

Shelter Update

By Cecelia Paul, Hawa Bogor and Meghan Hogg, Counsellors



Staff were excited receiving the Toronto Star Santa Boxes

From October to December, we celebrated Diwali, Thanksgiving, the Festival of Lights, and Eid al Adha, enjoying African and middle-eastern food. We also held a weekly tea party. Women sipped different flavours of tea, sampled home-made goodies, and enjoyed each other's company. In November the women learned how to cook on a fixed budget.

December was a month of carol singing, as the Christmas Season rolled in. Lights and various decorations hung from our humongous tree, and we all enjoyed the smell of fruitcakes and delicious food. We also participated in Kwanzaa, which features aspects of the African-Canadian and -American experience in North America. A few women attended the December 6 Rally commemorating the 14 women who were killed in the Montreal Massacre.

Goals for the New Year include education and empowerment. We had speakers on topics such as nutrition, and tenant rights, workshops on self care, and instruction in WEN-DO women's self defense.

February 1 marks the beginning of a historic Black History Month. We looked at the history of the civil rights movement in North America, and recognizing achievements of great black women in history, and in our own lives and communities. Weekly programs provided a space for women to share their experiences. On Valentine's Day, the women celebrated by putting love for themselves front and centre. They enjoyed a brunch, and free mini makeovers in the form of donated haircuts.

March brought International Women's Day. Nellie's staff, students, volunteers and women huddled together for warmth and marched to recognize the strength of women globally.

We also celebrated International Women's Day at a Diva Workshop. Toronto-area artist Supria Karmakar helped our women create their own personal diva, a testament to their strength and individuality.



Instructor Supria Karmakar at IWD Inner Diva Workshop

Some of the events we are planning for the months of April to June include celebrations for Earth Day, National Aboriginal Day, and Mother's Day. Our annual backyard clean-up and planting day will take place at the end of May, but we will be doing something different this time — planting native plants to reduce our use of water and attract beneficial insects. There will be lots more and we will give you a full report in our next newsletter.



Black History Month Celebration



Poet Flavia Cosma from pathways of Canada treats us a reading featuring love and migration

CSO Update

By Adriana Pelayo, Outreach Worker



Dance with Cuban music

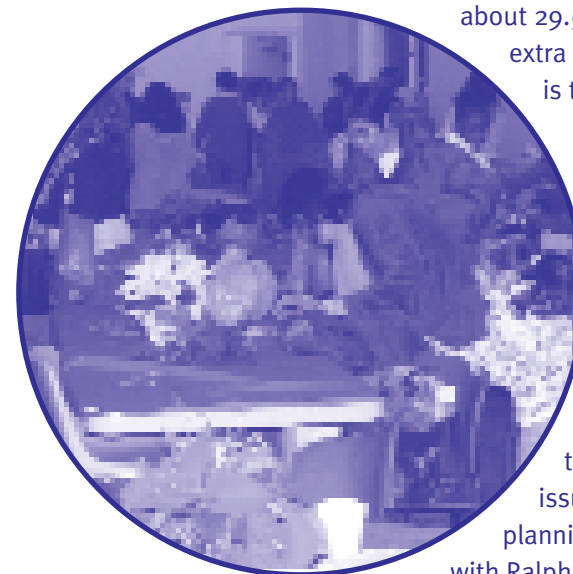
SiIn December, we held our annual Holiday party at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre. We had food from different countries, the traditional turkey, gifts for kids and moms, a cookie decoration contest, painting, singing; even Santa was there.

This winter was very cold, but our activities didn't slow down. In January and February we welcomed the Year of Ox with Chinese New Year celebrations. The holiday started with the new moon on the first day of the New Year on the Chinese calendar, and ended on the full moon 15 days later.



Thank you for the Cereal General Mills!

Do you know why Chinese New Year falls on a different date each year? The Chinese calendar is based on a combination of lunar and solar movements. The lunar cycle is about 29.5 days. In order to "catch up" with the solar calendar, the Chinese insert an extra month once every few years, usually seven years out of a 19-year cycle. This is the same as adding an extra day in a leap year.



