

2017-2018 annual report



WomanACT

WOMAN ABUSE COUNCIL OF TORONTO



Status of Women
Canada

Condition féminine
Canada



MESSAGE FROM CO-CHAIRS AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Woman Abuse Council of Toronto (WomanACT) is proud to present our 2017-2018 Annual Report.

We have had a successful year as we continued to fulfill our mandate to women and children whose lives have been affected by violence and abuse.

This year, working in collaboration with VAW sector leaders, WomanACT coordinated the fifth “End Violence Against Women (VAW) Week in Toronto”. This event was a massive success! With over 700 attendees from various organizations across the city of Toronto, we as a group of strong and passionate frontline workers, advocates, lawyers and policy makers were able to connect, share and discuss better ways to support and serve women and children who are fleeing violence.

We greatly appreciated our VAW sector's front line staff and managers taking the time from their very busy agendas to be part of this event. Their enthusiasm speaks to the importance and priority our sector must put on getting trained and updated on the latest information, tools and strategies that can be used to impact the well-being of women and children facing a variety of barriers such as poverty, precarious immigration status and access to effective legal aid.

For the third time, WomanACT hosted the Soul of a Warrior Awards Gala. Thanks to our supporters, our event continues to be a big success!

Award recipients are selected by the WomanACT Nominating Committee, based on nominations from Violence against Women sector representatives. The award recognized front line staff who provides exceptional services to women and children fleeing violence. Congratulations to Tashawna Thomas, Vania Sukola, Silvia Olivas and Victoria Roth, the 2018 Soul of a Warriors Award recipients!

MESSAGE FROM CO-CHAIRS AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

A key area in our work relates to policy dialogue, research and analysis. This area is critical for policy development that responds to the needs of women and advances in gender equality. WomanACT works with the Violence against Women sector, community stakeholders and Women with Lived Experience to identify the impacts that policy can have on women's safety and inequality and offer policy direction and solutions.

One of the keys to providing consistent responses to violence against women is working in collaboration with different sectors and experts in the area of woman abuse. WomanACT is cognizant of the fact that coordinated efforts will impact positively systems and service provision for women and children experiencing violence.

We are very pleased to continue coordinating two very important collaborations taking place in Toronto: The Transitional and Housing Support Program Network (THSP Network) and the Children Aid Societies and Violence against Women (CAS/VAW) Toronto Region Advisory Committee. This is an excellent fit given WomanACT's mandate to prevent violence against women and children and promote a Toronto-wide integrated, coordinated response through leadership, education and community mobilization.

We believe these are indeed exciting times for WomanACT, our future is grounded in our continued commitment to and development of a coordinated community response.

Best Regards,

Carla Neto and Lisa Tomlinson, *Co-Chairs*

Harmy Mendoza, *Executive Director*



RESEARCH, POLICY AND COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

At WomanACT, we believe that policy dialogue, research and analysis is critical for policy development that responds to the needs of women and advances gender equality. WomanACT's research and policy work provides evidence to support policy that prevents violence against women, promotes women's safety and advances gender equality. WomanACT works with the Violence against Women sector, community stakeholders and Women with Lived Experience to identify the impacts that policy can have on women's safety and inequality and offer policy direction and solutions.

Recommendations for the Canada National Housing Strategy: Supporting Women and Children Experiencing Violence

In the lead up to the development of Canada's first National Housing Strategy, WomanACT collaborated with community stakeholders across Toronto to develop key recommendations that would ensure the National Housing Strategy responded to the needs of women experiencing violence.

VAW Sector Representatives Recommendations: Income Security: A Roadmap for Change

In response to the report *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*, WomanACT engaged Violence against Women sector representatives in identifying policies related to income security that can be a barrier to women's safety and made recommendations for housing and social assistances policies and systems that provide women with choice and economic independence.

Supporting a Toronto Region Women Leaders Group for Systems and Policy Advocacy

WomanACT has received funding from Status of Women Canada for a three-year project to identify policy barriers to women's safety, develop solutions to selected policy issues and advocate for system and policy change. The project started in September 2017 with an initial focus on income security, housing and immigration policies. As well as completing an initial literature review on policy impacts, the project undertook sector-wide consultation on income security and housing policies.

