

Annual General Report  
April 1, 2018 – March 31, 2019



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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 Note from the Board Chair

It has been another wonderful year at the *Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre*, full of change and progress. We welcomed new staff and board members, and said good-bye to others, most notably, the passing of Doreen Paris, a valued member of the *PCWRSAC* for almost two decades. *PCWRSAC* continues to constantly grow and learn as we overcome whatever challenges come our way. Despite these challenges, we were able to continue offering a vast range of services to the women and girls in our community, including group programming, individual service, advocacy, and engaging in events such as *International Women's Day* and *Take Back the Night*. We have much to be proud of.



On behalf of the Board, I extend our sincerest thanks to the staff and executive director of *PCWRSAC*. They work tirelessly each day to support and empower the women of our community. I further wish to extend gratitude to the Board of Directors for their commitment to improving the lives of women and girls in Pictou County. It is an honour and a privilege to work with such a dedicated group of feminists.

Our success is our community's success. With the ongoing support of our funders, staff, Board and volunteers, *PCWRSAC* is ready for the challenges and achievements ahead in the year to come. We have continued building partnerships that will have a long lasting and positive impact for our community. Thank you for your commitment to social change and feminist issues in our community and beyond.

Best regards,

Mallory Arnott

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 within our team and community.

This year, we welcome staff members Allison Avery and Baillie MacDonald. They bring energy, experience,



education and dedication to the work of our Centre. We have re-structured our job descriptions making all members of our team a part of our support work circle. These changes came into effect late summer with our updated *Human Resources Policy and Procedure Manual*.

*PCWRSAC* staff are here to listen and support all women's voices, reaching out together to eradicate inequality. *PCWRSAC* is committed to both providing services and preventative interventions to work towards the elimination of violence against women in all its forms. 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.

The work of *Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre* is made possible through the work of many women including staff, Board of Directors, community partnerships and the women who walk through our doors. 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 Municipality of Pictou County allow for our services to be expanded including *MORPH*, *Yoga* and additional *Girls Programming*.

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 repaired walls, floors, added insulation and paint and shifted around our rooms to improve our environment. Briggs Roofing and Siding went above and beyond our contract to ensure added comfort to the women we serve. We are grateful for these improvements.

I am humbled to work with *PCWRSAC* and engage with our team and community. Special thanks to all staff and board past and present who make it possible every day for our Centre to provide services and work towards social change. We couldn't do it without you. 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 twenty (20) participants over the year. This group program, facilitated by Baillie MacDonald, offers women a safe and supportive environment to practice self-care, compassion and explore their experiences of feminism through open conversations. Groups offer a unique opportunity for women to come together.

Programs provide a safe environment to combat social isolation and connect with internal strengths like resilience. Candace Slater and Katie Williams worked with PCWRSAC to provide *Self Esteem* programming to women in the community at Ward One Community Centre. This program offers women a space to explore and care for their self-esteem. In addition, Candace Slater has supported fourteen (14) participants through two (2) *Grief Group* programs offering a safe space for women to process their grief.

With funding through the Municipality of Pictou County, we worked with Ursula Klum to provide a series of *Yoga* programs involving sixteen (16) participants. Yoga is an effective way to increase both one's physical health and their conscious experience of body positivity.

*One Women Together participant says; "I can't wait to get here on Tuesdays. Because it's a safe environment and the topics are so enriching. When I leave I feel very empowered."*

*One Self Esteem participant says the program is "enlightening, enriching and empowering."*



**WOMEN TOGETHER**  
EVERY TUESDAY  
10:00 - 11:30 am

November 6 - Fall Craft  
November 13 - TedTalk & Discussion  
November 20 - Self-care during the holiday's  
November 27 - Sexual health conversation with the Pictou County Centre for Sexual Health

503 South Frederick Street New Glasgow

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



**SELF ESTEEM WORKSHOP**  
TUESDAY  
JANUARY 8 -  
FEBRUARY 26 2019

Location: Ward 1 Community Centre New Glasgow  
Time: 6 to 8 PM  
Facilitators: Katie Williams and Candace Slater

