



Annual General Report  
April 1, 2019 – March 31, 2020



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## Mandate and Vision

*Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre (PCWRSAC)* offers support and advocacy to individual women and unites women, community and government to achieve equality.

As feminists we are committed to justice and equality for all people. Ultimately this means liberation of women from oppression and an

affirmation of the right of all women to dignity and autonomy. We support the struggles of all women to live in loving, non-exploitative relationships free from violence. We believe in freedom of choice and see women as experts in their own lives.

Our vision is a world of justice, equality and peace for all people. We see an end to sexism, racism, poverty, classism, ageism, and all other forms of oppression. We see a society where there is self-determination, both individually and collectively.



## A Message from the Board Chair

It has been a memorable year for the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre. A year full of challenges, hard work and progress. In addition to providing vital direct service and advocacy to the community, we were thrilled to bring back Slut the Play this year. This piece of social justice theatre is moving and thought provoking; spreading awareness about the impact of slut-shaming, sexual violence and rape culture. It was an honour to bring this performance and discussion back to our community and high schools.

This year brought many challenges, not least of all Covid-19. The staff of the PCWRSAC have braved the pandemic and the many changes it brought with it. With careful planning, dedication and caution, the staff has been able to continue to deliver direct service remotely during this sensitive time. They have worked tirelessly to evaluate the changing needs of the community and the best way to safely provide their much-needed services.

As Board Chair, I would like to extend my appreciation to the women who serve on the Board of Directors alongside me. Thank you to these women who volunteer their time to this wonderful organization. Special thanks to our board members who are leaving this year: Laura Stewart, Patsy Langille, Carson Cameron and former Chair Mallory Arnott. We wish them all the best and are excited to be joined by a new group of dedicated feminists.

Finally, on behalf of the Board, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our staff and Executive Director. Their passion fuels their commitment in the face of adversity. Thank you for all you do and for continuing to improve the lives of women and girls in our community. With the ongoing support from our funders, staff and board members, PCWRSAC will continue to grow and overcome the challenges that surely lie ahead. We look forward to another year of serving and empowering the women of Pictou County.

In solidarity,  
Devon Greene  
Board Chair





## A Message from the Executive Director

Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre is the oldest Women's Centre in Nova Scotia formed through the collective passions of women. Our non-profit is led by women, for women and about women. Feminism and a gender-based analysis inform our work together.



This year, we welcome staff members Krista Knoblauch and Megan Moore. They bring energy, experience, education and dedication to the work of our Centre. Krista has a background in Human Rights and Megan a background in psychology and counselling. Allison Avery shifted away from direct service work to bookkeeping services with us while she embraced a new opportunity to become a lawyer! Baillie MacDonald continues in her work with us through support work and MORPH (Mapping our Road to Power and Healing) Navigation.

PCWRSAC staff are here to listen and support all women's voices, reaching out together to eradicate inequality. We are grateful for the many women who trust us to support them on their journey. As a Resource Centre for women the reasons for accessing services is vast and often layered. For many, our open door provides a safe non-judgmental space to unwrap the layers of concerns surrounding them including relationship concerns, poverty, mental health, income security, housing and sexualized violence.

Our Centre is committed to both providing services and preventative interventions to work towards an end of violence against women in all its forms. Direct services, programs, raise awareness and respond to address the needs of our community.

The work of our Centre is made possible through the work of many women including staff, Board of Directors, community partnerships and the women who access our services. Our operation is supported through funding by the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Department of Community Services. Additional grants through the United Way of Pictou County and Aberdeen Health Foundation have allowed for expansion of our services regarding sexual violence prevention and intervention.

As proud owners of our Centre located at 503 South Frederick Street, New Glasgow, we have invested in making our space warm and welcoming. We were honored to receive a donation of furniture for our program room through the late Jessica Smith's family. Jessica's furniture, continues to support community and our Centre in meaningful ways.

In March, the global pandemic led to Nova Scotia and Canada entering into a State of Emergency with people being asked to stay home whenever possible. As a result, for the protection of our clients and team, we temporarily closed our doors but not our services. We are adapting and have invested in our IT infrastructure to help us adapt and expand our service

delivery options. We were able to purchase cell phones to expand our services to include text supports. Due to health and safety concerns, we have shifted how we work with our services currently being offered remotely from our Centre into the homes of our clients through video programming, calls, text services and emails. We are currently working on our plans for next steps of service delivery during this global pandemic. We anticipate a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of Covid-19 and will continue to be mindful of the health and safety impacts of this hazard for our staff and the community we serve as we work on recovery plans. We recognize that women have been greatly affected by this global pandemic and we want to ensure you we are here, we are listening, we are advocating for you.