Key activities over the life of the project will include

- Literature and policy review;
- Consultation with communities on key policy issues;
- Development and implementation of a policy advocacy plan

Gender Equality Network Canada

WomanACT is engaged in the Gender Equality Network Canada (GENC), a national network made up of 130 women leaders from across Canada. The GENC will work together over the next three years to advocate for policy and system change to advance gender equality in Canada. The network is convened and facilitated by the Canadian Women's Foundation and funded by Status of Women Canada.

COORDINATION

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ("CAS/VAW")TORONTO REGION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The CAS/VAW Toronto Region Advisory Committee is a trusted resource and advocate for families who have experienced domestic violence in the Toronto region. Through their Senior Management Advisory Committee, they serve as a central hub and mobilizer to build connections, leverage capacity, and amplify voices to achieve greater collective impact for the child protection and violence against women sectors.

The Advisory identifies emerging trends of concern for women and children fleeing violence in the GTA, share proven practices, and develop solutions for the benefit of the families they serve.

The Advisory Committee:

- Provides information and resources to frontline staff so that they are able to advocate for the families
- Produces educational materials that focus on bridging the gaps in services available to families
- Provides the opportunity for ongoing face to face networking and case planning discussions
- Flows important information and recommendations to the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) and the Ministry of Child and Youth Services (MCYS).



COORDINATION

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETIES AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ("CAS/VAW")TORONTO REGION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Annual Forum

The advisory committee believes that quality connections of frontline staff not only help each sector advance its mission but also supports the ability of the CAS/VAW Collaboration to achieve broader change together. Developing the opportunity for frontline staff to engage assists in leveraging connections and taking advantage of the resources available is an efficient way for both sectors to improve their effectiveness.

At the annual forum, participants;

- Are exposed to and engage in peer learning exchange.
- Share experiences and build trusting relationships with each other.
- Encourage innovation and improve communication between both sectors.
- Advocate for better policies to support the work of both sectors.
- Work collaboratively, share resources and learn from one another.
- Remove barriers to collaboration.

This year's forum, titled "Building Bridges Together: Child Welfare and Violence against Women; Supporting Families with Precarious Status," greeted over 200 registered participants from 37 organizations across the region.

E-Learning Centre

The advisory developed and launched an E-Learning Centre last year for workers in both sectors. It was designed to ensure increased learning, collaboration and networking among CAS and VAW workers in the GTA. There are currently three modules:

- Understanding the Collaboration Agreement
- Children's Safety & woman Abuse: For CAS Workers
- Working with Child Welfare: For VAW Workers

There are close to 300 registered users on the E-Learning Centre and learners have reported that they it to be a comprehensive learning tool while the materials are both interesting and challenging.



COORDINATION

TRANSITIONAL AND HOUSING SUPPORT PROGRAM ("THSP") NETWORK

The Transitional and Housing Support Program, funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS), provides effective, high quality and appropriate responses to break the cycle of gender-based violence.

The THSP Network is comprised of front-line staff and managers dedicated to promoting effective, consistent and high-quality responses that break the cycle of violence and address women's and children's need for safe and affordable housing, and transitional support to ensure their safety and economic self-sufficiency.

The THSP front-line staff meets monthly to share experiences, expertise, knowledge and promising practices to enhance service provision.

The THSP managers meet regularly to create and work towards a broader systems level vision and change for THSP services as well as for broader responses to gender-based violence.

The THSP Network has a distinct and critical role in promoting integrated, multidisciplinary and inter-sectoral responses to the impact of gender-based violence on women and their families.

In 2018, the THSP Network completed its strategic plan process for the upcoming three years.

A small working group was established to guide the larger Network through a thoughtful and dynamic process resulting in a strategic plan with renewed goals and strategies to address systemic issues faced by women and their families fleeing abuse.

The THSP Network includes three Task Teams: Economic Development, Housing and Legal Systems. The role of each Task Team is to identify and animate the goals developed during the strategic plan process.

In June 2018, the THSP Housing Task Team and VAWN's (Violence Against Women Network) Housing Committee held its first joint meeting to explore opportunities for collaborative advocacy efforts related to housing issues.

The THSP Network has a membership of 21 agencies across Toronto.

COORDINATION

SHELTER SUPPORT SERVICES AND CULTURAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

This action-oriented committee has become an essential support system for many front-line agency staff working in the area of violence against women. This committee has been the mastermind behind some of the biggest projects at WomanACT, and this year it continues to meet on a regular basis jointly with the Shelter Committee for information sharing as well as the provision of valuable input and insight into many of WomanACT's initiatives.

