

SUPPORTING SURVIVORS, *SHIFTING* *SOCIETY*

ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16



WAVAW
rape crisis centre

MISSION STATEMENT

WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre works to end all forms of violence against women. Guided by our feminist anti-oppression philosophy we challenge and change thinking, actions, and systems that contribute to violence against women.

We provide all women who have experienced any form of sexualized violence with support and healing, and engage with youth to develop leadership for prevention of future violence.

VISION

A society where all women are free from violence.



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

*Written by Irene Tsepopoulos-Elhaimer
Executive Director*

What a big year this has been for us all - a year marked by many changes at all levels!

When I reflect back on what we have accomplished I immediately think about our move into our new space. It was an enormous task that could only have been accomplished by the incredible teamwork of staff and volunteers. We are now reaping the benefits of being in a beautifully designed office that women have told us feels like a peaceful, respectful, and inviting healing space. This is the caliber of space that women should expect and deserve when accessing a rape crisis centre.

Change is never easy to navigate, and this year we have not only experienced change through the move, but also through exciting staffing developments. We have seen managers go on maternity leave to fulfill dreams of motherhood and family, and we are so happy not only to be part of this but to also to welcome them back with open arms. We also added a

new member to our management team - Sambriddhi Nepal, Manager of Fund Development - and she has been an incredible asset. We have intentionally focused on strengthening and building capacity of our team and have encouraged staff to use and hone all their talents, skills and expertise in all the work that we do at WAVAW.

An important change has taken place within the Canadian social context as a result of several high profile sexual assaults that featured prominently in the media and that captured our collective attention. Never before has there been so much focus on women's lived experience of sexual assault, rape culture, criminal legal response and the actual needs of women post-sexual assault. WAVAW has been called upon by media outlets both locally and nationally as leading experts to provide education, analysis and advocacy for women. As a result of this ongoing attention and exposure, we have seen an increase in calls to our crisis line, an increase in the number of accompaniments to the hospital and an increased demand for our victim services and one-to-one counselling.

What hasn't changed is the lack of any type of funding increase from our provincial government since they cut core funding for women's services and dismantled the Ministry for Women's Equality in 2003. We are still requesting funds to meet the needs for the critical services women are seeking. This is a travesty and one which we have addressed with all levels of government for many years. We hope that with the new federal government - who has already practiced and promoted a commitment to women's equality - the future will offer the much-needed financial support we need to serve all women who seek our support.

We are always amazed at the support we receive from our donors. We recognize that without their generous support we would not be able to keep our doors open. We are encouraged by their commitment and will continue to provide excellent services to women and to shift society so that we create a future where all women are free from violence.

In closing for this year, I want to acknowledge the stellar work of all of WAVAW's staff and volunteers. I especially want to thank the volunteer Board of Directors for their stewardship of WAVAW, their dedication and their unwavering belief in our work.



MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Written by Karey Brooks, Interim Chairperson

In its work to end violence against women, one of WAVAW's biggest challenges is working to change and challenge the thinking, actions, and systems that contribute to violence against women.

Over the past year we have seen a number of examples of the ways in which rape myths - beliefs about sexual assault that serve to deny or justify sexual violence, often by blaming the victim and/or exonerating the perpetrator - have presented very real barriers to women seeking justice through the legal system.

Most obvious is the Jian Ghomeshi trial, where the

former CBC Radio host was charged with several counts of sexual assault and choking. To show the complainants likely consented, the complainants were questioned relentlessly about their relationship with the accused and their post-assault conduct. After Jian Ghomeshi was acquitted of all charges, a chorus of survivor supporters, including WAVAW, engaged in a national conversation about how stereotypes about how women should act after an assault had improperly influenced the decision, and could deter women from reporting sexual assault. Although the response from women's groups and other

supporters was strong, the case shone a spotlight on the failures of the legal system to respond appropriately to sexual assaults.

WAVAW was also at the forefront of the raising concerns about the conduct of Justice Robin Camp in R. v. Wagner, a 2014 sexual assault case where the Judge asked the complainant, "Couldn't you just keep your knees together?" During the course of the trial Justice Camp relied on myths and stereotypes about the perfect victim to acquit the accused. WAVAW was granted intervener status in the subsequent "Camp Inquiry" established this year, which will consider whether Mr. Justice Camp must vacate his judicial post as a result of his conduct during that trial. WAVAW was invited to make submissions on the negative impact such judicial conduct has on the willingness of survivors to access the justice system.