I am humbled to work with PCWRSAC team to create opportunities to engage with community and work collaboratively with our partners. Special thanks to all staff, funders and board past and present who make it possible every day for our Centre to provide direct services and work towards social change. We couldn't do it without you! We have a strong dynamic, flexible team to help move us forward. I look forward to the year ahead and moving together towards our future.

Respectfully submitted,  
Shelley Curtis-Thompson, BA, RSW  
Executive Director



*I raise up my voice—not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard...we cannot succeed when half of us are held back.*

Malala Yousafzai

## Group Programs

Women need a place to meet with other women, share ideas and learn from one and another. As a result, we have created a weekly open group program called *Women Together* involving ten (10) participants over the year. This group program, facilitated by our support team offers women a safe, supportive environment to practice self-care and compassion while they explore their experiences of feminism through open conversations. Groups offer a unique opportunity for women to come together.


*One Women Together participant says; "Without women together and the other programs I participated in through the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre, I wouldn't be where I am today. I think the staff are fantastic and the groups wonderful."*

**WOMEN  
TOGETHER**

EVERY TUESDAY  
10:00 - 11:30 am

October 1 - Family Law Lawyer  
October 8 - Women's History Month  
October 15 - Take Back the Night  
October 22 - Mi'kmaq History Month  
October 29 - Coffee & Conversation

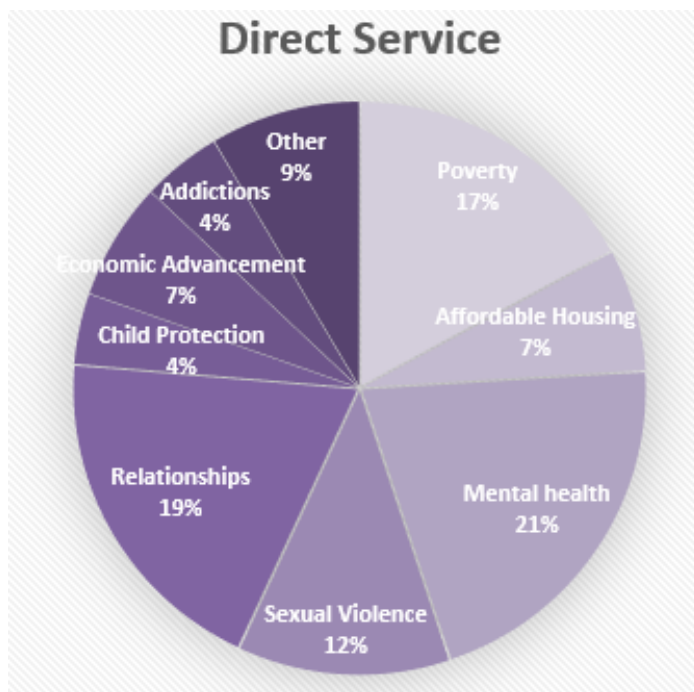
503 South Frederick Street New Glasgow

 For more Information:  
(902) 755-4647  
pcwc@womenscentre.ca

## Direct Service

PCWRSAC services offer a social safety net. One hundred fifteen (115) women dropped in without appointments to share and find out more about our Centre. Women may drop in to have a cup of coffee, conversation or borrow one of over 300 feminist-based texts from our Joanne Kohout Memorial Library.

A total of over one thousand three hundred eighty-three (1,383) people took part in one or more of our Centre's activities throughout the year. In summary, twenty-five (25) girls attended one of our girl's programs and ten (10) women in our *Women Together* program and twenty-three (23) MORPH group participants.



Women accessing our Centre may participate in one or more of our direct services. These services include support counselling, information and referral and programs. For some women our Centre offers important spaces to connect and decrease social isolation.

Our Centre is known for our advocacy work. For many, advocacy means the difference between knowing where to go and what to ask and feeling isolated and trapped. Advocacy, offers an opportunity to walk with a support person towards understanding services, rights and receiving answers. Our Centre provided twenty-seven (27) advocacy related sessions over the course of this year.

