

# **Working Towards Change: Integrating Diversity in Our Work**

## **January 21, 2008**

As Summarized By Irena Klebuc, Placement Student, Ryerson University

### **Introduction: Manjeet Birk (WACT)**

**Liz Janzen (WACT Board of Directors Co-Chair)**

### **Dawn Marie (Women's Voices for Action)**

Dawn Marie spoke about her personal experience with intimate partner abuse and described how it has affected her life. Dawn Marie stated that there are a myriad of systemic barriers that abused women face after she leaves an abusive marriage. Some of these barriers are related to lack of sufficient financial supports (welfare system), inefficient legal system (criminal and family) and oppressive child welfare system. Dawn Marie touched upon her struggles with depression and addiction and this affected her in a struggle to regain custody of her son. She encouraged participants to become advocates for women affected by domestic violence and to provide services with more sensitivity and responsibility.

### **Manjeet Birk (WACT)**

Manjeet described difficulties encountered when attempting to secure accessible, affordable, safe and apolitical space for this forum. She stated that diversity seems to mean many different things for different people and that many people within different institutions operate more within illusion of diversity and accessibility rather than factual diversity and accessibility.

### **Barbara Williams (Executive Director WACT)**

Barbara spoke about challenges lying ahead in the work that is being done in Violence Against Women Field, and about importance of being cynical as cynicism keeps one critical. Asked people to think what they bring to the table in this struggle and what they are prepared to offer.

### **Break**

### **Cindy Cowan (Interim Place)**

Defined work in Violence Against Women Field as political in nature and requiring constant deconstruction of racism and oppression, and implementation of policies and practices that would reflect this anti-oppressive and anti-racist stance. Cindy explained that historically racism and oppression shaped our institutions and that in order to challenge and change these systems of oppression we need to acknowledge our history and be accountable for it. Cindy referred to the latest murder of a young women in Peel Region and that fact that many people ascribe violence against women to specific cultures only, and do not acknowledge that violence affects all women across different races and different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Cindy stated that every time people challenge oppression and demand changes within systems (legal, housing etc.), there is a resistance. She reiterated that change can only happen if people

work in solidarity and are able to draw upon their own strengths.

### **Peter Menzies (Aboriginal Services at Centre for Addiction and Mental Health)**

Peter shared with the audience that up to 500 Aboriginal women have been murdered along the Highways of Tears, and that many of these women were murdered for sexual gratification. Peter expressed his horror at knowing that when an Aboriginal person goes missing nothing happens, but when a white person goes missing there is an uproar. He reiterated that in Aboriginal culture women were created equal to men and that only when Europeans arrived and imposed their patriarchal ways Aboriginal men started abusing women. He stated that for generations Aboriginal women were objectified in popular culture (literature, movies, sports, and advertisement) and portrayed as squaws who are unable to feel and are dirty. Many Aboriginal women were sexually abused through residential schools, and were used for entertainment by local peoples. Non-Aboriginal peoples carry out approximately 90% of sexual assaults on Aboriginal women. Peter reiterated that Aboriginal peoples face multiple challenges/issues such as addictions, poverty, homelessness, physical health problems (higher rates of diabetes, cancer, stress, aids, suicide). Aboriginal children have a higher involvement with CAS and many of them are crown wards. Peter stated that in order for Aboriginal peoples to have equal participation in government and senate their needs to be a separate bill of rights for Aboriginal peoples and federal funding for Aboriginal social services. Additionally in order to adequately dealing with the issue of women abuse Aboriginal women need separate healing centers and shelters.