Nellie's Annual Holiday Party

In February we celebrated Black History Month. The country we focused on was Cuba. Black History Month began in USA as Negro History Week in 1976 through the work of African-American scholar, Dr. Carter G. Woodson. In 1971, Toronto became the first municipality in Canada to proclaim Black History Month.

The Her Share group held workshops by Speakers from Yes Employment Services and Toronto District School Board to provide enhanced language training for immigrant women, and to offer health-related information on issues like diabetes, AIDS, and nutrition For the coming months, we are planning ongoing low-budget cooking classes, and a healing project in partnership with Ralph Thornton Community Centre. The project will help women heal psychological wounds through arts and crafts, dance, theatre and body expressions.



In March we had International Women Day, Easter celebrations (Christian) Eid (Muslim), Purim (Jewish) Mother's Day, Pass Over (Jewish). Our March Break activities for teens and kids included swimming, hockey, and basketball lessons at Ralph Thornton and Jimmy Simpson Community Centers. In May, we celebrate Mother's Day.

Adriana from Nellie's Health & Safety Committee demonstrated to the staff team how to use the fire extinguishers

We also have many different activities coming up in the summer for kids aged 10-16. Please contact Adriana at 416-461-2052.

Acknowledgements



Thank you to women at Curves East York, Danforth & Beaches for an amazing holiday party for women & children!



Margarita receiving a generous donation from Dirty Dollar Dollies Performance



thank you Mary Lou and friends bringing over these gift bags to celebrate International Women's Day at the shelter

Nellie's Calendar of Events	
Apr 9-16	Pesach/Passover (Jewish)
Apr 12	Easter
May 10	Mother's Day
Jun 21	National Aboriginal Day
Jun 27	Multiculturalism Day
Jun 27	Toronto DYKE March
Jun 28	Toronto Pride Parade
Jul 1	Canada Day
Aug 1	Caribana Parade
Aug 22	Ramadan begins (Islam)
Sept 7	Labour Day
Sept 19	Rosh Hashanah (Jewish)
Sept 21	Eid-ul-Fitr (Islam)
Oct 10	World Mental Health Day – UN
Oct 12	Thanksgiving
Oct 17	Int'l Day for Eradication of Poverty
Oct 17	Diwali (Hindu)

Note: Please visit our website at www.nellies.org for all community and cultural celebrations for 2008

Nellie's Contact Information

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



Shelter	Community Support
Tel: 416-461-1084	Tel: 416-461-3404, 416-461-2052
TTY: 416-461-7561	Fax: 416-461-0970
Fax: 416-461-0976	E-mail: outreach@nellies.org
E-mail: programs@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
Charitable No.: 11930-2727-RR0001
Thank you to Nellie's volunteer Editor, Julie Allin, for her help.



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.

March 2009 , Issue #25

Message from the Executive Director

I would like to start my message by congratulating Barack Obama on becoming the first African-American president of the United States. This means a lot to the world, turning a dream into reality. We're really looking forward to this change that will hopefully bring equality and justice to the world.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of our friends whose generous donations made this holiday season the best ever for the women and kids at Nellie's. I would like to especially thank our partners Curves (East York, Beaches & Danforth) and Lindt Chocolates Canada for their special support. 2008 was a fruitful year for Nellie's. Among the many accomplishments guided by the second year of our Strategic Plan 2007-2009, we are proud to inform you that with contributions from board members, staff and volunteers, we were able to achieve most of our goals. Our key message has been developed and our fundraising strategies have increased our sources of and total revenues. As a result, our funding situation is more stable due to the fundraising increases as well as to the uploading of 10 more beds to the MCSS Violence Against Women Program.

Excellent programs are being run on a weekly basis at the shelter. Violence Against Women and Conflict Resolution groups are now running all year in 12-week periods. The re-location of housing support from the shelter to the Community Support and Outreach staff has increased the total of women housed in 2008 by 45 per cent over 2007 and has freed up time for shelter counselors to increase weekly counseling sessions to support the women and children.

With approval of the general membership by recommendation of the board, our fiscal year will be changed from January 1st to December 31st, to April 1st to March 31st. You are cordially invited to join our Annual General Meeting on September 15 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the Ralph Thornton Community Centre.



