



Nellie's Newsletter

Nellie's Mission

Our Mission is to operate programs and services for women and children who have and are experiencing oppressions such as violence, poverty and homelessness. Nellie's is a community based feminist organization which operates within an anti-racist, anti-oppression framework. We are committed to social change through education and advocacy, to achieve social justice for all women and children.

Message from Executive Director

I want to begin by welcoming a new group of remarkable women to Nellie's Board of Directors. Welcome Carol Allain, Marcia Beck, Susan Hamilton, Erica Opoku and Lynda Roy. I would like to thank those who are leaving us this year for their leadership, vision and commitment to Nellie's. Best wishes and heartfelt thanks to our friends, Nadine Sookermany, Renu Madhane, Jyoti Singh and Monika Badih, for all your work with Nellie's. We will miss you all very much!

Nellie's Annual General meeting was held on September 28th. We celebrated with First Nations drumming and music with Roula Said and Maryam Hassem-Toller. In addition, we had Akua Bejamin, a longtime friend of Nellie's and Nobel Peace Prize nominee, speak about women's rights and previewed Nellie's new agency video. Special thanks to Ryerson University film student Caine Chow, who made Nellie's video possible. Our Annual Report for 2004/2005 is available online and highlights Nellie's work.

This summer we were very fortunate to have two human resource development students working over the summer. Many thanks to Carol Che and Ada Lee, who worked in the areas of finance, administration and fundraising. At the end of the summer, we said goodbye to students Felicia Oiboh, Leila Haddad and Fatima Sankoh. Thank you all for your contributions at both our Shelter and Community Support and Outreach program.



Welcome to all 2005/2006 volunteers!!!

October 2005 , Issue #17

In September we kicked off our United Way Campaign by participating in the Leaps and Bounds Walk and in the CN Tower stair climb. Women from our Community Support and Outreach program and the staff team contributed their talents, making and selling samosas, and in the process raised \$220.00 for the United Way. Staff members Wendy Sung Aad and Madeleine Mariano joined the United Way Speakers Bureau and were out talking about Nellie's and the importance of the United Way in our community. This October, our community program location received a sprucing up with a new coat of paint from a group of wonderful volunteers through the United Way Days of Caring.

The fall is a busy time in the community. Nellie's participated in the March for Dignity at Queens Park on Sept. 29. People from across the province, walked, wheeled and rode to demand better income security in the Province of Ontario. Nellie's marched in the annual Take Back the Night March, spreading the message that all women have the right to safely walk the streets at night without worry or fear. During the month of November, we will join with other women's groups to mark woman abuse awareness month in the province of Ontario through education and action to end violence in the lives of women.

This issue of Nellie's newsletter examines the issues of women and mental health. Discussions of women's mental health are complicated; experiencing violence and oppression has a great impact on our health. We believe that the social determinants of health are integral aspects in addressing women's mental health.

"I feel that, essentially, when a doctor prescribes a pill for me it is to put him out of my misery." - Anonymous

In Sisterhood,

Cindy Cowan

Women and Mental Health



The social determinants of health are the socio-economic conditions that not only influence the health of individuals, but of communities as a whole. They also determine the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs and cope with the environment.

Many studies have identified that one of the cumulative outcomes of social inequalities, systemic racial discrimination, sexism, poverty and the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples and members of racialized groups (including immigrants and refugees), is the debilitating impact on the mental health for members of these communities. (K.Kafele, 2004) Nellie's looks at the issue of women and mental health within a holistic perspective that links the spiritual, emotional, mental, physical, social, cultural, linguistic, economic and broader environmental aspects of health.

Traditionally, systems and perspectives of mental health have been constructed on Euro-centric, medical, and patriarchal views and practices. Women have not fared well within the mental health system. Currently, mental health assessments and services do not take into consideration factors that affect women, such as their experiences of sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism and classism. These lived realities have an impact on how women's rights and health issues are viewed and constructed, and also deter women from accessing services and demanding appropriate care and support. Women's voices and their many different and complex experiences are poorly represented within mental health organizational structures, clinical services, policies, research and practices. This is the reality, despite the fact that women are significantly more likely than men to be diagnosed with a mental disorder in their lifetime. (CMHA, *Women and Mental Health*, Feb. 2003.) Many of these diagnoses are superficial and address the presenting symptoms without considering or addressing the root causes for the acute levels of stress and disempowerment that lead to many of the "mental health disorders" that women experience.