In addition, we have hosted events like our International Women's Day Open House which brought in a total of thirty (30) people. This event allowed women in our community to get to know the Centre, connect and engage in empowering conversations with one another. On International Women's Day, we gathered with our empowered Slut the Play cast and team with two public presentations and conversations about sexual violence and prevention. It was a meaningful day of social change work.

Direct services offer women a safe environment to unpack concerns and work towards goals on a broad range of issues including poverty, relationships, violence, economic security, housing and much more.



Over the course of the year, one hundred eighty-five (185) new women accessed our individualized support services. An average of thirty-eight (38) women receive direct services each month. Some women may be seen briefly or over a longer period of time, depending on each individual needs and circumstance. Women reach out when they need and know we will be there to support them when needed.

## Girls Day Camps

Girls Camps engage with girls age 9-12 offering empowering fun community-based programs. Three (3) camps were offered to sixteen (16) girls. Camps are fun, engaging and empowering. Our Camps were held in New Glasgow, Pictou and Pictou Landing. They offered participants opportunities to explore leadership, self-esteem, communication and science. All camps are offered free of charge. Due to the global pandemic, we had to cancel our March Break camp.



*"To all girls watching, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful, and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams" – Hillary Clinton*

## Pictou County's Third International Day of the Girl Celebration



Since 2012 International Day of the Girl is celebrated around the world. It is a day to celebrate and empower girls. On October 10, 2019, Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre hosted our 3<sup>rd</sup> International Day of the Girl Event. With nine (9) girls, two (2) horses/teachers, two (2) facilitators, three (3) staff we were empowered to all be leaders.

We spent the day at Colchester Exhibition Grounds with Seabreeze Leadership and explored communication and leadership. We determined that leaders are courageous, supportive, and respectful, they dream big and inspire, and they are humble and brave. Everyone discovered more about their personal leadership style and the I became "we".

Much of our day focused on communication as a central quality of Leadership. The girls used gestures and touch to communicate with their horses and team gaining confidence and problem-solving experience. By stepping outside their comfort zones, the girls discovered no matter the task if you think, take turns, communicate and stay patient even the most difficult task can be accomplished.

Special thanks to United Way of Pictou County for their funding support of this event. Empowered girls grow up to be empowered women. The sky is the limit!



## Healthy Relationships for Youth

*Healthy Relationships for Youth* is a twelve (12) week program developed through Antigonish Women's Centre and facilitated through PCWRSAC. It involves partnerships with our local schools to arrange for the program. The program works with youth leaders from grade eleven (11) and twelve (12) delivering the program to grade nine's on various topics related to healthy relationships. This year, we supported one program at Northumberland Regional High School with thirty (30) student leaders. However, the program ended prematurely due to Covid-19. The program was not delivered to grade nine (9) students.

## Finding Me



Finding Me is an eight (8) week violence preventative group for girls in grade seven (7). The sessions in this program are roughly an hour long in length and are held at the individual schools alongside New Leaf – Pictou County's Opportunity for Men, who facilitate a similar program with the boys. This program has provided a safe space for the students to learn and feel comfortable discussing topics that they may not feel comfortable with when in a regular co-ed classroom setting. Topics

include sexuality and healthy relationships, consent and sexualized violence, non-violence/power and privilege, pornography and expectations of sex, body image and self-esteem, expectations of femininity, women's health, and a final wrap up session with an evaluation and pizza party.

In total, one hundred nineteen sessions (119) were offered to one hundred ninety-eight (198) Middle School girls. Finding Me is supported by United Way of Pictou County, Aberdeen Health Foundation and Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women with each funder offering specific support. The Finding Me program spanned six (6) schools in Pictou County.

An individual from the program said, *"I would like to say I really enjoyed the sessions; they were really fun, and I always felt like I was in a safe place."*



## MORPH – Mapping Our Road to Power and Healing

Sexual Violence is occurring at epidemic numbers with as many as one in three women and one in six men experiencing sexual violence in their life time. This is not acceptable. Mapping Our Road to Power and Healing (MORPH) acts as a resource and leader in both sexual violence intervention and prevention within community and is administrated through PCWRSAC.

Over the course of the year, twenty-four (24) sessions of groups were offered involving twenty-three (23) participants of all genders. Public Education sessions, Yes No Maybe So developed by PCWRSAC focuses on consent were offered seven (7) times involving one hundred nineteen (119) sessions to one hundred fifty-eight (158) participants.