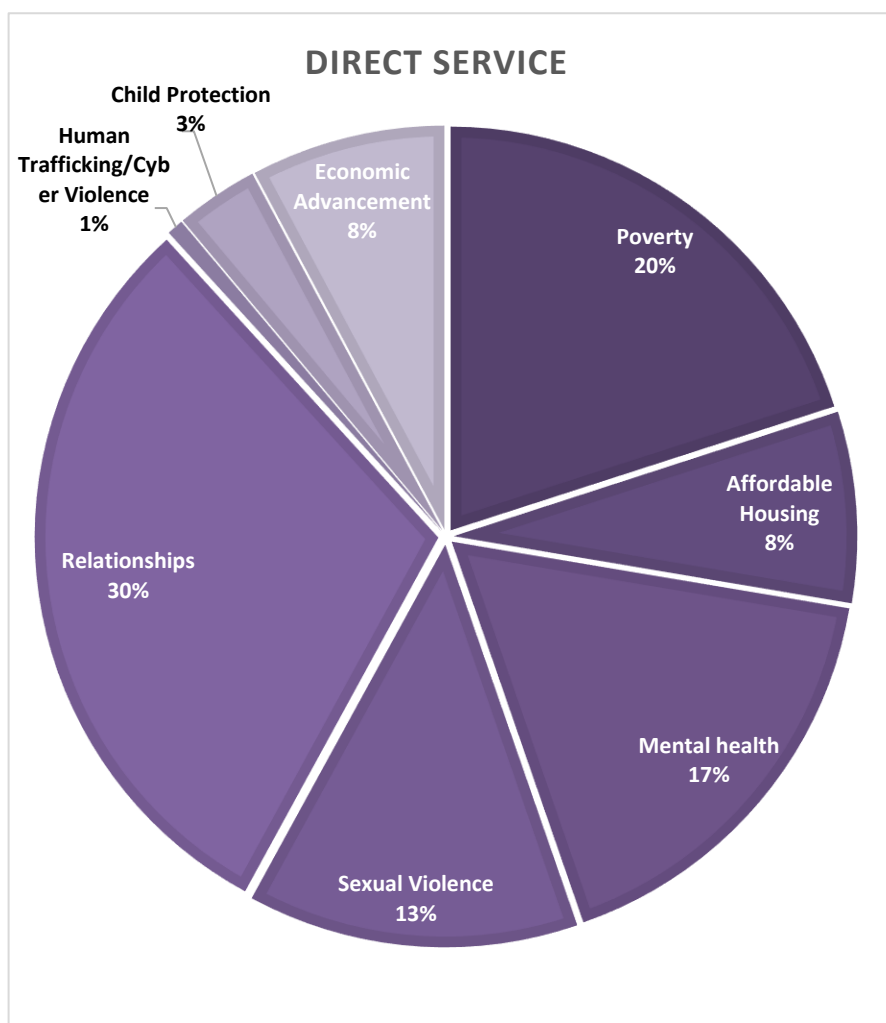
Limited funds available to assist with travel and childcare  
For more information contact:  
PCWRSAC  
phone:(902) 755-4647  
email: pcwc@womenscentre.ca

Hosted by the  
Pictou County Womens Resource and Sexual Assault Centre

## Direct Service

PCWRSAC services offer a social safety net. One hundred fifty-nine (159) women dropped in without appointments to share and find out more about our Centre. As many as twenty-three (23) women drop in each month, have a cup of coffee, conversation or borrow one of over three hundred (300) feminist-based texts from our *Joanne Kohout Memorial Library*.

A total of one hundred and nineteen (119) individual women participated in individualized services this year with an additional thirty-four (34) girls attending our girls programming and ninety-one (91) participants in other group programs. A total of over eight hundred fifty-seven (857) people took part in one or more of PCWRSAC's activities throughout the year.



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. PCWRSAC provided one hundred eleven (111) advocacy related sessions over the course of the year.

In addition, *International Women's Day* hosted one hundred fifty-five (155) people. *International Women's Day* celebrates the many accomplishments of women through out the world. This year, we celebrated sharing food from *Maple Cedar & The Syrian Kitchen* and hearing Rania Almethyb's journey to Canada and to now.

