

# ABOUT Women

## International Women's Day Continues to Build Momentum

**M**arch 8 is recognized worldwide as International Women's Day. Every year on this date, millions of women and men around the world celebrate the progress of women in many countries and many cultures. Women's causes have advanced immeasurably over the past century, and there is much to celebrate. However, March 8 is also a time to think about the millions of women who are still victims of political and personal abuse and to think about what we must do in the future to overcome the inequality that still exists.

Born at the turn of the 20th century, a time of great social turbulence and crisis, International Women's Day inherited a tradition of protest and political activism. Indeed, Lena Lewis, a U. S. socialist, declared in 1910 that this was not a time for celebrating anything, but was, rather, a day for anticipating all the struggles to come.

It was at a conference of Socialist Women held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1910 that Clara Zetkin, a German, presented a resolution calling for an International Women's Day to recognize women's struggles around the world, including the fight



*Learning together bonds women from every culture.*

for the universal right to vote. The resolution was passed unanimously by more than 100 delegates representing 17 countries. The first International Women's Day was celebrated the next year on March 19, 1911.

Although various countries honoured International Women's Day sporadically for many years, the most memorable International Women's Day was held in Petrograd (now Leningrad) in March 1917. It was after workers were locked out of the Putilov armaments plant on March 7 that the women of Petrograd began to

storm the streets. These women, the wives, daughters and mothers of soldiers, demanded an end to their hunger, humiliation and suffering. This movement gathered strength and passion as women swept through the city over the next few days in food riots, political strikes and demonstrations. The women of Petrograd launched the first revolution in 1917.

The United Nations designated 1975 as International Women's Year, and in 1977, the UN adopted a resolution

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# Minister's Message

**O** am particularly pleased, as Minister responsible for the Status of Women, to address you as we celebrate International Women's Day 2003.

While the official date is March 8, this year I will host a reception on Friday March 7 at the Legislative Building in Winnipeg. All Manitoba women are invited to join us to celebrate the many wonderful accomplishments women have already achieved and to consider the challenges we have yet to meet.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day will highlight the "international" element of women helping women. At this time, I am pleased to recognize the diverse communities of interest that have made contributions to women's equality in Manitoba and Canada. A number of community agencies that advocate for women or provide them with direct services have been invited to provide displays at our March 7 celebration.

In keeping with the international theme, this issue of *About Women* profiles several organizations and the women who have, over the years, made a vast difference in the lives of other Manitoba women. I know you will enjoy the

information about Samahang Pilipina 92 Inc. provided by the president of this Filipina woman's organization. An interview with Sandra Funk of the Original Women's Network highlights its services to Aboriginal women. In addition, in this issue you will find information on the women at Pluri-Elles, who offer counselling services to Franco-Manitoban women, and the initiatives and services offered by the Yellow River Chinese Association. There is also information about how the Manitoba Women's Institute and the Southwest Manitoba Farm Women's Network support rural women in starting their own home businesses and encourage each other to run for public office and seek other leadership roles in their communities.

An interview with Kim Clare, chair of the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council and director of the Inner-City Social Work Program, looks at how the program helps low-income women achieve a degree in social work and how many of the program's graduates go on to help other women.

Spring is a time for rebirth and rejuvenation, and it is a good time to renew our public commitment to support and advocate for women



across the globe. As we acknowledge our accomplishments, and move to future challenges, I look forward to joining you to celebrate International Women's Day at the Legislature Friday, March 7, 2003, at 11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. with the official program at 12:30. I also welcome your calls and letters and invite you to contact the Women's Directorate to voice your opinions or share your concerns with me. ■

*Diane McGifford*

Diane McGifford  
Minister responsible for the Status of Women

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inviting countries to dedicate one day a year to celebrate the rights of women and international peace. March 8 became the date recognized by most countries.

International Women's Day has evolved from a time for asserting women's political and social rights

into one for reviewing the progress made by women and celebrating women's gains in promoting equality. It is important to note that as we celebrate this day, we must remain conscious of the work there is yet to do.