Group offers a unique opportunity to learn and grow through group experience. Groups are led with our MORPH Therapist and a PCWRSAC co-facilitator. Janice Fraser, a well-known social worker in the area stepped into the MORPH Therapist role this year as Dorie Mosel has moved on to new opportunities. Evaluations of programs were positive. For example, MORPH program survivors learned strategies and skills for decreasing anxiety and increasing self-awareness. Members shared they felt inspired by witnessing group member's healing journey through the group process. Many participants noted feeling increased self-awareness, safety and more connected through MORPH programs as a result of practicing "living in the now" through mindfulness.

MORPH navigation provides a reliable, safe entry point for survivors to be connected to appropriate community resources including other resources offered by members of the Community Support Network and Pictou County Sexual Assault Response team.

MORPH Facebook Page and our Website are some of the ways that we engage with community. Our Facebook page has had four hundred forty-nine (449) page views with over ninety (90) posts. During Sexual Assault Awareness Month, we hosted the proclamation signing with thirty (30) participants. Our MORPH Navigator, Baillie MacDonald took the lead in Take Back the Night. This public event held on October 15, 2019 included fifty-eight (58) participants.

Notably, we see an increase of referrals for women and youth recently experiencing sexual violence. Previously many survivors sought our services after years of suffering without support. The development of MORPH and its resources has created space for survivors to receive immediate care in theory decreasing the long-term effects of trauma. Notably, MORPH reached over four hundred fifty-nine (459) people through initiatives directed by MORPH! Baillie MacDonald is the glue that connects us all. Thank you, Baillie!

Other members of community have participated in conversations, interventions and preventative activities through the MORPH initiative. Thank you to all survivors for sharing your healing



journey with us and our staff, partners who make this work possible including Tearmann Society, Pictou County Centre for Sexual Health, Pictou Landing First Nations Native Women's Association, Black Educators and the members of Pictou Sexual Assault Response Team. Special thanks to Department of Community Services who supported this work through remaining funding from Breaking the Silence grant and United Way of Pictou County, Aberdeen Health Foundation, as well as, our core funders Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

## Slut the Play

This year through a Standing Together Grant we were able to bring Slut the Play to Pictou County. This play written by award winning playwright Katie Cappiello was relevant and riveting. It was inspired by the real experiences of high school students, this play follows the story of a 16-year-old high school student, Joanna Grace Del Marco. Joey is sexually assaulted by three life-long friends. The play explores how sexualized violence impacts Joey's life and the lives of her friends. Slut the Play explores gender norms, rape culture, shame and brings light to challenges facing teens as they develop sexuality and self.

This activism piece was performed four (4) times to the community by our dynamic empowered team of young people. Two performances of the play were carried out at local high schools including North Nova Education Centre and Northumberland Regional High School with an additional two performances for the public at the New Glasgow Square. After each performance, the cast and the audience engage in a dialogue about the topics raised in the play. The dialogue involved meaningful conversations about gender norms, social conformity, and more specifically about the power and struggle of a bystander.

Slut the Play is an emotional journey that opens one up to new ways of thinking about rape culture and how it impacts people. The audience said the play allowed them to learn more about sexual violence, sharing they would recommend it to a friend.

Participants said

*"I learned a lot about how sexual assault can affect more than just the person it happened to."*

*"Experience of hearing the stories from another perspective"*

*"I got experience acting as one of the characters and I learned how important this topic really is and how much it needs to be shared"*

*"It gave me a chance to open conversation with my peers and gave me an open way to talk about my experiences. It also taught me that I'm not alone and I'm not as lost as I thought."*

*"A learning experience teaching me lots and bringing me closer to the women involved"*

*“I got a view into the life of a sexual assault survivor...”*

The journey of bringing Slut the Play to the stage highlights the importance of relationships as Cast and Production Team grew through our connections with one another. Inclusion allows for engagement in critical dialogue necessary to provide support to individuals. This dialogue is necessary to shift systems and dismantle rape culture which normalizes sexual and domestic violence.

Our team spanned many volunteers and had a cast of ten (10) young women, PCWRSAC staff team production support, stage manager, Megan Breen and four audiences with about five hundred (500) people. Special thanks to Dawn Peters our Director for her guidance and ability to help us get the most out of each gathering.



