

Together, creating a better world



**A handbook for community work
to end gender discrimination**
Written and compiled by Jim Gurnett

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Introduction by Satya Brata Das

International Association of Citizens for a Civil Society

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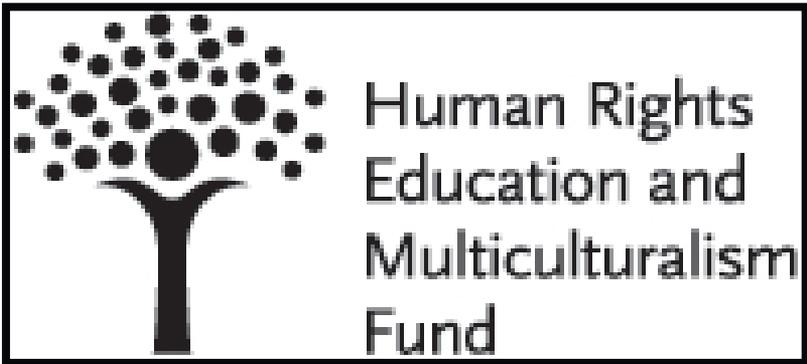
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Welcome and thank you

On behalf of the International Association of Citizens for a Civil Society and its major initiative, Daughters Day, we are happy to invite you to this handbook. Citizens for a Civil Society is dedicated to human rights, providing the practical foundation on which all of us live our daily lives. Daughters Day was developed both to provide a way to celebrate the vital importance of women in every aspect of our lives and to challenge those places and situations where there is discrimination or abuse that limits women from being able to fully pursue their goals and dreams.

It has been a powerful experience to see the energy and insights as nearly 200 women came together for conversations about how to end gender discrimination. They did not talk about academic concepts but about what is really happening in their daily lives. And from those conversations, we have sought to assemble a guide that will be easy to use, that is about the things everyday people can do in their own communities and families. It is a project that is more than a printed book as it offers an on-line opportunity for those who use it to offer more input and keep the work alive. We are humble in making this available with the hope it will contribute to making Alberta even more a province where every woman can participate in every area of life without restrictions or dangers.

In addition to the women who gathered for the conversations and the six women who shared their lives in deeper detail, this book is only possible because of excellent, respectful and enthusiastic work by those who facilitated and recorded the conversations — Kaylin Betteridge, Marie-Rose Bukuba, Audrey Gauly, Magda Guevera, Bobo Jiro, Esther Numfor, Angelica Quesada, Robby Shearer, and Bridget Stirling.

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The artwork is by Roger Garcia, and staff at Edmonton Public Library provided the bibliography of children's reading. The major funder of this handbook and the conversations is the Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund of the Government of Alberta, and we are deeply grateful for the support of this body to make the whole project possible.

Mita Das

Chair, International Association of Citizens for a Civil Society

Charan Khehra

Chair, Daughters Day Steering Committee

Human rights, democracy & inclusion: An end to gender discrimination

By Satya Brata Das

I am delighted to introduce you to *Together, creating a better world*, a flagship project of the International Association of Citizens for a Civil Society. As a board member of the association, it is my pleasure to introduce the broader context and challenges that gave rise to this work.

I am a Canadian of ancestry in India, the country of my birth, and this gives me a certain perspective on the centrality of inclusion, pluralism and diversity in any holistic vision of human rights.

My act of becoming Canadian enabled me to contribute substantially to the national discourse of what it should mean to be one. A generation ago, I was among a vanguard of Canadians from diverse origins worried that official multicultural policy served to put people in ghettos, to encourage a benign apartheid wherein cultures were separate and equal. The fundamentally hollow concept of “tolerance” only invited acceptance of something; it did not lead to sharing, discovery, and ultimately, celebration. We worried about the future of a cultural mosaic where every piece in the mosaic was separate and apart from the others.

We believed there could be a means of preserving seminal identities while sharing our lives and experiences with one another. This sat more comfortably in a country that did not believe in forcing assimilation into some overarching national mythos, as was the experience south of the border in the United States. We were working to reshape a 1970s and early 1980s milieu where “multiculturalism” was defined as giving grants to ethnic and cultural associations to propagate and perpetuate their own traditions. We believed that this would ultimately lead to an abundance of solitudes if there was no attempt to share across cultures, across ethnicity, across religion. And in this context, we worked to shape Canada as a grand inclusion,

in which one could maintain the bonds of heritage and ancestry while bringing them to reshape a dynamic and evolving Canadian identity.

In the early 1980s, I wrote an article in the *Edmonton Journal* titled, “Multiculturalism: A Kindly Apartheid?” and was roundly condemned by readers. The subject was so emotional that I could not successfully communicate my intent — to ensure the participation of all those cultural solitudes in the crafting of our collective future. Yet those thoughts of inclusion prevailed and ultimately succeeded in the following years. The future evoked by so many of us fighting for a different country now exists in my modern Canada. A generation later, our country is one of pluralism, multiple identities, cultural sharing, and a surging confidence in our young.

The International Association of Citizens for a Civil Society, which operates as “Citizens for a Civil Society”, embarked on this project of community consultation to evoke ways in which citizens, especially women, can incorporate human rights into their everyday lives.

The shared experiences collected and distilled here, with their accompanying action plans, are meant to train and empower citizens to know their human rights in order to claim their human rights. This is an evolutionary process, not a revolutionary one, and aims at collaboration and consensus to change the underlying values and attitudes that contribute to violence and misery. It thus differs from “code violation” monitoring like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch in looking for long-term changes in behaviour, rather than the mere chronicling of breaches or violations of human rights.

Indeed, the impetus of the programme pursued by Citizens for a Civil Society is deeply rooted in another venture launched earlier by some members of our organisation, the Human Rights City Edmonton. Drawing upon the pioneering work of Shulamith Koenig and her colleagues at PDHRE (People’s Decade for Human Rights Education), the international movement for human rights learning, that decade-old project continues to use the broader human rights framework to guide civic life in Edmonton.

Our work in Citizens for a Civil Society, and particularly in our flagship project Daughters Day, is a further distillation of that idea into a form of lifelong learning, in which the focus is on girls, boys, women and women learning from and with one another to celebrate daughters and women in everyone's lives.

Yet to learn, we must overcome the limits of the intellectual programming, the cultural rituals, the ingrained societal contexts, and indeed the accepted behaviours that shaped our formation and our character. About a decade ago, Shulamith Koenig convened an extraordinary conversation among thinkers from the world over. From it, she asked my friend Stephen Marks (who holds the unique chair of Health and Human Rights at Harvard) and me to draft the consensus, now a widely-endorsed document, called the Global Appeal for Human Rights Learning. This is what we wrote, published on Human Rights Day 2004:

The United Nations was founded with a vision of a world order built on the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable human rights of all. To secure this vision, all people must learn and act according to our universal human rights, which define a shared moral and legal framework for living in dignity within our varied communities.

Learning together also means unlearning the inhumanity, violence and injustice that plague the human condition. Learning from the experiences of people is as valuable as traditional teaching to embed the qualities of humility, empathy and mutual respect that underlie human rights. The voices of people deprived of human rights—and thus of their human dignity—are indispensable guides to learning our shared duties to the community, and to constructing a world where every individual and all organs of society secure universal respect for human rights for all. Through dialogue, interaction and learning we move from information to knowledge to realization of the imperatives of social and economic justice within a human rights framework. Learning human rights harnesses the energies of all people to develop a shared global culture of human rights.

I believe the wisdom Steve and I distilled into the Global Appeal is ever more important today as we launch this practical handbook to enable women to move forward with the full enjoyment of their human dignity and their inalienable human rights.

Like the Human Rights City, our project to empower women evolves from within the community, accommodating its unique cultural norms and behaviours and its own approaches to consensus and coalition building. The commonality in each Human Rights City is to enable “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want” within its own communities. In very practical terms, this handbook illustrates how girls and women are achieving, and can achieve, both of those foundational freedoms.

We further recognise that any true civil society, in order to succeed, needs inclusive, participatory and responsive systems of governance. This is found principally within, but not necessarily limited to, democratic models. Yet in its essence, democracy is strongly related to the principles of human rights and cannot function without assuring the full respect and protection of human dignity.

More than participation and representation, it is about *inclusion*, the right to be fully included in the civic life of one’s community, one’s state or one’s country. How fully an individual citizen exercises the right to be included and to participate is at the citizen’s own discretion, yet the right cannot be denied. Along with inclusion, the notion of pluralism is at the heart of democratic governance. This is the very act of overcoming “otherness,” of affirming that many streams of human experience and of the human condition can live together in dignity, under the rule of law, with diversity seen as a source of strength and resiliency. In essence, none with a justified claim to citizenship or other forms of legal residence can be denied inclusion and human dignity. This is the litmus test of democracy.

There is an apparent link between undemocratic structures and human rights violations. Yet even functioning democracies can be weak if they condone the denial of human rights,

thereby negating the full evolution of civil society. A violation is a specific breach, but the denial of human rights – which can often be the denial of genuine inclusion and pluralism – is societal and systematic. Even an advanced democracy like Canada, for instance, a perpetual leader in the United Nations Human Development Index, acknowledges that inclusion has not been achieved for its Aboriginal population.

In many advanced democracies, the full inclusion of women in circles of power and spheres of influence continues to be denied. In the United States, inclusion and pluralism is an ongoing struggle for minority populations and lesbian, gay, and transgendered citizens.

Conversely, the failure of inclusion and deficiencies in the practice of pluralism can have calamitous consequences. These were seen in widespread and violent civil unrest in France in late 2005, originating with minority populations. It is seen in continuing tensions in Germany with legal residents of Turkish ancestry, and indeed in the challenges of fully including citizens originating in the former East Germany.

A complete understanding of the obligations of pluralism and inclusion is essential to the healthy evolution of a democracy. Which is why, to this date, democracy is indisputably the system most conducive to guaranteeing human rights protection and human security.

Entrenching empowerment of women, within a context of civil society founded on human rights, is really an endeavour to build human capacity, both individually and in communities, and to enable the blossoming of women's potential. When women in any community are happy, safe and secure, they will be better citizens, better consumers, better employees and better customers. Apart from a handful of egregious regimes, few governments, no matter how maladroit, would actively impose policies of fear and deprivation on the people they purport to serve. There can be no accusations of "neo-colonialism" in advancing the ability of women, men, boys, and girls to live together in community with dignity—the natural "deliverable" of a holistic human rights framework based on freedom from fear and freedom from want.

It is also necessary to address a subtext that arose from some of our community consultations. More than once, a sentiment was floated that the empowerment of women in a human rights framework is a reflection of “Western” values that have little to do with the “home culture”, wherein systemic discrimination and bias against women is entrenched into social mores and the normative framework of everyday life.

Human rights are in fact universal when they are understood as the birthright of every human being to a life of dignity and purpose. In this context, the Emperor Asoka in pre-Christian India posited non-violence as a way of life, and the foundational notion of harmony in Confucian “great learning” is an essential foundation of “freedom from fear and freedom from want.”

Our project of empowering women in a civil society context, with human rights as a foundation, aspires to be transformational. Yet we should consider what that transformation ought to achieve. Generally, we would wish it to lead to the advancement of human rights, human development and human security – three overlapping and interlinked concepts that are the core of an alternative vision of the world. It should be noted that – taken together – they amount to a new way of looking at the world, particularly with regard to the evolution of civil society and notions of global governance.

Rather than an international order predicated on relationships between nations, this model goes beyond political boundaries to advocate the well-being of the individual citizen, no matter where she lives. Human rights imply freedom from fear and threats to one’s fundamental existence. Human development asserts a claim to the resources and freedoms one needs to develop to one’s full potential. And human security evokes freedom from hunger, war, ecological disaster, corrupt governance and other impediments to a life lived in justice with equality of opportunity for all. This vision departs from those notions of nation-states guaranteeing security by building significant military capacity and using economic prowess to secure their own prosperity with scant regard for the progress of others.

So what is the purpose of this handbook and the dialogue it hopes to enable? Instances of outcomes that could be measured, once women become fully empowered in a community, have implications that are far-reaching. We can expect to see changes in poverty levels, income distribution, volunteerism, commuting, crime, drug use, suicide, problem gambling, free time, parenting and elder care, premature mortality, infant mortality, educational attainment and voter participation.

None of these outcomes are singularly economic, social or environmental, but they are all interlinked and interdependent. Neither are the means to achieve the identified and desired outcomes subject to simple, quantifiable linear measurements. They often involve longer time frames and terms than most empowered people are ready to accommodate.

That is why the value and durability of this work lies in its practical advice on steps and measures we can take to abet the empowerment of women within our own communities and beyond.

As Albertans and Canadians who already are empowered and have by and large grown up in empowered nations and societies, we can make a deliberate choice to lead this movement to inclusion. Through our community consultation, we were able to develop strategies to enable us to reach to that sphere where society, culture, economics and politics all intermingle and intersect.

Throughout this dialogue, we also came to know and learn of the particular circumstances many women newly settled in Canada overcame. From the experience, we became ever more convinced that the answer to violence, war and terrorism lies not just in police action against perpetrators, but also in creating a more civil and more secure world where the benefits and the opportunities of human civilisation are available far more broadly than they have been.

The most excluded often live in places where there is no human security and little human development, and therefore no human rights. If economic globalisation is borderless, so is terror. So is ecological degradation. So is smuggling. So is

drug trafficking and prostitution. So many of the women who have recently come to call Canada home have fled places of deep insecurity. Yet as we learned from our conversations, we cannot turn our backs on those they left behind.

The challenge then is: can we make opportunity borderless? Can we offer the most wretched of the world some semblance of the life that the most privileged take for granted? We need to create identification and empathy between the powerless and the empowered, and this should be a principal focus of the discussions that arise as this handbook and our project of perpetuating civil society gains wider adoption and acceptance.

We need to give due consideration of every aspect of society and culture if the benefits of human rights learning with the purpose of creating a civil society and the establishment of a culture of human rights are to be extended to a far greater proportion of the world's people.

Especially in the current international climate, we must sharply delineate the difference between traditional notions of global governance and the emerging creed of human rights, human security and human development as the most desirable basis of relations between countries and peoples. All three of those depend on a strong foundation of economic development and equitable access to economic opportunity and resources.

Human rights are ultimately the foundation of civil society, and without them, no society can truly flourish, no matter how rich its economy. The root of this freedom is non-violence, the grand concept championed by M.K. Gandhi. In its essence, non-violence is the freedom to be safe. Without this freedom, we cannot stimulate human rights learning. Thus freedom from fear becomes not only the essential precondition, but the *first great human rights learning!* We have not done nearly enough to address the persistence of poverty, nor have we addressed the growing gap between rich and poor both at home and in the world. It is by setting our domestic house in order—by ensuring that human rights, human dignity and human security are extended to all our citizens – that we will better prepare ourselves to assert global leadership in crafting a civil society, in essence a more civil world.

The story of the handbook

Eliminating gender discrimination, ending inequality and abuse, removing barriers, advancing the rights and opportunities of women...not a modest vision, but a vitally important one, one fundamental to a world where human rights are respected.

A world free of gender discrimination has been the subject of large government initiatives around the globe. It has been the focus of academic research that fills shelves in libraries. Thousands of conferences have been held and media campaigns launched. World leaders deliver eloquent addresses on the issue, and the United Nations has had nations sign a declaration to bring it to an end.

Yet still, whenever a group of women gather and talk in the ordinary everyday world, from almost any background of culture, religion, education, or economics, they will share experiences of struggle, exclusion, abuse, neglect, and denial. Clearly the job is not done.

The inequality experienced in diverse ways and levels of severity by many women is not a reality that exists by chance. Social structures and acts that discriminate against or abuse women create the daily consequences of inequality that can spread through years and even across generations.

During the latter months of 2013 and early into 2014, at four communities in Alberta, thanks to funding support from the Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund of the Alberta government, nearly 200 women came together for 15 conversations to talk with each other about gender discrimination.

The conversations took the approach that the heart of each session would be to invite women to respond to the question, "How do you imagine a better world for all women?" Related questions included, "What do we need to do to bring this about?", "What do we wish we had known along the way?", "How can we create an environment for our children where they will not experience discrimination?" and "What did voices of wisdom and experience teach us?" The intention was to take a forward-looking perspective.

These conversations were marked at times by sharing the pain and anger of abuse and discrimination, but also the courage so many had demonstrated in the midst of difficult times. They were marked by the energy and determination of these women to do what they can to change the future for themselves and others, right in the communities where they live. They were marked by caring and love for others, by daring to dream of a world where women and men would know equality of power and possibility, by creative thinking about the practical actions needed to achieve that dream.

A strong thread weaving through the conversations was the recognition that truly ending gender discrimination is a process of transformation deep inside individuals and organizations. It is possible to impose some measures on people from outside that will address issues, but in the conversations, participants talked about real change, building lives together on a new solid foundation so that what is built on it will be sound and safe.

By design the women invited to the sessions were not those with positions and authority. Many came from populations marginalized not only by gender but also by race and poverty.

They were eager to be together, to listen and talk. They said the simple act of being able to gather with others around such a topic was important to them. Sometimes they would not stop when the agreed end time arrived. In addition to talking, at several of the conversations they also expressed some of their ideas in collages and art work. A few samples from this work are included in the handbook.

Their conversations demonstrated a deep grasp of gender discrimination as everyone's issue. They always found themselves talking about why things must change for the sake of children. They always talked about how men need to be involved in the changing, not the targets of it.

They were very clear in their views that it is time for action to change things and that actions are needed in homes and classrooms and communities and government and other institutions. They also talked about how important it is for everyone to be learning as well and that time for personal care and shared celebration are also essential in making change.

Those conversations are the heart of this handbook.

Brief samples of some of the things said in each of the conversations are woven through the book, along with some illustrations made by women to express their ideas. The remainder of the book is an effort to respond to the conversations. The women made clear they want to do something about gender discrimination. They affirmed to each other that it is not acceptable for any woman to be denied full and fair access to her human rights and the pursuit of her goals and dreams because of her gender. They said what would be helpful would be ideas and information they could take and use to develop local actions that would fit in particular circumstances.

This handbook is a tool for those women and others like them to use. It is not a philosophical treatise on issues of gender discrimination or an encyclopedia of the issues or the measures to address the issues. It is not a technical analysis of policies and legal rulings. It is NOT a reference manual of instructions to tell any person or group what to do or how to do it.

It is a modest, humble hand tool. It seeks to be practical. It is meant to be used, to become worn and underlined and tattered. It is intended to support building new things, constructing homes, schools, communities, even a world where gender discrimination no longer treats some women as less than other people or holds them down or discards them. It offers a rich sample of voices and possibilities and then invites each user to develop an individual application of what is found in it.

It can be used by bringing your ideas and questions to it and seeing where there is something that makes sense. Or it can be used by dipping into it and letting some idea seize you and then adding your imagination and seeing what new activity might emerge. It is intended to provoke thinking or to provide practical starting places. But it is not as a recipe book to be followed exactly. It offers stimulation and back-up for the ideas of people who come together at a synagogue or temple or friendship centre or school or service club or youth drop-in or labour union local or around a dinner table of friends, or at a coffee shop.