Welcome to Nellie's 2008-2009 team of volunteers, students, board members and staff

2009 will be another very busy year at Nellie's as we start to explore our new directions for the next three-year period, 2010-2012. The Strategic Planning Steering Committee will be leading the project with the support from Adobe Consulting team who will be collecting feedback from all stakeholders – clients, staff, board members, funding and community partners.

In February we celebrated Black History month. In March we participated in different internal and external activities to celebrate International Women's Day. May is the time of our signature fundraising event, Jazz It Up with Nellie's at the Royal York Hotel! Mark Thursday, May 21 in your calendar. Tickets are \$75 each. For more information please visit www.nellies.org.

This newsletter issue intends to raise awareness regarding women and mental health. The Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault organized a public demonstration against electroshock therapy especially for its use on women. It has proven that women are given EST two to three times more often than men, and that women are more brain damaged by the treatment. Our Theme Article discusses the antipsychiatry perspective. At the same time, the Social Justice Committee is working on developing recommendations regarding Nellie's internal policies for its work with women with mental health concerns and a position paper on its relation to women and the mental health system at large. This year we are counting our Annual Report as our summer communication media with the membership. Newsletter issues will now go out twice per year; one end of winter and another one in the fall. The next newsletter issue will be in November.

Justice and equity,

Margaret Munday

Beyond Pathology – Women and Mental Health

By Les Marple*

Women and children who are subjected to violence and abuse are forced to draw upon their own creativity and resilience to survive.

Violence is enacted not only through physical aggression, but also in racism, sexism, colonialism, ableism, classism, heterosexism – any oppression that denies a person’s humanity. Coming through horrific experiences and learning to cope is a testament to the strength of those who live without adequate safety, power and security. The reality of violence and abuse is that it forms the way in which a person knows the world. It destroys any fantasy of the world as benign and safe and it forces the survivor to adapt to this truth. Negative experiences can make it very difficult to trust other people; survivors may see things or hear things that others do not see or hear; and behaviours can seem strange to people who may not understand their logic and necessity.

Due to the types of reactions listed above, many survivors come in contact with psychiatry where their experiences are viewed as being “symptoms” of a “mental illness”. Psychiatry has developed a perspective on human behaviour that is represented within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV), a book that lists and describes mental and personality disorders. Where medicine is normally a practice of looking for a problem within the body and diagnosing an illness based on what is observable, the “diseases” listed within the DSM-IV have been developed by committees and rely on judgments of normal versus abnormal behaviours or perceptions. Psychiatry is therefore risk to subjectivity and becomes representative of the colonial, patriarchal and capitalistic forces that shape North American culture. The experiences of those in power are labeled as normal, while alternate realities of the oppressed are labeled as disease.

Where a person has already been hurt by our world and its manifestations of power, **the experience of being labeled as sick can be disempowering.** The individual is blamed, rather than the “sick” nature of our context.

Antipsychiatry is a perspective that was developed as a critique of psychiatry’s ideas of mental illness. This approach argues that different ways of being in the world, and peoples’ problems with living do not represent sickness; they represent diversity, pain and creativity. Further, these differences should not give power to psychiatry to use drugs or electroshock in an effort to change a person’s behaviour or their personality, to confine someone to an institution, or to force treatment through intimidation, misinformation or Community Treatment Orders.

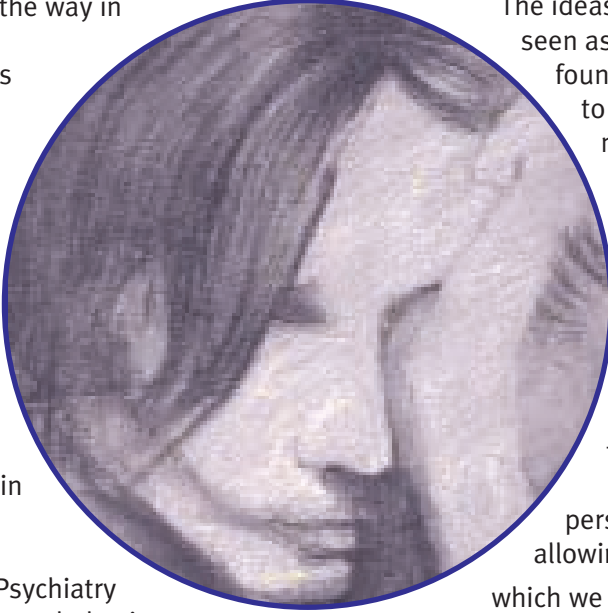
The ideas of antipsychiatry should not be seen as a critique of people who have found psychiatric drugs to be helpful to them and acknowledges that for many, psychiatry is the only available option for free support. At the same time, it is important to remember that pharmaceuticals are a multi-billion dollar industry, and companies have an interest in promoting notions of “mental illness” and the drugs marketed to treat them.