This year, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women will be

hosting a reception in honour of International Women's Day on Friday March 7 at the Legislative Building in Winnipeg during the lunch hour. Everyone is welcome to attend as we reflect on women's past struggles, celebrate their great accomplishments and join together and support one another to overcome future challenges. ■

# Pluri-Elles Meets Needs of Women and Families in French Community

**M**anitoba is proud to have the largest French-speaking community in the country, west of Quebec. Pluri-Elles Women's Resource

Centre offers French language support services and counselling to the women of this community.

Pluri-Elles in Winnipeg has been helping French-speaking women and their families for just over 20 years, offering counselling, literacy and job search services. The centre's employment project co-ordinator Robin Rooke says their clients' issues are common to all women, "Same issues, different language."

Domestic violence, sexual abuse, teen pregnancy, sexual harassment, suicide and lack of education and resources are just some of the challenges that bring women to the centre for counselling and support. The resource centre provides many counselling options – individual, drama therapy, group – for children and adults. An average of 100 clients per month use Pluri-Elles' counselling services.

Along with personal and emotional challenges, another important factor holding many women back is literacy. "Our literacy program is available to men as well as women in eight Manitoba centres, and there were 369 in the program last year, alone," says Mona Audet, executive director of the centre.

Pluri-Elles' literacy programs in Ste. Rose du Lac, St. Pierre, Notre Dame de Lourdes, St. Claude, St.



*At Pluri-Elles, staff and clients connect over good food on special occasions.*

Boniface, St. Georges, St. Laurent and Lorette provide the tools and confidence people need to begin changing their lives and the lives of their families. Literacy skills improve chances of finding employment, which the resource centre also helps with. The centre offers a 10-week job search program that includes individual career counselling and group classes on job search techniques and tools.

This year, Pluri-Elles has undertaken a research project to help define the needs of francophone women around the province and determine what services are required to meet those needs. Another new program, in partnership with Manitoba Justice and Cercle Molière, has francophones going into French communities to discuss violence

issues and then developing a play on the issues to be presented across the province.

In celebration of International Women's Day this year, the resource centre is sponsoring a day-long session for self-care. Presentations will include everything from Tai Chi and yoga to aromatherapy. The philosophy behind this "feminine synergy" day, says Rooke, is to encourage women to nurture and care for themselves so they can remain strong enough to nurture and care for others.

For more information on Pluri-Elles services, contact: 204-233-1735 in Winnipeg, or toll-free 1-800-207-5874 ■



# Yellow River Chinese Association Helps New Manitobans Adapt

**P**amela Wong recognizes the challenges faced by newcomers to this country. Born in Hong Kong, Wong moved to Canada in 1990 and became a Canadian citizen in 1997. Today, Wong is president of the Yellow River Chinese Association - a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting educational, cultural and recreational activities for newcomers to Canada. While the association welcomes all ages, genders and nationalities, the majority of its members are immigrant Chinese women.

Helping its members make a successful transition from China to Canada is the association's main goal. To meet that goal, the association provides referral services and holds workshops and information sessions for its members. Topics have included family law, employment insurance, income security, how to become a Canadian citizen, legal aid and women's issues and concerns.

"People come to Canada with hope," explains Wong. "We help to build a bridge to a new life. We help them to learn English and teach them how to access services, get experience, get a job and build a new home in Canada."

Wong is aware that adjusting to a



*Members of Yellow River Assoc. celebrate Canada Day with other members of the Chinese community.*

different culture and learning a new language can be difficult. Some immigrants, especially women, may avoid social situations or interactions with people other than familiar family and friends. Wong, however, encourages newcomers to get out and become involved in the community. She advises them to "enjoy and have fun" while gaining the knowledge and skills they need to develop full and satisfying lives. Leading by example, Wong and her husband operated a busy Chinese grocery store in Winnipeg for many years. She is also an active volunteer

who strongly believes in the value of helping others - particularly seniors and women.

In addition to helping newcomers, the association celebrates special events, such as Canada Day, with get-togethers, guest speakers and favourite foods. International Women's Day is observed with performances of traditional Chinese songs and dances and discussions about women's rights in Canada.