There have been studies that have identified a high rate of mental illness within the homeless population. The condition of being homeless or living in poverty results in extreme physical and emotional stress, and so it is not surprising that women in these circumstances are identified as having mental health issues. What is known is that many of the women who are homeless and have been diagnosed as having mental issues have been survivors of childhood abuse. According to the CMHA, at least 49 per cent are victims of childhood sexual abuse; 51 per cent are victims of childhood physical abuse. (*Ibid.*)

Mental health diagnoses in women, such as depression and eating disorders, have their roots in the high levels of systemic and personal violence that they experience. There has, however, been little acknowledgement of this reality in the treatment options offered to women. Even more importantly, our legal, social, economic and political systems still perpetuate structures that ensure that women will experience violence as a regular part of their lives.

In Canada we incarcerate women with mental health issues. It has been identified that major psychiatric diagnoses are more prevalent among incarcerated women than men. Federally incarcerated women are three times more likely to be depressed, self-abusive and suicidal, compared to incarcerated men. And 68 per cent of federally incarcerated women reported childhood physical abuse; 54 per cent reported sexual abuse. Among aboriginal women, 90 per cent reported physical and 61 per cent sexual abuse. (CMHA, *Women and Mental Health*, Feb. 2003.)

Appropriate, culturally relevant support for women with mental health issues remains a concern. This lack of service has resulted in women having to rely, or not, on a mainstream psychiatric system that does not begin to address the issues in these women's lives. Women end up on the streets, in jails, overmedicated, and incarcerated in institutions. Studies have shown that an overwhelming number of women receive psychiatric treatment when describing symptoms identical to those for which men receive a physiological diagnosis. Studies also confirm a high incident of the prescription of psychotropic drugs for women as compared to men. (Penfold /Walker 1983).

For women who have been assessed with a mental health condition, there are few other health conditions that bring with them such stigma, isolation and shame. Many times prescribed treatments, such as medication and hospitalization, do not address the underlying root causes of conditions such as depression and can do more harm to women. There are serious gaps in the mental health system. We need to ensure that research, policies and services understand and reflect the complexities of women's experiences and voices. Above all, we need to work together as women to deconstruct and reconstruct our society in ways that are equitable, inclusive and participatory, and respect those that are the most vulnerable.

Farah's Story*

* not real names



Farah has suffered from depression. She was hospitalized many times over the last year, and had been taking heavy doses of anti-depressant medication. Farah left her home country and came to Canada as a refugee. Her partner was murdered back home, and she herself had been a victim of torture. Farah was forced to flee the country and leave her 12-year-old daughter there with friends.

Farah heard about Nellie's from a neighbour and began attending the women's program. At first she was shy, but Farah began to talk with the other women and share experiences. She talked about how unhappy she was, and how lonely and difficult it was in this country. She missed her daughter, and did not know where she was, fearing that she would never see her again. The process of women sharing their experiences was powerful and Farah made new friends and felt less isolated.

She talked about how unhappy she was, and how lonely and difficult it was in this country. Nellie's Community Support workers spoke with Farah about her experiences back home, and the

violence she had survived. Farah was referred and went to counselling to help her address both the murder of her partner, and the torture she had experienced. She found a new doctor who helped her lower her medication, and she began sleeping and eating more regularly.

Farah joined a program that helps women who are newcomers find employment in their fields. She continues to come to Nellie's to visit with her friends, and has recently located her daughter. We helped her begin the process of sponsorship. Farah no longer feels like ending her life and even though she still struggles with depression, she has hope.

Jessica's Story*

Maria and her two children Jessica, 13, and Reanne, eight, came to Nellie's Community Support and Outreach program seeking assistance after a recent violent assault by her husband. Maria decided this time to leave him for good.

The emotional impact on Jessica and her sister was devastating. Jessica could not sleep and was having regular nightmares. She was acting out at school, and her grades fell. Jessica had begun to self-injure, cutting her arms and legs. She was also not eating and losing weight. Maria was worried, blamed herself, and was unable to understand or help her daughter.

The emotional impact on Jessica and her sister was devastating. Jessica could not sleep and was having regular nightmares. All the children received counselling and support to help address the immediate and long-term affect of violence. In addition, Jessica spoke to Nellie's Child and

Youth Advocate about her feelings of anger with her father. She talked about how cutting helped her "feel," and how she felt ugly, because she was fat and stupid. In time, and as she began to trust, Jessica spoke about her father touching her in bad ways.

The Child Advocate helped Jessica, her mom and sister get further specialized legal and counselling support. The Child Advocate provided support to help Maria understand and cope with what had happened to her and her family. Jessica began to see a therapist, and to attend a support group for

The Child Advocate helped Jessica, her mom and sister get further specialized legal and counselling support. young women with eating disorders. The support group continues to be a safe place, where Jessica is healing and learning new ways to cope with the abuse she has experienced.



Program Update - The Shelter, by Irene Jaakson, Program Manager

Note: For safety reasons, we can't show pictures of women and children from the Shelter Program.



