW name to reflect progress, mandate and inclusion; explored possibility of panel presentation, events in addition to memorial
- Possible to do a quarterly report on emerging issues; informed by PC caucus and Liberal caucus meetings
- Restorative approaches with children in daycares to improve problem-solving skills/emotional intelligence
- Contributed to a general public poll on gender and domestic violence
- Improving restorative justice measures for women

### **NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women (NSACSW)**

**Thank you to NS Advisory Council on the Status of Women for sharing with us the lifting of women’s issues and voices throughout Nova Scotia.**

Quarterly meetings were held with NSACSW as usual. Highlights include:

- Secured funding for Strait Area Women’s Place bringing their funding up to the same level as other Connect Member Organizations.
- Service Agreement formats were accepted. The agreement will be dated April 2019 to September 2021.

Women’s Centre Connect (WCC) has been part of a Service Level Agreement Working Group to improve the services and standards of Centres across the province. This work includes refining the logic model, mapping groups that address poverty and other important items. Working groups were established by issue:

housing, transportation, food security, public health education and social services and employment/income/social security. WCC was part of the last group, and this group is still being defined in terms of value, focus and action items.

Nova Scotia Coalition on Community Well-being was formed to further engage communities on poverty-related issues. A press conference to announce the Coalition and a community planning day were held in June.

**Rural and Remote Advisory Board** -AHANS Agreement; discussed funding for vulnerable populations and navigating new housing strategy

**Transition House Association of NS (THANS)**- attend meetings as invited.

## Public/Professional Education

Connect is committed to the professional education of our team, but also to educate the public on matters that are important to us and our clients.

## Trainings

### **Gender Based Violence Training**

- YMCA Halifax, Jan. 20

## Events

- Women's Centre Connect attended a HIFIS Retreat- Jan. 13-16
- NS Federation of Labour – March 7 and 8
- Standard Household Rate Information Sessions, Dec 5 understand
- Commemorative Event: National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against women, Dec. 6
- International Women's Day

## Interviews

- Radio interview with Sheldon MacLeod and Shiva Nourpana about the joint statement regarding the MI/RJ initiatives, March 11
- Chronicle Herald article featuring interview with Stuart Pendle and Shiva Nourpana regarding joint statement on MI/RJ initiatives, March 12

# Policy Engagement and Advocacy:

## **Advocacy for Bills**

WCC sent a letter of support to Minister Regan and Stephanie MacInnis Langley, Executive Director of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, requesting their support for the PC anti-porn bill. WCC met with key stakeholders to gather support for Bill 61: Protecting Children on the Internet Act and Bill 62: Employment Support and Income Assistance Act.

## **CSEP ESIA Working Group**

WCC met with Minister Regan in December to raise concerns about the state of ESIA in Nova Scotia. Concerns include the need to increase the poverty reduction credit, transportation analysis and the standard household rate, the impact of claw backs on employment insurance (EI), changes in service delivery and the need to improve quality of life and social inclusion. Efforts are ongoing to address these issues.

## **CSEP ESIA Working Group - Client and Stakeholder Info Session**

Presentation about changes that will be implemented in the fall. Topic highlights include income security, social inclusion, bus pass pilot project, standard household rate increase (from 2% to 5% starting Jan. 2020), super clinics that provide multiple services to people, tenant rights and the role of Dept of Community Services consider spelling out in shelter allowances and assuming costs for identification cards.

## **PC Caucus**

WCC presented emerging issues and current action items to the Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in January. Several requests were made by MLAs to stay informed and to contact the WCC to advise on those issues that may arise in house.

## **NDP Caucus**

WCC discussed recommendations, current needs of the Centre and emerging and important issues that are impacting vulnerable populations. Some members expressed interest in raising questions presented in house.

## **Province-wide therapy assessment**

Department of Health research into therapist needs across the province includes interviewing each Centre to assess the situation.

### **Connect Policy and Procedures**

Connect members participated and approved a Connect Policy and Procedure document, that reflects the values and priorities of the organization. The Policy and Procedure document provides guidance on a number of perspectives including Human Resources, Finance, and Public Relations.

### **British Columbia Council for International Cooperation**

Connect responded to a resource map produced by this group based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

### **Thank-you Letter to Minister Reagan**

Connect sent a Thank-you letter to Minister Reagan for providing emergency pandemic funding to each centre.

## **Top Issues for 2019-2020**

While there were many topics and issues tackled through this year, below are a list of issues that took a great deal of our time and energy.

- ESIA transformation and changes
- Establishing restorative justice approaches to address systemic issues
- Advocacy for anti-porn bill
- HIFIS implementation and use
- Meeting funding needs for Centres
- Restorative Justice (RJ) program transparency
- Research establishing safe sanctuary for women
- Covid-19 Pandemic