### **Questions/Answers**

- Aboriginal children should be taught about issues facing Aboriginal peoples and the effects of intergenerational trauma (generations of exposure to various forms of abuse)
- Aboriginal peoples living off reserve do not have a Health Card therefore are unable to access health care
- Present issues that Aboriginal peoples are faced with are the result of intergenerational trauma. Aboriginal peoples have to re-learn their behaviour using their cultural and spiritual beliefs
- Aboriginal peoples should have a presence on a police service board.
- Aboriginal peoples are dealing with generations of experienced racism, and with discrimination inherent within the political system
- Aboriginal children, when in care of child welfare authorities, should be fostered by Aboriginal foster parents.
- Lots of parallels exists between women and colour and aboriginal women, but also there is lots of differences

### **Wendy Komiotis (Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children – METRAC)**

Wendy spoke about equity and access, and how these concepts/issues are relevant in the work done in Violence Against Women sector. Wendy stated that equity and access starts with acknowledgment that groups of women are marginalized based on age, race, gender, class,

sexual orientation, religion, faith, and accents. Wendy reiterated that recognition of multiple intersectionalities existing within female gender is important as it points us out to the reality that generic woman does not exist. Power conceptualized within this context recognizes that women with differing social identities have unique areas where they exercise their power and areas where they lack power and experience disenchantment. Social identities are linked to having different social options (“better or worst”) when dealing with aftermath of experienced violence. Wendy stated that equity and access starts with the acknowledgment that certain groups have been historically marginalized, and that we need to create systems and practices that are reflective of people’s history and will facilitate removal of barriers prohibiting marginalized groups from exercising fair and meaningful participation in society. Wendy reiterated that power is always exercised in relation to something/someone, and continued to describe three different types of power:

1. **Power Over** - power that is based on violence and that is supported by hierarchy and couched in binaries. This power invites passive or active resistance on behalf of “disempowered” groups. This power structure is embedded within current organizational culture when certain frameworks, mandates, policies and procedures take precedent over other ways of addressing the issues.

2. **Power With** - power that is based on sharing knowledge and resources in solidarity with others. This power is exercised when all stakeholders (service users, staff, management, boards of directors) work together to achieve a certain goal. Power With recognizes need for respecting and valuing diverse needs, skills and values, and diverse ways of achieving overarching goal. This power can be also used when organizing social and political action in partnership with communities.

3. **Power Within**- power that is based on an assumption that once we achieve a degree of self-esteem, and personal empowerment we will be able to respectfully work with others. Power Within is connected to having pride in ones identity without feeling superior.

Wendy concluded her presentation with acknowledging that building diversity and access is about deconstructing our internalized oppression, valuing our own experiences and using these skills and knowledge in our work to transform our systems and our communities.

### **Questions/Answer Period**

- (Wendy) Definition of anti-oppression: There are certain systems and groups of people in the society who have power, and use it in a way that it is oppressive to other social groups.
- (Peter) Laws and structures were designed by people who inherited wealth and who carry specific worldviews and norms. In this system people whose norms and worldviews are different than the dominant worldview are exploited and de-valued. Allocation of power and resources needs to be understood within political framework and analyzed in terms of how each of us may benefit from this system and how we can we move towards accountability.

- (Sheila – CAMH/Aboriginal Services) Working in partnership with Aboriginal community allows for local tackling of issues that many marginalized groups face.
- (Cindy) Structural/institutional power can be used in an affecting systemic change.
- (Wendy) On the level of board of directors there are liabilities attached when boards sign on to an anti-oppression mandate.

## **Lunch**

### **My Story: Meri Kahani**

Play about women abuse within South Asian community.

#### **Part 1**

Woman who has been sponsored to Canada by her husband to live with him and his parents. Her husband works outside of home, while she is at home taking care of the children and household. In-laws are constantly criticizing her for not properly fulfilling her motherly and wifely duties. Woman shares in a letter written to her mother that she is not happy with her living arrangements and that her doctor suspects that she might be depressed. Mother encourages daughter to be patient and understand her husband obligations to take care of his parents and not to challenge and question this obligation. She explains to her that it is normal to suffer in marriage, and that she has had similar experiences in her own marriage. She suggests that it is better not to “play with fire” and not involve other people in the community as it is not worth the risk of losing her sponsorship. Mother instructs daughter to be happy with what she has, keep a clean house, make sure that children behave and make sure that supper is always ready.