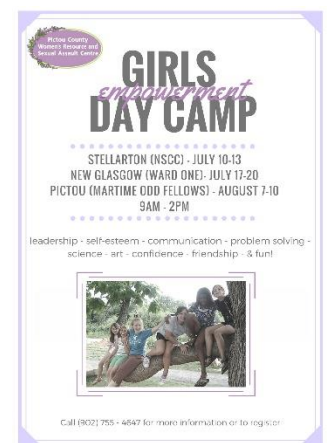
Direct services offer women a safe environment to unpack concerns and work towards goals on a broad range of issues including poverty, relationships, violence, economic security, housing and much more.

Over the course of the year, one hundred eleven (111) new women accessed our individualized support services. An average of forty-three (43) women received direct services each month. Some women may be seen briefly or over a longer period of time, depending on each individual needs and circumstance.

Relationship (183), Poverty (121), Mental Health (103), Sexualized Violence (80), Economic Advancement (47), Housing (46), Addictions (31), Child Protection (20), Human Trafficking & cyber violence (4).

## Girls Day Camps

*Girls Camps* engage with girls age 9-12 offering empowering fun community-based programs. Four (4) camps were offered to thirty-four (34) girls. Camps are fun, engaging and empowering. Camps were held in New Glasgow, Pictou and Sumac Farm. They offered participants opportunities to explore leadership, self-esteem, communication and science. All camps are offered free of charge. Special thanks to our staff, Allison Avery, summer staff Reid Sutherland and Heaven Davis for their dedication and care that made these programs possible. This program is enriched through volunteers and donations including donations from Subway. Thank you, community, for all your support.



*Girls are one of the most powerful forces for change in the world: When their rights are recognized, their needs are met, and their voices are heard, they drive positive change in their families, their communities, and the world."* – Kathy Calvin, United Nations Foundation

President & CEO



## Pictou County's Second 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 11, 2018, *Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre* hosted our 2<sup>nd</sup> *International Day of the Girl* Event. With twelve (12) girls, two (2) horses/teachers, two (2) facilitators, staff and volunteers 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 as the day evolved "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 that no matter the task if you think, take turns, communicate and stay patient even the most difficult task can be accomplished.



## Healthy Relationships for Youth

*Healthy Relationships for Youth* is a twelve (12) week program developed through Antigonish Women's Centre with youth leaders from grade eleven (11) and twelve (12) delivering the program to grade nine (9) on various topics related to healthy relationships. This year, we supported two (2) programs in Pictou County.

With over fifty (50) youth leaders, two (2) schools and four (4) classes of grade nine (9) students and a total of thirty-four (34) sessions of *Healthy Relationships for Youth* were offered at Northumberland Regional High School and North Nova Education Centre. The program is engaging and fun and opens up difficult conversations about consent, cyber violence, drugs, alcohol, and decision making in a safe and interactive way.

## Human Trafficking

Between 2009-2016, eight hundred sixty-five (865) victims of human trafficking cases were reported to police in Canada with ninety five percent (95%) of these cases involving women. Sex trafficking happens here in Pictou County. The majority of victims are lured and controlled by someone who they thought to be a trusted significant other. The majority of victims in Canada are young girls.

Common barriers to leaving sex trade include manipulation and control from the trafficker. Here at *PCWRSAC* we are available to provide supports to those impacted. We are here to listen and understand trauma and resilience. We have resources available in our *Joanne Kohout Memorial Library* that offer education on the subject.

As a Silent Witness member, we have been working throughout this year to support a *Human Trafficking Conference* in our area in May 2019. This conference was hosted by Pictou County Chapter of Silent Witness.

*Feminism isn't about making women strong. Women are already strong. It's about changing the way the world perceives that strength.*

G.D. Anderson

## 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.

January 2019, new legislation came into effect to protect victims of domestic violence. Our Centre, along with Connect, were part of these consultations resulting in both paid and unpaid Domestic Violence Leave.



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
- Multicultural Association of Pictou County

Provincially, PCWRSAC serves on the following organizations:

- CONNECT Women Centres of Nova Scotia
- Sexual Assault Services of Nova Scotia



## Honouring Doreen Paris

For the past twenty (20) plus years, Doreen Paris worked with us mostly in the area of gender-based violence. It is with great sadness we share her passing on Feb 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

Most of Doreen's work involved working with women on a one on one basis doing support counselling and advocacy. She was often seen at Family, Provincial and Supreme Court offering these services. Doreen also facilitated group programs and conversations opening up opportunities for difficult conversations about violence in our lives.