For more information on Yellow River Chinese Association, call 204-269-0123 in Winnipeg. ■

## Rural Women's Organizations Teach Each Other New Skills

**R**ural Manitoba women working together can make a world of difference in their own communities and their own lives, says Manitoba Women's Institute (MWI) president Diane Hall of Gimli. Priorities on women's issues, such as food safety and suffrage, have changed in the past century, but the

need for support and education has remained constant. An important aspect of MWI is its seminars and learning opportunities to help women to be more active and influential in their communities.

In 1897, the 18-month-old-son of Adelaide Hoodless died from drinking contaminated milk. To spare

other women from suffering such a tragedy, the Ontario mother brought local women together to exchange information on hygiene, and the Women's Institute of Canada was born. Today, the organization works on local, national and international projects to help women and families.

MWI members are now educating

each other about taking leadership roles in the community, creating effective lobby groups and starting home businesses. For instance, says Hall, the role of women in farming has changed dramatically over the years because farming has changed. "If farm families are to survive, women have to work in the fields alongside the men, get outside jobs or create their own jobs."

Fran Dickinson, a MWI member in Waskada, spends a lot of time getting women in her area interested in new projects that contribute to family finances, which, in turn, contributes to their communities. "It's important to the health of a community to get women interested in participating more fully," she says. "Starting home businesses is an excellent example."

Dickinson is also a member of the Southwest Farm Women's Network, a group who, among other things, sponsors tours for rural women to visit other women who have become entrepreneurs. "It's a very popular fall event that has grown from a single-day to a two-day tour," she says, "and at noon, we have someone to talk about starting a home business."

Local women have begun businesses in a variety of areas, including arts and crafts, bed and breakfasts, curing meat, farm vacation packages, home-made condiments, canned fruits and vegetables, willow furniture and packaging grains for soup mixes. The possibilities are endless.

Area agricultural offices can provide lots of ideas for home businesses, along with small business start-up and marketing information. Equally important are the experience and information provided by successful women entrepreneurs. Dickinson agrees that women already running home businesses are excellent role models for their friends and neighbours and are able to offer other women encouragement and confidence.

For more information on Manitoba Women's Institute, call 204-642-8401 in Gimli. ■

# Filipina Women Work Toward Equality

**C**oming to Canada from an old-world culture like the Philippines, says Edda Pangilinan, presents equality issues for many Filipina women. Pangilinan is founder and president of Samahang Pilipina 92 Inc., a women's organization that helps Filipina-Canadian women gain their rightful place in society.

Traditional culture narrowly defines roles for women. In a new country, new ways of defining women's roles can be confusing to both women and men. "Our role in the community is to help women who are victims of physical abuse, domestic worker abuse and employment abuse," Pangilinan explains, "particularly women who are working in non-professional jobs."

Pangilinan, now a retired registered midwife, was a hospital worker in Winnipeg several decades ago. She was distressed at the number of Filipina women who did not know their rights as workers or as wives and daughters, women who were afraid to speak up for themselves. Pangilinan became active in the hospital union and encouraged others to do so. In 1992, she created Samahang Pilipina with other concerned Filipina women. Besides the work they do with local women, the group also raises funds for important causes in the Philippines.

"Our organization wants Filipina women in Manitoba to be successful," she says. "To do that, they need to learn to demand respect from men, and they need to know what supports and resources are available to them.

"Along with all the strangeness of coming to a new country, immigrant women are at a disadvantage if they don't know much English. They need stronger, more experienced women to help them and stand up for them, until they can stand up for themselves."



*Edda Pangilinan*

Samahang Pilipina 92 Inc. members advocate for women in a broad range of areas, including deportation hearings, help with employment insurance, unfair employment practices, evictions, domestic abuse, separation and divorce, sexual abuse, child abuse, job search and acclimatizing to a new country. The association helps desperate women and their children in emergency situations find shelters, counselling, emergency funds and anything else they need to deal with the problems in their lives.

"Filipina women are so ashamed of their problems that they don't want to admit them to others in the community," says Pangilinan, "for fear of gossip and harsh judgement. If they come to us, they know their problems are confidential, and they can trust us to protect and help them."

Pangilinan says many women in Winnipeg's Filipino community will celebrate International Women's Day at the Legislative Building with other women who are dedicated to helping women.