We are all at risk of adopting the perspectives of psychiatry and allowing these to influence the ways in which we understand other people.

The media has created a culture of fear and helped to develop ideas of “crazy” people who put our safety at risk. We must challenge these stereotypes in the same way that we must challenge the multitude of other negative stereotypes that are put forth regarding different groups of people. No person is without stories and without a history and no diagnostic label can begin to capture the complexity of someone’s life and how they have come to their current location.

Nellie’s is endorsing **Stop Shocking Our Mothers and Grandmothers**, an initiative of the Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault. To be part of planning this event contact lmurple@oise.utoronto.ca.

**Les Marple is a M.Ed. student in counselling psychology at the University of Toronto. She is also a member of the Coalition Against Psychiatric Assault.*



My experience at Nellie’s



I’m Karen Sterling. I immigrated to Canada from the West Indies in 1990. I was born with a rare eye condition, so as a child growing up, I faced a lot of barriers. Through it all, my mother was my strongest supporter, and she always advocated on my behalf so I could be as “normal” as possible.

I am in my final year of the Assaulted Women and Children Counselor Advocacy program at George Brown College. I’m also doing my placement with Nellie’s, which I began in November, 2008. I am grateful that Nellie’s has given me this wonderful opportunity. Not only has Nellie’s taken me on as a student, but they also go above and beyond to provide the modifications I need to be self-sufficient and perform my duties.

Nellie’s mission statement asserts their commitment to inclusiveness and accessibility. I can personally attest to the fact that they value that expression and proudly work towards ensuring their mission is fulfilled. As a visually challenged woman, I have been receiving ongoing accommodations such as large-print materials, and software to meet my unique needs on all computers. Never have they hesitated to provide the services I need to support my work as a representative of Nellie’s.

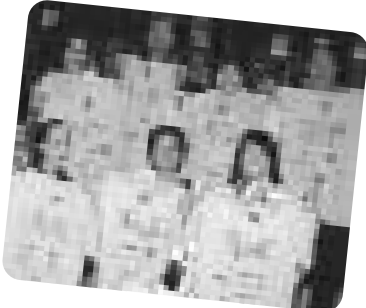
To help make my experience at Nellie’s as comfortable as possible, the staff and management work constantly to alleviate my nervousness. I never feel judged or ridiculed due to my limitations of vision. When they see I am facing a barrier, the staff work together with me to resolve any problems. Their support has helped me to complete my tasks independently, without the obstacles that normally appear because of my challenges.

Nellie’s has always made me feel welcome and accepted, and I can see why it is important for Nellie’s to be accessible and inclusive for everyone whose lives they touch. Everybody – the staff, students, and volunteers, all have an equal voice. We take part in the direction of the hostel and share in decision making whether they are minor or major issues.

There is never a dull day at Nellie’s. I’m always learning something new and exciting to help me become a better



Take Back the Night



Nellie’s climbers conquers 1776 stairs on United Way CN Tower Stairs Climb



Nellie’s display at Ryerson University on IWD

Nellie’s Community Events



Nellie’s team March on International Women’s Day



Minister Madeleine Meilleur and staff (Ministry of Community and Social Services) meeting with a delegation of OAITH members to honour the important and significance of International Women’s Day. Nellie’s representatives were Rebecca Rogers and Cecelia Paul.

