

Annual Report 2007 - 2008

National Association of Women and the Law

Real Equality Now!



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MANDATE

The National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), founded in 1974, is a not-for-profit feminist organization that promotes the equality rights of women through legal education, research, and law reform advocacy.

We recognize that each woman's experience of inequality is unique due to systemic discrimination related to race, class, sexual orientation, disability, age, language, and other factors. In our view, a just and equal society is one that values diversity, and is inclusive of it. We are committed to working collectively and in coalition with other groups to dismantle barriers to all women's equality. To this end, the general objectives of NAWL are to:

- Achieve equality before and within the legal system
- Eliminate violence against women
- Ensure a decent standard of living for all women through legislative reform
- Guarantee employment and pay equity
- Remove barriers that limit access to equality for all groups of women
- Establish a fairer deal for women and children in the event of divorce
- Ensure reproductive choice and monitor new reproductive technologies

NAWL's activities include but are not limited to the following:

- Lobbying for changes to federal and provincial laws and regulations
- Producing publications on legal issues affecting all aspects of women's lives
- Consulting with government officials on legal issues of concern to women
- Providing legal expertise in the service of the Canadian women's movement
- Advocating for gender equality in the courts and the legal profession
- Sponsoring national biennial conferences that formulate policy positions on such critical issues as the feminization of poverty, international perspectives on women and the law, and family law matters
- Hosting workshops and consultations on gender bias in the criminal justice system, family law and in the legal profession
- Promoting feminist scholarship through our Charitable Trust for Research and Education
- Organizing public education activities through our regional caucuses on legal issues affecting women
- Promoting feminist perspectives on current legal issues through the media

For the last 34 years, NAWL has focused its efforts on women's equality rights in Canada. Since that time, in coalition with other women's and equality-seeking organizations, we have achieved many victories including:

- Adoption of sections 15 and 28 in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms
- Amendments to the Criminal Code regarding sexual assault laws, rape shield legislation and criminal harassment legislation
- Positive changes to family law and to the Divorce Act
- Advancement of equality rights for lesbians



GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRACY & PARTICIPATION

NAWL is an incorporated non-profit corporation that is governed by a National Steering Committee made up of a maximum of 12 volunteers, which is representative of all regions of Canada and includes women from communities that are often marginalized in Canadian society.

NAWL has a nationwide membership of lawyers, law students, academics and other individuals who share a commitment to gender equality. The organization's policies are formulated in public forums convened during NAWL's biennial conferences.

NAWL briefs and papers are developed by working groups, with membership open to any equality-seeking individual who has demonstrated knowledge and skills on the topic that is being addressed. Every effort is made to include diverse community perspectives within all working groups and to include both French-speaking and English-speaking members.



NAWL STAFF

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MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE

In our last Annual Report, for 2005/2006, we told you that it had been a year of financial challenge for the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), because of late funding approval from the Status of Women Canada (SWC) on a major project. Despite this significant delay and eventual approval for a grant running for only 18 months instead of the usual 2 years, we continued with our work of promoting women's equality through legal education, research and law reform advocacy through 2005 to 2007.

September 2006 brought the greatest challenge NAWL has had to face in its more than 30-year history. The changes to the mandate of SWC's funding criteria rendered NAWL ineligible for funding.

Despite Stephen Harper's January 2006 election promise – "Yes, I'm ready to support women's human rights and I agree that Canada has to do more to meet its international obligations to women's equality. If elected, I will take concrete and immediate measures, as recommended by the United Nations, to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women in Canada" – he and his Conservative government moved quickly in the opposite direction.

Radical changes to the SWC mandate ended financial support for research and advocacy activities related to women's equality. Other changes also affected NAWL:

- The closing of 12 of 16 regional SWC offices
- The end of funding for the Court Challenges Program
- The abolishment of funding agreements for a pan-Canadian childcare program
- The rejection of the recommendations of the Pay Equity Task Force
- The dismantlement of the Law Commission of Canada

NAWL used the remainder of its 18-month funding from Status of Women Canada to meet the obligations of that grant, even as we struggled to survive knowing we did not have the possibility of future funding from SWC. At the same time, we worked with other women's organizations to fight the changes at SWC and the other program cuts and changes introduced by the government.