The Shelter and Support Services Committee provides a dynamic venue for front-line staff in the VAW sector to come together to network, to identify and discuss relevant issues and trends in the sector and to promote a comprehensive and integrated response to women and their dependents fleeing violence.

This Committee also creates an opportunity for front-line staff to collectively problem-solve around systemic issues faced by workers and clients alike through case study discussions.

The Committee hosts presentations by guest speakers from other relevant sectors for knowledge-sharing, to promote collaborative work and to improve women's access to appropriate services.

Members of the Committee have the opportunity to be part of a larger movement advocating for an improved response to violence against women and their dependents.

The Committee meets monthly on the 4th Tuesday from 10am-noon in a central downtown location.



COORDINATION

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COMMUNITY COORDINATING COMMITTEE (DV3C'S)

The Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) provides funding support for initiatives related to Domestic/Sexual Violence Community Coordinating Committees (DV3Cs). DV3Cs are community-based, cross-sectoral committees that work together to improve community responses to survivors of gender-based violence.

In Toronto, WomanACT is the lead agency coordinating activities related to the local DV3C.

This fiscal year, DV3C members were engaged in the following activities:

WomanACT continues to support the development of the very first Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") between the Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division (SSHA), City of Toronto and representatives from MCSS VAW Service System. Our goal is to have a signatory meeting during fiscal 2018-2019.

WomanACT engaged DV3C members in Toronto to prepare a response to the Ontario Income Security Strategy (A Roadmap for Change). To coordinate our voices locally, we consulted with the THSP Economic Development Task Team and the Violence against Women Network Working Group. The overall recommendation highlighted the need for a gender lens; women have different economic and social needs than men and women's experience of the social security system is different than that of men. The recommendations made in the report and how they executed must take these differences into account through an intersectional gender-based analysis.

The Toronto Police Service (TPS) is modernizing its policing model, as described in The Way Forward Action Plan. Part of that effort includes assessing the Service's organizational culture – the values, beliefs and behaviours that shape how the Toronto Police Service members do their work and interact with the community. WomanACT coordinated a consultation session with DV3C members in response to the Toronto Police Service's assessment to understand the current organizational culture and identify strengths and potential areas of change.

4TH END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WEEK IN TORONTO

Working in collaboration with VAW sector leaders, WomanACT coordinated the 4th “End Violence Against Women (VAW) Week in Toronto”. An entire week of education, training, policy development and planning, consisting of forums, panel discussions, keynote speakers, and a full day cross-sectoral training. Our audience included but was not limited to frontline workers in the Health, VAW, Substance Use, Mental Health and Child Protection Services sectors in Toronto.

We are so proud and happy to announce that the “End Violence Against Women Week in Toronto” continues to be a massive success! With over 700 attendees from various organizations across the GTA, we as a group of strong and passionate frontline workers, advocates, lawyers and policymakers were able to connect, share and discuss better ways to protect and serve women and children fleeing violence.



DAY

1

Monday
March 5th,
2018

CAS/VAW FORUM

Building Bridges Together: Child Welfare and Violence against Women; Supporting Families with Precarious Status.

Prepared and developed by members of the Children Aid Societies (CAS) and Violence against Women (VAW) Advisory Committee in Toronto; this full-day Forum brought together over 220 stakeholders from child welfare, violence against women organizations and the government to participate in an educational and inspiring session.

CAS/VAW FORUM

Building Bridges Together: Child Welfare and Violence against Women; Supporting Families with Precarious Status.

Panel Presentation

This year's panel was titled: "Building Bridges Together" and was facilitated by Carla Neto, Shelter, Manager, YWCA Toronto.

Panelists included:

- Julia Salmon, a young woman who shared her personal story as a non-status youth that became a crown ward.
- Loly Rico, Co-Director at FCJ Refugee Centre, whose talk used real-life case examples of how CAS can better support women with precarious status.
- Silmy Abdullah, Staff Lawyer, South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario (SALCO) Silmy shared recent cases showcasing how service providers can support families to ensure the best interests of children.
- Deepa Mattoo, Legal Director, Barbra Schlifer Clinic who shared a recently launched training toolkit that analyses the complex relationship between race, gender, and immigration status. The toolkit was shared with all attendees via email.

A Message from the Front Lines

Immediately following the panel, Jean O'Neil, a Child Protection Worker from Catholic Children's Aid

Society of Toronto and Sabrina Morgan a Violence against Women Collaboration Worker from Catholic Family Services of Toronto gave a brief presentation showcasing how they jointly collaborated on a recent case.