Come and Support Nellies

7th Annual Jazz It Up with Nellie's 2009

Thursday May 21st 2009, 6 pm,
Fairmont Royal York Hotel, The Imperial Room
100 Front Street West, Toronto

Featuring:
The Legendary Jackie Richardson
Hosted by:
Enza Supermodel Anderson

Tickets \$75 at Ticketmaster
416-870-8000 or www.ticketmaster.ca

For more information
www.jazzitupwithnellites.com
or www.nellies.org
Tel 416-481-8909

Chocolate Fountain
Hors d'oeuvres
Dessert Buffet
Silent Auction
Raffles
Auctions

A Fundraiser for
Nellie's
Women's Shelter



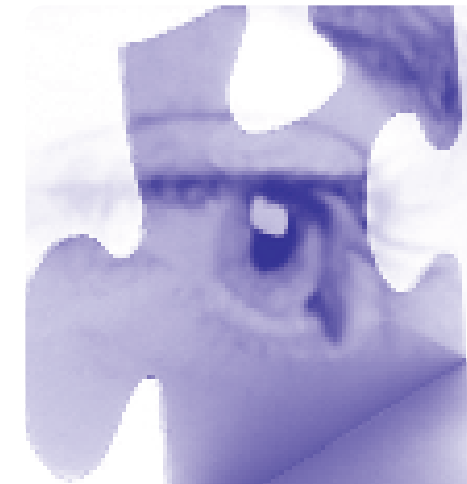
NOW



The institutionalizing of an abused woman: The journey of an African woman from her homeland to the revolving doors of Canada's mental health system

By Bernadette Dondo, Nellie's Counsellor

Francisca is a 34-year-old woman, and a refugee claimant from Africa. She came to Canada to flee domestic violence that was allowed by her culture in her homeland.



She had a church arranged marriage, and had three children by her 17th birthday. Francisca's husband was physically, emotionally, sexually abusive. He constantly shamed her in public to show that he was the "man". He never showed any appreciation or affection towards her, because it is culturally inappropriate to respect a woman.

Neither family nor church condemned her abuser. The priest told her that marriage was for life, and that she had to obey her husband, since he's the head of the family. Her mother told her that she too got abused, but stuck it out for her and her brothers, so she should to stay with her husband.

Francisca suffered in silence, becoming depressed, to the extent that she contemplated killing her children and herself, rather than remain in an abusive relationship for the rest of her life. And then it was arranged for her to come to Canada.

Her friend found her family a space at a city-run shelter, but Francisca continued to experience severe depression, and headaches. And she talked to herself. She felt guilty for what she saw as an abandonment of sacred vows. She wondered if God would forgive her. Shelter staff noticed that Francisca cried and slept a lot when her children were in school. She became withdrawn, and stopped taking care of herself and her children. The guiltier she felt, the louder she got, until one day she hit a woman who told her that she stank.

The police got involved, she was taken to a psychiatric hospital to be assessed, and was diagnosed with severe depression. Her three children ended up in the care of the Catholic Children's Aid Society, or CCAS. Francisca refused treatment with drugs, and was admitted into a locked mental health unit under the Community Treatment Act, where she was heavily drugged to calm her nerves and isolated for her "own safety". Francisca was in isolation and subjected to forced treatment for six months before being released. A hospital social worker called and referred Francisca to Nellie's.

Francisca told Nellie's staff of her abuse history. She was accepted unconditionally, and informed about the Violence Against Women group that's offered in the shelter to help women talk about their abuse in a safe and supportive space. She was also informed about the services of the Children's Advocate, who could work with her when she was ready to start the process of visiting with her children. Francisca became a dedicated member of the VAW group, where she shared her journey from her African homeland to her "home" at Nellie's. The more she talked about her story, the better she seemed to get, influencing more women to talk about their situations.

Nellie's staff referred Francisca to a gender-sensitive immigration lawyer, and provided the support she needed to complete her refugee claim. She got help registering in an adult learning centre, and finding appropriate housing. Staff worked with the CCAS until she got her children back. Francisca's family stayed at Nellie's until the day she got her permanent resident papers. On that day, there was not one dry face, as Francisca shed tears of joy and hugged every woman in the house.

Francisca's journey clearly demonstrates the need for healing communities where women (and children) can share their stories and grow to achieve their potentials. There is a recovery-based movement within the western mental health systems that is advocating for alternative healing that has shown positive results.