WAVAW knows that cases like these are not out of view of survivors. Survivors are listening. Survivors' experiences of discrimination and revictimization within the legal system affect whether individuals are willing to report to law enforcement, cooperate in investigations, or participate in prosecutions. This is a matter of grave concern to WAVAW who, as an aspect of its mandate, seeks to challenge unequal barriers marginalized women face with access to justice.

WAVAW has and will continue to take a leadership role in debunking problematic attitudes that perpetuate the notion that women are responsible for preventing sexual violence, and erase perpetrator responsibility. We do it for survivors, because we know they are listening.



Vanessa Chase Lockshin
Chairperson



Miranda Mandarino
Director at Large



Tanzin Begum
Director at Large



Karey Brooks
Director at Large



Katherine Lawrence
Director at Large



Brittany Wong
Director at Large



Nicola Shaw
Director at Large



Virginia Le
Director at Large



Ariana McBride
Treasurer

IN 2015, WAVAW:

ACCOMPANIED 103 WOMEN

to Vancouver General Hospital's Sexual Assault Service



ACCOMPANIED 20 WOMEN TO COURT

CONDUCTED 100 OUTREACH EVENTS
22 women volunteered as Educational Outreach Volunteers

PROVIDED 200 HOURS of volunteer training



DELIVERED 195 group counselling sessions

DELIVERED 710 individual counselling sessions

ANSWERED 3956 CRISIS LINE CALLS

33 women volunteered to answer after-hours crisis line calls



ANSWERED 20 MEDIA REQUESTS

SERVED 142 YOUTH through the Aboriginal Youth Program

ACCOMPANIED 18 WOMEN to police interviews

WELCOMED 441 WOMEN to our Victim Services and Counselling programmes

COUNSELLING PROGRAM

*Written by Khaleda Ebrahimi
Manager of Counselling Programs*

As we look back and reflect on the work we have done in the Counselling Program, we feel more resolute in our commitment to serving sexual assault survivors within a feminist anti-oppression frame. This is because it is the only approach that takes in to account the context of violence against women, while also meeting women where they are at.

Feminist counselling attends to the complexities of women's lives, their identities, and their experiences. This is so important when we as a society are not collectively addressing rape culture and are still buying into the myths about sexual assault, what survivors of sexual assault should look like, and how they should feel. Our inability to tackle the root causes of violence, like the legacy of colonization, racism, and sexism, compounds the harmful impacts of rape culture and normalizes the culture of violence we all live in.

We hear this from Indigenous women who see their mothers,

sisters, friends, and aunts go missing or are found murdered, and who fear they could be next. It is also evident in the numbers of women who call us for support. The weight of the impact of rape culture is evident in the 240 women on our waitlist for counselling services. 39% of those on the waitlist are young women between the ages of 14 and 25. Even more difficult to accept is that these women will have to wait for almost 2 years before they see a counsellor because sexual assault services are not adequately funded to meet the demand. These are realities that women experience and they need the kind of support that not only attends to their pain as sexual assault survivors but also their struggles as Indigenous women, poor women, immigrant women, Trans women, Queer women, and women with disabilities.

In Canada 1 in 3 women will experience sexualized violence, and Indigenous women are 3.5 times more likely than

non-Indigenous women to experience sexualized violence. A feminist decolonizing approach to counselling can serve to acknowledge the unjust world we live in and how violence against women is a societal problem that everyone must address, not a private matter for individual women to deal with. One of the most powerful beliefs in feminist counselling is 'the personal is political'. This connects personal experiences to larger social and political structures as well as the impact of historical events, which is critical to healing. It is of utmost importance for survivors to realize that systems, institutions, and social structures and norms are responsible for violence against women. To believe otherwise means blaming women and not holding perpetrators responsible for their actions. Understanding that women are not responsible for the violence they experience is central for all of us in order to push back against rape culture, so that we may eliminate the responsibility that women may

feel for the assault, as well as the socially imposed shame and blame that can deter healing for survivors. This is especially true for Indigenous women; understanding the historical context and the ongoing impacts of colonization helps to put the pain into perspective and acknowledges the enormity of suffering and loss that is present today and goes back for generations.