Both the activities and the products of such coming together should be unique to the time, place, opportunity, and vision involved. Ending gender discrimination is not plugging in this

handbook, or any other tool, and making it happen. It is the work of personal commitment and daring. It is thousands of candles burning in diverse ways on streets and in rooms of every sort, some buffeted by fierce winds, some glowing smoothly, some barely visible, each fitting where it is located.

In the conversations there were three broad topics that came up often as being necessary in the movement to end gender discrimination. One is for **learning**, another is **action**, and the third is **celebration**. Sections of the handbook are organized to identify which of the three topics it relates to. But what is also clear in the conversations is that these themes are woven together in a fabric, not a tidy sequence or formula, but as threads weaving in and out amongst each other. A similar activity might fit in any one of the three areas with only small variations in how it is organized.

Pages are provided at the end for each person to add their own new ideas, experiences, and sources of information. In the on-line version (at www.daughters-day.com) there is opportunity for sharing such things with others further. It is hoped to have a program associated with the handbook to assist interested people to become trainers so they can work further with the ideas in local communities.

Angela Davis, a woman working for social change for many years, says "You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time." This handbook is offered as a resource to people who are concerned that gender discrimination continues to limit the lives of too many women and who are not content to be disappointed at that but are motivated to get on with the work of transformation. Another woman of achievement, Margaret Mead, is credited with the message, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Heartening words of responsibility to hold as you move ahead to act on your own determination to be part of this important work.

Norquest Conversation

NorQuest College in Edmonton has a significant majority of women as students. On a November afternoon, finished with a long day of classes, a number of them, most involved with the Student Council, gather at the downtown campus to talk about what can be done to end gender discrimination. They had been invited to bring some object with them to represent important ideas they hold on the issue.

Several share photos, including of a woman speaking publicly, a husband listening to his wife, and a woman dressed so gender is not easily distinguishable. One woman has brought a shirt, and says it represents the work of many different people and tasks, demonstrating the necessity of everyone having a chance to participate.

The women talk of their own experiences in the workplace contributing to them wanting to bring an end to gender discrimination. “Work places are gender divided, men in the managerial roles where you make more money. And there is no chance to move up,” notes one, with the agreement of many. But the perspective is not supported by all, as one woman suggests natural abilities might be a factor, that some fields of physical labour are too difficult for women.

“No, it’s discrimination that stops them,” another responds. “Women need to stand up and do what we want to do.” Another agrees, “We have to make sure the obstacles are out of the way.”

Some of the group feel fortunate to have had models in their lives. “My father took me with him doing repair jobs around the house, and made my brother help my mother with the baking,” shares one. An Indigenous woman moved when a woman at a round dance picked up a drum when everyone believes women are the singers. They are proud of their own Student Council and the leadership of women there and more generally see NorQuest College and other post-secondary institutions as important in the deliberate effort to be gender inclusive.

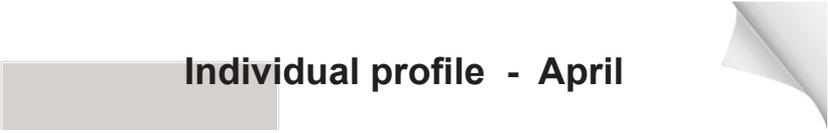
The conversation explores how the words we use might reinforce discrimination. “Lady’ is not a sweet qualification for me,” observes one. “I feel it describes belonging to someone.” While not all agree with this example, it is agreed everyone needs to think about the words used about gender issues.

The energy of the conversation leaps when talk turns to what needs to change. “My child will wear nothing by yellow and white — no blue or pink!” declares one. “Let children decide for themselves about clothing and toys, let them be,” advises another. They agree culture can create challenges, with one noting that in traditional Aboriginal society the boys are taken to hunt when still very young, but not the girls.

“We need to end discrimination amongst ourselves as women too,” is one suggestion. “When women work together they build relationships that help themselves.” It is noted how often expectations are put on others from the time they are children and these are hard to resist. “Both support and a sense of community are strong helps.”

The need for more deliberate programs about ending discrimination is agreed, programs where men and women are together learning how to identify and deal with gender issues. More generally, education for all ages is seen as powerful. Women willing to speak up, whether to stop bullying or support a positive idea, are inspirational. It is affirmed that programs can’t be all talk. “What results will we get from this meeting?” one enquires in closing.





Individual profile - April

I meet April Eve Wiberg in the lobby of the Sawridge Hotel between Edmonton's city centre and the airport on a Saturday morning in November. It is early, with hints of frost scattered asymmetrically across the pavement as I cautiously park my car in one of the hotel's tight parking spaces. The exterior of the hotel is plain, but as I enter through the sliding glass doors I am met with a much different impression. The ceiling of the lobby is lofty and angular, scattered with heavy exposed wood beams. In the center of the lobby is a semi-circular bar built around a towering stone fireplace. On this morning, most seats are empty. As I scan the faces in the room, I make eye contact with a young Aboriginal woman sitting next to a delicate water fountain arrangement. I move towards her and I notice recognition in her eyes. April Eve is slender and draped in layers of clothing—sage green leggings, a purple shirt, a scarf and a blue pea coat almost overwhelm her small frame. Her hair is tied in two smooth braids, partially hidden by a beige knitted hat.

I briefly introduce the goals of the interview and the project as an investigation of how women imagine gender discrimination and the practical solutions they propose. Almost without hesitation April Eve begins to tell me about her personal experiences with gender discrimination. I become immediately captivated by the softness of her voice and the rhythm of her words. As she continues, it becomes evident the way she imagines gender discrimination is manifested in the physical and sexual abuse of Aboriginal women in Canada. She speaks about violence as a means to establish control and subordinate an already vulnerable population in the wake of the residential school system. April Eve specifically links the number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada to the practices of men who engage with sex workers. She explains, "Everyday there is some woman, some daughter, out there selling herself and so vulnerable. You just wonder, are they next? Are they going to get picked up by that wrong guy? And just knowing that there are people who live in our society that prey on our most vulnerable. That just really angers me because I know some of those women and girls out there."

April Eve talks of her own experiences encountering the kind of men she is wary of. She recalls, "In some neighbourhoods if you look Aboriginal and there's johns in the neighbourhood looking for somebody to exploit quite often they will target you." She continues,

“So you can’t even walk to the store without being harassed by a john. It was one day, I was walking with my sister and I was pushing my nephew—he was two, he was still in his stroller. We were just coming back from Safeway. We were carrying groceries. Middle of the day. And this one john just kept circling and circling and circling. I just got so fed up. I just thought this is got to change. Like why is this okay?”

The way April Eve talks about resistance is in the form of raising awareness by telling her personal story and through organized activism. She says, “I don’t think there’s enough of us speaking out against this issue, but I have hope that as the awareness grows and more groups get involved, we’re going to send a powerful message to the people who are responsible for these crimes. We will be silent no more. We are going to stand up and protect our women and girls.” April Eve started the Stolen Sisters Awareness Walk in Edmonton several years ago. She says the purpose of the walk is to



share key information with the community so that we can prevent some of these crimes from happening,” in addition to honouring those women who have gone missing or have been murdered and acting as a place of support and community for their families.

Our interview concludes all too quickly, and I am left feeling both empowered by her strength and disheartened by the reality faced by many Aboriginal women in my community and across the country. She concludes her personal story with a statement that continues to resonate with me. On the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, she identifies these crimes as human trafficking. This is the first time I have been compelled to imagine this issue in such a way. April Eve explains, “I think in our society when people hear—I mean the average person—when they hear about human trafficking they think South Asia, Eastern Europe. No, think Edmonton, Alberta. Think your backyard. Because it’s happening here.”

By Kaitlyn Dyck

Centre d'accueil Conversation

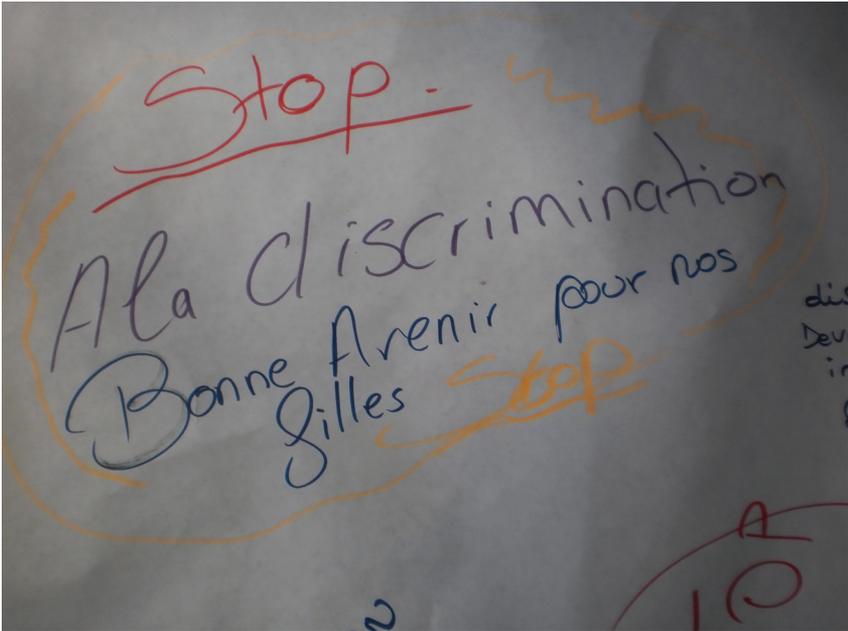
The women keep crowding into the small conference room at Centre d'accueil et d'établissement until it is packed. Some have little ones in tow. There is animated conversation as they fill plates with food catered by one of the group and gather on a chilly November evening to talk about their experiences and ideas about gender discrimination, women from several parts of the Francophonie, united in their desire to share with each other. The conversations takes place in French while the children are entertained in an adjoining space.

The conversation begins with lively comments about a society where everywhere you look, women are seen as sexual objects. There is agreement this is a lack of respect, an objectifying that is discriminatory. One woman notes that in her place of origin, it is overlooked in a marriage when a man is unfaithful, but a scandal if a woman is. The role of media is a concern: "The media is a time bomb that corrupts young girls with standards of beauty that hypersexualize women."

"We women always have to prove our worth and mute our concerns," says one. "Why should women be locked in the kitchen while men are out making money?" Another observes that wearing hijab closes doors in some parts of the labour market. "Our response to these discriminatory acts should be mutual support," is suggested. "Fear can influence willingness to speak up," one woman offers. "No matter how well a woman works, her performance is always judged as inferior to a man's." Another adds, "Discrimination destroys my identity."

How can women deal with cultures where there is discrimination? One woman says it is good for women to embody the values and norms of their culture but not to be forced to conform the them. "It's essential to respect traditions," insists one, while another notes, "It's unfair to prohibit women from certain activities, such as getting an education."

Education is seen as a key issue. "An illiterate woman is negatively judged, insulted, and discrimination is amplified," insists one woman. Anecdotes are shared of girls facing obstacles in many countries to go to school. "We women are expected to



be in the kitchen, not the library,” says one, adding, “If you want to study you are accused of being a prostitute.” But, it is observed, in Canada discrimination may not be directed as much towards women who are anglophone or white or who do not wear dress associated with a religion.

Educating daughters to have the tools to fight for dignity and rights is seen as a priority. This does not just mean ensuring they get good schooling but also “giving them our shoulders as other women to lean on.” Everyone concurs that educating in values to resist discrimination should begin with the very young and that critical thinking skills are important in this. “Strong family bonds will help too,” one adds, and another suggests older women must not just tell girls things but also take time to listen to them too.

There is concern that sometimes when a man rejects a woman in some communities, then the whole community pushes her out. “Women must help and trust each other, no matter what!” one insists. Stories are shared of women dealing with domestic violence but afraid to call the police as it will lead to them being shunned or saying nothing when the husband takes all the money she earns.

Learning



Learning together

In the conversations with groups of women that form the background to this handbook, the need to be better informed about many issues of gender discrimination came up often. If a group is interested to learn, as a step towards becoming involved in activity, there are endless possibilities!

Some learning activities that have been effective with other groups include:

- Form a media analysis group looking critically at movies, television, magazines, news coverage, or other communications with a view to identify how gender is differently presented both in what is shown/discussed and in the relative frequency of various things appearing.
- Start a speaker series inviting people to come and speak to a variety of topics related to gender discrimination over a period of time, perhaps as a regular element of the agenda at existing meetings or perhaps as a special series of talks. The Edmonton Daughters Day initiative has presented a variety of such events including an evening with elders from the Indigenous community addressing common challenges of Aboriginal women, a panel of newcomer women who have made significant achievements in areas of life in Canada, a panel of distinguished leaders (including Senator Douglas Roche) talking about the importance of the Canadian Charter of Rights, and an event for the UN Day of the Girl with Rumana Monzur sharing her personal story of overcoming life-threatening abuse.
- Present a one-day conference event with speakers, panels, discussions groups, entertainment; could have a fund-raising aspect perhaps.
- Develop a monthly film series with discussions after, perhaps in collaboration with another group. A public library might be interested – and able to provide a venue at no cost.
- Involve schools through writing, art, photography, or drama projects that lead to published or on-line anthologies or to shows with a focus around ending gender discrimination.

- Encourage community organizations to do something that focuses on women and promotes an end to gender discrimination. Maybe a folk club would consider a season of all women performers, or you could have a float in a community parade, or the museum might have a special display relating to women of the area and their important contributions.
- Nominate people (women or men) for local awards for their contributions around ending gender discrimination? In Edmonton, one television station has a monthly award for a woman of achievement, and the YWCA also has annual awards for Women of Distinction. If nothing exists in your community, what organization might work with you to begin one?
- Mark the calendar to notice relevant dates— births of people who have made important contributions (such as the Famous Five), anniversaries of achievements, officially designated days— and then find out more about them.
- Use family learning activities to build family relationships and support learning. Perhaps everyone creates a new Canadian coin to celebrate an end to gender discrimination, and they are all hung on the fridge, or you could take a break from television and play “20 Questions” with the secret answers all being famous women.
- Talk. Getting together in a safe environment to talk was highlighted repeatedly as valuable. There does not need to be an agenda or formal content or expected outcomes or products. Women in the conversations said they appreciate time to simply sit and talk with each other. They described how being able to tell the stories from their own lives both gave meaning to their past experiences and provided a place to find hope for the future, how it created a place where they could notice what they shared with others, that they were not alone in either what had taken place or in how they had been affected by it. A monthly night to gather at a nice pub or a regular Saturday morning coffee hour at a neighbourhood cafe can provide value for handling the rest of life well beyond its modest structure.

Let's talk about some ideas

In every conversation convened by Daughters Day with women from diverse backgrounds, the value of people coming together to talk and listen, to learn and support each other, came up as a recommendation to reduce discrimination. There was agreement that when people take the time to connect with each other, they understand things in new ways: they are challenged and comforted and get direction to more useful information. It was often mentioned that one of the ways that gender discrimination is perpetuated is when people are isolated and lose a sense that their concerns are shared by others or that they have the power to make change, either personally or in the larger community.

Book and movie clubs have a good record of providing a means for people to join together, with a focus also to learn. They are easy to create, and expenses can be very small. Public libraries may even be able to help with a “starter kit.”

What do you do if you alone, or with a few friends, are interested to start getting together with others to talk about ideas?

It's possible just to gather. Sometimes being new mothers, or enjoying playing a particular game, or sharing an interest in some aspect of culture is all that is needed. But often being able to read a book and then gather to talk about it is interesting to people, or to gather and watch a movie together (or to go to a theatre and do the same) and then discuss it.

The first task is to find a few others who want to join you. If a club gets to be more than 10 to 15 people, it will probably not be as satisfying because the chance for everyone to participate will be smaller. But if there is strong interest, there can be a decision to “split” and have two clubs that each carry on.

Social media offer many ways to get out the message you want to find others to be part of a club— Facebook, Twitter, emails. Municipalities and community newspapers often have events postings, both in paper and online, where a meeting can be listed. Handbills or posters in local businesses, especially coffee houses, can be good. Perhaps a local library can help. And just talking with others in your circle might be all it takes.

There are decisions to make.

Do you want a wide diversity of people or to define more narrowly? There are benefits to both approaches so there is no “correct” answer. Is it a club for men and women? People from a particular religious perspective? Is it for a geographic neighbourhood? For people who share a professional background (teachers, healthcare, etc.)? Geared to a certain age range? Is your interest in a particular genre (biographies, documentary films, reflective/spiritual) or eclectic? Do you want choices that will provoke strong diverse opinions or books where most will feel similarly?

How will you operate? How often to you want to meet? How will leadership of discussions happen? Will you meet in homes or find a public location? What days and times will work best, and how long will meetings last? What about food and/or drinks? How will you handle costs? What about holiday seasons and summer vacation? What about guests? Will discussion be informal or use a structure such as the talking circle? Some of these things might be suggested in the initial advertising to reach people, or they might be discussed at the first meeting.

At the first meeting, in getting to know each other, everyone might be asked to share about what they expect to get out of being part of the group and what they have to bring to it. And it will be important to share ideas about the books or movies people would like to see on the agenda and to agree on at least the first two or three.

Does it work? Here is the comment of Ameer Barber, currently part of a book club: “It is a great way to bring women together. We call ours a ‘literary creative’, and it means you bring something to the discussion that the book inspired you to make— food, a song, a poem or a painting. Then it’s a way for people to self express and talk about the book. We don’t run it very structured.”

Where to start???

You've decided it's important to get people thinking and talking about gender discrimination. You believe there is value in having some focus for people who come together. You think a book or movie club would be the way to go. Of course, it's great to have a first meeting and let those who come together make the decisions. But Daughters Day asked a number of women interested in ending discrimination for some of their ideas about what would draw them to a club. These wide-ranging suggestions came forward, along with strong testimonials to the value of book clubs. Some of those who suggested titles have been part of a book or movie club for years.

Books

Nomad: From Islam to America (Ayaan Hirsi Ali): "A bit controversial because of anti-religious statements, it covers her journey away from Islam and her divorce from her family. She talks about how she still does not feel at place in America."

A Handmaid's Tale (Margaret Atwood): "Has stayed with me for many years. It was definitely prescient in what happened with women being quickly and completely stripped of their rights by a totalitarian regime as happened with the Taliban in Afghanistan."

Whistleblower (Kathryn Bolkovac): Former U.S. police officer who went to Bosnia during war to investigate human rights complaints and discovered a human trafficking ring.

A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence and Power (Jimmy Carter): "Great book with great research and statistics on the violence that women face due to discrimination; a wealth of knowledge" (recommended by several people).

The Red Tent (Anita Diamant): The story of Dinah, from the Bible, a daughter of Jacob, in novel form.

Women Who Run with the Wolves (Clarissa Pinkola Estes)

Yes Means Yes What You Really Really Want (Jaclyn Friedman, www.jaclynfriedman.com): “Fantastic for women, especially teens. They discuss consent and health sexuality... practical way.” *What You Really Really Want* has assignments and reflection suggestions.

Half the Sky (Nicholas D. Kristoff): Looks at turning oppression into opportunities for women in the oppressed world.