The Afternoon

Each year attendees are presented with a written case scenario and asked to work at their tables to find solutions for the family in the scenario. Based on previous evaluations, participants were asking for a more tangible, interactive and fun way to collaborate during this exercise.

Taking past evaluations into consideration, the task team created an afternoon exercise titled: "Pathways to Solutions: Bridging the Gap. An Interactive Case Scenario Planning Exercise". The exercise included four case scenarios and an expert hub with over ten organizations present. Participants were encouraged to seek out experts, break down silos and to search for strategies and approaches to assist with their cases.



CAS/VAW FORUM

Building Bridges Together: Child Welfare and Violence against Women; Supporting Families with Precarious Status.

The Expert Hub

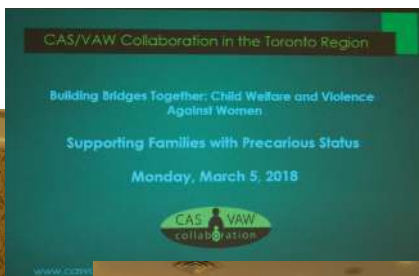
In a separate room, we created an expert hub with various organizations and community partners to assist participants with planning for their case scenario. Participants chose how to split up their teams and resources to provide the best outcome for the case they analyzed.

Attendees were expected to consult with as many experts as necessary by traveling through the hub. Experts were selected for their experience and agency expertise and were able to provide assistance and insight into each case scenario to help participants find the best solutions.

Team members took their passports to meet with experts, who after having a meaningful conversation towards the case, provided attendees with a stamp on their passport.

Special Thanks to Expert Hubs for supporting the 2018 CAS/VAW Forum!

Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic
 Child Development Institute
 Ernestine's Women's Shelter
 FCJ Refugee Centre
 Jean Tweed Centre
 Legal Aid Ontario
 Native Child Family Services Toronto
 Nilufa Hussein, Family Lawyer
 Rights of Non-Status Women's Network
 South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario
 Toronto Public Health





Members of the Children Aid Societies (CAS) and Violence against Women (VAW) Advisory Committee in Toronto

Catholic Children's Aid Society
 Child Development Institute
 Children's Aid Society of Toronto
 Catholic Family Services Toronto
 Ernestine's Women's Shelter
 Jewish Family and Child Services
 Native Child Family Services Toronto
 Woman Abuse Council of Toronto
 Women's Habitat of Etobicoke
 Yorktown Shelter for Women
 YWCA Toronto

Special Thanks to the CAS/VAW Forum Task Team members for their strong commitment, dedication and support to this initiative!

Fatima Valentim, *Yorktown Shelter for Women*
 Charlene Avalos, *Native Child and Family Services Toronto*
 Shereen McFarlane, *Catholic Family Services Toronto*
 Harmy Mendoza, *WomanACT*
 Carla Neto, *YWCA Toronto*
 Silvie Sousa-Cutulle, *Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto*
 Lisa Sura-Liddell, *Child Development Institute*
 Lisa Tomlinson, *Children's Aid Society of Toronto*



DAY

2

Tuesday
March 5th,
2018

DAY

3

Wednesday
March 6th
2018

VI Supporting Survivors by Supporting Staff Training Conference

WomanACT organized and hosted the annual Supporting Survivors by Supporting Staff (SSxSS) Training Conference for the seventh year. SSxSS is a 2-day, MCSS funded training event for front-line workers in the Violence against Women sector.

The Core Topics

This year, for the first time, WomanACT was supported by an advisory group made up of representatives from key networks providing VAW services in the city of Toronto to develop the two day training. Based on consultations with these stakeholders, the training was built around four core themes:

Trauma Informed Care and Practice: Trauma-informed care and practice recognize the need to respond to an individual's intersecting experiences of trauma, at all levels of support and care and across all settings. Trauma-informed services take into account an understanding of trauma in all aspects of service delivery and place priority on the individual's safety, choice, and control. Such services create a culture of learning and collaboration.

Trauma and the Brain: The psychological and neurobiological effects of trauma have significant implications for well-being. Clarity about these concepts assists service providers towards more effective interventions with service users suffering from the aftermath of trauma. An inside look at the developing brain and the neuroscience of memory and trauma.