#### **Part 2**

Young successful and financially independent woman of South Asian background comes to a therapist. Woman speaks to her therapist about experiences of growing up in South Asian family in America. Woman’s shares that she has a love/hate relationship with her mother, as she despises her mother for not standing up to her father, and for not leaving him. Woman tells therapist that her mother married her father right after high school and ever since her life has revolved around her husband and her children. Woman shares that her father was always angry, and that he continuously yelled at her mother, controlled her money and physically abused her (shoved her, pulled her hair). Woman recollected one instance of abuse when her father shoved her mother against the dresser, while she watched it all hidden in the closet. Woman disclosed to the therapist that her father stopped beating up her mother only after her brother stood up to him. Woman discloses that currently she is dating a man, who wants commitment, but that she is unable to decide on that. She explains that she continues to have the same dream in which her father is yelling and hitting her mother, and her mother is shouting for help. Woman stated that at the end of the dream her mother’s face becomes her own face and her father, who is choking her, becomes the man that she is currently dating.

### **Power and Privilege Workshop: RACT from METRAC (Alana and Angie presenters)**

Alana stated that Canadian history is full of examples of oppressive practices and policies. Some of examples of these oppressive and racist policies are:

- Increase of head tax on Chinese immigrants from 50 dol. to 100 dol. in 1885
- Refusal to accept black people (former slaves) who were escaping from USA in 1910
- Refusal to admit ship full Jewish people into Canadian territory in 1939 (as a result one third of the people on the ship died)
- Prohibiting women of colour to come to Canada and work as domestics until 1880's
- Sending of Japanese Canadians to concentration camp in Alberta in 1941
- Prohibiting South Asian in British Columbia to vote until 1947
- Over 120 queer related homicides and 300 assaults that were not properly investigated by police between 1990-2004

### **Screening of a movie "A girl like me"**

(Movie about how Eurocentric standards of beauty are applied to all non-white peoples and how children and young women of colour internalize these stereotypes by associating whiteness with beauty and desirability and blackness with ugliness and inferiority)

### **Comments/Discussion**

Exercise about uncovering stereotypes.

Some of the discussed stereotypes:

- Gay men are promiscuous and want sex with all men
- white men are strong and heroic
- native men and men of colour are lazy and violent
- Asian people are smart
- Asian women are submissive
- Black women and Asian women are overly sexual and sensual
- all Muslim people are terrorists
- all white women are angelic and pure

### **Manjeet Birk - Closing remarks.**

## **Working Towards Change: Integrating Diversity in Our Work** **January 31, 2008**

### **Introduction - Manjeet Birk (WACT)**

### **Spoken Word Artist - Gein Wong**

Gein presented a spoken word piece about violence and diversity. She spoke about the experience of many women who work as caregivers (mostly from Philippines) who face tremendous isolation, exploitation and multiple of other abuses on the part of their employer and Canadian Immigration system.

### **Panel Discussion moderated by Andrea (METAC)**

Panel consists of Angie Rupra (Springtide Resources), Pat Durish (David Kelly Services at FSA), Peer Educators (Chinese Canadian National Council- Toronto branch)

Moderator: we will present and discuss different approaches to addressing violence against women in diverse communities.

### **Pat Durish (David Kelly Services)**

Pat explained that traditionally gays, lesbians, queer and transsexuals have been marginalized within mainstream social services; therefore many of them do not access these services. She stated that the issue of partner abuse within LGBTQ community is complex as it is happening within the context of homophobia. Society sexualizes LGBTQ relationships therefore often individuals experiencing partner abuse in the community will not leave their abusive partners for the fear of losing their identity. Pat reiterated that LGBTQ people have experienced tremendous violence and discrimination within the mainstream systems (courts, police, shelter system, etc.) therefore often they will stay in abusive relationships reasoning that violence experienced within the abusive relationship is lesser than the violence that one, and ones abusive partner, is to experience in the larger society. Pat, stated that often in instances when abuser have been exposed LGBTQ community does not want to acknowledge and address the issue of partner abuse out of the sense of loyalty to the community. Pat stated that in all these years LGBTQ community has experienced burnout from fighting aids and gay bashing, and there is a real compassion burnout. The only services currently available to LGBTQ are 519, David Kelly and Sherbourne Health Centre. In total there are only 8 counsellors available to serve the whole LGBTQ community. Pat stated that due to the unstable funding experienced by many of the agencies delivering services to LGBTQ community most of the past and current responses to partner abuse in the community, in forms of counselling, mediation and shelter system, happens

informally and on voluntary basis within LGBTQ community. Pat concluded that the same partner abuse within LGBTQ community offers a teachable moment for all of us.

