



# 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 the Executive Director

June 2013 , Issue #35

It is with great sadness that I have to inform that Cindy Cowan, Nellie's past Executive Director lost her long battle with ovarian cancer. Cindy died on Saturday May 25, 2013. Her strength and commitment to improve women's life is a great loss to the sector.

As part of our 40th anniversary celebrations, we held a community Open House on Saturday June 1, 2013. Our outreach site at 754 Queen St. East was part of the "Eats & Beats in Riverside" street festival. Forty years ago, Nellie's opened its doors to provide safe housing for homeless women experiencing violence and poverty. From the initial 16 beds in 1973, we have now 36 beds available to provide safe space for women and their children.

Join us again for Nellie's Annual General Meeting, Tuesday Sept. 10, 2013 at the Ralph Thornton Community Center. We will be celebrating the efforts of many people for their roles as volunteer, staff, funders, donors and participants over these 40 years. These people have contributed to improved safety and life conditions for women and their children experiencing violence in their lives.

As a lead-up to our 40th anniversary, we launched our video on December 10th, 2012 to raise awareness on the issues of family violence. We highlighted the relevant role the shelter plays in supporting women regaining control over their lives. This project was made possible with the support of the Donner Canadian Foundation and the courage of the women who agreed to share their stories in an effort to inspire others.

In addition to the production of Nellie's video, on International Women's Day, we launched our new website. Nellie's new website has received positive feedback from the community and is an even better place for accessing information regarding our programs and services and resources on issues affecting women's lives.

In our continued efforts to increase our quality of services,

we also launched our accessibility position paper on International Women's Day. The paper provides us with clear guidelines to improve services to women living with disabilities and deaf women. Now that the position paper is completed, we are initiating implementation procedures and training opportunities for staff, board and volunteers. We have recently completed renovations at our outreach site, too, increasing our accessible space. We're currently running, in partnership with Springtide Resources, a focus group for women living with disabilities.

As summer time is finally approaching, we are getting ready to run our special summer programs for children and the women staying at the shelter and participating at our community outreach programs. We are also eager to participate in the Pride celebration and more.

Nellie's provides services to a diverse population of women regarding age, language, religion, country of origin, sexual orientation, self-gender identity, etc. Our capacity to provide services to such a diverse population is our strength, but at the same time presents challenges given the very limited space we work in which affects the privacy of women and their children.

This inappropriate space is one of the main reasons we are searching for a new site to build better accommodations for Nellie's women and children.

The main article in this newsletter issue is also dedicated to raising awareness of accessibility issues.

We offer our sincere appreciation to the individuals and organizations that so generously contributed towards the renovations to improve our accessibility.

Justice and Equity,

*Margarita Méndez*



# Women on the Move — Nellie's launching our position paper on accessibility

By Lynda Roy, Outreach & Education Mentor from Springtide Resources and Adriana Pelayo, Nellie's Community Support and Outreach Program Worker

Often, women with disabilities are rendered invisible, their human rights are violated, they experience multiple forms of discrimination and gender equality is even more challenging to achieve. Studies suggest that women with disabilities are at greater risk of experiencing violence and abuse in their lives, and yet there are few spaces where women with disabilities who have experienced violence and abuse can meet to explore what constitutes abuse, how it has affected their lives, and share strategies for healing. This lack of safe, accessible and disability-positive space is surprising.



Photo credit :  
Annie Sakkab

“About 650 million people in the world, or 10 per cent of the world's population, live with disabilities and frequently encounter many physical and social obstacles. They often lack

the opportunities of the mainstream population and are usually among the most marginalized in society. Women face barriers to full equality and advancement because of such factors as race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability.

Persistence of certain cultural, legal and institutional barriers makes women and girls with disabilities the victims of two-fold discrimination: as women and as persons with disabilities”. [www.un.org/womenwatch/enab/](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/enab/)

## Ontario Facts -

- 16 per cent of all women are disabled.
- disabled girls are twice as likely to be sexually assaulted.
- disabled women are more likely to be the victims of violence.
- support and services for disabled mothers are almost totally inaccessible or do not exist.
- women's services are often inaccessible to women with disabilities.
- many doctors have difficulty dealing with women who are both pregnant and disabled.
- The unemployment rate for women with disabilities is 74 per cent.
- The most inescapable reality for women with disabilities is poverty. The median employment income for a disabled woman is \$8,360. The median employment income for a disabled man is \$19,250.