A House in the Sky (Amanda Lindhout): The personal story by the founder of Global Enrichment Foundation, an Albertan, the book tells the story of her kidnapping and imprisonment in Somalia and her powerful learnings about compassion, forgiveness, and resilience.

Dancing on Live Embers (Tina Lopes and Barb Thomson): Primarily about racism, but this hands-on book is broadly about how privilege operates in workplaces, using stories, and looks at what can be done about it.

In the Name of Honour (Mukhtar Mai): “A classic case of miscarriage of justice, despite enough evidence of a gang rape that happened in broad daylight in front of several onlookers. Mukhtar’s story lays bare the ordeal of a rape victim and what keeps her steadfast in her determination to seek justice.”

Nectar in a Sieve (Kamala Markandaya): How a family slides into deeper and deeper poverty. “Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve: hope without an object cannot live.”

Redefining Realness (Janet Mock): “Written by a transgender woman of colour, speaks of her multiple identities... an honest look at her life and struggles.”

Just a daughter (Sarita Skagnes): Autobiography of a woman born in Punjab who moved from being an oppressed woman into a strong activist.

I am Malala (Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb): The subtitle says it all: “The girl who stood up for education and was shot by the Taliban.”

Movies

Bend it Like Beckham: “Lovely British film for anyone who loves soccer, about two teenage girls from different cultural backgrounds in England wanting to be the best soccer players they can be.”

Brave: Animated movie that displays gender discrimination and how a strong girl overcomes it.

Earth; Fire; Water: Three films by Deepa Mehta, with vivid portraits of the lives of women, set in historically important times in India. They are the sort of movies the reviews always describe as “epic”.

Fried Green Tomatoes: “Deals with issues of empowerment, midlife, aging and elder care, female friendship, domestic abuse, but full of some really funny and lovely moments”

GirlRising: “Showcases the importance of education for women and also how far support from fathers and brothers can take girls”.

It’s a girl: “A rather heavy documentary that looks at murder of infants and sex-selective abortion”

A League of Their Own:

The Mask You Live in: “Takes a look at the pressures society puts on boys, a different perspective on gender roles”.

Miss Representation: Looks at sexism and the portrayal of women in the media, especially women in powerful positions, such as political office. “A real eye opener about the deliberate derogatory representation of women by the media”.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie: Story of a single, independent school teacher in 1930s Scotland.

Whale Rider:

CEASE Conversation

Women with past involvement in sex work receive services from CEASE, the Edmonton Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation. A group of women who want to become community leaders agree to talk about ending gender discrimination at one of their regular meetings on a late November evening. All the women taking part are also mothers of daughters.

They begin by sharing objects or pictures that are symbols of their vision about women. The objects include a small angel as a sign of hope, the lyrics of a song with the line “A world where there is love, no hunger...”, a dream catcher made by the woman’s grandmother, and a photo of a daughter, seen as strong for how she has stood up to bullying at her school.

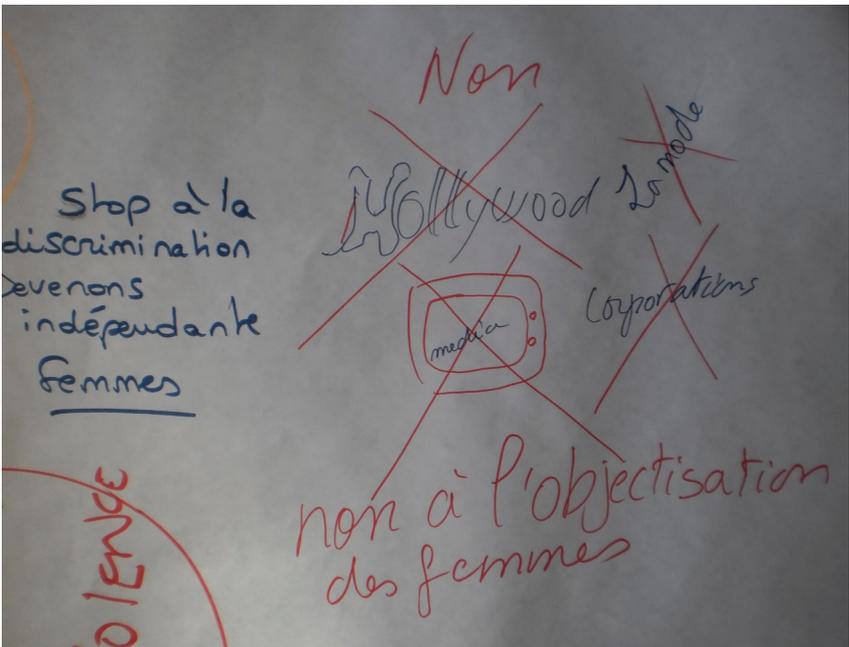
The gathered women had been through many tough times in their lives, but they are eager to contribute. “We are role models of change, what we have been through and the changes we have made, is valuable, yet people still discriminate against us.”

Their views of discrimination are not academic. They talk of the difficulties to get decent housing or to be considered for jobs, or of being seen as objects and not as people. They describe living in fear of losing their own children if they share information about their lives with those who should be helpers, and they speak about how criminal records haunt them, even when they are in a record as a victim rather than a perpetrator. Their views of what needs to change are equally down to earth:

- A girl should not be seen as a sex object because she is a girl.
- Men should not expect you to be a housewife just because you are a woman.
- We need less looking at life in material terms, where children are discriminated because of whether they wear the right brand name clothing.
- Eliminate violence against women on TV and radio.
- Improve flawed laws where people are sexually abused and nothing is done. Nobody advocates for children who face abuse.
- Educate children better about the dangers of social media.

Suggestions for a better world include making sure everyone has time for family and community life and can be less driven by materialism. Schools are seen as important and needing to do more to be places where boys and girls learn to live sensitively and with respect for women, elders, everyone. And organizations are needed where women can gather together, or adults and children, or men and women, to learn to be sensitive and overcome past negative learning.

Closing words: “We have to create a new generation to look and think differently.” “No one is cheap! Everyone has value.” “Share real stories of real change— women who break the barriers of discrimination are really cool.”



Footsteps of learning

Walking has an ancient and honoured link with learning. There are many stories about great teachers and philosophers in every part of the world who taught as they walked with students or followers. Many people can remember a childhood walk with a grandparent, where wonders of nature or tales of long ago times were shared along the path.

A planned learning walk is sometimes used by organizations wanting their supporters to learn more about an issue too. The United Way of the Alberta Capital Region has used this way to have its campaign cabinet learn more about poverty. The Jane's Walk movement, named in honour of urbanist Jane Jacobs, uses this way to get people noticing the way people and buildings interact with each other in a neighbourhood.

In 2013, the Daughters Day initiative created a "Commitment Walk" to offer an opportunity for people to learn and think more about some key issues related to gender discrimination. The walk took place before the annual celebration event. Participants were given a map and some information about each issue, including some questions to think about and some references for further learning. People went in their own groupings, a few friends or a family group for example. At each station along the walk there was a volunteer waiting who could answer questions and would also put a stamp on the walk guide. When the walk was completed, people were given a bracelet, hand-crafted by women in a South American village as a social enterprise, to tie on their wrist as an expression of commitment to take action on something that had been learned during the walk.

A learning walk offers several advantages for people wanting to engage others in the community in learning. It is a public event, so others not taking part see the small groups moving along, and may become interested. It is an activity that has almost no costs and that provides a reason for those in a group to do their own learning, as the walk is created, and lets them then teach others, and it ties the issue of gender discrimination directly to a local community.

In planning a learning walk, some issues organizers should make decisions about include: accessibility of the route for people with all sorts of mobility, how long it should take, and whether everyone will go in a large group with a guide or if smaller groups will walk on their own. It may be decided to make the walk focused only on local women and issues, or it may include a larger, even a global, focus.

For the Edmonton walk the route saw participants stop at:

- 1. Homeless Memorial: a sculpture in a public park, the focus was on how poverty and homelessness affects women's lives**
- 2. Winspear Centre: a performing arts centre, the focus on women artists, performers, working in culture**
- 3. Canada Place: the federal government building, the focus on women in elected office**
- 4. Inukshuk: located on Jasper Avenue overlooking the North Saskatchewan River, the focus on the place of women in Indigenous culture**
- 5. World Trade Centre: home of Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, the focus on women in business and commerce**
- 6. Milner Library: Focus on published information by and about women**
- 7. Workman sculpture in Churchill Square: a work of art of a man with a lunch box, focus on women in the trades and other non-traditional occupations**
- 8. Pioneer woman sculpture: a sculpture honouring pioneer women near City Hall, the focus on role of women historically in the settlement of Alberta**

Individual profile - Linda

I enter the deserted parking lot of a Humpty's Restaurant in Edmonton on a slow Sunday morning. In the distance, I see Linda getting out of her car. She has bright blonde hair that sits in wisps around her face. A loose red sweatshirt hangs on her lanky frame as she walks quickly towards the entrance of the restaurant. In a few moments we meet near the till inside. We shake hands. Her grip is delicate as I imagined it would be. After making our awkward introductions, a young man in a black uniform leads us to a booth near the window. The forest green vinyl is stiff beneath me as I clumsily drop into one side of the booth. I pick up the coffee-stained paper menu and fixate on the breakfast selection, as my hungry stomach growls. After a moment of deliberation, Linda decisively orders only a coffee. I follow her lead and order tea, letting go of my desire for breakfast as I slide the menu between the wall and the salt and pepper shakers.

Linda plays nervously with her hands while looking into her coffee mug as I explain to her the purpose of the interview. I describe an investigation of the ways in which a diverse group of women imagine gender discrimination and the practical solutions they propose. When Linda speaks about gender discrimination, it becomes clear she imagines it as control over finances and other household matters. She speaks of control of this nature in her past relationship, saying, "When I was married to my first husband I never could get established in my business. We moved eighteen times in eighteen years. Just as soon as I'd start setting something up, we'd be moving again." She continues, "I felt like a prisoner actually. I was not really free to do anything. I didn't make the decisions and anything I owned could be smashed, taken, sold, or whatever, anytime he wanted to. If he was angry with me he'd smash my things or sell them. I didn't really own anything that was really mine."

Linda also speaks about control in the forms of physical abuse and control over personal dress. She explains the controlling nature of her ex-husband with respect to the kind of clothing she wore and the extension of this notion to society more generally. Of society's control over women's physical appearance she says, "We are definitely taught that it's very important to our self worth. There's a lot of prejudice against women who don't look the way they're supposed to look."

Linda identifies violence and isolation as mechanisms some men use to produce subordination and maintain control over women. She explains of her past marriage, "Abusers create isolation. You become very isolated. There is nobody to talk to. The only people we saw were his friends. The only



church we went to after we got married was his church and they of course were all his friends."

Throughout the interview, she identifies these types of control occurring within several social institutions or systems, including justice, welfare, the church, education, and marriage. With respect to proposed solutions or resistance, Linda describes the act of telling her story as most powerful. The importance of telling for her is heavily tied to its therapeutic and social level problem-solving qualities. Linda likens the benefits of telling to a Coleridge poem. She says, "It's like *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*. He had to tell the horrible story over and

over and over. I imagine that eventually the poet would get to the point where he no longer felt compelled to tell it. He was healed through telling it.”

Linda is the creator and managing editor of *Alberta Street News*, published monthly. Of the newspaper, Linda says, “Writing. Writing is very powerful. People writing their poetry, writing their stories. The newspaper provides an arena where they can tell their story.” In addition to the role of telling as therapeutic, Linda also speaks of telling through writing as a mechanism for social level problem solving. She says, “I’ve spoken to different social justice groups. I started out writing stories when I was on social assistance. I was writing stories about the welfare system, writing stories about food banks.”

Linda also realizes her identity and femininity through painting. She explains, “Painting is just what I am. It’s something that’s just being me. It’s just something that is. It’s just me.”

As our cheque arrives, Linda explains how her life has changed. She is the portrait of strength and self-assurance as she says, “I started my life over again and became who I was supposed to be. The most important thing is living your freedom. Having the freedom to be yourself.”

By Kaitlyn Dyck

Adventures in reading

The importance of children and youth thinking about gender and growing into a healthy inclusive understanding of it was voiced over and over in the conversation groups. Thanks to the generous help of staff at Edmonton Public Library, here is a sample of titles that invite learning and discussion about gender topics. There are titles to read to the very young, and titles older children can read for themselves. As long as the titles are available at Edmonton Public Library, you can get a small description of any book by using the link provided with each title below. As you find books that are effective with the children in your life, please keep sharing new titles using the link at the Daughters Day website (www.daughters-day.com).

In addition to your local public library and book stores, the website A Mighty Girl, which describes itself as “The world’s largest collection of books, toys and movies for smart, confident, and courageous girls,” may also be helpful in looking for high-quality, girl-empowering stories for children. It has over 1800 titles— ranging from biographies to puberty guides— for children and teens. For example, for stories starring princesses that break the conventional ‘damsel in distress’ mold, the “Ultimate Guide to the Independent Princess” collection features nearly 100 books about princesses who are smart, daring, and aren’t waiting around to be rescued. A Mighty Girl is at www.amightygirl.com.

Picture Books

Meggie Moon (Baguley, Elizabeth)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/575070005908_meggie_moon

Signed, Abiah Rose (Browning, Diane)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/812015005908_signed_abiah_rose

Olivia and the Fairy Princesses (Falconer, Ian)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1002189005908_olivia_and_the_fairy_princesses

The Sissy Duckling (Fierstein, Harvey)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/447496005908_the_sissy_duckling

Punxsutawney Phyllis (Hill, Susanna Leonard)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/566914005908_punxsutawney_phyllis

Stagecoach Sal: Inspired by A True Tale (Hopkinson, Deborah)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/766611005908_stagecoach_sal

Rough, Tough Charley (Kay, Verla)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/918053005908_rough_tough_charley

Dogs Don't Do Ballet (Kemp, Anna)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/895844005908_dogs_dont_do_ballet

The Worst Princess (Kemp, Anna)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1111263005908_the_worst_princess

The Best Beekeeper of Lalibela: A Tale From Africa (Kessler, Cristina)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/612838005908_the_best_beekeeper_of_lalibela

My Princess Boy [A Mom's Story About A Young Boy Who Loves to Dress Up] (Kilodavis, Cheryl)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/2026521068_my_princess_boy

Mary's Penny (Landman, Tanya)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/864213005908_marys_penny

Kiss Me! I'm A Prince! (McLeod, Heather)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/904914005_kiss_me

The Paper Bag Princess (Munsch, Robert N.)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/117024005908_the_paper_bag_princess

All the World (Scanlon, Elizabeth Garton)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/list/show/120938163_nwlyouthoutreach/212238665_gender_amp_racial_equity_picture_books

Madam President (Smith, Lane)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/686492005908_madam_president

Not All Princesses Dress in Pink (Yolen, Jane)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1850056068_not_all_princesses_dress_in_pink

Fiction

I, Emma Freke (Atkinson, E. J.)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/2067751068_i_emma_freke

Always Neverland (Barton, Zoe)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/939880005908_always_neverland

The Terrible Thing That Happened to Barnaby Brocket (Boyne, John)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/2273522068_the_terrible_thing_that_happened_to_barnaby_brocket

The Manny Files (Burch, Christian)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/600618005908_the_manny_files

Magic Marks the Spot (Carlson, Caroline)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1143887005908_magic_marks_the_spot

Wild Orchid (Dokey, Cameron)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/777118005908_wild_orchid

The Breadwinner (Ellis, Deborah)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/391841005908_the_breadwinner

My Mixed-up Berry Blue Summer (Gennari, Jennifer)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/2177493068_my_mixed-up_berry_blue_summer

Bo at Ballard Creek (Hill, Kirkpatrick)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/2269409068_bo_at_ballard_creek

The Trouble With May Amelia (Holm, Jennifer L.)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/906169005908_the_trouble_with_may_amelia

The Day Joanie Frankenhauser Became A Boy (Lantz, Frances Lin)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/564040005908_the_day_joanie_frankenhauser_became_a_boy

Gender Blender (Nelson, Blake)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/599644005908_gender_blender

Lara's Gift (O'Brien, Annemarie)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1160808005908_laras_gift

Rickshaw Girl (Perkins, Mitali)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/620662005908_rickshaw_girl

Alanna: the First Adventure (Pierce, Tamora)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1228746005908_alanna_the_first_adventure

Words in the Dust (Reedy, Trent)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/870396005908_words_in_the_dust

Riding Freedom (Ryan, Pam Muñoz)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/2091232068_riding_freedom

Chasing the Secret (Snow, Maya)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/753129005908_chasing_the_secret

Sisters of the Sword (Snow, Maya)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/686510005908_sisters_of_the_sword

The Case of the Missing Marquess: An Enola Holmes Mystery (Springer, Nancy)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/587947005908_the_case_of_the_missing_marquess

Shabanu Daughter of the Wind (Staples, Suzanne Fisher)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1062765005908_shabanu

The Boy in the Dress (Walliams, David)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1840321068_the_boy_in_the_dress

Leviathan (Westerfeld, Scott)

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Girls to the Rescue

Tales of Clever, Courageous Girls From Around the World

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/474804005_girls_to_the_rescue

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/411532005_girls_to_the_rescue

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/495483005_girls_to_the_rescue

Non-fiction

Gertrude Is Gertrude Is Gertrude Is Gertrude (Winter, Jonah)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1776751068_gertrude_is_gertrude_is_gertrude_is_gertrude

Guyness Body and Soul (Pitt, Steve)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/573170005908_guyness

Girlness Body and Soul (Peters, Diane)

http://epl.bibliocommons.com/item/show/573167005908_girlness

CAIWA Conversation

It is a snowy day with the feel of early winter, but in the meeting room at Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association in downtown Red Deer, every chair is full, women eager to talk, curious to learn from each other and share experiences after enjoying a good lunch together.

"If you could do any thing in the world that would change gender discrimination and abuse or create more equality for women, what would it be?" the facilitator asks as the conversation begins.

"Educate men," comes up immediately. "A man is a man when he has a son and that culture needs to change." But some note women often support this happening, letting roles be organized according to gender. Still there is wide agreement on the need to educate more about the issue, both in the home and in formal settings. It is noted that this inequality begins right from the toys given to girls or boys. "Women are the first teachers in the home. If we educate boys to respect women they will grow with that," one person asserts.

Many at the discussion have limited financial resources and say expensive child care stops them pursuing education and careers when they have children. They share experiences in the labour market, where employers like to hire women who are effective with multitasking and so are good workers—but too often they are offered low wages despite their hard and good work.

There is talk of the encouragement that comes from seeing role models of women in more equal roles, with mention of everyone from Oprah Winfrey to Malala Yousafzai.



Coming from many places of origin, the women are pleased that Canada is doing much in some formal ways, such as job listings, to make clear women have full opportunity, but more attention is needed about daily life issues, like men helping with housework.

“Society has to be cautious of equality— it does not mean being exactly the same, but is treating everybody fairly. Nobody should stop a women from doing what she wants. What should be equal is salaries for comparable work,” declares one woman.

As the conversation draws to an end, broad agreement exists around the need for more and better community resources and organizations for women; effective educational programs for women and men, boys and girls; much more attention to women having a better chance to succeed in the labour market with the practical results this would have; and more public attention and special events that draw attention to the importance of women and gender equality.