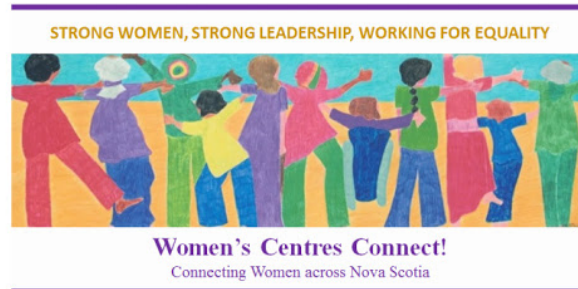
*One audience member stated “I realized how powerful social media is in today’s society. We need to re-educate our youth on what is, or is not, acceptable in respect to sexual conduct. No means no. Just listen, believe, and support them (survivors).”*

## Starting Point

Women joined Starting Point Program with the goal to enhance their self-esteem and pre-employment skills. The program led by two facilitators, Caroline MacIsaac and Angela Fogarty was eight (8) weeks in duration and was held at the Plymouth Community Centre. This program provided eleven (11) participants with the tools to self-assess and explore their strengths and needs, establish priorities and preferences, review a selection of potential occupations and determine how to make appropriate career choices. The different modules focused on topics such as life and interpersonal skills, self-esteem, self-awareness, establishing goals, communication and public speaking, budgeting, community resources, work/life balance, conflict resolution and volunteer experience.

## Women's Centers Connect

Connect is our provincial association of Women's Centre's. Connect unites, nine Women's Centers from across the province offering a gendered analysis on policy and speaks up about women's issues provincially. Our coordinator, Georgia Barnwell retired this year, we



wish her all the best in her retirement. We welcome a new coordinator, Cora Cole to our Connect team. Our Executive Director serves as the Connect Treasurer and is a representative on their Policy Committee, Financial Committee and Personnel Committee. As our Connect representative our Executive Director attended nearly forty (40) Connect meetings this year. Our coordinator represents Connect and has a lead role at various tables including:

- Domestic Violence Court Program and Metro Interagency Committee on Family Violence
- Community Society to End Poverty (CESP)
- Halifax based Community Agenda for Social Assistance Reforms (CASAR)
- Sexual Assault Network of Nova Scotia
- And much more.

Women's Centre's in Nova Scotia are multi-service organizations located in nine (9) communities across Nova Scotia. We provide direct services and programs for women and girls, work with our local service partners to respond to emerging issues, and work for change to create equity and equality for women, their families, and communities. Connect member Centre's serve and respond to the issues of women and girls in our communities. Our activities are rooted in a feminist analysis informed by an intersectional, non-oppressive, and trauma informed approach.

## Social Change

Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre works towards equity, equality and empowerment through direct service and community engagement and partnerships to address gaps in service.

Our social change work occurs in collaboration and the global pandemic heightened the necessity for collaboration and connection. Women working in service industry have become unemployed, others have been double tasked with unpaid Labour and paid employment in their homes or on the front lines. With the whole world shifting, we have a new look into people's homes sometimes highlighting domestic violence and its dangers. We must continue to work together towards an end to violence in all its forms.



Locally, PCWRSAC serves on the following committees:

- Aging Well Coalition
- Community Support Network Working Group
- Leave a Legacy
- Pictou County Chapter of Silent Witness Nova Scotia
- Pictou County Interagency on Family Violence
- Pictou County Partners
- Pictou County Sexual Assault Response Team

Provincially, PCWRSAC serves on the following organizations:

- CONNECT Women Centres of Nova Scotia

*She believed she could, so she did.*



## Public Education and Events

### At a Community Level:

- Community Food Connections
- Consent Workshops
- Finding Me
- Girls Camps
- International Day of the Girl
- International Women's Day Open House
- Mental Health Round Table
- Nova Scotia Women's Summit
- Pride Week
- Sexual Assault Awareness Month Events
- Slut: The Play
- Take Back the Night
- Women Together

### Ongoing Learning:

- Assessing Intercultural Competence
- Atlantic Problem-Solving Conference: Sharing What Works
- Citizens at the Community Engagement Thought Leaders Series
- Deescalating Potentially Violent Situations (funded by United Way of Pictou County)
- Domestic Violence
- First Aid
- Grief (Funded by United Way of Pictou County)
- HIFIS Training
- Mental Health First Aid
- Neighbors' Friends and Family
- Silent Witness Human Trafficking Conference
- Tec Zoom

## In the News



## THEATRE

## Slut: The Play addresses the topic of sexual violence

BRENDAN AHERN  
THE NEWS

NEW GLASGOW, N.S. — Less than 10 days away from their performance at Glasgow Square Theatre, 11 performers and dedicated crew are preparing to deliver some hard truths to their audience.