#### **Alana Lo (METAC)**

Alana described some of the barriers that young people face when trying to succeed within current educational system. As an alternative to conventional educational system she proposed popular education. Alana introduced the concept of popular education and how this type of education is crucial in engaging youths as it acknowledges and addresses relevance of youth experiences and struggles. Alana stated that popular education focuses on diversity of students and creates an environment in which people can learn collectively, and from each other.

Alana reiterated that popular education recognizes that we are all experts in our own lives, and there is a link between individual struggles and social action. She stated that it is extremely important to use popular education to engage youth, as many youth feel excluded and marginalized from the “mainstream system” and many of them already have been shot and killed.

Alana listed some of the principles that organizations should use when working with youths. Some of the main points mentioned were:

- work to create an opportunity for youth to be involved
- create opportunities for training and leaderships of youth leaders
- facilitate opportunities for youth to reflect on their identity and learn from it
- expose and de-construct some of the stereotypes that the agency may operate within
- review agencies policies and practices
- provide supports for youth after they have been hired recognizing that youth are dealing with multiple and complex issues that other people do not have to struggle with

#### **Lydia Yong (Project Coordinator for CCNC)**

Lydia started her presentation by sharing with the audience that as university educated new immigrant she experienced multiple challenges in the process of adaptation to life in Canada.

Lydia reiterated that many of the people within the Chinese community faces the same barriers plus many of them face the stigma and struggle related to living with intimate partner abuse. She shared that many men and women within the Chinese community believe that the man has a right to beat his wife (to educate her), and that it is the woman’s duty to provide a man with sex once she marries him. Lydia acknowledged the existence of these stereotypes to the fact that in China domestic violence is considered a family issue, and not a human rights issue, therefore generally women do not call police as they know that they will not be helped. Lydia explained that many of these gender stereotypes have been brought to Canada, and as a result many people within immigrant community operate within the same sexist belief system. Lydia stated that some of the main barriers that immigrant women face when attempting to access services for abused women within the mainstream social services are lack of knowledge about services, inability to speak English, isolation, lack of understanding of Canadian law and culture as well as family and community pressures to keep the family unit together. Lydia expressed her dismay that often in a situation that woman call the police and the husband is arrested and there is a community

backlash against the women, and often she is blamed for bringing on the abuse on herself (though not adequately performing wifely duties) or she is accused of being an abuser herself. Lydia stated that currently within the Chinese community her agency is training volunteers/ambassadors to do community outreach and to provide information, referrals and supports to women who are affected by domestic violence. She stated that so far they have trained 60 people.

### **Angie Rupra (Springtide Resources)**

Angie stated that in her presentation she will discuss Family Group Conferencing, and ways that this model of practices have been used around the world. Angie stated that traditional way of responding to violence against women have been reactive in nature as they consist of: crisis counseling, health care, emergency shelters, transitional housing, training, education and influence from criminal justice system. She reiterated that in this conventional way of delivering services to women and children are the only ones that benefit from these direct services, as family and community are excluded from any meaningful participation in this process.

Angie explained that Family Group Conferencing originated in New Zealand in response to the expanding child welfare system and its limitations (exclusion of family and community). She stated that Family Group Conferencing consists of three phases:

- Family group coordinator investigates who is involved with a woman, and decides who will be at the conference. If abuser is going to participate he needs to acknowledge the abuse, otherwise conference will not take place.
- Conference takes place (if it is unsafe to precede with the conference the process can be canceled). Conference is divided into private time (family time) and with service provider. In private time family comes with a plan for the anchoring issue.
- Service users provide feedback on presented plan.
- In instances where there is domestic violence woman may chose not to participate, or may bring supports (family/friends) to the conference.