Another important part of feminist counselling is honouring different perspectives. At WAVAW, we create space for women to explore and learn about themselves and what they value in life. We insist that women's responses to violence are not the problem. Because experiences of violence can leave women feeling powerless, it is important that we respect women by listening to them, believing them, and seeing them as experts of their own experiences. This work is deeply relational and it is profoundly personal. One of the most insidious impacts of violence is disconnection and interruption in life-lines such as friends, family, community and ceremony. Because of this, connection is central to the work we do with women. We support women to connect with themselves and others. At the core of healing is knowing that you have people standing with you who will hold you up and see you through difficult times.

At WAVAW we stay connected with women as we see ourselves in a community with them, supporting them in their process and walking alongside them in their healing journey.



VICTIM SERVICES PROGRAM

Written by Dalya Israel
Manager of Victim Services and Outreach Programs

In a world that continues to harm women we provide...

A radical space where women are believed, honored, supported, offered information and options and, most importantly, held within a community of women. This community of women at WAVAW acknowledges that a survivor is neither broken nor sick but has been harmed by the violence that someone has enacted upon her body. This community of women acknowledges that she is responding in her own way, that there is no 'right' way to respond. This community of women acknowledges that she is the expert of her own experience. Sexual violence is isolating but you cannot heal from it in isolation.

At WAVAW our philosophy is "we are the women we serve". Embodying this philosophy enables us in the Victim Service Program to stay present with women and to offer services that are unique to each woman we

see. We take into consideration all the facets of a woman's identity in order to provide her with the most relevant healing journey. This means understanding how different intersecting systems have an impact on a woman's life and, therefore, her experience of sexual violence. We treat women the way they want to be treated. Every woman has the right to choose her own path to healing and justice, and we dream with her to find those paths together.

In the Victim Service program at WAVAW we use our relational approach to strengthen relationships and have influence within systems to encourage those systems to be accountable to women who have experienced sexual violence. With our commitment to changing attitudes and lending our expertise we see endless possibility when engaging with systems alongside women.

This year, one of the first women that I supported visited WAVAW on

the 11th anniversary of her assault to make a donation and see me. She told me about having recently graduated from nursing school. She also told me that every year on the anniversary of her assault she makes a donation to WAVAW. She does this because she wants the narrative in her mind about the assault to be about the support and care she received at WAVAW, and not about the violence she endured

When we believe women and offer them a space to be held by a community of women, they know that they are not broken because they were assaulted. These services are lifesaving and life-affirming, and allow women to move away from suffering in the face of sexual violence.

It continues to be an honor to lead a team of dedicated women in the Victim Service, Volunteer and Outreach Programs, and I am constantly in awe of the things we can accomplish to support survivors and shift society.

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH PROGRAM

*Written by Ariana Barer
Educational Outreach Coordinator*

In a world that continues to harm women, WAVAW's Educational Outreach provides connection for those struggling to make change. Shifting society is not work that can be done alone. In a culture of fear and violence, we are divided and isolated. Connection is needed not only for survivors to heal from sexual assault, but also for our community to heal from this culture of violence.

Through our Educational Outreach, WAVAW creates opportunities for teachers to come together to learn about social justice, anti-violence education. They feel regenerated in their struggle to teach for liberation.

“So good for my job and my soul.”

- Raise It Up teacher training participant

Through our Educational Outreach, WAVAW creates opportunities for service providers in communities all around BC to come together to learn and talk about decolonizing ourselves and our work. They see that they are not alone within social service systems that often reinforce the status quo and feel regenerated in their

commitment to dreaming alongside the women we serve to access healing and justice.

“I cannot thank you enough for the honour of being at the Decolonization workshop with both of you and the amazingly wonderful women in the room. If given the opportunity, I am sure the wealth of knowledge, experience and love in that room could create enough positive societal change to change the face of suffering in Canada.”

- Decolonizing Praxis workshop participant

Through our Educational Outreach, WAVAW creates opportunities for high school students to come together to learn about challenging objectification and porn culture. They see that they are not alone within a culture that teaches them that they are never enough, that men are entitled to women's bodies, and that disconnectedness and anger are normal. They feel regenerated in their interest in critical thinking and healthy relationships.

“Personally, I've already discussed the workshop with a couple friends and my family because I think it's very important to address. I want to open the conversation with my girlfriend. I feel it's important to talk about these issues.”

- Student in Disconnection workshop

“I feel so much more connected to my students and so excited and hopeful about their willingness to continue grappling with these ideas.”