“Too often girls grow up not putting value on themselves. It is the responsibility of the whole society to see this changes,” is a statement that receives strong agreement. “But that means we women have to appreciate our value and stand up for it,” adds another.

What's going on?

When a person or several people together start looking at what is going on in their lives or in the community where they live or in the world and find they have questions that challenge what they are seeing or have concerns about what they are seeing, that person or group is on the road to getting involved.

Every person or group that becomes aware all women and girls do not have the same chances to pursue their dreams and goals as do the men around them is getting in position to be active in ending gender discrimination.

But before action, it is important to be aware of what is happening. Questions are the powerful tool of those who are working for a better and different world. It can be an exciting activity to get together with a few friends, with some pads of sticky-notes and a blank wall, and to start talking about some issue of concern, writing down every question that comes to mind, peeling back layers of the onion of the issue.

Questions need to be honest, not asked to prove a point or with a view to what the answers should be.

When the questions run out, organizing them into categories is a useful next step. Making some decisions about which ones are the priorities may be a next step. Talking about where to find information that will help to answer the questions may come next— being sure to think of sources of information that are from outside the usual mainstream sources of information. Getting input directly from the people affected by an issue is especially important. Sometimes this is called the “voice of experience” and such people are the real experts in many ways.

Once new and expanded information is on hand, more analysis can be done than was possible before. New perspectives might begin to suggest new actions. Often more information will make clear that few issues are simple “Either/Or” situations, and so this may lead to more work being identified. But it will also provide the foundation to identify who else is concerned and what might be done. It is important in the exciting work of

gaining better understanding of issues to allow enough time to think about information too and not to jump quickly from some new information directly to action.

When a few people join to do such investigation of social issues and public policy there can be powerful energy generated. Too often people sit back and think things like:

- “It’s all too complicated. What can I do?”
- “Even the experts don’t agree. How can I think I can do anything?”
- “Who am I to question those in authority? They must know what’s really going on.”
- “Getting involved in this stuff is going to disturb my comfortable life.”

Deciding you will do your little bit is how things begin. There is a children’s rhyme, hundreds of years old, that says,

“For want of a nail the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe the horse was lost.
For want of a horse the rider was lost.
For want of a rider the message was lost.
For want of a message the battle was lost.
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.”

Ending gender discrimination will not happen because a charismatic leader inspires a nation to act. It will happen because ordinary everyday people of all ages and ethnicity and economic status and educational achievement, in schools and coffee shops and workplace lunch rooms and off-leash dog parks and mosques and at family dinner tables and watching children racing about at the local playground and sitting talking on the bus begin to be analysts of what is going on around them, find others who are also concerned, and learn and act together, confident each small step may be the one that swings the balance in a new and better direction.

It only takes a question to get started. A question that can come from you, the person holding this handbook now.

Latino Conversation

On a sunny autumn afternoon women from several Latin American places of origin gather to share their experiences and ideas about gender in their lives, guided by a trusted facilitator. The animated conversation takes place in Spanish.

From them first introducing themselves it becomes evident they have lively views and experiences. “I couldn’t wear pants growing up. I had to cover myself and dress like an old lady,” says one. “I had to get married at 17 because that was what women were to do. I had to escape the hotel on my honeymoon,” shares another. A third, also married at 17, says, “Virginity was essential in my family. My husband was a chauvinist, but my mom told me marriage is forever no matter what.” Yet another tells of being put down: “My achievements were never enough for my husband. I was always diminished by him.”

Some see the way they were raised as a reason they became submissive and didn’t know their rights or how to stand up for themselves. But there is confidence things can be different. They see this beginning with themselves and the values they teach in the home, and continuing with education in schools. “We need to educate and motivate our daughters to be independent,” one affirms, and another notes, “Education can open doors.” They agree sons need to learn new ways of understanding themselves, as much as daughters.

Some talk of life in Canada offering more freedom from gender discrimination, more options, but another says there is much of value in their own cultures that should not be lost. “We should retain the positive and leave behind the negative things.”

Several have personal experiences of abuse, and they affirm it must not be tolerated. “It is not worth to stand

any abuse from any man. It's better to fight for your rights and to be strong and succeed as women," is what one survivor says she has learned.

What can be done to end violence against women? "Teaching self-respect to women and men is needed." One feels teachers are embarrassed to talk about sexual education, but on the other hand society delivers too much sexual messaging through the media. "We need to talk to our daughters and sons about options and consequences of their actions, to give our children confidence to communicate with us, so our children understand that I'm not only a mother, but a woman."

Self-care is important. "You have to start by respecting and loving yourself, knowing you have value as a woman," is agreed by many. They suggest that developing such a perspective includes knowing you have rights. "Many women do not feel valued if they do not have a man by their side. A mother is the mirror for a daughter. Parents shape you. We have great responsibility."

As the conversation closes, women draw pictures of their key advice to others, and the messages are strong:

- Know your rights, find new opportunities.
- Education is the principal factor to develop an egalitarian society.
- Identify as women with each other.
- Women should fight for their rights.
- I am very important! Love yourself!

Action



Taking action on dangers

At the extreme end of gender discrimination is abuse and violence. This handbook is designed for taking positive action to create a better world for all women, all people. But there is still far too much abuse and violence directed to women, and it is important to also know what to do in such cases.

The starting point is to know firmly that abuse is wrong. It is not acceptable behaviour and cannot be justified on any basis. Most forms of abuse are criminal behaviour. Abuse does not always mean physical or sexual violence. It may be emotional, psychological, financial, or social.

Some people choose to stay in an abusive relationship. Anyone doing so needs to have an understanding of the consequences of this, which can be severe not only for the woman but for children. Some people choose to stay but try to make changes. Again, it is important to fully understand what this might involve. But all women can be confident in knowing they have the right to live free of abuse and to leave a situation where it is taking place.

In abuse situations, including threats, not only actual acts, the police are an important resource. In extreme cases, using the 911 phone option should bring quick response. Women able to escape from abusive treatment may also get help by getting to a hospital. If the circumstances in a relationship begin to cause concern about the possibility of abuse or violence, a woman would be wise to make some plans in advance, such as having extra car keys and money in some special place.

In addition to calling police, there are other emergency calls for some circumstances. These include:

- Child Abuse Hot Line (1-800-387-5437)
- Sexual Assault Crisis Line (1-800-552-8023)
- Mental health Crisis Line (1-888-255-3353)
- Suicide Crisis Line (1-800-667-8089)

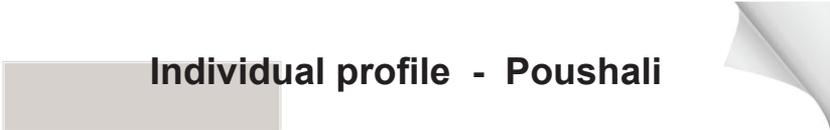
all are toll-free from anywhere. Various communities may have local services by phone as well that a person can become familiar with.

In most parts of Alberta there are emergency shelters and transition houses that are free to women and children leaving abuse. Getting help to get to such a place can be very important because there is a wide range of services provided there. They can even help with things like clothing for women who must escape quickly. Staff at a shelter can help with practical issues such as getting income support from the government or health needs and with personal counselling services.

If abuse leads to the end of a relationship, in most cases a woman may be eligible for some amount of financial support from the former partner as she builds a new life. If there are children the former partner must pay child support. These things will require time and action in the courts.

Police can help with “emergency protection orders” that can be obtained quickly and without charges having to be laid. This will keep a dangerous person away for a limited period of time while other actions are taken. Queen’s Bench protection orders, restraining orders, and peace bonds are other legal tools that permit more actions to protect a person experiencing abuse. It may be valuable to have a lawyer when dealing with the legal issues of abuse and violence. If this is an expense a person cannot afford, some people can qualify for Legal Aid. The police can also lay charges against an abuser, usually the charge of “assault,” of which there are several variations including harassment, sexual assault, and uttering threats. If a situation leads to a trial in court, there is assistance available from Victim Services Advocates.

Individual profile - Poushali



I arrive in the lobby of the downtown Stanley Milner Library on a brisk early October evening. The lingering autumn sun is just beginning to dip behind the glass peak of City Hall across the street. A few moments after my arrival, I am met with the warm smile of a young South Asian woman. Poushali's hair is swept up in a loose braid to one side. She is wearing a peony blue collared blouse and tailored black pants. She introduces herself to me softly and leads me into the depths of the library for our interview.

We float between the aisles of books and students, talking about the weather and the architecture of the building. After several minutes, we reach a large wooden table on the second floor of the library in a secluded area. There is a long rectangular window to one side. Poushali walks towards the ledge and points to her first Edmonton workplace, just across the street. After lingering a moment at the sight of post-rush hour downtown traffic, she delicately chooses a chair near the corner of the table and sits down. I follow her lead and sit across from her. The table is enclosed by tall bookcases on two sides and a painted model replica of the Titanic suspended in a glass case. As the interview begins, I start to recognize the saliency of the library for Poushali. As she speaks of her education in literature and journalism she offers an introspective smile, losing herself somewhere between private memories. I feel that she is at home here amongst the books.

I explain to her the nature of this project to investigate the ways in which women imagine gender discrimination and the practical solutions they propose. As Poushali speaks of gender discrimination more generally, it becomes evident that she imagines this as control, particularly relating to silencing or not having a voice. Her understanding of this is heavily situated within the institutions of family

and marriage, while remaining located within her Indian cultural heritage.

Poushali is reluctant to identify with this type of control on a personal level but is invested in the protection of other women impacted by these abuses. She perceives her role in this issue as an advocate of women who are controlled and silenced. Her investment in acts of service for other women is realized in her involvement as an advocate for safer and more respectful communities through her work with Daughters Day. She says being involved in the community and working in service of women helps her appreciate her own femininity and humanity.

When I ask Poushali about her experiences of gender discrimination, she talks about the sexual abuse of women in India. She says, “We have heard our government and political leaders shouting that if women dress properly in traditional clothing, and don’t wear



Western clothes like skirts or jeans, then the chances of sexual abuse are minimalized.” She also explains the obligations many Indian women have to their husbands and in-laws, especially with respect to expectations of physical dress and behavior. She says, “When you are married, you are expected to behave, talk, sit, walk, dress in a particular way.” She continues, “Girls especially. They are often groomed and brought up for a suitable marriage relation. It’s common practise in India.”

The practical solutions she proposes include economic

independence for women, gender based activism, and speaking up against these types of control. The most prominent way Poushali resists gender discrimination as control is through talking and telling. She provides several functions of talking as a beneficial practice in these contexts: therapy, problem solving, questioning patriarchy, and protection. Specifically she emphasizes the therapeutic and individual level problem solving capacities of telling or speaking out. Poushali says, "Talking is a cure, and it's strongly feminine and it's strongly human." When I ask about the origins of her own emphasis of talking, she says, "I was not very obedient from a young age. I used to question, I had a lot of audacity. But a lot of respect as well for elders, peers and younger ones." Poushali continues, highlighting the collaborative nature of conversation and the connection to problem solving when she says, "You meet and you share your stories, and if you don't have an answer, someone else might."

As the interview begins to wind down, Poushali poignantly compares the act of talking, embodied by her personal voice, as her protection against forms of gender discrimination and abuse. She is at first unclear as to why she has come to this understanding, but later states, "Maybe by protecting my mum, it encouraged me in a big way to speak up for others who are not able to speak and make a statement." She continues, "My voice is my protection."

I realize I've been lost in this conversation for well over an hour. As we wrap up, I gather my belongings and follow Poushali to the lobby. We descend together down the stairs to the tracks of the light rail transit. Her train arrives first, and I watch as she disappears into the dark tunnel. I place my bag on the bench and wait for my train to arrive, losing myself in the lingering memories of the interview.

By Kaitlyn Dyck

Change - it doesn't just happen

In conversations with groups of women late in 2013 and early in 2014, there were many issues related to reducing gender discrimination brought up that require more than the actions of individuals or social groups in their own personal lives and local neighbourhoods. Topics like school curricula, availability of good daycare, labour market equity, housing, the justice system, and many more are matters of public policy.

Women talked about the need to become involved in working for change in such areas. They expressed an energy for the work.

Legislation, government programs and public finances are essential aspects of ensuring that what is in place will help ensure every person can live without limitations or dangers related to gender.

And so what can be done to bring about positive change in areas like these?

People need to come together to engage in the full range of democratic activity that affects public policy and its practical applications. Voting in elections is well-recognized as a duty that falls in this area: voting in a well-informed way that looks at candidates and their political parties for their records of past performance and the commitments they are now making.

But far fewer people become involved in seeking to express views and influence policy decisions between elections. This is activity that is often called “advocacy” or “activism.”

Advocacy is not only the property of large organizations like Amnesty International or Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society or Public Interest Alberta or the Legal Education and Action Fund. Individuals can engage on their own, or small groups can form and develop actions on an issue of concern, or people can choose to become involved with larger groups and seek to influence the choices made there about activities. For example, becoming active in the school council of your child's school might provide a place to encourage more gender neutral structures and activities in the school or to support Gay Straight Alliances. Becoming active in a

labour union local in your workplace might offer an opportunity to get a campaign going for more flexibility in working hours for people with young children.

Often in working for change, people will be dealing with views that differ from theirs. The advice of folk singer Pete Seeger is relevant: "It's important to learn how to talk to people you disagree with." If advocacy is done well, it can sometimes produce change in a "friendly" way, without a fight.

Advocacy take time and work, so it is essential to keep in focus from the beginning that the purpose of such activity is to make change, and to do that it is vital to reach new people. No matter how interesting or clever an advocacy plan, if it only engages or connects with people who are already in agreement about the issue, it is unlikely to lead to change. (Which is not to say like-minded people don't get other benefits from spending time and doing things together.)

There is a rich menu in the world of advocacy. It might mean assisting an individual to get better treatment or cut through the red tape. It might be politely "working within the system" (lobbying), raising public awareness to create more pressure on those who can make the change, or educating key brokers who can influence those you want to change. It might be more dramatic action to provoke reaction and visibility (sit-ins, "invading" a news conference) or participating in a process of input or consultation initiated by those in power. It might involve crowds and big numbers, or it might involve a solitary letter.

Understanding the context

Things are not as they are by chance.

Most issues of public policy in a democracy have come to be because some part of the community has persuaded officials to do things their way and they probably don't want change. Never underestimate the resistance you will encounter to advocacy efforts to bring about change. Generally the status quo is not sitting waiting for someone to come along with a better idea— it likes the way things are. Advocacy takes smart tough work.

Advocates can anticipate their efforts will be met by a variety of obstacles, including:

- denial there is any problem,
- personal attacks to discredit advocates,
- confusing the issue (dragging in irrelevant issues and seeming to link them),
- dishonesty,
- hiding and delaying in responding,
- attempted buy-offs,
- counter-attacks, and more.

The process

1. Prepare

Research is critical— know as much as you can and more than you think you need to. This should be more than a quick “environmental scan” it is a careful investigation of all the assets, liabilities/barriers, and other possibly relevant information about the issue. The research should look both internally at the group’s own strengths and challenges and the opportunities and threats that exist in the larger context. This mapping will help identify all the parties involved and the relationships between them, including your own allies and partners. Many times the personal experiences and stories of people will be more valuable information than facts and figures.

When a group feels they have gathered all the information, it is good to test themselves, asking tough questions to identify where they may have incomplete or inaccurate answers. It’s better to find the shortcomings yourself before taking advocacy work out in public.

2. Plan

A good plan will be realistic and ensure overly ambitious initiatives don’t lead to burn out or fade out nor aim too low.

A good plan understands that success requires that messages be actually received by the other side, not simply issued by your own side.

A good plan begins with a clearly focused brief core statement of the goal. Always think in terms of what will change because of the advocacy activity. Do not focus on what you do or say but on what the result will be of your activity.

All aspects of the plan should relate directly to the goal statement by clearly outlining resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes in precise language. Ensure the planning is based on a realistic understanding of the money, time, skills, and other resources the group has available and not on wishful thinking.

Planning should also consider in advance what flexibility you are prepared to have— what lesser result than your full goal will you accept? This is where advocacy is sometimes defeated: when a point comes where some want to take what is possible, others are not willing.

Advocacy can often work best from “inside”, lobbying key politicians, trying to work with them on committees, etc. When that can accomplish something, dramatic provocative actions can be avoided. If there is a decision to be provocative in advocacy, evaluate the possible consequences (funding cuts to partner organizations, public opinion backlash, criminal charges, etc.) and be sure members of the group are prepared for them.

In planning, remember most of those you will be dealing with will have much less familiarity with the issue than the people who have been doing all the planning and research, so avoid overwhelming and confusing with too much content. There is always value in the “Keep it simple” approach. Most people do not have high levels of education, especially in relation to public policy issues— newspapers don’t write with Grade 8 vocabulary for no reason. Most people have active busy lives, with many commitments and involvements, and your issue is, at most, a tiny part of their whole life. Avoid actions that will require others to give you a lot of time and focus.

Advocates often underestimate how many times a message needs to be repeated before it makes any impact in the very busy message environment in which people live— say it and say it and say it again. When advocates think they cannot bear to repeat a

message once more, they are probably just beginning to make a small impact on a more general audience.

Being specific (“Five percent increase in funding for public licensed daycares”) rather than general (“We must address the denial of the basic human right to child care”) often works best. A clear memorable “slogan” can help, and visual images are powerful.

When the plan is developed, take time to prepare and practice. Remember the well-proven principle from sports that most of the time should be spent practicing the things you are not yet skilled at, and not enjoying doing what you already can do well.

The professional media (newspapers, TV, radio) are important for much advocacy activity. Never assume they are either an enemy or an ally. They have a job to do, and knowing how they operate and working appropriately in relation to them can be very helpful with communications. It is useful to get to know key individual journalists, but maintain a relationship that respects their professional status and do not impose on them for “favours.”

3. Persist

Even small changes are usually more difficult than people anticipate. The strongest weapon the opposition has is the ability to wait you out. Most community activism has limited resources. But the law still holds true that if you push something hard enough it will fall over. Make sure the focus of your advocacy is something on which you can push hard enough. And always look to add to your allies— identify parties that have some point of agreement or connection with the group’s issues and invite them in, cooperating as much as possible, without insisting on entire ideological “purity”. Advocacy calls for patience and persistence— neither becoming complacent, nor panicking.

In preparing and planning, it is important to stay positive by not overestimating the difficulty of the task. But in keeping up spirits, advocates should also never overestimate the difficulty of the task. Many substantial improvements have been made because of advocacy.

A basic toolkit

Novel and unexpected activities are wonderful if they are well planned and delivered, but just because they are new or unusual does not mean they are any better than some of the old standbys.

People who want to make change can make use of activities in a toolbox of inexpensive, quick things that are not too complicated to do, do not require a lot of special expertise, and that have been proven to be effective over time.

Writing letters to express a position is one good measure. Letters can be sent to politicians or to media. Technology permits this to be done quickly now by email, without even having to go out in the snow or rain to mail them. It is widely agreed that when many politicians get letters on a particular issue, they are more likely to bring the subject up in caucus meetings. Each person who takes the trouble to send a letter is seen to represent several more voters, and good politicians know the importance of keeping in touch with the concerns and issues that matter to the people who elected them.