VI Supporting Survivors by Supporting Staff Training Conference

Self-Reflective Practice: Taking the time to reflect, self-reflective practice is a way of studying our own experiences to improve the way we work. Engaging in reflective practice is an excellent way to increase confidence and become a more proactive professional. It also helps improve the quality of care we give and close the gap between theory and practice.

Unpacking our Biases, Unconscious and Conscious: Unconscious Biases is defined as a tendency or preference towards a particular perspective, ideology or result, which interferes with our ability to be impartial, unprejudiced, or objective, and of which we are unaware. Furthermore, unchallenged biased beliefs shape the social interactions and may be reinforced by the multitude of facets that make up our cultural norms, our personal experiences, and our environments; this can lead to gender discrimination and negative racial stereotyping, promoting discriminatory attitudes and actions towards women and people of colour.



The Agenda

The agenda for the conference differed from previous years where the format included a keynote speaker, panel presentation and several workshops or smaller breakout sessions. This year, both days were co-facilitated by Bo Yih Thom, Director of Integrative Counselling Resources, Toronto-based private practice and J. McKnight, a clinical social worker/therapist working from a private practice in New York.

The two-day workshop was designed to help attendees build individual, organizational, and sector capacity through a combination of experiential and content-based learning activities. Participants worked through group activities, with an emphasis on direct experience, application of frameworks and tools to practice settings, and dynamic discussions on crisis support, mindfulness, resilience and healing, intersectionality, substance use, and supervision.

“

Very important work for us who support survivors. Looking forward to more work on self-care.”

“The event was very well organized. Easy check-in process. Lovely event space.”

“I liked that there were opportunities to buy books relevant to the sector.”

“WomanACT staff are very nice, professionals, lovely and courteous”

“Excellent presenters”

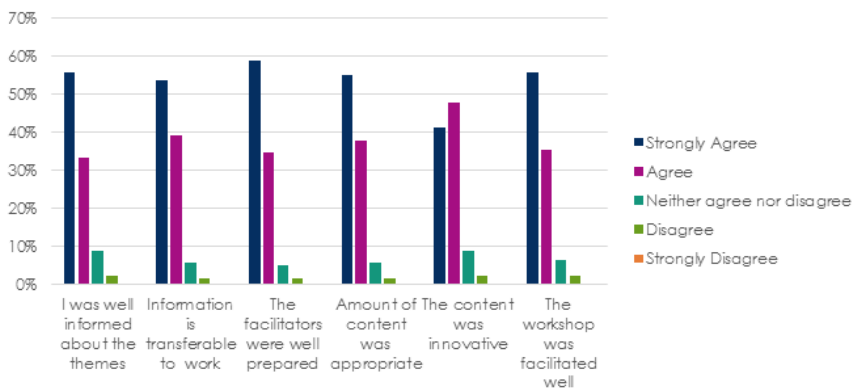
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Conference Survey Results



On March 6th, 2018 there were approximately 214 attendees. A total of 138 completed evaluations were collected at the end of the day for a response rate 64%. Cumulative scores for 'strongly agree' and 'agree' ranged from 89% to 93% for all categories.

Tuesday, March 6th, 2018



“

“The breathing movement exercises were great.”

“Encouraging and really enjoyed the full day workshops.”

“I appreciated the incorporation of meditative activities to keep the energy flowing.”

“Bo Yih facilitates with such great confidence in particular where she is naming some of the 'isms' within a number of sectors. Thank you to J. for simplifying complex terms throughout his facilitation. I would love to attend a similar training over a 3 day period. They were a dynamic duo.”

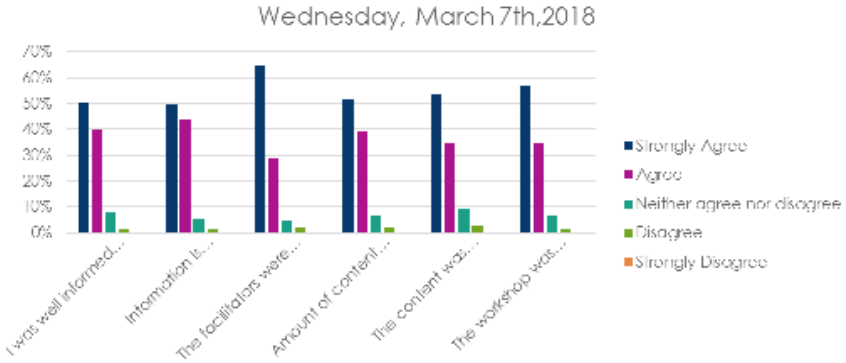
“Really good interaction between facilitators and us.”

