

Antigonish Women's Resource Centre

Summer 2007 Newsletter

Heather Mayhew and Leslie Buckland-Nicks discuss "Why the Environment is a Women's Issue" at the AWRC/AWA Annual General Meeting in May 2007

We've all caught ourselves procrastinating and panicking about unfinished work. According to Heather Mayhew and Leslie Buckland-Nicks, who presented at the 2007 Annual General Meeting for the AWRC/AWA, that is how we should be feeling about the state of the world right now. "Global warming is here and the effects are being felt in many ways", says Mayhew.

And the effects are real. We are destroying our environment at an unprecedented rate. Our forests and oceans are being depleted of their rich flora and fauna, our soils and aquifers are severely threatened, and our supply of fossil fuels and natural gas is due to last only a couple more decades— if we're lucky. All this, combined with an ex-

ponentially increasing world population, is a recipe for global disaster.

While many people feel the environment is an important issue, it is seldom considered a women's issue. Yet, as Mayhew explains, evidence shows that "women, as a group, are the most affected by the environmental degradation of this planet", due to a combination of poverty (women make up at least 70% of the world's poor) and socially based roles and responsibilities.

There are many examples of women being disproportionately affected by climate change. The majority of those killed in the 2005 Asia Tsunami were women. During the extreme heat wave that hit France in 2003, significantly more



elderly women died than men.

What can be done? Google 'ecofeminism' to find out more about the environment as a women's issue. The most important thing is that we need to act now. "Environmental degradation, whether due to global warming or through toxic waste or deforestation, creates real poverty", Mayhew explains. "Women need to play a leading role in decision making about climate change adaptation and mitigation. "



AWRC Welcomes New Staff

The AWRC is pleased to welcome three new staff members to our team.

Denise Bowman, our new Women's Support Worker, is excited to be working at the AWRC. "I [love] the AWRC mandate that every person is an expert in their own life and the advocate's role is to walk alongside and support

women in their journeys", she says. Denise has an MA in counseling psychology, and in British Columbia she worked in career counseling for people with barriers to employment.

Denise is a seasoned globe-trotter. Born in Australia and having spent much of her life in BC, she has done volunteer work in countries

such as Kyrgyzstan, Kenya and Iraq, and is now experiencing Antigonish with her husband Shawn.

Melissa Arnott is the new Coordinator for *Justice Matters for Women: Rural Outreach in Guysborough and Antigonish Counties*. Melissa has a Bachelor of Social Work from St. Thomas University. **(cont'd p. 2)**

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Newsletter prepared by Betsy MacDonald, AWRC Summer Staff Member



New AWRC staff Kalysa Archibald, Melissa Arnott and Denise Bowman.



I'll Put it Down

(by Abena Amoako-Tuffour)

"Don't break you bones
sister

only got 'em for
sometime."

Tell me that when I'm not
carrying my world
in the crevices of my spine.

tell me one more time and
I might put it down.

Just let me wash this load,
pay this bill, pull this shift,
and lose ten pounds

and I'll put it down, I'll put
it down.

Lord help me carry it or
let me put it down.

New staff, continued

She spent the past year working as a Community Outreach Worker at Addictions Services in Antigonish. Melissa is thrilled to be joining the AWRC and is very excited to be working in Guysborough County.

Kalysa Archibald is join-

ing the AWRC as the new Healthy Relationships for Youth Program Coordinator. Kalysa is a graduate of Acadia University where she completed an honors in Political Science and English. She has taught English and has worked as a manager and corporate trainer in

Japan. Kalysa is thrilled to have the opportunity to return home and continue to grow as an educator and facilitator while contributing to the community.

The AWRC extends a warm welcome to our three new workers!

Celebrating Newcomers!

AWRC summer students have been working on ways to welcome new families to Antigonish. The first step taken was to gather key community members for a meeting at the AWRC to share plans and pool ideas. The meeting was facilitated by Abena Amoako-Tuffour and Betsy Macdonald and included representatives from agencies such as the Regional Development Authority (ARDA) and the St.