In 2011, through an analysis of current issues and trends, Nellie's Social Justice Committee explored the issues of accessibility and ableism and developed the position paper on accessibility. Using a broad-lens analysis and anti-racism, anti-oppression framework, we explored the issues women with disabilities and deaf women face. We identified challenges and emerging issues, and developed strategies for working with women and ensuring accessibility from an equity-based model.

In February 2013, Nellie's was proud to announce the launch our position paper on accessibility for women with disabilities and deaf women. The paper highlights

societal perceptions and personal biases about disability. We explored the intersectionality and differential impacts of ableism on various communities including immigrant and newcomer women, Aboriginal women and women of colour



On March 7, Nellie's launched a program called: “Women on the Move: A Psycho/Educational Support Group for Women with Disabilities”. The 10 participants focused on their experiences of violence and oppression. The group provided a safe and inclusive space to explore issues related to violence and abuse. This was an eight- week social support group in partnership with Springtide Resources. Through this program, women gained knowledge on violence, safety planning, community resources, self-care and coping strategies. Peer support has meant that the women are less isolated. They gained skills to advocate for themselves and have an increased understanding of the systemic nature of violence and the reasons violence occurs. We have also been successful in increasing community awareness on accessibility. Women who have attended the program continue to receive supports and services at Nellies.

These are what our participants said:

*“I feel respected, no one judges me when I'm speaking”*

*“Talking about my violence story took a very long time. After the group I can start my healing process.”*

*“This is a space we all need. No matter how far I live, I want to come back.”*

*We are very happy with the success of this program and continue to work towards ensuring our services meet the needs of women with disabilities and deaf women.*

## Voices of Women – Anne’s\* Story

*By Karen Sterling, Nellie’s Counsellor*

When Anne came to Nellie’s shelter with her then 1 year-old son Justin, she was fleeing her abusive estranged husband. She was broken down from the psychological, emotional and verbal abuse she was subjected to daily.

Justin was diagnosed with Down syndrome, and her husband would blame her for their son’s disability. He would often say that she was the reason why the child was born with a disability, telling her that she was too old to give birth, and that she placed a curse on the child due to her age. Anne started to believe the negative and derogatory words and suffered through the numerous lash outs.

Anne was referred to a parent support group for moms. This program included meeting other families to hear their challenges and success stories. Anne said that the program gave her the support that was greatly needed for her and her child to heal from the years of daily abuse to which she had been subjected.

The family was also referred to the Canadian Down Syndrome Society, where mom and son were also able to get the support through education. Anne was educated about the characteristics of Down syndrome, its challenges and its expectation as Justin gets older. She is expressing a better understanding of her son’s disability, and she is not feeling scared and frightened anymore.

Anne said that there were times when she felt stuck, with no way out of the abusive situation. She now feels a sense of victory for walking away from her abusive husband.



## Minerva’s\* Story

*By Julia Steinecke, Transitional Housing & Support Worker*

Minerva is a young woman who came to Nellie’s shelter after fleeing an abusive caregiver. She used a walker and she was visually impaired, though she had some vision in well-lit areas. She spoke Spanish so we used a cultural interpreter to do safety planning and discuss her goals.

Minerva fell between the cracks of community services: she was not eligible for special priority housing for victims of abuse because she hadn’t lived with her abuser. The waiting list for her supportive housing was very long. There was transitional housing for homeless people, but many buildings were non-accessible or poorly lit inside. One application was turned down because she expressed her anxiety and they decided she was too needy. Meanwhile, many mental health supportive housing agencies would not accept her because her anxiety was not considered severe enough.

Other kinds of barrier-free housing had long waiting lists - or were for seniors only. Many had no Spanish-speaking staff. We contacted over 50 organizations and organized case conferences with several agencies.

The private market landlords we contacted required a guarantor for applicants receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) income. Minerva did not know anyone who would be her guarantor. Finally, we found a barrier-free building with well-lit bachelor apartments, where no guarantor was needed. We had to advocate on her behalf to get the landlord to accept her, and then we had to advocate to ODSP because her rent was higher than their housing allowance.

As Minerva prepared for her move into the community, we help her develop a monthly budget. We gave referrals for free furniture and for home care. Minerva was connected to our Community Support and Outreach office and she could call us for assistance anytime.