“Very good training, but I would like to have this kind of training or similar at least twice a year.”

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Conference Survey Results

On March 7th, 2018 there were approximately 200 attendees. A total of 133 evaluations were collected for a response rate of 67%. Cumulative scores for 'strongly agree' and 'agree' ranged from 88% to 93% for all categories.

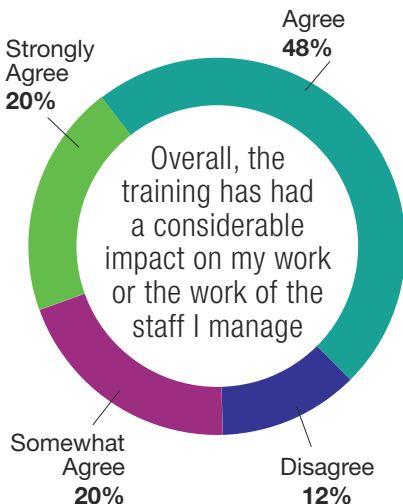


“

“Great tools for supporting women as well as reflecting and awareness of self-care and keeping tuned with feelings and needs. Love the great energy and complementing of the facilitators.”

“The best MCSS training I've been to because of the energy of the co-facilitators, the content and the format. I really enjoyed it and learned a lot this year.”

”



WomanACT's 2018 Soul of a Warrior Awards



What is a warrior? It is a term that carries different meanings respective to the context. We describe a true warrior as one who protects and works towards balance and peace.

The WomanACT Soul of a Warrior is an award given to an exceptional front-line workers in the Violence against Women sector. Nominees for this award must work in Toronto and show commitment to advocacy for improving the lives of women and children experiencing violence.

This year, WomanACT presented our first annual Soul of a Warrior Awards Gala on Thursday, March 8th, 2018 during International Women's Day.



WomanACT's 2018 Soul of a Warrior Awards

For the first time, an independent nominating committee reviewed applications received from our community of practitioners. After extensive review and deliberation, the four winners of the 2018 Soul of a Warrior Awards are:



PARTNERSHIP AWARD

Tashawna Thomas

*Resident women's advocate,
Yorktown Shelter for Women*



LEADERSHIP AWARD

Vania sukola

*Abuse councillor,
Family Service Toronto*



DEDICATION AWARD

Silvia Olivas

*Skills exchange worker,
Ernestine's Women's Shelter*



DEDICATION AWARD

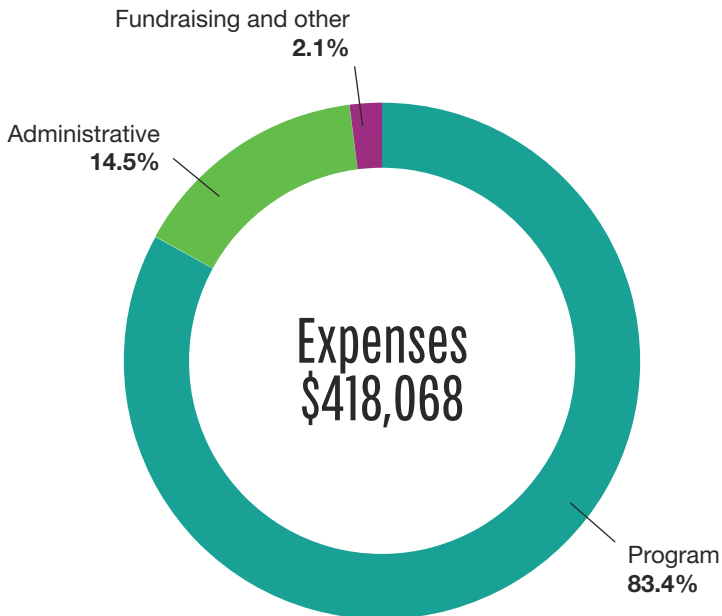
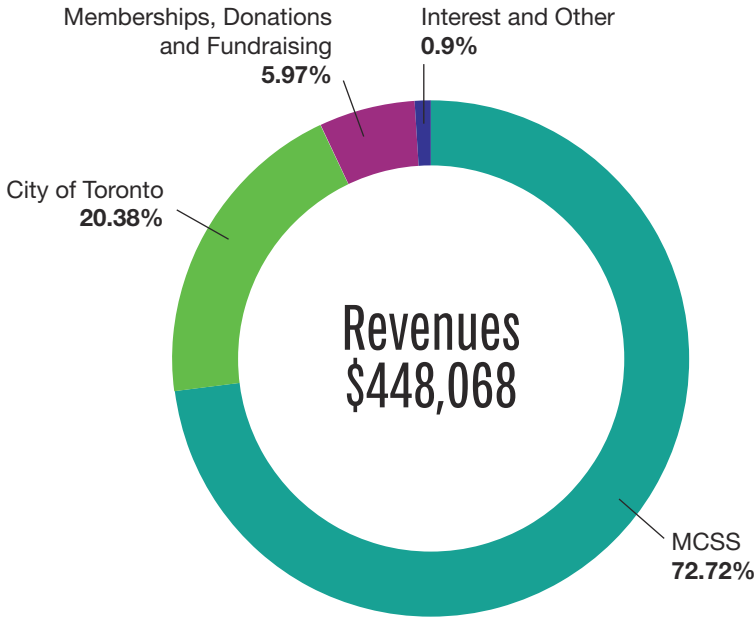
Victoria Roth