Doreen was a community minded woman serving on many boards including: Tearmann Society, New Leaf, Silent Witness, Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Women's Institute of the African United Baptist

Association of Nova Scotia to name a few. She was a member of the Canadian Delegation to the United Nations in 2000.

Doreen came to work every day until August 2018 when she left on a leave with the hopes of returning. Since her passing PCWRSAC has received many calls from women sharing stories of her feisty dedication in supporting them. They share stories of how she helped them move towards their own healing.

Like the women who came through our doors to see Doreen, we are grateful for the ways she has impacted on our Centre. To honour her memory, we will develop a group program recognizing her called *Speaking Out* focuses on assertiveness and action, as Doreen was a woman of action.

For her work she received much recognition including Queens Silver Jubilee Metal, Queen's Diamond Jubilee Metal and Elizabeth Fry's Rebel with a Cause and others.

Doreen is missed by family, friends, co-workers, community and clients. Her messages of activism will be with us and help us build our future.



## Women's Centers Connect

Connect unites nine (9) Women's Centers from across the province and offers a gendered analysis on policy and provincial needs. Our coordinator, Georgia Barnwell represents Connect and has a lead role at various tables including:

- Domestic Violence Court Program and Metro Interagency Committee on Family Violence
- Restorative Conversations Group
- Home-Warming Advisory Council
- Community Society to End Poverty (CESP)
- Halifax based Community Agenda for Social Assistance Reforms (CASAR)
- Sexual Assault Network of Nova Scotia

Women's Centres 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 services 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.

**Women's Centres in Nova Scotia**

We are multi-service organizations located in 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. Most Centres serve rural communities with unique regional challenges that benefit from the gender-based and rural lenses that inform our work.

**Direct Services**

- One-on-one Support Counselling and Crisis Management
- Information and Referral (legal, primary health, financial security, community-based services, employment support, mental health, and addictions)
- Individual Navigation, Advocacy and System Navigation, Accompaniment
- Drop-in for any reason: social contact, problem-solving, accessing support and resources, safe and quiet space
- Programs (personal development and empowerment for women, girls, and youth), pre-employment, health and wellness, economic development and self-sufficiency, healthy relationships, poverty relief and food security, healthy cooking, and more!

**Collaboration and Partnerships**

We work with community agencies and government:

- Direct services, including information, referrals, navigation, and joint programs
- Interagency Committees, Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs), and others relevant to regional situations
- Improve services for women and strengthen our work for social change
- Share resources and build capacity to address increasingly complex issues in our communities and social / political systems

**Work for Change**

- Community Development
- Policy Engagement and Advocacy
- Public/Professional Education

Our services respond to the issues women and girls in our communities face. Our activities are rooted in a feminist analysis informed by an intersectional, non-oppressive, and trauma informed approach.

**Women and adolescent girls are at the centre of our work.**

**Women's Centres Build Strong Communities**

Centres work with their communities to create a rural safety net. Our work:

- Addresses issues of concern to women and girls, including: poverty, housing, food security, health and mental health, economic security, violence and sexual violence
- Improves the lives of women, girls, and their families through direct service, information, and education
- Strengthens our communities through community development and public education
- Reinvests in community and our social and political systems by bringing a rural and gender lens to inform positive change

Women's Centres provide a safe and confidential space for women. Many women drop in initially with simple requests, but once they feel safe, they will disclose more serious concerns, and will work with support staff to make positive changes in their lives that benefit themselves and their families.

In many of our rural communities, Women's Centres are the one door open to help.

## Mapping Our Road to Power and Healing (MORPH)

Sexual Violence is occurring at epidemic numbers with as many as 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 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, thirty (30) sessions of groups were offered involving thirty-two (32) participants of all genders. Sixty-three (63) individuals identified sexualized violence as a concern and received support services. Public Education sessions focused on consent were offered twenty (20) times involving two hundred thirteen (213) participants including sessions offered in community with Pictou Landing First Nations. An additional five hundred eighty-seven (587) *Finding Me* sessions were offered to one hundred ninety-four (194) middle school girls.