"It takes what's private and makes it public," said Shelly Curtis-Thompson of the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre. "Although we don't normally talk about what's being talked about on this stage, the stories are not shocking."

For the second time in three years, the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre is staging Slut: The Play.

First debuted at the 2013 New York Fringe Festival, Slut: The Play addresses sexualized violence and people's response after a sexual assault occurs to a young woman in their community.

"Some are supportive, others are not, and (the play) takes you through some of the real-life things that happen," said the play's director, Dawn Peters.

This is the second time Peters has helmed the social justice play. She and the cast said the



Owen Atkinson, Phoenix MacKenzie, Grace Henshaw, Faith Taylor, Rachel Rowan and Nora Ryan are all part of this year's production of Slut: The Play, produced by the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre. **BRENDAN AHERN/ THE NEWS**

process has been challenging.

"It's always wonderful to bring together mostly strangers and have them support each other through really painful dialogue," said Peters. "It brings things up and it's very moving."

Speaking with the cast, all of whom are students at North Nova Education Centre and Northumberland Regional

High School, they described the experience as being both overwhelming and rewarding.

"It's really heavy, but it can shed some light on a really important topic," said NRHS Grade 9 student Norah Ryan.

"Think of it as more than a play," added Faith Taylor, NNEC Grade 10. "It's really acting out something that's

happening."

At the end of the play, there will be community conversation where audience members will be free to ask the cast questions.

"Every person sitting in the audience is going to have their own emotional interpretation of the play, and that will be impossible to ignore," said Curtis-Thompson. "I suspect that the

audience will leave here changed. They'll leave with a new point of view and understanding of the reality of sexual violence."

The Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre 2019 production of Slut: The Play will be staged for the public at Glasgow Square Theatre on Nov. 30 at 2 and 7 p.m.

www.pictouadvocate.com

The  
October

## Taking back the night

By Heather Brimicombe

heatherbrimicombe@pictouadvocate.com

A group of Pictou County citizens gathered at Laurie Peace Park calling for change and awareness last week as the sun set and the park was washed in the dim light. The annual Take Back the Night march saw a crowd gather in the park before they headed through downtown on a march.

Students from the local high schools came together to speak about a play that is being performed called SLUT, The Play. The theatre piece was performed in the county a couple of years ago and has been brought back due to the importance of the subject matter. The students spoke about their experience being



Local demonstrators took to the streets last week to speak out against sexual violence and violence against women.

(Brimicombe photo)

involved in the play that questions rape culture.

The group made its way

through downtown New Glasgow with chants calling for the end of rape culture, sexual

violence, sexual assault and victim-blaming.

"I definitely think that it's more than last year," said Baillie MacDonald, Mapping Our Road to Power and Healing (MORPH) co-ordinator about the crowd. "Our event is getting stronger."

MacDonald said she was pleased with the turnout and the awareness from the event and hopes it sparks conversations about sexual violence and more.

"There is support out there and there is help out there," MacDonald said. In her role as co-ordinator of MORPH, MacDonald helps support and empower victims of sexual violence in the community and helps them navigate systems that can be used to seek help for victims of sexual violence.



## AWARENESS

# Healing journey

Local groups participate in Take Back the Night walk in New Glasgow



Baillie MacDonald, of the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Centre, speaks at the Take Back the Night event in New Glasgow. KEVIN AD SHADE/THE NEWS

### KEVIN AD SHADE THE NEWS

NEW GLASGOW, N.S. — About 40 people attended the Take Back the Night event on Oct. 15 in New Glasgow.

Baillie MacDonald, of the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Centre and navigator with MORPH Pictou County (Mapping Our Road to Power & Healing), said the New Glasgow walk, which was held at Laurie Park, is one of many Take Back the Night marches held throughout North America.

"The event is to show survivors that we're here to support them and to raise awareness in the community," she said. "We're here to help them continue with their healing journeys."

Some of them would later pick up signs and walk through the streets on New Glasgow's east side, trying to spread their message.

Among those who spoke during the hour-long event were cast members and the director of the play "Slut," which the women's resource centre is producing and will be staging later this fall at Glasgow Square.

Donna Smith, the executive director of Tearmann House Society, said more than 140 women and 50 children walked through the doors of Tearmann House last year in order to access her organization's services.

