

# Counsellors for Social Justice

Newsletter of the Social Justice Chapter of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association

## Welcome from the Chapter President

We are excited to launch the first newsletter of the Social Justice Chapter. The chapter has grown significantly since its initiation in 2007. We currently have 117 members and hope to grow this number substantially over the next few years. The purpose of this newsletter is to update chapter members about the activities we are involved in and encourage you to join with us in support of our collective goals to promote social justice within and beyond our profession. The mission of the Counsellors for Social Justice [CSJ] Chapter is to advocate for social justice and social change through the role of the professional counsellor. The Chapter promotes equity and human rights for individuals and societies through action, education, training, consciousness-raising, advocacy, and conscientious objection. The Chapter is dedicated to working across borders, boundaries, professional disciplines, and differences in the pursuit of peace and wellness for all.

**Sandra Collins** is the President of the CSJ chapter. She lives in Calgary and is the Director of the Graduate Program for Applied Psychology at Athabasca University.

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## Social Justice in Action

### Building a Fence With Members of the Social Justice Chapter

The vision of the CSJ Chapter is to host an event at each CCPA conference to both highlight social justice issues and to make a positive and active contribution to the local community. In conjunction with the CCPA conference in Saskatoon this past May, eleven members of the social justice chapter volunteered with Habitat for Humanity for a day. Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit organization that helps families build affordable housing across Canada. The purpose of this activity was to raise awareness of social justice issues while modeling active participation toward social change. We also ended up raising \$850 for Habitat for Humanity

through this field trip and by raffling a quilt. In this article, I will share some of my thoughts regarding this experience.



First thing in the morning we boarded a bus that was supposed to take us to the Habitat store and then to the construction site. After a bit of confusion and detours, we finally made it to our destination. Our job for the day was to construct a fence manually, something I had never done. After our project leader, Al, gave us some instructions, we eagerly began manually drilling holes into the ground to put in fence posts. At the end of the day we had put in eleven posts, which was serendipitous because the posts matched the number of volunteers.

The experience of volunteering with Habitat for Humanity impacted me in several ways. Despite the cold weather, it was enjoyable to spend time with a group of like-minded people who value social justice. Furthermore, volunteering with members of the social justice chapter helped to deepen my commitment to social justice issues.



I also appreciated the opportunity to learn how to make a fence. The Habitat leader was extremely generous in sharing his knowledge and skill, and he has taught past volunteers how to do their own home renovations. One of his volunteers enjoyed the experience of building so much that she has opened her own business. I find it touching that volunteers invest their time and are able to gain so much in return.

One of the most gratifying aspects of this experience was the tangibility of the outcome. It was gratifying to see that we had constructed the structure for a fence in less than one day. As a counsellor, the outcomes of my efforts are often intangible. Therefore, it was satisfying to look back at the end of the day and see what we had accomplished together.

I often think about different ways I could contribute to my community, but I am unsure at what level to direct my efforts. Should I address social justice on a broader scale (e.g., policy development), or should I volunteer with agencies like Habitat on a local level? Although I intend to get involved in many kinds of social justice activities throughout my career, I appreciated the opportunity to affect change on a practical level. This experience has helped me to realize that small acts can be important because they can provide momentum for further efforts. As Lerner (1993) said, "I believe that the direction of our lives is more important than the speed at which we travel them" (p. 189).



Lerner, H. (1993). *The dance of deception*. New York: Harper Perennial.

**Christina Schmolke** is on the board of the CSJ chapter. She works as a provisional psychologist at a psychiatric hospital in Edmonton.

## Social Justice in Action

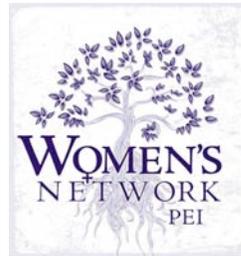
### CCPA Conference 2010 CSJ Raffle

Continuing in our tradition of undertaking social action that benefits the local community at every CCPA conference, we also held a raffle at the 2009 conference in support of Habitat for Humanity and its work to provide affordable housing to families in Saskatoon, SK. Jo-Anne Stoltz, CSJ Past-President, created a beautiful quilt for that raffle. We were very excited to raise almost \$900 to support this local initiative. Thank you to all of you who participated!

We are now planning ahead for the 2010 conference in lovely Charlottetown, PEI. We will be holding another raffle this year with three items that we hope you will all plan to bid for:

- Another of Jo-Anne's gorgeous quilts, with new design and colour scheme
- A basket of local treasures from Wolfville, NS that will enhance your holiday travels
- The book, *Culture-infused Counselling* (2010), by Nancy Arthur and Sandra Collins.

Our goal is to exceed our 2009 success by raising at least \$1000 for a local agency in Charlottetown. This year, the funds will go to support the Women's Network PEI.