FX Enterprise Development Centre (XEDC).

A Welcoming Celebration was held on June 12th at St. James United Church. Guests mingled over refreshments as they met new people and enjoyed musical and dance performances. Among some of the guests were Coady international Institute participants, St. FX international students and some of the Sisters of St. Martha's.

The next phase being planned to welcome newcomers is to provide a meeting space for newcomer women, with a focus on immigrants. The purpose of this is to give women a place to come for information that will help them adjust to life in Antigonish. It will also hopefully be a place where they can offer each other their skills, support and often much-needed company.

Congratulations to Outgoing AWRC Staff

This summer, the AWRC is saying "see you later" to four of our beloved staff members, Jean Crosby, Isabel Gillis, Jennifer Steylen and Meghan Mulcahy.

Jean Crosby has worked at the AWRC for many years on the Rural Youth Healthy Relationships and Healthy Relationships for Youth projects. Jean will be working in Guysborough, Sherbrooke and Canso with Mental Health Services.

Isabel Gillis has worked at the AWRC for the past six years. As a Women's Support Worker, Isabel has provided information and

help to women dealing with a variety of life issues. She will be leaving the AWRC temporarily to pursue a 14-month Masters of Education and Counseling at Acadia University. Through this she plans to further develop her skills so she can offer "one hundred and ten percent" to the women she works with. She leaves the AWRC with a message—"I'll be back."

Jennifer Steylen is the smiling face women see when they visit the AWRC on Fridays. Jennifer, a long-time AWRC volunteer and staff member, is beginning a

new chapter of her life in Halifax.

Meghan Mulcahy, the AWRC Rural Outreach Coordinator, has just completed her project entitled Justice Matters for Women: Rural Outreach in Guysborough and Antigonish Counties. Meghan will be pursuing her Masters in Social Work at McGill University starting this September. She will be returning to the AWRC in September 2008.

Good luck to our outgoing staff members. We'll miss you all!



Feminist News

The **Center for Woman's Global Leadership** is consulting with women across Canada to choose a theme for the 2007 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign. The campaign provides a vehicle for women to speak out, challenge obstacles and make our demands known as we struggle for a society that is free from violence against women. Recent themes have included: For the

Health of Women, For the Health of the World: No More Violence; Creating a Culture That Says 'No' to Violence Against Women; and Racism and Sexism: No More Violence.

'**Gender equality, work and health**', a new review published by the World Health Organization (WHO), documents the relationship between gender inequality and health and safety problems. It re-

views gender issues in research, policies and programmes on work and health, and highlights some specific issues for women, including the types of jobs they do, as well as their need to reconcile the demands of work and family. Read the full report: <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/>

Genderwork-health.pdf



Peering through the glass ceiling of academia

Think women have made it in the academic world? Think again! Ivory Towers: Feminist Audits is an annual postcard of statistical data on women and other equity groups. Here are the percentages of women holding various positions in the Canadian academic world:

- University Presidents (2007), 13%
- Tier 1 Canada Research Chairs (2006), 15.8%
- University Vice Presidents (2000), 17.2%
- Full Professors (2005), 18.8%
- Tier 2 Canada Research Chairs (2006), 27.3%
- Associate Professors (2005), 34.7%
- Assistant Professors (2005), 41.4%
- PhD Students Enrolled (2005), 45.6%
- Full-time Non-tenure Track Faculty (2005), 48%
- Master's Students Enrolled, 51.4%
- Undergraduate Students Enrolled (2005), 58.2%

Supportive Housing for Youth in Antigonish

In June, a group of community members came together at the AWRC to discuss a growing reality in Antigonish: youth homelessness.

While homelessness is not always apparent in rural communities, many young

people have no fixed address and have trouble finding safe, affordable housing. This is due in part to a gap in social and economic supports for people aged 16-19, which makes it easier for youth to 'fall through the cracks'.