Highlights of NAWL's work in 2006/2007 include:

Pay Equity: NAWL continued to play a leadership role in the Pay Equity Network and, in May 2007, held a national forum to discuss and strategize about the steps necessary to bring about pay equity for women. Details of this forum can be found on NAWL's website at www.nawl.ca.

Mothering in Law: the NAWL Conference: NAWL held its regular biennial conference on May 11 and 12, 2007 in Ottawa. We partnered with the University of Ottawa for this successful event that attracted more than 100 participants. The theme was the promotion of equality rights for mothers. Plenary sessions provided an opportunity for discussion about policies, programs and legal reforms in such areas as:

- Maternity and parental benefits

- Universal child care
- Custody and access
- Access to matrimonial property for Aboriginal women living on reserve
- Parental rights for lesbian mothers
- Spousal sponsorship
- Family law and religion

A conference paper was produced, which is available on NAWL's website at www.nawl.ca.

The conference ended with a Mother's Day lobby on Parliament Hill on Monday May 14, 2007.

Assisted Human Reproduction Act: NAWL's Reproductive Technologies Working Group met in Montreal in early June 2007 to discuss NAWL's position on the Assisted Human Reproduction Act. This legislation reflects Canada's position on an array of controversial bioethics issues related to assisted reproduction. Women's bodies and autonomy are at the centre of these issues, which makes this topic a very important one for NAWL.

The June meeting produced the beginnings of a NAWL position paper and generated considerable interest in an ongoing role for NAWL on this issue. NAWL has been unable to follow up on this to date because of funding cuts.

Jurisfemme: Despite limited resources, NAWL produced its Spring 2007 Jurisfemme, which focused on the actions of Stephen Harper and provided updates on a number of NAWL initiatives. The full issue of Jurisfemme can be found on NAWL's website.

Ad-Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights: NAWL and other women's equality-seeking groups worked hard through 2006/07 to draw attention to the actions of the Conservative government. A major event was held on Parliament Hill on December 10, 2006, to mark the 25th anniversary of Canada's ratification of CEDAW. For this, the Coalition produced a "Statement for Women's Equality," which was signed on to by more than 500 local, provincial and national groups.

For Valentine's Day 2007, NAWL sent a "Heartfelt Reminder" to parliamentarians to remind them of the importance of ending systemic discrimination, being accountable under the Charter and supporting advocacy by women's groups.

March 8, 2007, International Women's Day, brought "Put Equality Back on Track!" stickers and information flyers. Throughout March, women's groups occupied regional SWC offices, demanding that they not be shut down.

Through the summer and fall of 2007, the Coalition produced a cookbook containing recipes and strategies to oppose the Conservative government and a video, entitled "Putting Equality Back on Track," which is available on You Tube.

Campus Cocktails: NAWL worked very hard through 2006/07 to involve young women in our work. Our "Campus Cocktails: Braving the Anti-Feminist Backlash" tour visited 10 university campuses across the country and allowed us to hear from young women about feminist advocacy.

To support this tour and other outreach initiatives, NAWL produced its first ever publication aimed directly at young women: a “zine” available on NAWL’s website.

Staying Alive: It is not surprising that fundraising was a significant focus of NAWL’s work in 2006/07. We launched our “Stayin’ Alive” campaign to reach out to women across Canada as we had never done before.

Closing the NAWL office: Despite all the efforts by NAWL staff and National Steering Committee, as well as NAWL allies and friends across the country, NAWL was forced to close its office and lay off staff in September 2007.

The Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) kindly offered us a space in their office, which is where NAWL has been housed ever since.