Group offers a unique opportunity to learn and grow through group experience. 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 the witnessing the healing journey of others through the group process. Many participants noted feeling self-aware, safer and more connected through the programs practicing “living in the now” through mindfulness.

*MORPH* is always responding, engaging and looking forward. A 3<sup>rd</sup> stage group program manual, asset map report and a school-based *Finding Me* program were developed this year. These resources support our ongoing prevention and intervention work.

Two (2) sessions of *self-defense* were offered through *MORPH* at Ward One Community Centre involving twelve (12) participants. These unique sessions, provided practical hands on *self-defense* teachings including consent acknowledging that any contact without consent is assault under the law as well as conversation regarding social media safety.

*MORPH* navigation provides a reliable, safe entry point for survivors to be connected to appropriate community resources including other members of the Community Support Network and Pictou County Sexual Assault Response team. Sixty-three (63) individuals accessed these services this year plus nearly five hundred (500) more through community engagements and education sessions.

Thanks for our funding we were able to offer various training opportunities throughout the year including *Doing It Better*, a program offered to support staff working with intellectually disabled

*I made some new connections  
inside and outside of my being.  
Bonus.*

*I feel like I have more tools to  
cope when my feelings  
overwhelm me.*

Anonymous survivor

adults promoting sexual violence prevention. We also offered two (2) *trauma informed* sessions for those working with survivors focused on appreciative inquiry and documentation and responding through a trauma informed lens. These educational sessions involved one hundred twenty-three (123) service providers building resilience in community.

Over four hundred fifty-eight (458) 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, our staff and 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 many members of Pictou Sexual Assault Response Team. Special thanks to Department of Community Services who are supporting this work through remaining funding from Breaking the Silence grant and United Way of Pictou County, as well as our core funders Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women.



**United Way**  
**Pictou County**



**MORPH**  
Mapping Our Road to Power & Healing

## Education and Events

### At a Community Level:

- Celebrating Women
- Consent Workshops
- Finding Me
- Girls Camps
- Grief Groups
- Healthy Relationships for Youth
- How to Respond to Disclosure Workshops
- International Day of the Girl
- International Women's Day
- Not So Silent Vigil
- Pride Week
- Self Defense
- Self Esteem Programs
- Sexual Assault Awareness Month Events
- Take Back the Night
- Women's History- Open House
- Women Together

### Continuing Education

- Assist Suicide First Aid
- Avalon training on Responding to disclosures of sexualized violence
- Building Communities, Indian Brook
- Restorative Justice
- SAGE and Tec training programs
- Trauma Informed appreciative inquiry, documentation, support counselling, resiliency training

*She believed she could, so she did.*



# Taking back the night

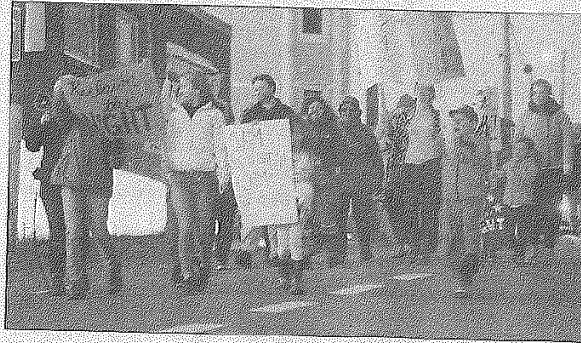
By Heather Brimicombe

heatherbrimicombe@pictouadvocate.com

Calls rang out through the night air last week calling for the end of violence against women and sexualized violence. The third annual Take Back the Night march in New Glasgow made its way through downtown in protest form.

"It's to seek an end to sexual assault, sexual violence, dating violence and all forms of sexualized violence," said Baillie MacDonald, MORPH (Mapping Our Road to Power and Healing) co-ordinator for the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre.

Take Back the Night marches happen to help raise awareness



Take Back the Night demonstrators walk along North Provost Street last week to raise awareness about violence against women and sexual violence.