For more information on Samahang Pilipina 92 Inc., call 204-667-3339 in Winnipeg. ■



# Unique Education Changes Women's Lives

**F**or many, getting a social work degree means attending a conventional university. But for more than 200 Winnipeg inner city women, half of whom are Aboriginal, getting that degree meant attending an exceptional school – the Inner City Social Work Program at the Winnipeg Education Centre. It is one of the University of Manitoba's ACCESS programs.

While the accredited social work degree program is open to both men and women, program director Kim Clare says 90 per cent of the students are women. "Women are more attracted to the program," she explains, "because it's a compassionate profession, and the program requires students to take emotional risks to succeed."

Program entry is based on financial and academic need, says Clare. "You have to be poor to get in, that's what this program is for – people who haven't had the advantages most university students have."

Once financial need has been shown, academic levels are assessed, and students get help to upgrade reading, writing and math skills as well as their ability to work with theoretical concepts. Once they are academically ready, they continue with regular course work to complete the program.

The school meets more than academic needs. It also supports a Harvest-sponsored food bank and a used clothing exchange, provides personal counselling and academic advice, and helps students find day-care. These are the kinds of supports so many women lack when they're trying to improve their lives through education.

More than half the students are Aboriginal and another 20 per cent are immigrant women. The average age is 35 and many are single parents. "These graduates reflect the diversity of the communities in which they'll be

working. They relate to their clients because they've been in their clients' shoes," Clare says.

Some graduates go straight into jobs, about 10 per cent do their master's in social work and others qualify to teach the social work course at the school. Not only do they help other women, they provide strong role models.

Marie Lands, a graduate of the Inner City Social Work Program, has come full circle. She began by using the help available from the school and other students to find her way. Now, she works for the program as a counsellor, an academic advisor and an instructor. For her, the program provided "a really good education that related to so much of my life experience. It made me aware of myself as an Aboriginal woman," she says, "gave me self esteem and confidence, and made me feel a part of society."

Lands came from a background all too familiar to Aboriginal women, a history of residential schools, child welfare and reform schools. Her way of coping was alcohol addiction and a feeling of hopelessness.

Her first step was to conquer her addictions. Then, when she was working at an entry-level job for the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, she discovered she had a right to justice like everyone else. The realization gave her motivation to pursue her education.

While taking the social work program, the mother of three took advantage of the many practical supports as well as the opportunities to develop self awareness and begin her personal healing. Lands encourages women who are wondering how to break the cycle of hopelessness to be strong – to take personal responsibility for, and control of, their own lives.

"Begin your own healing process, get an education and then you can make your own opportunities," she says. "You have to take a good look at



*Marie Lands – now teaching social work*

yourself and make some hard choices." Along with her choice to work at the school, Lands has also chosen to write a book about her personal experiences.

"It's important to let others, especially kids, know that they're not alone – that I've been there and I chose to make a better life."

For more information on the social work program, contact: Kim Clare, director, at 204-668-8160, ext. 26. ■

## ACCESS

The Inner City Social Work Program shares the Winnipeg Education Centre building with another ACCESS program that offers a five-year combined Bachelor of Arts/Bachelor of Education degree, through the University of Winnipeg. Like the social work program, the criteria to enter the program are based on financial and academic need. Also like the social work program, about 90 per cent of the program's students are women, more than half are Aboriginal. The education program students receive the same kinds of support with counselling, academic readiness, etc. and share the food and used clothing banks with the students from the social work program. For information on this program, contact: Bill Gadsby, director, at 204-668-8160, ext. 31.

# Centre Supports Thompson Women in Crisis

**P**romoting the elimination of violence against women and providing a safe place for victims presents unique challenges in the northern Manitoba city of Thompson.

Serving the city of 15,000 - in addition to more than a dozen isolated, outlying communities - the Thompson Crisis Centre offers an emergency shelter program, children's support services, a transition program, satellite school program, support group and a 24-hour toll-free crisis line.