Most NAWL files were taken to the Women’s Archives at University of Ottawa, which has generously offered to allow us to have them back if we are ever in a position to re-establish an office.

From September – December 2007, NAWL maintained itself through the efforts of a very part time office staff person and wonderful volunteers, who ensured that required administrative work was completed. The NSC, which had already provided considerable leadership through 2006 and early 2007, took on the role of a working Board.

NAWL received very large donations from a number of trade unions in the fall of 2007. The NSC made the decision to hold this money while it considered the best way in which to move forward.

Postscript: This Annual Report is required to cover NAWL’s activities only until the end of 2007. However, given the unusual circumstances, we want to update our members with some crucial decisions that have been made and actions taken in 2008:

In February 2008, the NSC decided to use some of its money to hire Pamela Cross, NAWL’s past Executive Director, to work with NAWL on a contract basis to ensure all administrative responsibilities were carried out and to lead the organization in finding an appropriate survival mandate and structure.

The NSC has decided to focus NAWL’s work on research and brief preparation on key law reform issues that affect women’s equality. The NSC will be holding a Think Tank this fall to determine the appropriate organizational structure and to set an operating budget and resource development strategy to support this focus.

It is our hope that following this meeting, NAWL will once again be providing the law reform analysis and strategies that have supported work for women’s equality in Canada for more than 30 years.

Thank yous:

Annual Reports always provide an opportunity for organizations to thank their boards, staff and volunteers. This year, it seems appropriate to be especially effusive in those thanks.

The members of the National Steering Committee have dedicated themselves well beyond the call of duty to ensure NAWL's survival. All are women with other lives that are more than full enough. 2006/07 was a year where some of the steering committee members welcomed new babies while others faced the challenges of new career obligations and illness. Despite these challenges, members continued to be there when NAWL needed them.

For this commitment and determination, all of us at NAWL are extremely grateful.

It is impossible to find words to convey the extent to which the tireless efforts of NAWL staff have been critical to the survival of NAWL. The NAWL conference, Jurisfemme, Campus Cocktails, fundraising – none would have been possible if NAWL staff had said: "Sorry, not in my job description," or "Sorry, but I have already worked 50 hours this week."

To NAWL staff, both past and present, we thank you for ensuring NAWL's survival though the most difficult political climate of NAWL's history.

The Campus Cocktail event at Carleton University and a student placement from the Human Rights Program at Carleton brought NAWL a crew of energetic and enthusiastic volunteers. These young women provided invaluable support with research, fundraising and the conference, as well as with the less pleasant task of packing up and moving the NAWL office. Many are still active NAWL supporters, whom we hope to involve in NAWL's new incarnation later this fall.

To these wonderful young women – we thank you for your willingness to help NAWL through this difficult time.



PUBLICATIONS, 2007/08

Jurisfemme: Volume 25, No. 1 - Spring 2007

Mothering In Law: Defending Women's Rights in 2007 – Conference Report



CHARITABLE TRUST FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

NAWL established the NAWL Charitable Trust for Research and Education in 1983 with the purpose of promoting and understanding the status and role of women in Canadian society among the general public. The Trust prepares and disseminates research and education regarding legal issues in all aspects of the social, economic and political life of Canadian women. It assists in the protection of women's civil rights and liberties by charitable means, as well as in the relief of poverty. Unlike NAWL, the Trust is a registered charity and all donations are tax creditable.

The Charitable Trust is composed of five members appointed by NAWL's National Steering Committee. The Trustees are responsible for decisions regarding the allocation of funds.



THANK YOU!

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS WHO HELPED FUND PROJECTS

Status of Women Canada
Court Challenges Canada

***THANK YOU TO MEMBERS AND DONORS FOR THEIR
SUSTAINING SUPPORT OF THE ORGANIZATION***

***WE WOULD ALSO LIKE TO THANK ALL VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS
OF WORKING GROUPS FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT
AND DEDICATION TO NAWL.***