*Shelter counsellor,
Women's Habitat of Etobicoke*

The night was a huge success as we celebrated and honoured front-line workers in the Anti-Violence sector. With over 90 attendees, the night was filled with entertainment, and most importantly, celebration to honour our three winners!

Congratulations Michelle, Iliana and Chris!

FINANCIAL STATEMENT



BOARD MEMBERS

Carla Neto,
Co-Chair

Lisa Tomlinson,
Co-Chair

Sharlene Tygesen,
Secretary

Amninder Sandhu,
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Michelle Edwards,
Member

Aisha Saitiche,
Member

Adrienne Clarke,
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Priyanka Sheth,
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Silvia Samsa,
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STAFF

Harmy Mendoza,
Executive Director

Lieran Docherty,
Project Manager

Paula Wells,
*VAW / CAS Committee and Social
Media Coordinator*

Irene Gabinet,
THSP and Committees Coordinator

OUR FUNDERS

City of Toronto

Ministry of Community and Social
Services

Status of Women Canada

2017-2018 COUNCIL MEMBERS**GENERAL MEMBERS**

ACT - To End Violence against Women
Assaulted Women's Helpline
Abrigo Centre

Barbra Schliifer Commemorative Clinic
Catholic Family Services of Toronto
Catholic Children's Aid Society
Child Development Institute
Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Elizabeth Fry Toronto

Ernestine's Women's Shelter
Family Service Toronto

Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto
Interval House

Korean Canadian Women Association
Nellie's Women's Shelter

Oasis Centre Des Femmes
Scarborough Women's Centre

Springtide Resources
South Asian Women Centre

West Neighbourhood House
Women's Habitat of Etobicoke

Woodgreen Red Door Family Shelter
Yorktown Shelter for Women

YWCA Toronto

North York Women's Centre
Redwood Shelter

Woodgreen RedDoor Family Shelter
West Neighbourhood House

Women's College Hospital
Women's Habitat of Etobicoke

Working Women's Centre
Yorktown Shelter for Women

YWCA Toronto

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Ministry of Community and Social
Services

City of Toronto

Status of Women Canada

Legal Aid Ontario

Toronto Public Health

2017-2018 OUR SUPPORTERS

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Stancer Gossin Rose LLP
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Fox Theatre
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Half Baked Glass Company
Holiday Inn, Yorkdale
Honda Indy
MLSE
Palm Sunday
Pro Martial Arts
Steam Whistle Brewing
The Old Spaghetti Factory
Toronto Symphony Orchestra
Vibe Studio



ABOUT WOMANACT

MISSION

WomanACT is a council of organizations dedicated to preventing violence against women and children and promoting a Toronto-wide integrated, coordinated response through leadership, education and community mobilization.

VISION

WomanACT aspires to a coordinated service response where women and their children experience safety, dignity and opportunities.

VALUES

WomanACT holds the following values

Gender Equity Promote equal opportunity for women and children by addressing social, economic and political power inequalities.

Inclusivity Support participation of all women in decision-making

Dignity Respect the fundamental worth and dignity of all women

Efficacy Produce intended results

Knowledge Sharing Support catalytic and innovative learning initiatives



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