Minerva moved into her apartment, very excited about a brand new chapter in her life in which she would be supported, yet independent in the community.

\*name has been changed



# Program Update – Shelter

By Cecelia Paul, Counsellor



*Staff cooking a big feast for holiday celebrations.*

Winter programming was a time of great fun, laughter and togetherness at Nellie's.

Several women attended a workshop in January, celebrating the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. The famous "I have a dream" speech was partially read along with other poems.

With angelic voices beaming through the house, a karaoke night was born. Laughter and excitement lit up the house as moms and children sang their favourite songs.



*Black History Month celebration*

As February rolled by, women participated in a night of games, sipping different teas and basking in the delightful aromas. On Valentine's Day, each woman received a rose to remind them how special they are in the world and how important they are to humanity.

In February, we also celebrated Black History Month. We presented and celebrated the accomplishment of black people. We celebrated Black History Month with food and dancing; two things in which everyone at Nellies takes great pride! Children also went bowling with their mothers.



*Hands Hanna!*

Despite the cold March weather, we celebrated the International Women's Day by attending rallies and marches to commemorate the day.

At Easter, again we enjoyed food, music and chocolates and held an Easter egg hunt for the children at the shelter.

Our Healing Through Art program has continued to support women to achieve their goals. By creating their own style of jewelry, the women's confidence and self-esteem is strengthened.

Once more, we started a Women Experiencing Abuse and Violence (WEAV) Group, which is a psycho-social educational support group for survivors of violence against women. Participants learn of the cycle of violence, power and control, oppression, and coping with trauma. The group is a place for women to express themselves, feel respected and learn from others. This group runs for 12 weeks, from April to the end of June.

The women and children are now looking forward to the summer programs.



*Hanae Hanzawa from Asian Community AIDS Services at the workshop on Sexual Education and Women's Health*

# CSO Update

*By Adriana Pelayo, Community Support & Outreach Worker*

December was a month of celebrations. We enjoyed the social gatherings, food and presents at Nellie's. Thank you to the volunteers; your donations made our party a beautiful moment to remember.

In February we celebrated Black History Month. This year our guest country was Honduras. Many Hondurans are the descendants of African slaves brought into Honduras during the colonial period.

2013 is the Year of the Dragon. We celebrate the Chinese New Year with traditional Chinese food and a walk to Chinatown to see the Dragon Dance.

Her Share workshops were very informative. We had a diabetes information seminar from the Canadian Diabetes Association; sexual education and women's health from Asian Community AIDS Service (ACAS); oral care from Toronto Public Health; immigration information from No One is Illegal; career information from Woman Transition to Trades and Employment; and general education on homophobia and transphobia from the 519 Church Street Community Centre; and Wen Do Self Defense empowered our women by teaching self-defense techniques.

Also, representatives of the Independent Police Review provided information on how to make a complaint in case the police didn't provide the services which were required.

The Supper Surprise Program is at full capacity. We have around 80 women coming to get food boxes. Thank you to Second Harvest and our volunteers who pack the food boxes.

In March we started our second Women on the Move group for women with physical disabilities. This is an eight-week program to support women with disabilities. It covers topics like: violence against women, including definitions of violence and different types of violence; power and control; safety planning; self-defense and more. Women coming to the group are very happy to have a place where they can share stories without feeling invisible.



*Lisa Higgins from Health Canada gave a workshop on diabetes*



*Francisco Rico-Martinez from FCJ Refugee Centre gave staff training on immigration issues.*



*2012/13 student placements from left to right: Rebecca Sellan, Munira Abid and Alisha Riley*



*Happy Mother's Day!!*



## Nellie's 40th Anniversary

### Celebrating and supporting women and children in our community since 1973

For 40 years, Nellie's has been a place of safety and recovery for thousands of women and their children at the most difficult moment in their lives. Just by reaching our door, they have shown immense courage. While here, they overcome their vulnerability and display impressive strength as they begin their new journey.

Forty years ago, domestic violence was something few talked about publicly. Women who were physically, emotionally and sexually abused had little support, even from their own families.

Change has been a long time coming. Even thirty years ago, when MP Margaret Mitchell first brought the subject of domestic violence to the Canadian Parliament, men in the House laughed and jeered at her.