There are a few hints to keep in mind when writing letters as a part of advocacy:

- Keep the letter brief, focus clearly on a single policy or suggestion.
- Clearly included your name and full contact information (postal and/or email address).
- Make sure that spelling and grammar are correct, and, more important, ensure any facts used are correct.
- Make clear exactly what you are asking or requesting and state that you are expecting a response.
- If there is a related matter about which a sincere and appropriate commendation can be made to begin or end the letter, that may be useful, but avoid exaggerated flattery.

- Many advocates believe it is valuable to show at the bottom of your letter or in the cc line of an email that you are copying a leader/member of the opposition and/or to your own member from your constituency/riding.
- Try not to copy someone else's letter—think about the general information and write with your own language/voice, giving a personal perspective to it.
- Have someone else read your letter and offer feedback to check that you have made your point clearly.

Closely related to writing personal letters are activities such as signing form letters or petitions or calling in to radio programs on issues. Campaigns where large numbers of names are gathered on petitions or signed post cards offer an opportunity at a key point to deliver the signatures to a key politician-- and provide a useful way to get contact information on new people who support the goal of the issue, people who might then be invited to get involved.

Social media offer other helpful tools for advocacy. With Twitter, advocates can enter directly into commenting and interacting with elected leaders and journalists on issues in real time, minute by minute, as things are unfolding, and can reach very large audiences with messages and information. It takes some time and work to build up a good following on Twitter, but once it is accomplished, it can be used speedily. Facebook can be helpful by having pages for both advocacy campaigns and event pages for particular activities. This can be helpful in building momentum for an activity and also getting a sense of what attention it is gathering. It can also be effective to distribute small pieces of information in a sequential way to build interest over time. When an activity is underway, Twitter and Facebook, as well as Instagram, all offer ways to post photos or word updates in real time that can be seen by both local interested people and a wider audience.

A lot of the work in any advocacy campaign is getting information out to people, so developing attractive leaflets— always with good photos, graphs, tables and pull-out quotes, not just panels of text!— are easy to distribute and useful. They can also be sent electronically as pdf documents for others to print and spread further.

Getting “coverage” by the media is one of the most venerable of the advocacy tools. Sending out an advisory by email to media in

advance (usually one or two days at most) is good. Phone calls to individual journalists with assignments related to the issue are also helpful. A news conference might be held to create an event on its own, perhaps to announce a new campaign or release some new information. Someone with a strong personal story to tell that relates to the issue can be a valuable part of a news conference. With material that is not as strong, simply issuing a news release by email to all the media and announcing an availability time and place can be better than trying to get journalists to something that is not as compelling.

One of the best known tools of advocacy is a public event. This can include rallies, marches and walks, or vigils. They require good planning and design. For example, decisions may need to be made about the route to be walked and dangers along if from traffic. Getting police escort may be an issue to be discussed— and there can be costs associated with this. They are vulnerable to poor weather, but are highly visible. The program is vital to many of these events— if there are too many long speeches it is easy to lose participants. Deciding who will be permitted to speak might call for careful analysis. Will any politician who asks be included? Will someone with more radical views who might like to piggy-back on your credibility try to get involved? Some good entertainment can attract people. Having associated actions such as signing a petition or collecting donations for future work can succeed when there is a good crowd of people present. The timing of a public event might consider the news cycle too. Usually doing things at a time that will enable getting a story on the 6 PM television news offers the strongest way to reach a large number of people with your message.

Change - it doesn't just happen

Gender discrimination needs to be taken on from many directions. Individuals need to make personal change. A wide range of organizations need to take action. But there are many aspects of the challenges women face that require change to public policy and institutions. The action to bring this about may call for advocacy. But advocacy does not call for professionals and experts. The basics can be taken up by any concerned group of people with an idea or a proposal or a concern. Getting together and taking the first step is how it begins.

TERRA Conversation

Terra Centre provides services for pregnant and parenting teens in Edmonton, including a school. A group of young women gathers in a classroom at Braemar School after a long day of classes on a dark late November afternoon, their children happily occupied in the child care down the hall. Not surprisingly they begin talking about difficulties accessing good child care, an essential need for them to continue education or work.

Young themselves, they talk about the need to make sure things will be better for their daughters. They are uncomfortable with the assignment of certain roles for boys or girls early on. "Girls are only supposed to play with certain toys or wear certain colours," one observes. They talk about their sons too, saying, "Boys should be nurtured to have emotions and be caring." They intend to bring up their daughters not to think a man controls a relationship or their daughters to think their place is in the kitchen. And they will raise their sons to respect women, ignore the stereotypes and follow their hearts.

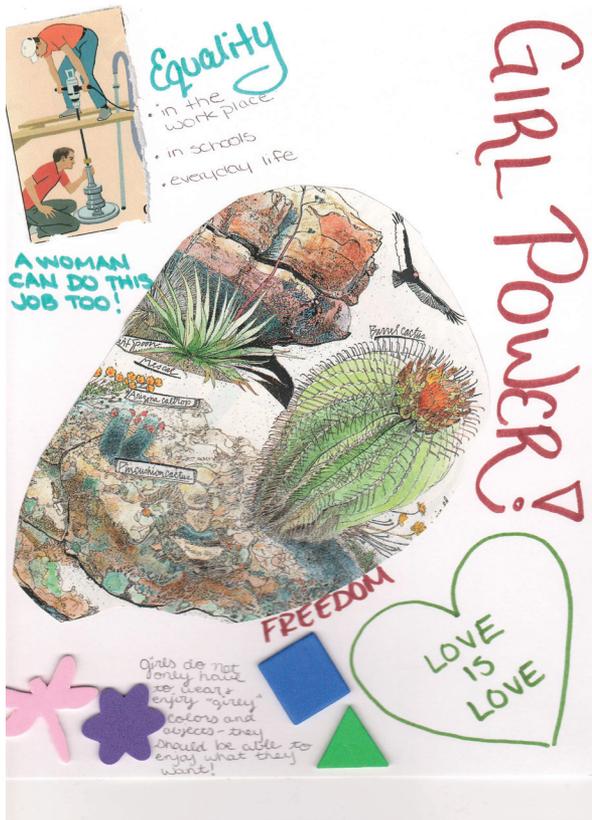
The influence of communications media trouble them. They see how media portray women, to make money, affecting how people think and act. "Billboards show women naked, and because it is shown everywhere men tend to see women in that light," one suggests. "Ads on TV for cleaning products only show women using them," another notes.

A sense things are not fair for young women comes up often as they share ideas. Inequality of earning capacity has difficult practical consequences for some, and they talk of facing discrimination from those who believe without a man, a woman cannot raise a family. Their experiences are that in school girls cannot easily take classes like mechanics and are channeled more towards food classes.

The women are proud of what they are doing. They say

being able to get together and talk about these things is essential. They are determined their actions will lead to change. "I have been firm on sharing roles at home. My boyfriend does the dishes or sweeps or cooks, and sometimes I take the garbage out," says one proudly. "I will teach my daughter to stand strong," is a declaration that is well received, as is the affirmation of another, "I plan to go into a building trades career, and I will rock it."

Still in their teens, raising young children, pursuing education, and facing economic challenges, the women in the circle declare over and over that if things are to change they must be the change. "I will be a role model of a better way," they insist as the meeting wraps up with the arrival of pizza and their little ones eager for mom's attention.



Individual profile - Ramya

Ramya Kandala did not have an easy childhood, and it didn't help that she was a girl. Born prematurely with little hope for survival, Ramya's first few years were difficult. Being a girl in a patriarchal culture ensured her later years were equally hard. Unlike many girls born to families in India, she had parents and a supportive older brother who wanted her to be healthy, flourish, and pursue her dreams, but beyond the walls of her home, discrimination and sexism lurked in every corner. "Your existence pretty much depended on how well you interacted with men," she observes. However, dealing with unsolicited sexual advances from men and constant messages to be submissive and quiescent did not trouble her one bit.

"I was always treated like a rebel, I was the one who would always fight for my rights." she enthusiastically shares, "My aim was to get into a good college or university on my own merits." Ramya was accepted to the University of Alberta in 2010 on a full scholarship into the Faculty of Arts, and in 2014 is finishing her degree. Even this momentous occasion was met with scepticism and judgement from her extended family. "Not a single person congratulated me," she notes, but instead they questioned the validity of her grades, how she was going to fund herself, live in a new city, and succeed academically in a foreign school. Even her mother was worried that she wouldn't be able to make it. Again, Ramya did not let the cynicism and disapproval get her down.

The move to Canada was not easy, and she did not know a single person when she arrived. Ramya now brags she has friends from countries all over the world. Discrimination did not magically disappear when she crossed over the Pacific. Being from another country, adjusting to a new culture and new ways of interacting

with both men and women challenged and stretched Ramya in ways that she didn't expect. "Every time I answer in class, people turn around and act like 'Oh it's a girl', 'Oh she's not from here', 'She's from a different country.'" Once she was accused of cheating because a group of Indian students in her class did cheat – and it was assumed that because she was from India, she participated in it as well. She hadn't, but needed to rely on her reputation and allies in the department to defend her and absolve her of wrongdoing. This was a difficult time in her life, but in the end, everything worked out.

"When I was living in India, I was very conservative. I oil braided my hair, covered my entire body, and didn't speak much to men," she remembers. After coming to live in Canada, Ramya has experienced some positive transformations in her life: a growing confidence, a newfound respect for people of differing racial backgrounds and sexual orientation, and a new dream to empower young girls all around the world. "There are experiences that have changed me quite a bit. I am free to express my beliefs here in ways that I cannot back home." These changes did not happen overnight, swooping in and instantly transforming. They have often times collided with her past: her religion, culture, upbringing, and parental wisdom. Ramya navigates a complex terrain, one in which she is constantly balancing her ultra-conservative, patriarchal past, her history, and her roots with her newfound convictions about equality, freedom, and anti-discrimination. The critical link between these two worlds is her parents and her brother. Nothing but adoration, compassion, and respect leave her lips when talking about her family; family is supremely important to Ramya, even if they don't always agree.

Drawing on her own personal experiences of violence and discrimination and new convictions about the equality of all human beings, Ramya is adamant that treating people poorly "is not okay" and that "it's not just about

being a woman, it's about being a human being.” There is courage and determination in Ramya: her adversity has shaped her into the kind of person she is today. “I go out and I encourage people, I care for people, I feel the need to make other women feel as empowered as I am.” Her voluminous volunteer hours, student counselling positions, and dreams of starting her own non-governmental organization all speak to the ways that Ramya has successfully melded her past to her present in order to make the world a more equitable place. As she observes, “A woman is a personification of love, education, knowledge, and strength” – words she lives by. At the end of the day for her it all comes back to family. “All I can say is that I've been fortunate to have the family that I have.” It took her parents a while to warm up to the idea of their daughter studying in a different country, learning a different culture and way of life. But over time, Ramya proved her ability to succeed and flourish in university, and now her education and success is paramount, “My mom says, even if I talk about marriage, she changes the topic and says, ‘You have to get your degree. You study, that's important. Get your degree, get your degree.’ She supports me a lot.” Ramya also adores and respects her older brother: “My brother has been my main inspiration. He was the one who encouraged me to come here for education. He convinced my parents that I am capable. He was the one who supported me throughout school. I wouldn't have had the courage to be here. He challenged me to challenge myself. Today I am who I am because I have a loving family,” she tells me. “My dad, my mom, they are very confident and very proud of me”.

By Jennifer Braun

ASSIST Conversation

The women gather in a room at the bustling ASSIST Community Services Centre in central Edmonton, some at the beginning of their education and careers, others well into their senior years. They greeted each other in Mandarin as they take off bulky winter clothing, get tea, and gather around a table.

Most are quick to declare gender discrimination is very familiar to them, whether close to home, with families valuing males more than females, or in the labour market, where their experience is that the senior positions go to men.

One woman tells of a well-off family with five daughters and three sons. Arrangements are made for the daughters to work in the family factory as soon as possible, but the sons are all supported to go on to post-secondary studies. One daughter is permitted to attend night school if she saves up the money for tuition herself. There is a lot of agreement that wanting to have sons rather than daughters remains a common view. If there are daughters, they are at home doing chores, while the parents are proudly out in the community with the sons. Stereotypes of roles remain evident, with males usually doing the driving when the family goes out as one example.

Women come to Canada from China sponsored for immigration because of marriage. The women talk about how such women are often not trusted; family members feel they are interested in the immigration benefit and not loyal to the marriage. In consequence such women will be pressured to do all the work in the family and will receive little respect. One anecdote compares a daughter-in-law educated in Canada with a good job who is treated well by her in-laws but another sponsored to come and marry who is used like a maid. The women observe it is unusual for women treated like this to express any complaint.

Strong agreement is shown that changing these realities must start with how young children are raised. "Help the boys and girls to share chores," one urges. "Be consistent with rules between girls and boys," offers another. With adults, the women suggest people need to be asked to put themselves in



the shoes of others to begin to identify the discrimination now going unnoticed. And the danger of isolation is also noted. “Women need to know how to find assistance when they need it,” several observe. “We need time to get together with friends, share about our lives, and give each other support,” is mentioned repeatedly.

When women feel supported they can say ‘No’ when necessary or set boundaries, and they can keep positive attitudes. Being able to go to organizations where support and assistance is available is also valuable. Opportunities that lead to economic independence are a practical issue raised many times.

One of the older members of the group speaks to one of the Daughters Day team in the end, sharing in her limited English, “In our own homes we never get to talk about these things. This has been a great experience,” and offers a big smile.

Elected leadership

Advocacy, seeking to persuade elected leaders to create better laws and programs to end gender discrimination, is important work. But elected leaders in most cases remain overwhelmingly male in all orders of government. In Canada's House of Commons only 24 percent of Members of Parliament are women for example, and on Edmonton's City Council only one of 13 is. It has been over 80 years since women legally acquired the right to seek office in Canada, yet there is still an imbalance of women in politics.

It is not that male politicians will ignore or reject decisions and actions to end gender discrimination. But good representation of women will bring perspectives and experiences that will improve the awareness of possibilities and quality of actions in this area.

Seeking elected office is one of the most substantial ways of taking action. It is a major life commitment with large implications for many years if a person is successful in being elected.

The leading organization supporting women to be involved in politics in Canada is the non-partisan Equal Voice. The Equal Voice website (www.equalvoice.ca) is a great resource for one-stop shopping about the issue, offering statistics, background, practical information, and useful resources.

Equal Voice has a comprehensive bilingual campaign readiness guide for women on the requirements and demands of running for public office, *Getting to the Gate*, on line. *Deep Roots, Strong Wings* is a version developed in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit, and Metis women. Both versions are self-paced. Equal Voice also has five-minute video vignettes featuring a range of remarkable elected women from coast to coast to coast. (www.equalvoice.ca/memCampaignBeHer.cfm). Any woman considering seeking elected office would also benefit from seeking to meet with women locally who are in elected office or have been candidates and learning from them personally.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities provides a webinar series created for campaign planning in municipal elections but has pertinent planning information to most campaigns as well as other resources

(www.fcm.ca/home/programs/women-in-local-government/).

For provincial and federal politics, most political parties will have policies and information especially for women considering politics that can be found by contacting them directly.

Kim Campbell, the only woman to have served as prime minister of Canada and a part of Equal Voice, has an essay that can be read at (www.theglobeandmail.com/commentary/canadian-politics-nees-a-commitment-to-gender-parity/article7924473/) on why more needs to be done to have women in politics.

Karina Pillay-Kinnee was mayor of the town of Slave Lake for nine years and provided leadership during the time of the catastrophic fire in 2011 that destroyed much of the town. She was also one of the Daughters of the Year in 2012 and the keynote speaker at the celebration of Daughters Day. Now studying medicine at the University of Calgary, she offers a reflection on politics:

I am grateful that our society has progressed to appreciate that we need to encourage and support the growth of leaders regardless of their race, age or gender. The health and sustainability of our communities relies on this attitude.

In 2004, Slave Lake, a northern Alberta rural community, gave Karina Pillay-Kinnee, a 33 year-old female and visible minority, the honour of serving as mayor. The people of Slave Lake recognized that it is about the inner qualities of a person- integrity, dedication, intelligence, confidence, compassion that make strong leaders, not the outer shell of a person. Also, good communication skills, collaboration skills and being a team player all contribute to being an effective leader.

It's this progressive attitude and having the capacity and opportunities to grow within the community that fosters great leaders. It's not about encouraging women or men into leadership roles; it's about supporting good people with good skills into leadership roles. I grew up in a community and family that nurtured and cultivated these skills.

We need to focus on building communities that embrace and nurture all of citizens to reach their potential. This involves citizen engagement, creating the capacity and systems for growth and promoting a spirit of teamwork and respecting diversity. Out of this, great leaders – men or women – will rise.

Linda Duncan is the Member of Parliament for Edmonton Strathcona. She founded the Environmental Law Centre at University of Alberta. She has worked as an advisor to Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Jamaica on environmental enforcement and was Assistant Deputy Minister of the Environment for the Yukon. She is an ambassador of the Daughters Day program. She offers these thoughts on women and politics:

Women have a unique perspective and experience to offer in shaping a more just Canadian society and on our role in the world. It is our joint responsibility to break down the barriers to women's engagement.

I was fortunate to be raised in a family where I was encouraged to aim high and pursue my dreams. I have been supported by a loving community of family and friends who have supported my efforts for community rights and protection of the environment, my lifelong focus. I have been privileged to work alongside strong, determined women.

My decision to seek political office arose out of this work, and I have been blessed to be supported in that goal by dedicated women of all ages and backgrounds who spent countless hours to elect a representative espousing their common shared goal of a more democratic and sustainable future. I truly believe that each woman who does this will be amazed at the support she will get from those around her and then from others she has never met, who will applaud her for coming forward. It is an immensely rewarding experience.

In 2011 I was re-elected to a New Democrat Official Opposition caucus of 40% women, representing a diversity of ages and ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Canada's parliamentary debates have been enriched by these voices, speaking not just on behalf of women but for the common interests of all Canadians. It is important we all do our part to encourage women to pursue elected office and to support women seeking office so we can be assured we are building a better Canada for all.

... and the boys and men

At every women's conversation that contributed to this handbook, there were comments about the importance of beginning with young boys if progress is to be made around ending gender discrimination. The women also said there is a need for men to be engaged, on their own and with women, in learning and taking action on the issue. Women affirmed the value of having times and places to be together without men, but they also made clear that until men are committed participants in changing social views and behaviours in relation to women, real progress will not be possible. Sometimes the conversations included painful sharing of the injury done by the actions and attitudes of men, but in every case, the dominant view was not "male bashing" but rather a deep desire to have men be true partners in creating communities free of gender discrimination, where true femininity and true masculinity would be manifesting together for the greater good of both.