(Brimicombe photo)

about violence against women and sexualized violence. To help emphasize this, before the march began there were a few speakers

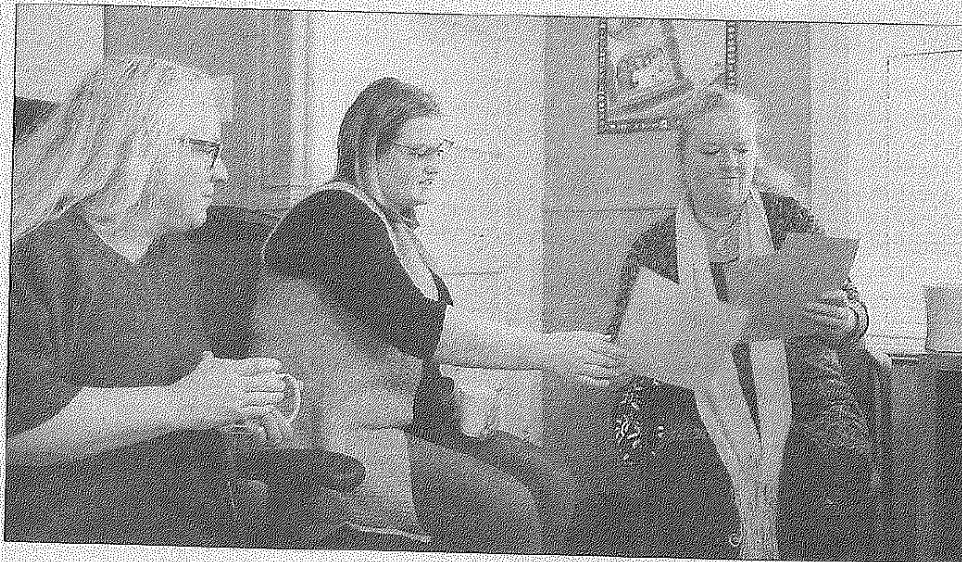
as well as a smudging ceremony and jingle dress dance by members of the Pictou Landing First Nations.

Armed with signs created last year, the group of about 50 people — on par with last year's crowd — took to the streets to chant for an end to the violence.

"I think it's important because sexual violence, dating violence, happens all around us," said MacDonald. "It's important to show survivors that we're here to support them."

MacDonald added that anyone in the community who may have experienced sexualized violence can contact the centre for help.

"It's a great way for people to have their voices heard," said Vania MacMillan of the Pictou County Sexual Health Centre. "It impacts everyone so everyone needs to be heard."



## OPEN HOUSE

From left, Pictou County Women's Resource & Sexual Assault Centre's Allison Avery, program and administrator support, and Baillie MacDonald, MORPH coordinator, talk to Lynn Mackie who was visiting the center during the organization's recent open house.

(Brimicombe photo)



# Not so Silent Vigil Dec. 6 in New Glasgow

THE NEWS

NEW GLASGOW, N.S.

A Not so Silent Vigil will be held in Pictou County on Dec. 6, marking the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women.

On Dec. 6, 1989, 13 female students and a female administrator at École Polytechnique de Montréal were murdered because they were women. Their deaths

led Parliament to designate Dec. 6 as the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. It is a time to honour the 14 young women whose lives were taken on that fateful day as well as a time to reflect and take action on eliminating gender-based violence.

Modelled after the "Not so Silent, Silent Vigil" held in Halifax each year, local activists created the event and brought it

to Pictou County. The very first "Not so Silent Vigil" was held on Dec. 6, 2017, and was a huge success. It helped to bring awareness in the community about the realities of violence against women and girls, organizers said.

"After attending the 'Not so Silent, Silent Vigil' in Halifax I was inspired," says vigil co-ordinator Donna MacGregor. "With so many talented women in Pictou County I thought that an event

like this would be a perfect fit. I really wanted to keep the grassroots vibe of the Halifax vigil while at the same time being conscious of the fact that many women live in poverty and often don't have access to transportation. I wanted our vigil to be accessible to everyone, regardless of their income."

With support from the Pictou County Women's Resource & Sexual Assault Centre, this year's

"Not so Silent Vigil" will be held at 135 Provost St., New Glasgow (formerly Lolly's), from 6 to 8 p.m.

The evening will feature musical, literary and dramatic performances by talented women in Pictou County. The performances speak to the epidemic of violence against women and girls, as well as celebrating women in their many roles as mothers, daughters, sisters, grandmothers and friends.

## Survivors and supporters meetings coming up

Women who are survivors of sexualized violence may benefit from participation in a group being organized by Mapping Our Road to Power and Healing Pictou County.