Hopefully that wouldn't happen today. But the reality is that government funding for vulnerable women and children does not reflect a strong commitment to support women and children experiencing violence and who are in need of emergency shelter.

Despite the social changes of the last 40 years, Nellie's is needed more than ever.

A 40th anniversary is a time to reflect and recommit. We are dedicated to supporting women and children so they may overcome violence, poverty and homelessness. And we are determined to increase the accessibility of our services to all women.

This year, we continue to embark on the exciting project of building a new shelter. Our current 36-bed shelter is over 100 years old. We need more space to help more women and we need to increase accessibility for women with physical disAbilities.

We're proud of the work we've done in this time, and are inspired by the women who have passed through our doors, sharing their strengths and rebuilding their lives.

Thank you to our community for your support over these years. Because of you, thousands of women and children today are leading healthy, independent lives free from violence and abuse.



# Please join Nellie's Social Justice Committee

*By Kendra-Ann Pitt, Board member and SJ Committee member*

Come volunteer for the Social Justice Committee at Nellie's Shelter! Nellie's is committed to the eradication of the various forms of oppression that women and children experience such as violence, poverty and homelessness. The Social Justice Committee plays a significant role in achieving this goal. This dynamic committee responds to social justice issues affecting women and children in the community from a feminist, anti-racism, anti-oppression perspective, and engages in a range of activities including activism, research, and awareness- raising in order to address these issues and create sustained changes in the community.

Throughout the past year the committee has been a part series of varied events and activities. These include

- Taking part in various community based events such as the International Prisoners Justice Day, the Pride Parade, and the Take Back the Night March.
- Publishing a series of blog articles addressing various social justice issues such as the Occupy Movement, World AIDS Day, Aboriginal Awareness Day and Ending Sexual Violence Against Women.
- Completing Nellie's position paper on women and accessibility, finalizing the organization's Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act policy, and creating plans for accessibility training for members of our organization.
- Hosting the "Right to Housing Community" Forum. This event is held to raise awareness of issues pertaining to homelessness and the right to adequate and affordable housing. Guest speakers at the event address a number of issues including women's experiences of homelessness and the "Housing as Legal Right Campaign".

These are just a few examples of some of the exciting work that the committee is engaged in! If this sounds like something you would be interested in participating in, we invite you to submit an application to join our committee and contribute to the fight for equity and a life free from oppression for all women and children. Check on our website [www.nellies.org](http://www.nellies.org) for details or call 416-461-8903.

## Nellie's Community Events

*Nellie's team at the IWD march*



Rebecca, the program manager, attended the Canadian Network of Women's Shelters and Transition Houses' Leadership Forum. "We're a unified voice collaborating, educating and innovating for systemic change that ends violence against women making Canada a model for safety in the world"



*Nellie's attended a two-day OAITH Networking Forum. Members and directors of OAITH gathered in Toronto to discuss and assess funding plans for the Association with Minister Laurel Broten (standing centre).*



*Nellie's organized a Right to Housing Forum on the National Day for Housing on November 22. Tracy Heffernan from Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario spoke about the Right to Housing Campaign and several Women from Voices from the Street came to share their stories of homelessness.*

## Acknowledgements



Staff and volunteers at the IWD celebration party. Thank you for your hard work!



Thank you to our young donors for their generous gifts during the holiday season!



Thanks to the generous support of everyone who donated through the WCS Bridgeforce Financial Holiday Gift Drive for Nellie's!

## Nellie's Calendar of Events

Jun 29	Toronto DYKE March
Jun 30	Toronto Pride Parade
Jul 1	Canada Day
Jul 9	Ramadan begins (Islam)
Aug 8	Eid-ul-Fitr (Islam)
Sept 2	Labour Day
Sept 5-6	Rosh Hashanah (Jewish)
Oct 1	International Day for the Elderly – UN
Oct 7	Thanksgiving
Oct 10	World Mental Health Day – UN
Oct 17	Int'l Day for Eradication of Poverty
Nov 25	Int'l Day for Elimination of VAW - UN
December	Universal Human Rights Month
Dec 6	National Day for Remembrance & Action on Violence Against Women
Nov 28-Dec 5	Hanukkah (Jewish)
Dec 25	Christmas (Christian)
Dec 26-Jan 1	Kwanzaa (African-American)

Visit [www.nellies.org](http://www.nellies.org) for more community & cultural celebrations for 2013.

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