The Housing Initiative for Youth in Antigonish (HIYA) is looking into ways to strengthen our community's response to homelessness. HIYA hopes to renovate a house which would provide a supportive environment for youth who are journeying toward independence.

AWRC Profile: Vangie Babin

"Why are they so helpful?" Those were Vangie Babin's thoughts when she first called the AWRC. Years later, Vangie is living proof that the values of the Women's Centre—fairness, gentle support, and belief in women's strength and wisdom—are woven into the Centre's everyday work. Ask anyone who knows Vangie, and they will tell you she personifies these values while maintaining unfaltering humility, a calm, gentle demeanor, and a sharp sense of humor.

Vangie moved to Antigonish from Inverness, Cape

Breton in 1992. She worked as a babysitter and waitress until an unexpected turn of events led her to enroll in a computer course in New Glasgow. When seeking a student placement, she was told to check out the AWRC. Still baffled by the helpfulness of the woman she had first spoken with on the phone (turns out it was Katherine Reed!), Vangie went and was accepted to do a placement at the Women's Centre. She was first hired in October 1994.

Vangie remembers times when she, Lucille and

Katherine were the only AWRC staff persons due to limited funding. Having witnessed the Women's Centre grow over the years, Vangie can testify to the resilience of the organization and its staff. "It grows on you", Vangie says about the AWRC. "I can't imagine working anywhere else."

It's a good thing that is the case, because it's hard to imagine life at the AWRC without Vangie. Her incredible skill set and compassionate approach to working with women make her indispensable to the Women's Centre and the community.



Vangie Babin, Office Manager and Women's Service Coordinator, has been working at the AWRC for 13 years.

Come visit us at the AWRC!

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Handfuls

by Abena Amoako-Tuffour

She comes with big black oval ear-rings,

A ferocious laugh and the scent of nutmeg and paprika

Sometimes at once, sometimes on alternate days

She comes with the impressions of four ex-lovers,

Two handfuls of tears if added up over the years

From true love, fake love, near love and broken love.

She comes with memories of salty seas, playing house,

Childhood on beaches but mostly in trees

When abundant manes of hair escape the attention of little girls

Until it's too late

And so,

She comes with long extension braids,

Black as coal before the diamond

She comes with the same few thoughts that make her laugh every time!

Every time...

She comes with the need for purpose,

The fear of not making it in the end,

A spontaneous craving for jujubes

And the flaw of pride.

She comes with laughter as her saving grace, just in case

Little baggage but lots of emotion, cocoa butter lotion,

Size nine feet, bright brown eyes,

A near white set of teeth, gap on the right side.

A parcel she is, bumpy from life lived.

Tight lightly, tied, tightly

With a hole in the corner

For space to grow.

Justice Matters for Women: Reflections by Meghan Mulcahy

Justice Matters for Women: Rural Outreach in Guysborough and Antigonish Counties was created in response to requests by women in Guysborough County to extend the services of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre to their area. The program provides law-related information, advocacy, accompaniment and problem-solving support to women and adolescent girls one day per week each in Canso, Guysborough and Sherbrooke. It is funded through the Nova Scotia Law Foundation.

Meghan Mulcahy, the outgoing Rural Outreach

coordinator, reflects on her work: "Coordinating the Outreach for Rural Women Program has been a wonderful and insightful experience for me", she says. In an area where issues such as unemployment and outmigration pose challenges to families and communities, Meghan has "learned a tremendous amount from the women I've met since the outreach program began".

Meghan's work has been received warmly in Antigonish and Guysborough counties. "Many community members noted that such a program is not typically offered in their rural communities and that they are excited that it finally

is", she says. A highlight has been the Inspire Program, which has engaged 71 adolescent girls in group discussions around a variety of issues such as self esteem and healthy relationships.

In speaking about the women she has worked with through the Program, Meghan says, "I am in awe of the strength and resilience they consistently show in the face of often tremendously challenging barriers and am honored to work with them to pursue the changes they wish to see in their lives."