At the heart of engaging men in ending gender discrimination is Clementine Ford's message, "You might not be a bad man— but unless you're doing something to challenge and change the world we live in for the better, you're not a good one either. All you are is an ordinary person, doing nothing and holding your hand out for a cookie that you do not deserve." The full article from which the comment comes can be found at <http://www.dailylife.com.au/news-and-views/dl-opinion/what-does-it-mean-to-be-a-good-man-20140213-32klv.html/>.

Organizations and movements:

White Ribbon Campaign: Perhaps the best-known movement, now worldwide, with many local expressions in communities, it promotes a "new code of manhood" and has a website with a wide range of information. Also Facebook and Twitter presence. <http://www.whiteribbon.ca/what-you-can-do>

http://whiteribbon.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/wrc_swc_issuebrief.pdf

www.wrcedmonton.com (a local Edmonton expression)

Alberta Father Involvement Initiative: Seeks to provide relevant and well-crafted information for fathers, including the New DADS manual especially for fathers of newborns and available free on-line

www.abdads.ca

https://www.facebook.com/AlbertaFathers

City of Edmonton: Community Services branch has a variety of programs and groups meeting in different parts of the city. For information, email *mensgroups@edmonton.ca* or go to *www.edmonton.ca* and search “men’s support services.”

Gender-Based Violence Prevention Project at University of Alberta: Includes men’s circles that meet regularly on the campus to create a place to talk about masculinity and gender.

https://www.facebook.com/GBVPP

MenCare: Global fatherhood campaign with a mission to promote men’s involvement as equitable, non-violent fathers and caregivers, to achieve family well-being and gender equality. At the website they provide information related to ten key topics including sharing the work, play, supporting the mother, education, showing affection, and teaching equality and respect.
http://www.men-care.org/Get-Started/What-You-Can-Do.aspx/

MenEngage: A collective voice on the need to engage men and boys in gender equality, to build and improve the field of practice around engaging men in achieving gender justice, and advocating before policy makers at the local, national, regional and international levels.
http://action.menengage.org/shareyourstory/

Men’s Action Network Calgary: Focuses on engaging men from a range of ethnic/cultural communities in family violence prevention.

Promundo: Works internationally to engage men and boys to promote gender equality and end violence against women.
http://www.promundo.org.br/en/_

Information:

Engaging Men and Boys in Family Violence Prevention (Lana Wells and Liza Lorenzetti). Reviews promising practices from around the world, including ones that are workplace based and ones that tie in with sports. A publication of the Shift project to end domestic violence, about which information is also available at the Calgary United Way website. www.calgaryunitedway.org

Engaging Men and Boys to Reduce and Prevent Gender-based Violence (www.whiteribbon.ca). A practical manual built around three key ideas: Boys and men must be engaged in the move for an end to gender violence, working with boys and men is an effective way to progress on this issue, and as boys and men change there can be a positive transformative impact in the lives of women as well.

Guy's Guide to Feminism (Michael Kimmel and Michael Kaufman)

Men Speak Out: views on Gender, Sex, and Power (Shira Tarrant)

101 Everyday Ways for Men to be Allies with Women Often simple but startling difficult things to realize might make life more difficult for women and reinforce discriminatory barriers between men and women. <http://michaelurbina.com/101-everyday-ways-for-men-to-be-allies-to-women/>

10 things men can do to prevent gender violence:

One of the frequently shared resources around men and gender discrimination is this set of suggestions developed by Jackson Katz. The ten actions are copyright by Katz but may be used without permission as long as credited to him. The focus of this advice is preventing violence, but Katz has written and speaks widely on the broader issues of men being involved as partners with women in ending gender discrimination more generally. www.jacksonkatz.com

1. Approach gender violence as a MEN'S issue involving men of all ages and socioeconomic, racial and ethnic backgrounds. View men not only as perpetrators or possible offenders, but as empowered bystanders who can confront abusive peers.
2. If a brother, friend, classmate, or teammate is abusing his female partner — or is disrespectful or abusive to girls and women in general — don't look the other way. If you feel comfortable doing so, try to talk to him about it. Urge him to seek help. Or if you don't know what to do, consult a friend, a parent, a professor, or a counsellor. **DON'T REMAIN SILENT.**
3. Have the courage to look inward. Question your own attitudes. Don't be defensive when something you do or say ends up hurting someone else. Try hard to understand how your own attitudes and actions might inadvertently perpetuate sexism and violence, and work toward changing them.
4. If you suspect that a woman close to you is being abused or has been sexually assaulted, gently ask if you can help.
5. If you are emotionally, psychologically, physically, or sexually abusive to women, or have been in the past, seek professional help **NOW.**
6. Be an ally to women who are working to end all forms of gender violence. Support the work of campus-based women's centres. Attend "Take Back the Night" rallies and other public events. Raise money for community-based rape crisis centres and battered women's shelters. If you belong to a team or fraternity, or another student group, organize a fundraiser.
7. Recognize and speak out against homophobia and gay-bashing. Discrimination and violence against lesbians and gays are wrong in and of themselves. This abuse also has direct links to sexism (e.g. the sexual orientation of men who speak out against

sexism is often questioned, a conscious or unconscious strategy intended to silence them. This is a key reason few men do so).

8. Attend programs, take courses, watch films, and read articles and books about multicultural masculinities, gender inequality, and the root causes of gender violence. Educate yourself and others about how larger social forces affect the conflicts between individual men and women.

9. Don't fund sexism. Refuse to purchase any magazine, rent any video, subscribe to any Web site, or buy any music that portrays girls or women in a sexually degrading or abusive manner. Protest sexism in the media.

10. Mentor and teach young boys about how to be men in ways that don't involve degrading or abusing girls and women. Volunteer to work with gender violence prevention programs, including anti-sexist men's programs. Lead by example.



Men who have the courage to take a leadership role in the community around ending gender discrimination can be a strong force for good. Here Didar Pannu, one of the founders of Daughters Day, receives the mayoral proclamation from Councillor Amarjeet Sohi at the 2012 event. His daughter and granddaughters stand with him.

One man's journey

Effective community action to end gender discrimination often is born when one person or a few decide they are not willing to let an unacceptable situation continue or to complain about what is, but instead to take action. Ryan Valley is one man who took such an approach.

“Perpetrators of domestic violence often have myriad personal factors influencing their choice to use violence, but there is also an external influence in our society’s cultural conceptions of masculinity or what it means to be a man,” observes Ryan, explaining why he created WRC Edmonton as a local grassroots initiative aiming to prevent men’s violence against women. It is linked to the White Ribbon Campaign, an international movement engaging men and boys in addressing the root causes of male perpetrated violence in relations. “Cultural conceptions of masculinity as something inherently dominating or bad are what we aim to change by promoting non-violence and respectful relationships,” Ryan says.

Ryan was born into poverty and grew up in an abusive environment with suicidal and depressed family members. “I grew up without primary role models for socializing me into traditional gender norms. My family moved a lot, and because of my differences I faced harsh bullying,” he recalls. “As I got older, I heard stories from good female friends about negative experiences they’ve had with men in relationships. I learned that these experiences were not an attempt to get attention or to make people feel sorry for them but were traumatic and not told without great trepidation, and that often women had lost friends over trying to talk about what happened to them,” he says. He began to see these experiences were disturbingly common, and he researched about sexual assault and domestic violence. “The information backed up what I had come to believe from my personal interactions, and at that point I felt I had to somehow attempt to mobilize men in a positive way and encourage men to behave in healthier ways and promote healthier ideas about relationships.”

Ryan has not stopped with WRC Edmonton. He has also developed Men Edmonton or ME. ME serves to help empower men to make positive and healthy lifestyle decisions. “It’s no secret that the narrowly defined parameters of masculinity have harmful effects on the entire community. How we perceive ourselves as well as how we think we are perceived by others help decide how we interact with the world around us,” Ryan explains. He sees many men raised to believe violence or silence are the only options they have. “When we buy into a false belief these are the natural male behaviours, it justifies our own alienation and hurts our relationships,” he says. He believes it is important to break the idea anger is the only acceptable emotional expression for men, as it limits quality of life. ME works to promote healthy ideas about behaviours and relationships by engaging with men in the community, encouraging and supporting more positive life choices and relationships.

Alberta Avenue Conversation

In a small art gallery/studio in Edmonton's Alberta Avenue neighbourhood women gather to spend some time talking together on a Friday morning. Some are part of an informal group of new mothers who have been meeting for a while; others of many ages and backgrounds have been invited by a friend in the area. They are enjoying getting to know each other. Several toddlers move in and out among them as they talk.

Issues related to the workplace come up right away, women who have been employed for many decades finding common ground with others with little experience. Some jobs are dominated by men, wages are unequal for the same jobs, women are expected to put up with verbal insults and jokes— a level of concern that in the world of work, men have the upper hand, and it can seem easier to put up with it or leave than to try to make change. There is frustration at employers who will not consider flexible work options for women raising children.

The conversation shifts to noticing positive developments. Some mention partners who are taking an active role with housework and raising children. Another shares her experiences mentoring and encouraging other women, having herself succeeded over the years in a traditionally male occupation.

With many of the group currently being mothers, issues of how to deal with popular culture and how it presents what women should be like is a large concern. So too are the busy demands of having children and housework and no time to meet with others for support. "It is hard to always be alone, doing the housework, no contact with anyone else," notes one. "Women are caring. When we can talk together, socialize, it is helpful." Anecdotes are shared of how women have learned or been inspired because of a conversation.

More than this, there is agreement about the power of having models. Being able to be part of Girl Guides has been valuable for one, others point to mothers, one who raised her children as a single mother despite the social pressures of the time, another who raised sisters and brothers the same. Some have a strong sense of hope. One brings a small stone to represent the strength of women. Another tells of how as a girl her father put her down over keeping a diary and how she has worked to build a good relationship with him as she became an adult.

Sharing stories of how their own upbringing either supported or challenged them brings the conversation back to children and the role of the whole community in their growing up. Play groups so house-bound mothers can get out to see others are needed. Some have encountered negative response to breastfeeding when in the community. Schools need to encourage boys and girls to get out of gender-role boxes.

As the time draws to a close one woman observes, "Equality is not sameness: women do not want to be men but have the opportunity to do what they want."



LBTQ Conversation

Making time over a lunch hour on a busy December weekday at the downtown facilities of the Edmonton Pride Centre, a diverse group of women who identify as lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer gather to share a meal and views about gender discrimination.

The importance of “voice” is expressed early and identified as a source of power. “Women are not the silent sex,” affirms one. The value of open dialogue, where people talk together and share diverse views, is especially powerful.

Talking about gender discrimination early is important. “Let the young boys know that people are not going to make fun of you if you stand up for women,” advises one woman. But there is also a perspective there may be too much identification of everything with gender. “It’s wrong that everything— toys, clothes— is sexually divided. Gender neutrality is needed.”

One ugly aspect of gender discrimination is harassment and violence. “Some people feel like the feminine needs to be put down,” suggests one. “We need to abolish hierarchy to deal with violence,” recommends another. Participants are angry that the concept of “No” is not the rule of life in sexual matters. “Nobody is entitled to what they want, to make other people please you,” one says. Another adds, “If you don’t want to have sex, then you don’t have to. Young women and men need to get this.”

There are mixed views about punitive justice, several wishing it was not necessary but seeing a need to deal with some situations. “It is hard for women to get out of abusive relationships. Sometimes they don’t even have the information about options,” is noted. Harsher penalties for gender-based crime may even be necessary.

Social attitudes still need attention. “People believe that a strong woman does not need help or support, that she can do it all by herself. They say ‘Pull your shit together, you’re strong,’ but that is not helpful.” They agree women can be very strong but that vulnerability and emotions are just as much a part of their personality. “When you feel safe, you can grow your strength and express all of your true self,” one says.

The patriarchal society remains a problem. “People don’t care about rape and pedophile jokes; they are considered to be normal,” suggests one person. Stereotypes and derogatory language for women are used and not even noticed.

There is hope for better times if children grow up in genderless homes, where boys and girls play with the same toys and do the same activities. “You can have a stay-home dad and that is totally right,” is another example cited. “I saw my mother crying. She was not hiding her vulnerability. But she stood up for her kids too, and told us ‘Your stepfather does not have the right to touch you.’”

“Women need good education and access to information on birth control, cycles, contraception, that a woman’s body is not shameful or dirty.”

The concept of “third gender” is seen as a hopeful tool, people who embody masculine and feminine together gracefully. “We have a new society coming from a binary one. We should have a traditional one: simple— no difference,” suggests one. Gender-neutral washrooms are an efficient practical example.

Community celebrations are valuable ways to address a new approach to gender. “In Canada we have supports available and rights for everyone to speak about issues. We need to value and protect that.”

A municipality committed to women's participation

Early in 2014, the agenda at an Edmonton City Council meeting included a bylaw to create the Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton Committee. Council support was unanimous, and soon after the invitation went out to the community to apply to join the new committee— an invitation met with a large and enthusiastic response from people seeking to serve in the 15 positions on the committee.

“The members of this committee will be hubs of other networks, enabling the City of Edmonton to reach broadly and deeply into many different parts of the community,” explains Lara Pinchbeck, a planner with the City actively involved in the initiative. She sees it as a way to get communications flowing in many directions, providing relevant and useful information to City Council from the community and also letting City Council share messages with the community in new ways.

“The goal of the new committee, and the larger overall commitment to women's participation in all aspects of community life, is to make change,” Lara explains. She has a very practical perspective on why a comprehensive initiative makes sense. “When women have an equitable quality of life in a municipality, there will be a direct positive impact on the overall economic well-being of the community,” she explains.

“With WAVE in operation, there will be a direct connection to Council for women throughout the community, and we look to this fostering a city-wide discussion about issues affecting women and activating a gender lens in all aspects of City activity.”

The overall women's initiative has three goals: to improve the daily lives of Edmonton women, to make Edmonton a leader in women's equity, and to provide women a voice in civic issues. These are goals that any municipality could adopt, if voices of citizens were raised in support.

As more aspects of the whole initiative join the WAVE Committee, Lara believes two things will happen: the municipality will

identify more ways to do things internally to support the full and fair participation of women, and the example of the municipality doing this will provide encouragement to the rest of the community to be similarly engaged. “The marker of our success will be for the City to become a leader on gender equity,” she suggests.

The momentum towards the bylaw began with three symposia attended by 700 women in the previous couple of years, where a wide range of voices were heard. Nearly 30 of those who attended these conversations offered to serve on an advisory group that developed the actual bylaw. From the beginning the process has demonstrated a strong collaboration on championship of the issue from elected leaders such as previous Edmonton Mayor Stephen Mandel; from dedicated City of Edmonton staff, including Elaine Betchinski, Alisa Wheeler, Susan Kankkunen and Kate Gunn; and from women from all walks of life volunteering their time to work together.

The current high-profile activity is building on years of prior activity that developed such actions by the City as a mentorship program for women interested in municipal politics where they are connected with sitting councillors, ongoing tools and strategies being assessed and implemented to involve and engage the broadly diverse voice of Edmontonians effectively, and human resources action to address the need for women to have equal access to employment possibilities within City operations.

“Now we are underway with new actions, it will be essential for this ambitious vision to have the necessary resources to do its work properly,” Lara says. There are a range of other mechanisms and programs being considered to complement the WAVE Committee. Lara is impressed by the commitment of members of City Council to take the time to listen and learn from those on the WAVE Committee and not just direct them to act on ideas of Council.

“As a city, we need to ensure women’s rights, issues, and opinions are represented fairly and equally,” Mayor Don Iveson said at a City-sponsored event to celebrate International Women’s Day. “Women provide a unique voice, and without that voice we

cannot continue to evolve as a forward-thinking and global city. Accomplished, influential and inspiring women need to have their voices heard.”

City councillor Bev Esslinger says, “I want Edmonton women to stand up and play a part in building the future of Edmonton. Wherever women are – in academia, working in neighbourhoods, or schools, on a sports field, or running a business – women have a wealth of knowledge and experience. Let’s work together to make Edmonton a great city for women and a great city for everyone.”

WAVE is part of the Women’s Initiative to advocate on behalf of women in municipal life and enhance the City’s leadership role on gender-based issues important to Edmonton women. Approaches may also harness the wisdom of powerful community women leaders through mentorship of younger women in all forms of community and civic leadership and provide opportunities, both formal and informal, to seek input from Edmonton women about a wide range of gender issues, barriers and opportunities. The on-going developments with WAVE and the whole Women’s Initiative will be available to follow at www.edmonton.ca/women.

Esslinger also sees the committee being a positive model of citizen engagement more generally. “WAVE is a public committee. We look forward to its meetings being attended by members of the public, being a place where citizens see women exercising influence on public life and policy at a significant level,” she emphasizes. “WAVE will offer Edmonton a place where women have a visible role contributing to leadership and where women will be mentors for others who will become active in other areas of life.”

Lara believes municipalities can move the end of gender discrimination forward by working with each other. “We are looking at examples of good things happening in places like Ottawa, Vancouver, and Hamilton. We hope other communities will be getting in touch about what we are doing in Edmonton,” she says. “Major change will not happen overnight, but we are on the road.”

A snapshot of women in Edmonton

- 398,770 (49% of population) are women
- 25% are immigrants, 30% are racialized minorities, 7% are Aboriginal
- 13% live below the poverty line-- women on average make 76% of male counterparts
- 27% have a high school diploma, 30% a post-secondary certificate/diploma, 17% university degree, 8% a graduate degree, 18% less than high school graduation
- Slight population “bubbles” between ages 20-30 and 45-55
- 50% work out of the home and travel to work— 70% by car. (2011 statistics)
- Approximately 820,000 people in Edmonton, 1.16 million in Capital Region
- Between 2006-2011 more than 80,000 people came to city, an 11% increase
- Municipal elections: In 2010 14 of 68 candidates were women (21%), and four were elected; in 2013, 15 of 79 candidates were women, and one was elected



Women who took part in one of the City of Edmonton symposia that helped develop the City's women's initiative report back to others during the gathering.

Indo-Canadian Women's Association Conversation

The young South Asian women are mostly university students. They have been meeting for some months on a weekday evening to talk about things together, and they have strong, articulate views of what needs to happen to create a better future. They want real social change, not superficial accommodations.

One woman was part of a team that made a car as an engineering project but felt that when they took it to the United States for a show, she was included in the group because it was mandatory for a woman to be part of the team, not because of her own merits.