- High school teacher

Through our Educational Outreach, WAVAW creates opportunities for the VCC campus to come together to envision, strategize, and work toward ending sexualized violence at the college. They see that they are not alone within a climate of denial and feel supported to take a leadership role in moving post-secondary institutions toward accountability and safety.

“VCC's work will be helpful to our colleagues as we work

through this. [The] project will reap positive benefits for our students, staff and faculty while promoting a safe and comfortable learning environment for all.”

- VCC Gender Based Violence and Harassment Committee member

Through our Educational Outreach, WAVAW creates opportunities for journalists to understand sexual assault and cover stories in accountable ways. They see that they are not alone in a context of “if it bleeds it leads” infotainment media and feel supported in their values and interest in having WAVAW shape public discourse.

“I was recommended to speak to you by my colleague. Note that I tried to include some helpful information at the end, in case readers have been affected by sexual assault. This is something we would like to start doing on the bottom of every story we write about sexual assault and would love to work with you on that, if you have any advice or even templates on how the media can best phrase that information.”

- Journalist

As we support these individuals to connect with us and with each other, we are shifting systems, institutions, and society. We are building a movement that is speaking truth to power.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

*Written by Sonmin Bong
Coordinator of Volunteer Program*

In a world that continues to harm women, our volunteers have not stopped, and will not stop, fighting for a society where all women are free from violence. In a world that continues to harm women, the Volunteer Program provides connection and hope.

As the Coordinator of the Volunteer Program, I often think about how many people we are able to reach and inform about rape culture and WAVAW's essential services with every volunteer who walks through WAVAW's door. Our volunteers are so enthusiastic about telling others about WAVAW: their family members, friends, co-workers, classmates, schools, and strangers. Their enthusiasm and connections are the heart of the Volunteer Program.

Because of our volunteers, women are able to call our Crisis Line when they need it the most. Our volunteers are like a bridge: they connect the women we serve and WAVAW staff so we can provide wrap-around services.

Almost all volunteers have come to WAVAW because they want to do something about sexualized violence. They are tired of the hopelessness. They are tired of the unsettling reality

of violence against women in our society. Whenever they get a chance to tell others in the community that something can be done about our culture of violence, they feel fuller in their hearts. The volunteers understand that it is important for our community to also feel connected.

Our office volunteers support WAVAW's work by being a warm presence at reception, welcoming women into our space. They are often the first connection between the women we serve and our healing space. They remind us that fighting for a better future and shifting society can be done in many different ways.

Without hope for a better future, we would not have women of all ages going through our Volunteer Training, making commitments, waking up in the middle of the night to answer the Crisis Line, endlessly talking back to rape culture, protesting and marching on the streets, and constantly asking WAVAW how they can be of support. The Volunteer Program reminds us that we all do this work because we are the women that we serve.

Without hope, we would not survive in a world that continues to harm women.



FUND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Written by Sambriddhi Nepal, Manager of Fund Development, Carissa Ropponen, Fund Development Coordinator, and Monica Singh, Community Giving Coordinator

A small group of women started WAVAW with the goal of supporting women who had survived sexual assault. They shifted the landscape in Vancouver by providing woman-centered services. Today, 33 years later, we continue to do this work and have expanded to include counselling, victim services, and educational outreach.

When women come together and support one another, amazing things happen: the women that we serve are supported in their paths to healing and justice; they find solidarity and sisterhood; and they know that WAVAW will be out in the community, tirelessly advocating for social change.

Below image and opposite page: WAVAW runners at the 2015 Scotiabank Half-Marathon & 5K



Our donors make these amazing things happen.

In 2015, 10,500 donors donated a total of \$707,000 to WAVAW.

Without this generous support, WAVAW would not be able to continue providing critical services for women.

50% of our funding comes from the generosity of donors. Our donors made the following possible in 2015:

They reduced the wait for counselling services, and made it possible for 80 women to attend individual counselling sessions

They expanded our group support program, and made it possible for 100 women to attend group support sessions

They amplified WAVAW's outreach program, and allowed us to be at 100 outreach events

They allowed WAVAW to continue to the long legacy of women supporting women and creating social change.

WAVAW is so grateful to all of our generous partners and grantors:

BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres

BC Ministry of Justice

BC Gaming

City of Vancouver

Coast Capital Savings

Department of Justice Canada

Health Sciences Association

Women's Health Centre





WAVAW - Rape Crisis Centre

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