### The Women's Network PEI -

<http://wnpei.webnode.com/>

Women's Network is a not-for-profit organization, which has been working with women since 1981 to strengthen the status of women, advocate for social justice, and improve women's access to services. Their Trade HERizons program supports women in non-traditional career

paths and occupations to gain the skills, education, and supports required to succeed. They received a grant in 2008 to develop workshops and resources for rural women in PEI to advance their social and economic well-being. Women's Network is also currently focusing on developing programming for girls aged 10-14 that will build self-esteem and value-based decision making skills in order to decrease their likelihood of becoming victims of violence in domestic relationships. This organization is founded on principles of feminist practice and analysis of women's issue and services.

Some other projects that the Women's Network has completed in recent years include: Improving access to maternity and parental leave; developing recommendations to improve provincial labour standards; healthy sexuality for youth; improving safety for women with disabilities; improving access to family law legal aid; creating a plan for integrating midwifery care into PEI health care; and coordinating the PEI Food Security Network.

Women's Network creates, develops and maintains partnership across the province of PEI. The organization works with immigrant women, women with disabilities; aboriginal communities, with a special focus on engaging women who live without livable income.

**Michelle MacCallum**, Executive Director, Women's Network PEI.

Please visit our display at the CCPA 2010 conference to purchase your raffle tickets in support of this organization. The first, second, and third prize winners will be announced on Thursday afternoon in the main conference area. You must be present to collect your treasure!

### Focus on Poverty and Mental Health

Our support of Habitat for Humanity and the Women's Network are a reflection of the emergent theme of **Poverty and Mental Health** that the CSJ executive have identified as a unifying focus for the chapter. Here are some startling facts about poverty, with some Web links you may want to follow for further information.

- “At the start of the 21st century 1.2 billion people live in abject poverty, most of them women. More than 800 million people go to bed hungry and 50,000 people die every day from poverty-related causes.” From *Make Poverty History* – <http://www.makepovertyhistory.ca>
- “The rate of child poverty in Canada is the same as it was in 1989... Eighteen years later, despite a 50 per cent increase in the size of the economy, the child poverty rate remains unchanged at 11.7 per cent in 2005.” From CBC News - <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2007/11/26/child-poverty.html>
- “Women on their own are the poorest of the poor, especially women raising children in lone-parent families, who are almost five times more likely to be poor than those in two-parent families... Older women on their own are also 13 times more likely to be poor than seniors living in families, with more than 14% of them having had low incomes in 2007.” From Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives - <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/>

Many other resources, community organizations, and news items related to poverty in Canada are available on the PovNet Web site at <http://www.povnet.org/>.

### **CCPA Conference 2010 Workshop: Getting Down to Basics – Poverty, Mental Health, and Counsellors for Social Justice**

Please join us Friday May 14 10:45 a.m. for an interactive workshop by the CSJ Chapter. The workshop will raise your consciousness about Canada’s poor track record in ensuring basic supports for mental and physical wellbeing for all, the impact of poverty on mental health, the depth of need that most Canadians cannot relate to, and the role of counsellors committed to social justice in effecting change locally and nationally. Participants will engage in exercises and activities designed to bring to life the experiences of those living at or below poverty levels. We will examine real life examples of interventions designed to address these needs and the impact of poverty on counselling practice in Canada.

## **Highlighting Social Justice Initiatives**

### **Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Committee**

What happens when police are dispatched to a situation involving someone who is emotionally disturbed? Stories abound about mismanaged interactions with such individuals as the case of Robert Dziekanski demonstrates. In October, 2007, Mr. Dziekanski was tasered by police at the Vancouver airport and subsequently died.

Traditionally police have had little if any training in dealing with people who are in some kind of mental crisis. The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program was developed to address this deficiency. The original program, developed in Memphis Tennessee in the late 1980’s, is an enhanced 40 –hour training model for improving police response to emotionally disturbed persons. Since that time CIT training has spread across North America.

The first multi-agency integrated Crisis Intervention Team program in Canada was implemented in 2006 in British Columbia by the Lower Mainland District RCMP. It has evolved into a collaborative program that provides integrated community based training to inter-agency service workers (e.g., police, ambulance) to provide knowledge and skills to effectively deal with individuals who may be in an emotional or cognitively disturbed state. The integrated training

also fosters a strong working relationship between police agencies and Provincial Health Authorities, with the common goals of providing effective first response, safe resolutions, appropriate disposition and follow up care for individuals suffering through a mental health crisis.

The CIT program is governed by the Lower Mainland CIT Committee, which includes people from policing, ambulance, health agencies, mental health associations, corrections, universities, consumers, and family members. I have been a member of the CIT Committee for the past two years and am excited to see the program develop and expand throughout BC. It is our hope that someday all first responders in BC will receive CIT training. I trust that the case of Robert Dziekanski would have turned out much differently if the officers involved had applied such training.

**Kathleen Irvine** is a Registered Psychologist in Vancouver where she works as Director of Training and Community Service at the Adler School of Professional Psychology. She is the CSJ Chapter Secretary.