With the Autumnal Equinox almost upon us, we have had time to reflect on the summer that has just passed us by. We attended AfroFest 2005, an event to promote and celebrate African cultures in Toronto through music and dance. The festival has featured many of the greatest stars of Africa, and we spent the weekend enjoying their talent.

Caribana was another celebration not to be missed. Thousands of brilliantly costumed masqueraders and dozens of trucks carrying live soca, calypso, steel pan, reggae and salsa artists jammed the 1.5 km. parade route all day, to the delight of women and children of Nellie's – along with hundreds of thousands of others!

What was *intended* to be a quiet picnic turned into an event to remember. With chicken, macaroni salad, sweets and all the fixins' for a picnic at the beach, we headed out to Kew Gardens for an afternoon in August. That's when the first "sack race" was held, and pretty much when "quiet" turned to rousing! The sack races were followed with gripping games of badminton, soccer and hide and seek. No picnic would be complete without a running race, but the rule in this one was that the participants had to race with a spoon in their mouth, and an egg on the spoon. Good thing the eggs were hardboiled!



Maureen from St. Christopher House gave a second workshop on Income Security

As we move forward into fall, women and children head back to school. Special events programming will include feasts, events in the community, speakers and social, recreational and educational programs.



Mr. Tang showing his expertise on "Facial Massage"



Bashir the chef, teaching economical festival food

Jackie, Loui and Peggy-Gail from Parkdale Legal Clinic spoke on the "Ontario Works – Income Security Program"



Nicole Morgan from Criminal Injury Compensation Board gave a workshop on criminal injuries



The Community Support Program made Nellie's history this year with its first annual camping trip. With generous support from Moorelands, 25 women and children enjoyed five days of camping, at a site about three hours north of Toronto. The excitement in the days leading up to the camping trip was palpable; the children could hardly contain themselves. And when the day finally arrived, 754 Queen Street was filled – practically at dawn – in anticipation of departure. The camp was a total success: hiking, swimming, canoeing and kayaking were just the beginning. Crafts, marshmallow toasts and campfires made the week an event to remember.



"It's so exciting!!"



"I'm ready to climb up the rope!"



"My favourite place to be here – Kawagama Lake!!"



A sunny day with a boat ride!



"Let's build a castle"



The summer camp project benefited 8 families with 15 kids.

In the fall, we will continue to do our anti-bullying and anti-racism workshops with school-aged children in partnership with Moorelands.

The "Hershare" program has begun and will include plans for Tai Chi, Yoga and First Aid/CPR Training.

The holiday season will be upon us before we know it, which means the CSO will hold its annual Festival of Lights Party.

Great Art Glad Heart Art Auction

By Gellien Lai, Finance Manager

Our deepest appreciation goes out to the artists who participated in this year's Nellie's Annual Art Auction! You all contributed to the success of the event, and we really hope that in 2006 you will come back again and be one of our signature artists for next year's event. The diversity of the artwork enriched and stimulated the auction. Of course, we cannot miss thanking Councillor Olivia Chow, our excellent and talented auctioneer who added sparkle to the evening. Finally, many thanks to everybody who attended the evening to help, to bid and to support Nellie's. We look forward to seeing you all in June of next year.



Guests sharing a great time with Olivia at our art auction



The crowd at the auction

Thank you to this year's participating artists: Adam Lodzinski; Alva Gao; Anna Gauci; Babs Collier; Bao-Qing Meng; Catherine Heard; Charles Taylor; Chiquita Phillips; Christa Galligan; Clive Shirley; David Hu; David Hunter; David Mayer; David Wong; Diana Li; Eddy Lui; Elizabeth Bacon; Erika Burck; Ethol Christensen; Eva Lewarne; Frances Ferdinands; Gellien Lai; GongYu Lin; Grace Channer; Gregory Robins; GunShan Zhu; Herman Grunfeld; Hugh Poon; Irina Badescu; Irene Jaakson; Jane Orr Novotny; Jen Silk; Jiin Yiong; Judy Thorley; Ken Tobias; Keng-Hing Wong; Kevin Fainbloom; Kim McCullough; Laura Horne; Leon Lau; Margaret Glew; Maria Rodrigues; Marita Engel; Nancy Howell; Noxious; Olina Lin; Patricia Ki; Pauline Dinham; Phillip Che;

Ramona Persaud; Robert Allen; Rose Marie Dickob; Ross Bonfanti; Sadko Hazihasanovic; Shannon Guiffiths; Sharmylae Taffe; Sherece Taffe; Steven Wilson; Tom Lane; Tracy Harvath; Wayne Sung; Yaojun Huang; and Yuko Okita. We'd also like to thank all our supporters, who came out to buy some great original art!