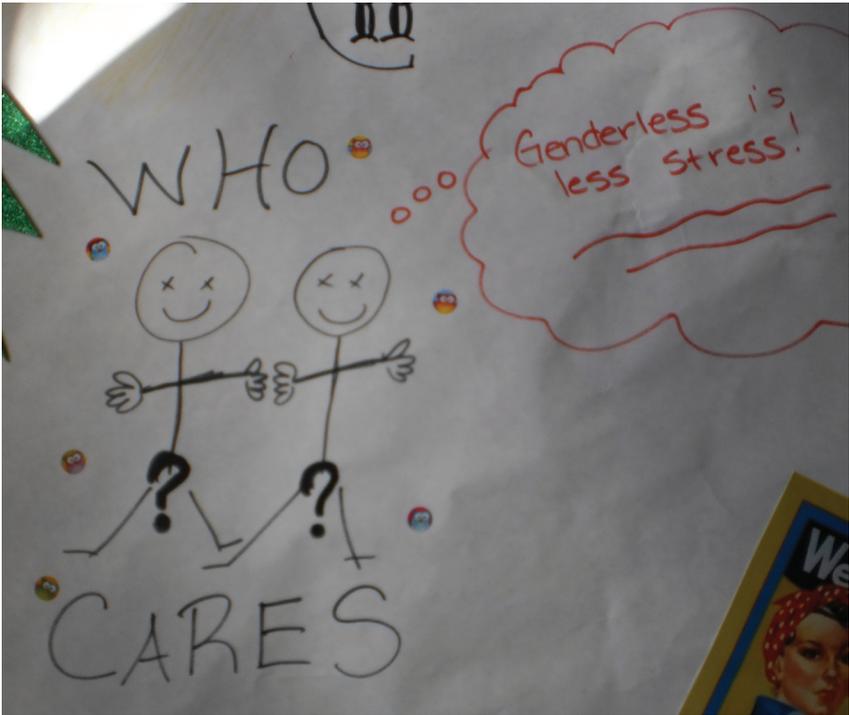
“There is the stereotype of looking that women cannot do certain things. Women are proving themselves by going to school, but people still think they cannot do things.”

“They put men in the leadership positions,” one charges. “We need more support and encouragement to pursue leadership activities.”

The powerful influence of social expectations is expressed as well when one says, “Careers are not good enough if you are not making money. They do not see that you should enjoy what you are doing, rather than it all being about making money.”

“It starts at an early age. Girls are seen with caring jobs like doctors and nurses, and boys to become engineers.” There is agreement that too often in India, the birth of a boy brings praise, but not a baby girl. This develops into internalization of inferiority and women who do not consider their own futures outside of depending on a man. There can be pressure to have children at a young age, just when making a career is important. If a marriage fails after this, a woman has nothing to use to carry on. Several feel there needs to be more deliberate work to break down stereotypes and proactive initiatives, policies and mandated requirements to bring women into every area of work and life.

At the same time, they are concerned men are taught roles of not letting emotions show and are given a diet of violence through the media.



Social and cultural pressure is very real to these young women. “Society keeps measuring in terms of property—house, children, husband. We are encouraged to lean on men,” one laments.

Suggestions are made for there to be provision in workplaces for nursing mothers and day cares right at workplaces.

“Civilization is changing. Women should lead the struggle for equality, because we give birth to boys and girls, and we can start the shift in how they are raised to think and act,” suggests one woman. Another adds, “A woman is always seen in some relationship, like a daughter, a mother, a daughter-in-law. We need to talk about women as women.”

They note in closing the similarities in the experiences they face and the importance of connecting women with each other to overcome societal and cultural pressures.

Celebration



Daughter's Day: Bringing the community together

Imagine a well-known public space in the community filled with activity celebrating the importance of women. Not dwelling on the challenges and difficulties many face or highlighting the hurts suffered or the shortcomings of public policy, but proclaiming loudly and proudly, "Women make this community great!"



This is the heart of the Daughters Day celebration begun in Edmonton in 2012.



It is a model of a high profile public event having a powerful impact building community solidarity around an issue, raising awareness, engaging people, and demonstrating commitment to a meaningful cause. Hundreds of people have attended the event each of its first two years.

Providing a place for people to get good information about services for women is part of a useful public event.

Daughters Day is a unique community initiative, developed by local volunteers and presented

with modest funding requirements. But part of the goal is that the Edmonton event might be a catalyst, with the idea taking root in other communities so that each will be an expression of a particular community, yet at the same time a growing web of events would express a shared commitment in communities all across Alberta.

The basic elements of the Edmonton event are simple:

- High visibility;
- Honouring models of success, Daughters of the Year;
- An entertaining time— music, food, pomp;
- A stimulating speaker;
- A chance to learn more through an information fair.

The celebration has been well documented. Videos and photos are available at its website (www.daughters-day.com) and Facebook (www.fb.com/DaughtersDay), and provide a good sense of the event.

Why “Daughters Day”?

Daughters Day came into being before the United Nations established the Day of the Girl and in the context of other designated days such as International Women’s Day and Mother’s Day. The word “daughter” was felt to express how every woman is linked in relationships so



Involving young daughters in the activity is part of the celebration. These girls were part of a drama group from the Indo-Canadian Women’s Association that performed in 2012.



Great entertainment made Daughters Day fun. Metis fiddler Darla Daniels was part of the 2013 event.

that the purposes of the overall initiative would not be seen as abstract but as directly relevant to the lives of people living together. “Every woman is a daughter,” was expressed by the creators.

There are a few other Daughters Day events in other parts of the world, but no general recognition of such a day in the calendar.

The Edmonton group chose to set Daughters Day on September 1. This is the date Alberta became a province in 1905, and the vision was that a province named in honour of a daughter of Queen Victoria would become a beacon for the commitment to ending gender discrimination. The decision that participation would be best for the event on a weekend and the availability of a preferred venue has meant that in 2013 and 2014, it actually lands on a date close to September 1.

Planning is essential

The success of a major event such as this depends on good planning. In Edmonton, this began with inviting a wide range of leaders and organizations to share ideas about what an event might look like, and out of that meeting, identifying a smaller number of people enthusiastic enough to become a working group to keep things moving ahead.

Any municipality or neighbourhood developing a Daughters Day event would benefit from ensuring it was a truly local event, with decisions made by the interested people involved, so the Edmonton event is not offered as a template but rather as a case study to assist local thinking.

In developing a work plan, tasks were identified related to:

- Design and preparation of a program for the event,
- Developing the Daughters of the Year process,
- Raising funds,
- Promoting the event through media and other ways,
- Identifying and securing a venue, and
- Recruiting and engaging volunteers for a variety of tasks.

Program

An important question is the length of the program. In its first year, the planning group was eager to include a large number of components, and the result was a program that went beyond two hours. The evaluation was that despite each aspect of it being positive, it was too long for most people. It was noted for families who had brought younger children it was not effective. The second year was kept to a little under 90 minutes, and the evaluation indicated this was better received.

The full event can still be several hours long when the information fair and refreshments are also included. In Edmonton, the addition of the Commitment Walk, discussed in another part of this handbook, also added time to the whole event.



A wide variety of interesting activity has been part of the Daughters Day celebration so that it can be enjoyed by the whole family, no matter what ages.

The Edmonton Daughters Day program has featured entertainment by local women. After the initial year it was decided that those who performed should receive a



Edmonton-Strathcona MP Linda Duncan presented the Daughter of the Year award to Shawnay McCrorie in 2013.

modest honorarium and not be expected to share their talents without practical recognition. In addition, some funding was obtained in the first year to support having Paula Kirman, an active volunteer with the event and a talented singer/songwriter, compose a theme song which can be performed annually as part of the event. Entertainment has included dance, singing, and brief drama.

It has been felt the credibility of the event is enhanced by having key elected leaders represented, so each year the Prime Minister, Alberta premier, and Edmonton mayor have been asked to provide a written message for the program booklets and to attend and bring greetings. While all of them have provided written messages each year, and Premier Alison Redford attended the 2012 event (with her daughter), none of these senior leaders have brought greetings. In each case, they have designated another elected person to represent the order of government. The people bringing greetings have been asked to make this part of the program brief, and this has been respected.

To create an atmosphere of pomp and circumstance, the police (Edmonton Police Service one year and RCMP the other) have generously provided a bagpiper who has led the party of special guests in at the beginning of the program.

One important part of the program has been to have a good keynote speaker. Discussions have considered bringing a high-profile name, which would likely have a speaker fee and other costs associated but would draw a large audience, or to use a respected local name. In the first two years the latter was the choice, with Karina Pillay-Kinnee, then the mayor of the town of Slave Lake who had provided leadership following a devastating fire in 2011, and Christine Sokaymoh Frederick, a leader in the aboriginal arts community and chair of the Edmonton Arts Council, presenting.

The other significant aspect of Daughters Day has been to honour several women as Daughters of the Year. This has been left as quite a broad category to encourage broad ideas for achievements of many types. Daughters of the

Year have included high school students and seniors. The first year, the four recipients were selected by the planning group, but in 2013, it moved to an invitation to the general public to nominate. Nominations were open for several weeks until the end of June and were promoted in the media and through community organizations primarily. The recipients were selected from the



No celebration is complete without food.

The recipients were selected from the nominations by a jury of five respected community leaders to put decisions at arms length from the Daughters Day/ Citizens for a Civil Society organization.

Ending gender discrimination is helped by relationships, and so the event provides refreshments and time both

before and after the program for people to visit informally, meet and talk and enjoy each others company. There have been fun things for children to do.



A celebration should be fun! At the 2012 event steering committee member Gurcharan Singh Bhatia jokes with hosts from CBC Radio, Portia Clark and Adrienne Lamb.

Ending gender discrimination also requires information. Associated with the celebration program has been an information fair with many community organizations and projects as well as government programs and services having displays and staff on hand.

One benefit of the Daughters of the Year award has been that it provides a reason for many to become interested in the event because of a desire to have some woman who is seen as deserving nominated. Generating awareness and getting nominations submitted takes a lot of work, with volunteers encouraging

people in their circles to consider who they might nominate, especially in the early years before many people are aware of it. The nomination requirements are kept simple, so it is not a difficult or time-consuming task to make a nomination.

Each year the planners have secured two major media sponsors. This has helped with marketing the event for a more modest cost. Marketing has also been done by having volunteers who have attended such community events as the K-Days parade, Heritage Festival, Fringe Festival, and CariWest parade to distribute handbills about the event.

Volunteers are encouraged to wear the bright-coloured t-shirts that have been made each year.

Media coverage has varied, with some community papers giving significant coverage of such things as the keynote speakers or some Daughters of the Year. In the first year, a positive editorial in a major newspaper was well-received.

Branding the event has been helped by having a graphic design of a group of diverse girls that is used with all communications, from the shirts to the letterhead. A small grant made it possible to have a professional artist create this design to ensure its quality.

The costs of the event have been kept as low as possible by using a City of Edmonton venue (City Hall one year, Sir Winston Churchill Square another). Many of the refreshments have been donated by businesses. It has been decided that an event of the size and complexity of Daughters Day in a larger municipality like Edmonton requires a paid coordinator so the many tasks involved can be certain of being done well and within time requirements. Funding to meet the range of costs has come largely from sources such as small donations from interested individuals and the sale of messages in the program booklets to businesses and organizations. In 2013, some costs were also covered by funding from the Government of Alberta's Community Initiatives Program.



The celebration events succeed because many volunteer to help. This group are about to head to their stations to go to work at the 2013 event.

Daughters Day in new communities

The vision of the founders of Daughters Day is for the Edmonton event to be the beginning and that over time, groups in more communities throughout Alberta will take up the idea and develop local expressions of it. Currently, any Albertan can be nominated for the Daughters of the Year honour at the Edmonton event, but as other communities decide to have such events, the eligibility in each community could be made more local.

The impact of the day may be stronger if all communities hold events on the same day, keeping to the original concept of a day associated with the founding of Alberta. Events would each be developed in line with the ideas of local organizers and may or may not follow elements of the original Edmonton event. People in any community wanting to create their own Daughters Day are encouraged and welcome to contact the Edmonton group and stay connected.



Hundreds of people gathered in Edmonton's City Hall in 2013 to celebrate the second Daughters Day.

Daughters Day Song

© 2012 Paula E. Kirman

Stories of survival
Emerging from the darkness of fear
Begin with our arrival
A lifetime on a road led by tears

And there's lots of joy and lots of pain
Sunshine and wind and rain
Blood flowing through our veins
With the strength and the wisdom of years

Obstacles surmounting
Overcoming them one by one
Towards freedom we are counting
And changes have already begun

When we're writing our own history
Breaking through the mystery
Standing up for all to see
The battles that we've won

So here we stand before you
Daughters of all ages today
Proclaiming something so true
We're ready and willing to say

Stand for love and not for hate
Our rights are not for debate
Join with us – it's not too late
For we will not go away

And there's so much we can celebrate
Here on Daughters Day



Paula is a freelance writer, editor, and photographer with a passion for music, peace, social justice, and responsible media. She is a well known singer-songwriter, visible at many rallies on peace and justice issues. As well, she documents events of the local social justice community through her website, RadicalCitizenMedia.com. In November of 2012, Paula received the Salvos Prelentzos Peace Award from Project Ploughshares for her efforts in the areas of promoting peace and human rights through her music and cameras.

Community Leaders Conversation

The chill is in the winter air outside the room at Edmonton Immigrant Services Association, but discussion is animated as women active in a variety of communities gather over lunch to share perspectives with each other on how real change can be achieved to end gender discrimination.

After introductions, one of the first observations is that women can sometimes be harsh and judgemental with each other. The example of older women wanting to tell younger women what they should do or not do is mentioned as a source of tension.

“But we do need to learn from each other. Mentoring— formal or informal— is valuable,” notes one woman. “Education can happen when women share personal stories or encouraging words with each other.”

“Many of us just need time to talk about what it means to be a woman. We are socialized as women, but we don’t identify consciously in this way. We are often not even aware how gender discrimination is an issue around us.” Several say women see themselves as doers and leaders and as ready to take action.

Education that leads to everyone realizing the importance of women in the economy and community life is needed, another mentions. “Mothering is an activity with many values for society. And it is mothers who can end the tyranny of pink and blue in raising children,” one observes.

More formal educational attention is also needed some say, including more focus in school curricula on gender. “When you educate girls, the whole community benefits,” affirms one woman. Mothers taking time to read with children and get them talking about how gender is presented in stories is one tactic that comes up. “Even children can learn to identify stereotypes in stories, like that men don’t cry or women are always passive and rescued by men,” says one.

The challenge created by mass media that provide poor coverage of women’s issues and promote stereotypes concerns several in the group. “We need to get involved with campaigns that say we won’t buy products promoted in sexist ways.”

When one woman suggests isolation and loneliness is a major issue, heads nod around the table. “We need the support of a community, time to get together and know what we say will be heard.” The women concur that big broad issues of gender will be made practical when women can talk about them. One value noted when women can spend time together talking is that similarities are noticed across age and culture and backgrounds. “There is power in seeing others share your perspective,” affirms one.

“Women are so busy with so many necessary things to do. It is hard to find time for this, but without love and support from others you can’t give to the community either.”

The conversation moves to the value of ordinary women learning from each other. “It is not the big headline names we need to hear about, but voices in the neighbourhood,” asserts one. “We do want and need models and their stories however,” another notes. “We need to see pacesetters around us in the community,” adds a third person.

There is still a need for practical information such as where to find mental health services or what to do if abuse is experienced. There is concern about poorly designed services for women, with public transit and policies around children’s services given as examples. “We need to know about the groups in our communities doing good work to provide education or services for women,” adds another.

“Ending gender discrimination is not about bashing men, but understanding the effects of patriarchy,” is how one describes the situation. “There is a challenge to engage men and boys in ending gender discrimination. The example of fathers can be so valuable if they are models in such things as fair sharing in family and household duties.” Another suggests the approach should be to have men understand why it matters to them to end gender discrimination if they are to be engaged.

As the session draws to an end, one woman observes, “Just having time to talk together has made a difference. I have new connections I didn’t have before. Maybe we can start by each making a list of what we can do in our personal lives now, a month of actions, and start with small steps.”

“But this is important. We need to be sure as we take action that we have plans and accountability,” another insists.

Elizabeth Fry Conversation

Women who have been in prison can find themselves isolated when they are released. A place is provided at Edmonton's Elizabeth Fry Society for them to join together to talk about issues. On a chilly January morning several meet in a small cozy top-floor room at the society's downtown building to talk about communities free of gender discrimination and create visual images of their idea in collages.

They are quick to share views about what this would mean—more acceptance in every area of life, less discrimination in their workplaces, less being judged in terms of stereotypes and more in terms of who they really are.

They also observe that things might have turned out differently if discrimination was not so common as they were growing up. "My mother had been abused, and she ended up not being much of a role model for me," one recalls. "No one encouraged me to identify my own capabilities, so I ended up in an abusive relationship," another notes. "If society respected women and supported them to stand and help their children, and not be suppressed by the male dominant society, life would be safer," says one.

Most in the group have had very difficult circumstances in their lives and regret that there had often been no one to advise them. "Women should be able to come together and talk to get healed," says one. Retreats where women who have been incarcerated could get away into a safe comfortable setting for some time are recommended. They worry about further inter-generational transfers of trouble to women because of the lack of services to assist them to make change.

Sexual abuse has been a particularly hurtful issue in their lives. "Sexual abuse should stop, because it stays with the woman forever," says one, and another comments about the stress from the fear of not being able to protect her own children from abuse.

There are deep concerns about structural realities that let discrimination continue. To avoid homelessness, women will accept mistreatment. They do not have access to good child care to let them take jobs and get education. They see the legal system as focused on incarcerating women and taking their children instead of on rehabilitation, skills development, and parenting support. "Social workers have a lot of lines they cannot cross for fear of their jobs," one suggests.

Gender discrimination is more likely when women live in poverty. "I'm not asking for fame and fortune," says one. "I just want enough to pay the rent and feed my kids."

The women talk about wanting their voices to be heard, their experiences known. They have experienced being stereotyped as Aboriginal women and then having their ideas ignored. They recognize learning can go in all directions: "Mothers are not the only ones to teach, daughters too can teach mothers." And they note women can sometimes be too tough on themselves: "It is difficult for women to ask help. They are good at internalizing, they feel when a woman asks for help she is weak."

"Women should not be squashed," one declares with feeling. "Every woman is a leader, not a leader that needs followers, but a leader in her own life." As the group draws to an end, one participant says, "To beat this, we need more unconditional love, to be able to talk about problems with others and not have to carry it all on your own."

Individual profile - Sandra

Being a farmer's wife was not what Sandra wanted in her life. Where she was growing up, in that time, a young woman had two choices after Grade Ten: marry a farmer and get pregnant, or leave. Sandra chose the latter. "I always knew I wasn't farm wife material," she notes, "but I always knew I loved, loved, loved politics". So, after some meandering about, in university and elsewhere, Sandra finally pursued her Master of Arts in political science and then went on to do a doctorate. Today, she is a professor at the University of Alberta.

Being a woman in politics brought with it challenges: "Gender wasn't part of the political science story." After the war, the social sciences were divided and specialized, she explains, "Economics was about the economy, and that was all male, and political science was about power; power and maleness and whiteness were the same." Sandra's natural academic place was supposed to have been sociology, studying deviance in the home. She didn't agree.

This decision to stick with political science was, at times, alienating: "I was the only woman in my class, so there was a lot of harassment and bullying and those kinds of things because I was different." Sandra tells one particularly maddening story: "I shared my office with a total jerk, who, one day, put *Playboy* pinups all over the whole office." Graphic images of naked women surrounded her. "It forces a sense of exclusion and the message of not belonging and the sexualisation of your body in the most crass form," she recalls. "How do you respond to that?" At the time, there was no recourse for her; sexism wasn't even a word or concept. Sandra had no power to stop the discrimination, nor did she have the power of language to articulate and call out such offensive behaviour.