**"We're here to help them continue with their healing journeys."**

Baillie MacDonald

"[It] seems to be the average, so it's a well-needed service in our community, unfortunately," said Smith, whose organization marked its 35th year on the very evening Take Back the Night was held. "But the work is amazing, and the women and children who access our services are also amazing. We don't want to make that OK. We want to make change."

She cited statistics stating that a woman is killed in Canada "every two and a half days" so today is important, and this walk is important.

# Give me shelter

When home isn't the safest place to be...

By Jackie Jardine  
jjardine@pictouadvocate.com

Home is the safest place to be. Stay home. Self-isolate and help #flattenthecurve during these days of COVID-19 chaos.

Sounds idyllic. The opportunity to work comfortably from home yet still be connected with family sounds like a dream come true for many women.

But what if home actually isn't the safest place for women to be? "For women in particular, this is just more that's

been piled on their plate," says Shelley Curtis-Thompson, executive director of the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre in New Glasgow.

"When it comes to COVID-19, I think women are disproportionately affected because of the responsibilities that women are seen as taking on. When you look at work-life balance for women, women have less hours normally that are free for leisure because they're responsible for their work in the workforce as well as

their unpaid labour at home. And those unpaid labours have just become a lot more complicated."

It is an extraordinary time of stress for people. And when domestic violence enters the picture, it becomes even more stressful.

That's why the women's centre and other support systems are remaining open during the province-wide state of emergency and the COVID-19 panic.

"It's really critical for me that we be able to keep our phone lines open so that people can have that connection. From the centre's perspective, we are doing our best to be accessible to people."

For people reaching out by phone, internet or Facebook messenger, there is also a change in their level of privacy while they are at home.

"People are doing the best they can do as they did before the day COVID-19 became a situation. They are trying to figure out ways to cope and get through this crazy situation until they can get out the other end."

If this is the case, Curtis-Thompson would like women to know one thing: "We're there for them."

While staff can no longer meet women face to face because

of Public Health restrictions, they are still available to provide service through video and telephone.

In an emergency unsafe situation, 9-1-1 will help. "They will help you get to a shelter and Tearmann House's doors are still open, they're still taking in people to support them and they're doing the heroic work of supporting women and children who are unsafe as a result of domestic violence."

In many ways, it seems as if COVID-19 has changed everything but Curtis-Thompson says in reality, nothing has changed.

"Not for profits like ourselves at the women's centre and Tearmann and others in the community remain that social safety net for people and we're still there to support people. COVID-19 putting people together in isolation certainly can be stressful and is magnified when those situations aren't safe in the first place."

Tearmann's Donna Smith confirms, "Tearmann House is still operating as a shelter and we have our 24-hour crisis line available to anyone who is in need of support. We are able to take women in who are experiencing intimate partner violence. So we want to assure women there is a place to go."

The executive director agrees that home may not be the safest place for women to self-isolate during the COVID-19 crisis, and can become particularly less safe for women with an abusive partner. "In those cases, our 24-hour crisis line is available. And if

home is not a safe place then we certainly support women in finding a safe place, whether that be the shelter or alternate arrangements. We just want to make sure that women have the message that they are not alone and they can reach out."

Smith stresses her organization is available 24/7 for all women — regardless of geographic location — particularly for those in rural communities where transportation is an issue. "Wherever they are, we will figure something out; we will find a way to make it happen."

In unprecedented times like these, organizations like the women's centre and other shelters continue to provide a valuable service to vulnerable groups while thinking outside the box.

"If women are self-isolating due to COVID-19 I wouldn't want them to think that they can't call because they are self-isolating. If they call we can figure something out. So our message is: You are not alone, please do reach out, please do call and we will work through a plan together," Smith encourages.

"As a community we all need to reach out and check in with people, neighbours. Maybe there's a support that can happen that way. We all have to take care of each other. If you're a woman and you're safety planning, that plan can be established that includes neighbours and people

checking in and friend facts and that kind of thing more than ever, we're more open to support neighbours and being step up sometimes you might not have done that."

Safety planning is Stacey Diamini, executive director of Tearmann House, advocates.

"It's more important that women or youth situations have their own plan. Is there a safe neighbour or friend to take you in if home is place? As always, if you or your children are in danger, call the police."

There is limited support for Youth at the Atlantic Compassion administered through the Way of Pictou County, hotel room for a couple to give someone time arrangements for the Anybody needing to call PC Roots for 902-695-3241.