Volunteers at work

Message from the Board - Nellie's Staff Team

By Safia Ahmed, Board Treasurer



Nellie's staff is a diverse group of women, who bring with them multiple skills, enormous experiences, commitment and dedication to provide client-centered services to the women and children who come to the shelter, or who participate in Nellie's many community programs. These women are counsellors, child advocates, transitional housing workers, community development workers, and administrative and management staff.

On any given day, Nellie's staff team will provide counselling to women and children fleeing violence; advocate for clients to access essential services such as housing, legal, daycare; escort women and their children to courts, medical appointments, schools; offer after-care and community programs to women and children; participate in

community action groups working for social change; and work with funders and supporters of Nellie's to secure the resources needed to make all these things happen.



These women are united by their belief that every woman and child has the right to live a life free of violence and oppression, including homelessness and poverty. They work from a feminist framework and seek equality, freedom, justice, and peace for every woman and child. Their jobs are challenging and often times require resiliency, persistence, tact, and the consummate ability to navigate through bureaucracy to access services for clients. They have once again proven that they are up for the challenge. On behalf of the Board a big thank-you for jobs well done!

Special Thanks...

We appreciate the support from all of our donors, however due to limited space, those listed are major donors for the period of January to June 2005.

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Nellie's Community Events



Nellie's information booth at the Pride Community Fair

Nellie's team at the United Way Walkathon in Sept 25



Nellie's booth at the United Way Kick Off at City Hall

Board member Mary Byberg doing the 5K Walk for Nellie's at the Toronto Waterfront Marathon



Voices of Women – Our Volunteer Experience at Nellie's

By Fatima Sankoh and Leila Haddad



We consider our volunteer experience at Nellie's to be one of our lifetime achievements. We are very grateful to Regroupement des Femmes Immigrantes Francophones who organized this project to provide work experience for immigrant women of francophone background. We both felt lucky to be assigned to volunteer with Nellie's.

During the past six months, we had the opportunity to encounter many diverse women of different cultures who were in need, and to learn how to help and provide support. We also learned about community issues, policies, how to organize programs and worked as part of a staff team. We thank Nellie's for giving us this great opportunity

and for all the support from the staff team. Thanks especially to Maddy, Asha and Sandy from the Community Support and Outreach team.

In 2004, Nellie's wrote in support of project funding for Le Regroupement des Femmes Immigrantes Francophones, (RFIF). RFIF provides service to French-speaking African women, runs a resource centre and offers information sessions on employment. This project provided an opportunity for francophone youth to develop practical job readiness skills and meet the needs of the labour market. We were pleased to be a partner in this project and provide a placement opportunity for young women. This project benefited our programs, as we provide services to immigrant francophone women. This enabled us to provide a higher level of support to this community. In return, we were able to help young women gain skills and experience in the social service/community sector.



Special thanks to Olivia Chow, City Councillor as our Auctioneer at Nellie's 2nd annual fundraiser, Great Art Glad Heart



Cindy receiving a cheque from Yvan Bourdeau and Maurice Hudon of BMO Fountain of Hope



Thank you to Summerhill LCBO for hosting a BBQ fundraiser for Nellie's



Cindy thanking Caine Chow for donating the production of Nellie's Information Video

Nellie's Calendar of Events

November	Woman Abuse Awareness Month & National Native American Awareness Month (US)
Nov 1	Diwali – Festival of Lights (Hindu)
Nov 4	Eid ul-Fitr (Islam)
Nov 25	International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
December	Universal Human Rights Months
Dec 6	National Day for Remembrance & Action on Violence Against Women – Dec 6 Fund
Dec 26-Jan 2	Hannukah (Jewish)
Dec 26-Jan 1	Kwanzaa (Afro-American)
Jan 1	New Years Day
Jan 29	Chinese New Year – The Year of Dog
February	Black History Month

Note: Please visit our website at www.nellies.org for more community and cultural celebrations for 2005

Nellie's Contact Information

Mailing Address:

970 Queen Street East, PO Box 98118
Toronto, ON M4M 1J0

Shelter

Tel: 416-461-1084
TTY: 416-461-7561
Fax: 416-461-0976
E-mail: programs@nellies.org

Community Support

Tel: 416-461-3404, 416-461-2052
Fax: 416-461-0970
E-mail: outreach@nellies.org

Transitional Housing & Support

Tel: 416-461-0980
TTY: 416-461-0625
Fax: 416-461-0970
E-mail: tsw@nellies.org

Administration

Tel: 416-461-8903 Fax: 416-461-0970
E-mail: community@nellies.org
Website: www.nellies.org
Program, Volunteers, Students: 416-461-0739
Financial Donations: 416-461-0769
In Kind Donations: 416-461-0521
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