## **Highlighting Social Justice Initiatives**

### **What does social justice look like in Rural Alberta’s Mountain View County?**

Vision for Non-Violence: Beginning in 2008, with the town’s Family & Community Support Services departments and other human service providers of Carstairs and Didsbury, this partnership has actively promoted social justice by:

- Mobilizing our communities by facilitating a community action plan process involving key agencies to raise awareness of Family Violence in our communities through provincial Family Violence and Bullying Prevention funding.
- Helping to identify and address family violence service gaps in community and help make services easier to reach and use.
- Asking local businesses, health clinics, employers, and faith organizations to display family violence awareness information and information on local services for those affected by family violence.
- Educating committee members and human service providers through learning opportunities about family violence and diverse relationships.
- Encouraging a community stand that family violence and bullying is wrong (signs in windows that state “Eliminating Family Violence is my Business”).
- Holding public forums on Family Violence.
- Educating young people about dating violence and all other forms of abuse.
- Starting support groups for victims of family violence.
- Implementing programs and services that support those affected by family violence.
- Displaying information at workplaces about family violence and resources that can help victims.
- Encouraging the local Council(s) to declare November as Family Violence Prevention Month.
- Promoting Family Violence Awareness Month activities such as Purple Ribbon Campaign and Public Service Announcements.

This local project is in concert with this year's Provincial *END the Silence and STOP the Violence* campaign. Albertans are encouraged to take action to help end the cycle of family violence and find out more about how you can help. One way to help is to start today by wearing a Purple Ribbon to show your support in working towards an end to this preventable social issue.

Information obtained from: Bowman, R. (2009). Vision 4 Non-Violence Project Town's of Carstairs and Didsbury

**Melissa Seaborg** is a member of the board of the CSJ Chapter and a student in Master of Counselling program at Athabasca University.

## We Welcome Your Involvement

We strongly believe that all counsellors have a role to play in social justice, whether locally, nationally, or internationally. Many of you are already engaged in activities to address poverty, discrimination, and inequalities in access to resources, services, and opportunities. All members of the chapter are encouraged to send us ideas, get involved in chapter activities, or join at our annual meeting and workshop in PEI in May. We will soon be launching our Counsellors for Social Justice Web site, with interactive communication tools that will enable us to stay more closely in touch throughout the year and discuss important issues as they arise – watch for updates in our next newsletter. Together, we hope to inspire ourselves and others to embrace the vision of promoting a just society, through both our personal and professional lives.

The purpose of this newsletter is to highlight the activities of the social justice chapter and its members. Our aim is to bring issues and practices related to social justice to life. All members of the chapter are encouraged to submit articles, commentaries, or suggestions for future newsletters. Take this opportunity to feature the social justice initiatives that you are involved in so that we can all learn from the great work that is being done across the country. Please send your suggestions to me at [sandrac@athabascau.ca](mailto:sandrac@athabascau.ca).

**Sandra Collins**, CSJ president and editor of the Newsletter

### Student Benefits of Involvement in the Social Justice Chapter

Last year I joined as a student member of the CCPA and was able to attend the annual conference in Saskatoon. It was at the conference that I was able to meet and connect with the social justice chapter and my experience has been encouraging. I have gained relevant knowledge about social justice initiatives, the advocacy stance within the chapter, while also gaining new and interesting connections within the counselling world.

The social justice chapter is striving for social awareness through providing factual information about various social justice issues, promoting volunteerism, and coming together as a team that is building awareness about social justice issues. It is a wonderful way to see social justice put into action.

I have been able to apply what I am learning in my courses while also applying and developing my professional interests. It is a fantastic involvement as a graduate student and I know more students would benefit from involvement within the social justice chapter.

**Melissa Seaborg**, CSJ board and Athabasca University student

## Upcoming Events

### CCPA Conference 2009 – May 12 to 14, Charlottetown, PEI

- CSJ Raffle – watch for us in the main conference area.
- CSJ Annual Meeting and Lunch – Wed., May 12, noon to 1:00
- Chapter Roundtable Cracker-barrel Session – Thurs., May 13, 4:30 to 5:30
- Getting Down to Basics: Workshop presented by CSJ Chapter Executive – Fri., May 14, 10:45 to noon

### Counsellors for Social Justice Executive

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## Support for Haiti

In response to the heartbreaking crisis in Haiti, we have assembled the following information about donating and/or volunteering.

1. Link to this CBC news article that cautions people to be careful about where they send money for Haitian disaster relief: <http://www.cbc.ca/consumer/story/2010/01/14/consumer-haiti-donations-scams.html>
2. Donate only to charitable organizations that are widely known, and donate directly to the organization, not through another person or organization claiming to collect on their behalf.
3. Some reputable Canadian disaster relief organizations include the Canadian Red Cross, Care Canada, Oxfam Canada, Save the Children Canada, and World Vision Canada, as well as international organizations such as UNICEF, the Humanitarian Coalition, and Doctors Without Borders.
4. The Canada Revenue Agency provides tips on responsible giving and recommendations for donating to the relief effort in Haiti and: <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/donors/>.
5. Find out whether there is a disaster relief program that includes a psychosocial component in your province. BC has a Disaster Relief Network. Counsellors can obtain specialized training in Disaster Psychosocial Response and be on a 'call' list.

#### Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are strictly those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association, its officers, directors, or employees.