"I really think that's incredible in terms of the ways to step up. But how inventive we as women I really think it's important to remember the human and human be each other, and there's not-for-profits that are Curtis-Thompson says.

## REACH OUT

- Tearmann House Crisis Line (902) 752-1633 (24/7)
- Tearmann House main line 902-752-0132
- Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Health email pcwrc@womenscentre.ca or call 902-755-4647
- PC Roots for Youth at 902-695-3241
- Kids Help Phone (24/7) at 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868
- Emergencies 9-1-1

### To The Editor,

During the Covid-19 pandemic, home is the safest place we can be. We are socially isolating in an attempt to stop the spread and flatten the curve.

However, for many children, youth, and adults home is not a safe haven. Incidents of child abuse and intimate partner violence frequently rise during periods of isolation. Isolation compounded with uncertainties about health, food security, and bill payments increase anxiety and stress in the home.

Children and youth who rely on school, extracurricular activities, and friend's homes for their safe space, as well as adults who rely on work and social circles for their safe places, are vulnerable to increased violence at this time. The longer we must take drastic measures to stop the spread of Covid-19, the longer these individuals must survive without their supports and safety nets in place, placing them in increased danger.

If you or someone you know is at risk of physical, emotional, or mental abuse the following resources are available:

Tearmann House in New Glasgow can be reached 24/7 at 902-752-0132 or 1-888-831-0330.

Roots for Youth in New Glasgow can be reached at 902-695-3241

Kids Help Phone can be reached 24/7 at 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868

For immediate help dial 911

Sincerely,

Kevin Adshade, OPRA Pictou County

## Facebook

PCWRSAC uses social media as a tool to educate, engage and empower the community. Our most popular social media has been our Facebook page where we aim to share posts daily. These posts may include information regarding topics like mental health, self-care, domestic and sexual violence, community resources, women empowerment, holiday/international day celebrations and any updates regarding the Centre itself. We also use this platform to gain interest in events and groups that we are developing or hosting. Below you will find the numbers which will give you an idea of how engagement has increased over the past year.



Our Facebook messenger is another way individual who are seeking more information or support are able to connect with us. We are always looking for ways to be more accessible to community. We now have a cell phone that we can text and call individuals from. Our cell phone number is (902) 921-4647.

**Page likes:** 1,345 which has increased by 74 in the last year

**Page followers:** 1,322 which has increased by 82 in the past year

**Posts:** We share posts a few times a week and aim for at least once a day.



If you would like to visit our Facebook page, go to <https://www.facebook.com/pcwomenscentre/>.

You can also find our website at [www.womenscentre.ca](http://www.womenscentre.ca).

General email for inquiries: [pcwc@womenscentre.ca](mailto:pcwc@womenscentre.ca)



## Staff and Board of Directors

### PCWRSAC Staff Members:

Executive Director:

Shelley Curtis-Thompson

Support Workers:

Allison Avery (re-assigned)

Krista Knoblauch (currently on leave)

Baillie MacDonald

Megan Moore

Bookkeeper:

Allison Avery

Accountant:

Brenda Parker

MORPH Counsellor:

Janice Fraser

Dorrie Mosel

Student Placements:

Shaylyn Palmer

Megan Moore

Krista Oickle

Summer Student:

Dominique Amit

Grant Staff:

Caroline MacIsaac

Angela Fogarty

### Board of Directors:

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Devon Greene

Vice-Chair:

Jillian Hennick

Treasurer:

Jill (Davidson) Gratto

Secretary/ Executive Director:

Shelley Curtis-Thompson

Directors:

Carson Cameron

Kate Gratto

Patsy Langille

Janet Wallace

Retired/Resigned members:

Mallory Arnott (April 1, 2019- Dec. 31, 2019)

Laura Smith (April 1, 2019- Dec 31, 2019)



Thank you all for your contributions.

## Special Thanks to the following Funding and Grant Partners:

Aberdeen Health Foundation

Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Nova Scotia Department of Community Services

Nova Scotia Standing Together to Prevent Domestic Violence Grant

United Way of Pictou County



## Special Thanks to the following Community Supporters:

Community Support Network

Co-operators Insurance

CUPW 87

Della Curtis

Tonya Francis

Ian Grant

Rotary Club of Pictou

Don Mingo

Nova Scotia Community College Social Services

Dawn Peters and Slut the Play Cast

Isha & Shreya Sharma

Gordon and Bev Sutherland for their install of our window air conditioners and odd jobs throughout the year.