These instances of powerlessness never left Sandra, but nonetheless, she quickly climbed the ladder of success in the academic world through hard work, perseverance and critical thinking (and a little luck, she adds!). Now she is in a relative position of power in her profession and is acutely aware of that privilege. "One thing I have learned is to be much more aware

of mentoring younger female faculty, just to keep track and open possibilities, which is something that was absolutely not there for me.” Drawing on her own experiences of blatant sexism and alienation during her career, Sandra has taken on the responsibility of mentoring young academic women, critically interrogating ideas and models that perpetuate sexism, racism, and homophobia through her work. While actively trying to open doors for those typically underrepresented in the academy. “One thing I’ve consistently done is recognize places in the system where there are gatekeepers and put myself there and tried to open gates, essentially recognizing these places that power works.” These gatekeepers, in her profession, exist in national adjudication processes and awards, memberships to prestigious societies and groups, and chairing special committees – all of which Sandra has done. “You have to be in a particular place to subvert the system,” she notes.

Doing anti-discrimination work takes many forms. “I don’t think activism is only reduced to the active body; it is also the active mind,” she observes. “For me, being able to unearth or expose the matrix or subvert a concept is as important as going to a march.” Or, as Sandra points out, “Sometimes in order to get ahead, we have to step back and allow space,” meaning “the social justice tent is much bigger than gender, and sometimes we, white feminist academics, aren’t attentive enough to building alliances and being supportive. I think it’s as much an expression of social justice and solidarity to take a step back to make spaces [for all different kinds of women] than to occupy them,” she explains.

Being a university professor is the last thing her family and community expected, especially in political science. For that reason, Sandra describes herself as “self propelled” and “self charting” throughout her entire academic career. She endured the harassment, bullying, estrangement, and opposition for many years of her life pursuing a career she loved, but now, she has been given the power to work against those types of forces, particularly inside the academy. Anti-discrimination work, as she has shown, can take on a multiplicity of forms in a variety of different spaces with equally different approaches. Each are valuable in their own way as people from all walks of life work towards ending discrimination.

By Jennifer Braun

MWSSA Conversation

Older women can bring a rich treasury of experiences, positive and negative, with gender discrimination. When they come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and experiences in many parts of the world, the conversation is even richer. And this is true as a lively group gathers at Multicultural Women and Seniors Services Association in south Edmonton to share a delicious lunch and strong ideas. They are passionate in expressing anger about situations they feel are wrong and yet full of optimism about how it is possible to make change for the better

They start in a simple way, noting how often women do all the household work and are still expected to bring in income for the family. “Too often we are taken for granted at best and suppressed at worst,” says one. This leads to the observation that gender discrimination is not always overt but lurks under the surface, “You feel it,” is how one describes it. They agree on the need to insist on more open talk about what it is, why it happens, and what to do about it— discussion involving men too.

There is concern the issues are sometimes treated too superficially by blaming a certain culture or religion. “Islam respects women,” one notes, and it does no good to advancing equality if complex issues with social and economic aspects are hastily painted as the fault of a religion. Many of the women have direct experience of “honour” violence or the uneven access to schooling in other parts of the world and agree there must be change but are not sure change can be imposed.

“We need to create spaces where all genders and ages can be meeting each other and doing things together,” is one suggestion. “Involve community and religious leaders,” is another piece of advice.

“Education has a strong part to play in a better future. Education is not only classroom education, it is life experience, courage. The mother can instill the idea of equality and confidence, as my mother did with me,” one declares. “She was not educated but made the children go to school, never discriminated between boys and girls.”

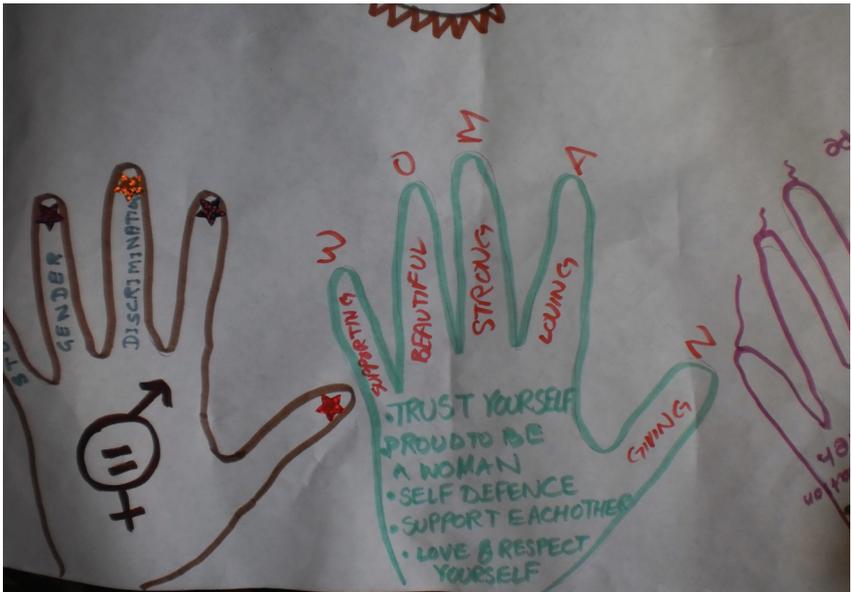
In the community beyond the family, women describe discrimination in jobs, not getting raised to higher positions when men did, and falling behind because of time away for maternity. They feel human resources policies and procedures could be used to address these

issues, including better training for supervisors. They shared experiences of having to leave their own work because a male partner got a new job and they had to move somewhere else with him.

The group agrees women cannot ensure an end to gender discrimination on their own. “Teach boys to respect everybody. Boys learn from their father. If the father does not respect the mother and daughters, the boys learn that too,” one asserts.

“More training and workshops, sometimes with the safety of no men present where we can talk more freely as we are today,” one woman offers as a need. “But men and women should be educated together so that they learn from their different views,” another suggests. “We have to get media to stop repeating stereotypes about women and men,” a third says.

The conversation moves on to notice that issues of race and age can also make life more difficult for some women. “Just seeing you are a different colour causes some to shun you,” one says of her experiences. “Elderly women who have language problems and are in institutions are facing a lot of discrimination and negligence,” says another.



Taking care of ourselves

The Canadian folk singer Bob Bossin, who often performed at advocacy events, used to sell t-shirts at his shows with the message, "Just 'cause you're changing the world don't mean you can't have fun." And Angela Davis, after nearly 50 years of community activism, says self-care is vital to working for change but that it is not just a duty for individuals, but is also about being able to be part of community.

This advice is important for those who are busy with action to address the serious challenges of gender discrimination.

It is difficult to keep doing good work on an important issue if a person is alone. Keeping time to maintain relationships with family and friends is important. The support that comes from having caring people at hand is great.

Time to just take it easy or to have some fun is important. You can even keep sharing ideas about gender discrimination while at the playground with your children or on a bike ride through the river valley trails with a friend, but you are getting a break too. Fatigue can reduce the effectiveness of people working on a cause to the point where time is being poured in with no results. Being rested and able to do good quality work is usually a better route.

When people care passionately about a cause, they may make themselves (and others) feel guilty if not enough is being given or done. But guilt has been proven not to be an effective way to get good results either. More effective is the lavish use of praise and appreciation, building into activities lots of time to honour volunteers and activists and celebrate their contributions.

Positive attitudes have strong value in quality of work. When people are looking at the problems and hurts caused by gender discrimination and how it seems to persist in so many places, it is easy to move to a place of mostly feeling angry or discouraged. But the poet and politician Vaclav Havel, a long-time activist on social issues, said, "Hope is remembering that what you are doing makes sense." Being able to retain a sense of hope is a strong resource in working on a difficult issue. Hope is not the easy belief that things will all turn out well in the end but the confidence that there IS a better way and that the effort to move in that direction is the correct thing to do.

Slave Lake Conversation

The low afternoon sun brightens a chilly January day as women gather in a room at the new Government Centre, built after the devastating fire of 2011, in Slave Lake. Most participants are Indigenous, and the conversation is especially enriched by the participation of an Elder from the community.

“I was experiencing gender discrimination when I went to school, and it’s not very comfortable to see it still alive and well in town,” observes one. The lack of respect for women is identified by nearly all as hurtful and a limiting factor. This disrespect is not only in attitudes and words but also in the difficulty of getting a fair chance. Inadequate child care services, workplaces that do not accommodate flexible hours for single mothers, poor parental leave rules, lack of assistance to address high rent for housing, and only having access to low-paying jobs are all realities that trap women at the bottom in a small town. One woman shares the crushing experience of losing a job she enjoyed because she was breaking into an area where no woman had gone before and the men there were determined to be rid of her. “Child bearing should be a celebration, but instead it is a barrier,” one woman observes.

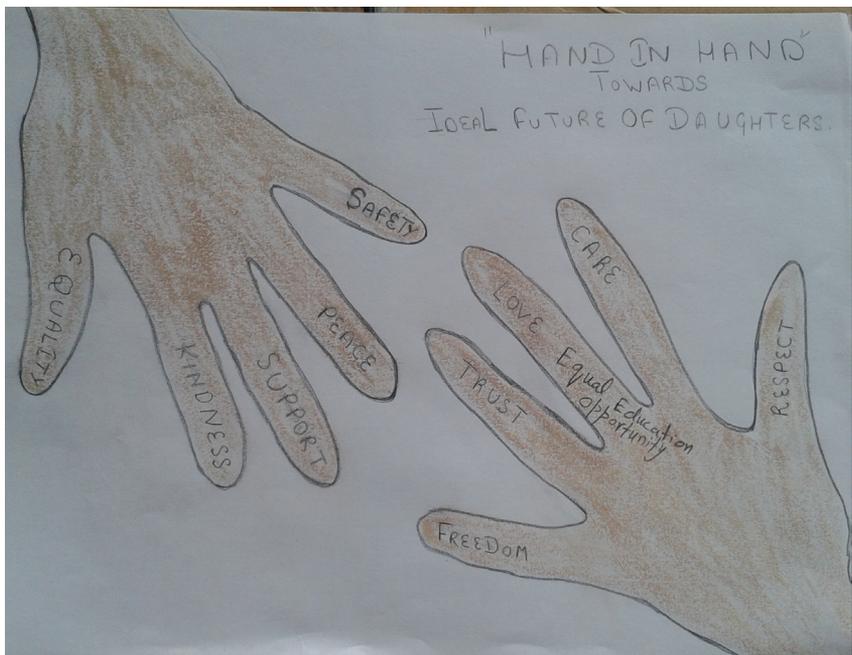
Several women share personal experiences of dropping out of school or putting up with abuse because of low self-esteem. They want more to be done to honour women, both through formal programs like awards and in education that focuses on their rights and importance to society. They are positive about the local friendship centre and how it provides a place for women to come together for companionship and services, but are troubled at the deeply-rooted patriarchy found in their rural and small town context, fearing that until that can be changed, it is hard to make progress even if they do support each other.

The conversation also considers the overlap of racism and sexism. There is a lot of interest in traditional parenting

practices and sorrow at how the residential schools had a large role in knowledge and skills being lost for many. There is deep concern about the many children taken into foster care today so that families continue to be destroyed. "Children don't experience love," says one. The value of multi-generational families is noted, and there is a feeling when you have single mothers with no one to share child rearing it will lead to more difficulties, especially in relation to boys.

"How would we make a better world?" the women muse. "We need to raise our voices," is agreed. "We ourselves have been hurt by abuse, and we need to be supporting others who are facing that now," offers one woman. "Let's pay attention to mental health, especially with young teen girls, and get them talking about ideas to make life better for women, how to move society away from discrimination."

While the conversation has often been about hurts and problems, as it comes to an end the declaration, "Women are strong. We can change things," provides a point of agreement.



Individual profile - Teresa

Survival. This was the only word that mattered to former gang associate Teresa Strong. For almost 16 years, Teresa lived the vicious and unforgiving lifestyle of a gang associate. Consumed by addiction and perpetually looking for somebody to get high with, gang-life was all Teresa had. The 33-year-old mother of four gave up that lifestyle almost eight years ago but is still involved, albeit in a different, with women and gang members. Working and volunteering part time with the Elizabeth Fry Society of Edmonton and full-time with Metis Child and Family Services in the SNUG Program, Teresa is passionately pursuing her desire to get young girls out of gangs. "Women [in gangs] are disposable," she shares, "I just want to work with young people to deter them from that life."

Teresa's story is marked by violence and abuse everywhere in her life, from the time Teresa was a child up until she left gang life. Teresa grew up in Fort McMurray, Alberta, with her dad, step mom, and sister. "My dad was always working...My mom abandoned me, so I sought attention elsewhere." Teresa and her sister would go and visit their mom in Edmonton, but while they were there, their step dad would beat them. "My step dad was abusive to me and my sister. I saw my step dad beat my mom, too." Resentment and anger slowly built up, and at a young age Teresa turned to drugs and alcohol and eventually prostitution to escape her disastrous home life. The violence and abuse didn't end there.

She worked the high track in Calgary prostitution and eventually the streets of Edmonton for over ten years, "basically to feed my addiction," she admits. As Teresa talks about life on the streets, she describes the consistently horrifying lifestyle women must endure, a lifestyle of perpetual and unforgiving physical and sexual violence. "Men will use women for sex and rape and kill her. I've lost many friends to the streets," laments Teresa. "I don't know how many times I've seen guys beat women, everywhere I went." Even within the gangs themselves she says "You see a lot of Aboriginal males and white males beating on their women or putting their women out on the street." Teresa endured countless abusive boyfriends

and pimps. “I got into needles, smoking crack, anything ,and everything, with a lot of abusive boyfriends in between.”

Tolerating this cruelty was just “part of survival”, Teresa tells me, matter-of-factly. She says she didn’t know any other way but violence and discrimination: “It was the norm back then, it’s all I knew.” When asked to describe her feelings about her life, Teresa says, “Numb. Like I was so numb from the drugs, there was no emotion,” and so “I didn’t even know I was being discriminated against.” This numbness and acceptance of abuse is common among women who work the streets, Teresa assures me, because “We’re just hookers and trash...we’re nothing.”

After getting clean and turning her life around, Teresa came to realize that she was not, in fact, “trash” or “nothing”, but a valuable and worthwhile human being, strong, smart, and fiercely determined. Being physically and sexually assaulted is not, in fact, a normal way of life, nor should it ever be tolerated. “It irritates me, aggravates me, makes me angry. There needs to be changes. Now I wouldn’t let anyone discriminate against me, now I have my own voice. Don’t mess with me!” Teresa is adamant about this. In fact, she is so passionate about it she has dedicated her life to helping others get out of gangs and off the street. “That’s my heart and soul: to get kids out of gangs, young girls, especially. If you deter the women from the gang life, you’re gonna get them off the street too.” Getting into a gang is easy, but getting out is the tough part, she says.

Many women who want to leave a gang feel alone and without support. Teresa hopes to change that by becoming an addictions counsellor and forming a support group that centres on women who are trying to leave gang life behind. She also gives talks to women at CEASE (Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation) in the Building Bridges Program, a program that she herself successfully completed a number of years ago. She sees herself as a ‘real live’ success story and a model for other women who want out. “You have to have empathy for other women, regardless of where they are in their life. Everybody has a journey.” Women should not have to endure physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, no matter where they chose to work, and Teresa is working hard to make sure that doesn’t happen. “We are survivors,” she emphasizes, “and discrimination is huge and it shouldn’t be.”

By Jennifer Braun

CIWA Conversation

The board room at Calgary Immigrant Women's Association fills up on a winter afternoon with women (and a few children), some who had been in Canada only a short while and others with many years living here, women from a dozen places of origin around the world. They all share the desire to hear what others had to say about creating a world without gender discrimination.

One has come prepared with a quote from Napoleon Bonaparte, "Give me educated women and you will have an educated generation," to start things off.

The theme that women need to create the world they want to live in animates the afternoon. "Women should trust themselves that they can do it, women should be able to balance work and life in order that men should not take advantage of them," is how one explains the task. They also come back repeatedly to talk about the importance of women looking out for each other, offering support or comfort— or a challenge when needed.

Affordable and accessible post-secondary education for all women is a top priority. "Women are capable of everything, but they need education." Formal education is not the only approach however, and all agreed being able to gather and share in a conversation like this day is also valuable. "Education is not only in a classroom, day-to-day life offers many opportunities."

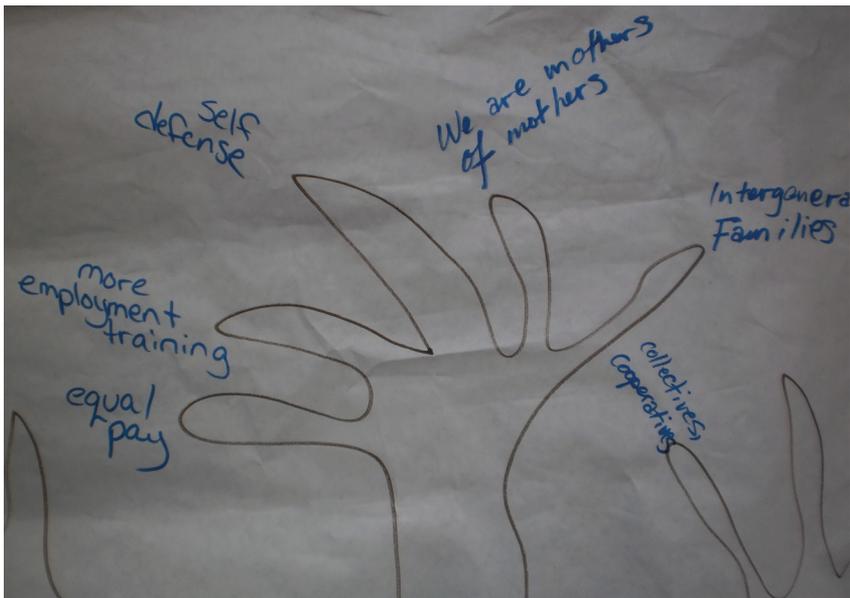
"If you want it and know what you want, you go for it," "Let us continue to support even the women who are not educated," "Women should initiate, educate and support each other," are all comments offered. The importance of a large public event to focus on ending gender discrimination is suggested as a form of education of the broader community.

That ending gender discrimination cannot only involve women is clearly understood, whether in the context of

paying attention to the values little boys learn or in resisting partners who feel women should just stay home and cook. The potential of supportive men was illustrated by one woman who shared, “My husband grew up seeing his mother do everything, and he does not want his wife to have a life like that.”

In changing attitudes, women see that other women can also make things difficult. One woman tells of being pregnant and her husband, born of a feudal conservative family, being told by his mother to prepare for the possibility the baby would be a girl, “as if a girl child is not a child.”

The need for courage is articulated. “Rather than stopping daughters from going out in the evening to study or work, you can train her to be able to face problems, even to learn self defense.” And women need to be not only taking on these issues themselves, but need to become active advocates for better public policy and services, agents of social change. “We have to take responsibility to make the future better.”



My Notes

My Notes

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When you invite 200 Alberta women to share ideas about creating a world where every daughter has the opportunity to pursue her goals and ambitions, free of gender discrimination, a wealth of good thinking is released. This handbook shares some of the results of 15 conversations that took place around the province.