The group will gather in New Glasgow over the span of eight weeks.

Topics for the group include coping strategies, mindfulness and yoga. MORPH is now open to referrals and registration.

MORPH will also be run

ning a four-week Ally Group program which is a skill building group for supporters of sexualized violence survivors.

Topics for this session include responding to disclosures, self-care and vicarious trauma.

To register or for more information about either of these sessions contact Baillie MacDonald by phone at 902-755-4647 or email navigator.morphpc@gmail.com.

## Inspiring women the focus of soon to be published book

The PC International Women's Day Photo Book is a project designed to celebrate the Women of Pictou County.

This is an inclusive project that welcomes all people to submit photos of women from Pictou County whom they believe to be impactful and inspiring. Impactful and inspiring women tend not to think of themselves as impactful and inspiring... let's celebrate these women to let them know that they are.

If you want to submit a photo of an inspiring Pictou County woman, contact Carson Cameron at cce056947@gnsps.ca. Include a low resolution photograph and a short "blurb" explaining why you feel the woman you've chosen is excep-

tional. Ensure that your subject is aware of the accolade you are extending.

Diversity and creativity are respected and encouraged.

A physical copy of the photo book will be presented at the Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre on International Women's Day (March 8, 2019). Following the event, several copies of the photo book will be donated to the public schools of Pictou County so that students can have an understanding of the positive contributions being made by the women around them.

Questions about the project may be directed to Carson Cameron through Facebook or email (cce056947@gnsps.ca).

# Lives lost remembered in Not So Silent Vigil

By Maria McLean

For The Advocate

Men and women of all ages came together for the second annual Not So Silent Vigil on Dec. 6, The National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. This date is also the anniversary of the murders of 13 female students of l'École Polytechnique de Montréal.

**Co-ordinator** Donna MacGregor was inspired to organize the event in New Glasgow after an empowering and emotional experience at the Not So Silent Vigil in Halifax.

"With so many talented women in Pictou County, I thought that an event like this would be a perfect fit," she

explained. "I really wanted to keep the grass roots vibe of the Halifax vigil while at the same time being conscious of the fact that many women live in poverty and often don't have access to transportation. I wanted our vigil to be accessible to everyone."

The event, held at 135 Provost St., began with a moment of silence, followed by the lighting of three candles. The first, to remember those women who

have lost their lives to violence; the second, to acknowledge there are still women suffering from violence; and the third, to extend hope for gender equality.

The question of why women stay in situations and relationships where they suffer violence is one asked often. MacGregor

explained that there are countless reasons why women feel they cannot leave.

"They stay for their children, they worry about their financial stability, they would be homeless if they left, they worry how they would get to work," she listed. "And, of course, some are terrified to speak to someone."

MacGregor also spoke passionately of current educational efforts, and the need to do better. "There must be better education

in schools about violence against women. There must be more organizations that go into schools and talk to students. We have to have conversations around our tables and in coffee shops, because we cannot stay silent."

Her passion for this cause

while encoosing the event was as luminous as the Christmas decor on the walls and went ablaze as she read a self-written story titled *Butterfly Kaleidoscope* which ended in a standing ovation from a somber crowd.

The evening featured powerful poetry readings, musical performances, tears, and the overwhelming feeling of empowerment as women came together for the same reason: to break the silence.

"Abuse comes in many forms," explained MacGregor. "It can be physical, emotional, verbal or mental. It can look like stalking, belittling, withholding finances, and so much more. Women suffering must be lifted and inspired."

If you or a woman you know is suffering within a violent relationship, there are many local resources available. Information is available online for the follow-



**Dawn Peters passionately recites the poem 'A during the Not So Silent Vigil held in New Glasgow of the National Day of Remembrance Violence against Women. (McLean photo)**

ing organizations: Tearmann Friends and House, The Pictou County Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Witness NS, Assault Centre, Neighbors,

## Staff and Board of Directors

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Brenda Parker

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**Student Placements:**

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Miranda Bouchard, Addictions and Mental Health, NSCC

Leighen Lyons, StFX Nursing Student

**Contract MORPH Therapist:**

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*"Each time a woman stands up for herself. She stands up for all women"*

Maya Angelou