Angie explained that Family Group Conferencing can be used in situations where there was domestic violence. It can be used when families wish for the abuse to end or when families wish the abuse to end and the relationship to end or when families wish for relationship to end, but wish to pursue joint custody. Angie stressed that Family Group Conferencing is a complex and time consuming process (may take few years) but it has been applied with success in different countries around the globe.

### **Questions/Answers**

- Family Group Conferencing is to be done by trained professional otherwise it can be dangerous (Q. child being taken away by her father after he applied for custody after being unable to take accountability for emotionally abusing his partner)
- Family Group Conferencing increases abusive partners' accountability to their communities (Comment: need to apply for custody during the process as children can be used to hurt/manipulate the partner)

- Children need to be part of the plan when proceeding with Family Group Conferencing (Q. in regards to children being manipulated in the process)
- Domestic violence is not a religious issue, but ones religious affiliation needs to be considered when addressing the abuse within this context (Q. what do you think about involving religious institution)
  - Most religions are still homophobic, therefore it is difficult for many individuals to get the acceptance and support within these establishments.
- Many churches within Rexdale area are the only places where youth can access programs and services and meet friends... But they are also challenges especially in regards to homophobia
- we need to extend compassion when dealing with marginalized groups. Trans-women are very vulnerable when trying to access mainstream services ( e.g. shelters). Agencies need to collaborate, educate, do prevention work, and put in place policies and structures that are non-discriminatory towards marginalized groups)

## LUNCH

### **Meri Kahani: My Story**

Survivor of an abusive situation and worker from Peel Crisis Centre is being interviewed by a female reporter for a weekly TV program.

Crisis counsellor explains that she works with women who has been slapped, kicked, punched, have their cheques taken away and often have been sexually assaulted by their partners. She explains that abuse is a hidden crime, and that she teaches women about their rights.

Survivor of spousal abuse describes different types of abusive behaviours that her husband would inflict on her. She shares that he would slap her, call her names and would prohibit her from coming to his workplace. She stated that initially she justified his abusive behaviours by blaming it on his work or him having a bad day. Woman stated that she stayed with her husband until he kicked her down the stairs as a result of which she has lost her baby. Woman said that at that time she was not aware that she was pregnant. She explained that shortly after she was released from the hospital she decided to leave her husband. That day she heard on the radio about the services that are available for women who have been abused, and she called them, and got phone numbers of people who assisted her to leave.

The interviewer shares with the audience that even though she appears like someone who is very successful and powerful she is also a survivor of abuse, as her ex-husband threw a pot of boiling water at her. As a result of this assault she was badly burned, and until this day has extensive scars under her clothing.

Interactive Activity that challenged people to see how they feel to be outside ones comfort zone.

### **Questions/Answers**

## **Breakout Groups**

### **Break**

#### **Reporting to the larger group.**

##### **1. Group one - Family Violence in Corrections**

- Limited outreach to immigrant communities and lack of cooperation and participation of religious institutions in community outreach and education
- Need for men to educate other men about abuse
- Need to educate people within school system (often teachers that abuse prevention education is parental responsibility)
- Need to work on a community level and with men

##### **2. Group two - Integrating Diversity in the workplace**

Some of the barriers to achieve diversity in the workplace are:

- Lack of diversity on a front line level and on a management level (staff and management predominantly white and of European decent )
- Most services are delivered according to one standard- “so called Canadian”. New immigrants are expected to discard their cultural identities of the countries that they came from and are expected to learn how to be a Canadian.

Some of the ways to address diversity:

- Need to create educational materials that are reflective of the client population that we serve
- Need to recognize and practice value and wisdom inherent in different cultures (to uphold one cultural system over another) within social services field

##### **Group three - Family Group Conferencing**

- Need to create networks of individuals, agencies that are interested in developing and implementing this model of practice
- Survivors of domestic violence are valuable resource in developing services that will address their needs.

#### **Closing Comments - Manjeet Birk**