"Transportation is one of our biggest challenges," says Wendy McTavish, executive director of the Thompson Crisis Centre. Many remote communities are connected to Thompson but lack all-weather road access. Instead, they rely on a combination of air, marine, rail and winter road services. This can result in high transportation costs and unreliable transportation services.

"Women in crisis situations need to leave their communities quickly," says McTavish. "But limited transportation options can cause delays. When you are up in the middle of nowhere and you can't get out...you feel really trapped." In these cases, the centre encourages women to rely on families and friends to help get them to the crisis centre. While many women

receive this support, others do not. The centre is aware of men in some communities who discourage and try to prevent women from leaving in these situations.

***"Thompson is a very diverse and transient community," says McTavish.***

"Poverty is another barrier for the women we serve," says McTavish. Many of the centre's clients depend on social assistance and must also cope with the high cost of living in the north. Finding affordable housing, for example, can be a problem for women who have left an abusive environment and must make new living arrangements. Finding suitable daycare space is another hurdle for some women.

As Manitoba's third largest city, Thompson is a thriving, modern community that offers shopping malls, hotels, restaurants and an airport. But the isolation of the north causes concerns for the staff and counsellors at the crisis centre. Professional development opportunities are limited, for example, and they miss networking with other service providers in the province.

"Thompson is a very diverse and transient community," says McTavish.

"The city has a large immigrant and Aboriginal population. Residents are very supportive of social issues such as the prevention of domestic violence." She cites the high attendance at the Annual Walk Against Violence and the annual December 6 vigil commemorating the women who died in the Montreal Massacre.

McTavish notes that use of the crisis centre services increases each year. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that domestic violence is on the rise in Thompson; just that more women are reporting it. The crisis centre staff attend many community events to help educate the public about preventing family violence. As a result, the public is now more aware of this serious issue. "Domestic violence has been around for a long time," says McTavish. "Today, women are more willing to stand up for themselves and not tolerate abuse. We get them the help they need."

The crisis centre staff will be celebrating International Women's Day with other Thompson and area residents at a special luncheon for the event.

For more information on Thompson Crisis Centre, call 204-677-9668. ■

## OWN Raises Public Awareness on Aboriginal Women's Issues

**T**he Original Women's Network (OWN) is committed to providing communication and support services, developing skills and promoting the visibility of Aboriginal women and their contributions to society, says Sandra Funk, executive director of the non-profit, charitable resource centre for Aboriginal women.

"Research indicates that Aboriginal women are behind in employment, finances and education," she says. To address this, OWN offers a 52-week business skills training program that prepares and assists First Nations, Metis and Inuit women on Employment and Income Assistance or Employment Insurance to enter the workforce. Certified through Red River College, the program provides

training in computers, Internet, e-mail, bookkeeping, accounting and office procedures. Successful graduates can expect to find work in administrative and managerial fields.

Funk points out that the Aboriginal workforce is one of today's fastest growing employee segments.

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Currently, 10 per cent of Manitoba's workforce is of Aboriginal descent, and this number is expected to increase dramatically over the next 10 years. "We are giving Aboriginal women the skills they need to participate in the workforce," Funk says. These skills will enable the women to fill positions in local business and industry.

Another OWN initiative is the broadcast of *Not Vanishing* - Canada's only Aboriginal women's call-in radio show. Heard from Churchill to Winnipeg every Wednesday afternoon, *Not Vanishing* is broadcast on Native Communications Inc. The show deals with issues and concerns of economic, social, political, cultural and spiritual importance to Aboriginal women.

"Whenever we do a show about violence, we get a tremendous response," says Funk. "Often women phone in and share their experiences - what they did in a certain situation." This information can be very helpful to women facing similar circumstances, particularly those isolated in northern or rural communities.

OWN also contributes a monthly column to *Grassroots News* - an Aboriginal provincial newspaper. The column expands on issues and ideas explored on the *Not Vanishing* radio program. In addition to these activities, OWN's Aboriginal Women's Recognition Awards



*Computer skills are important for women wanting to succeed in business.*

acknowledge and honour the achievements of Aboriginal women in the community.

A recent victory for OWN, Funk says, was the return of its status as a registered charity after a 2 1/2 year struggle. Finding continuing funding is a common challenge for non-profit groups. There are many advantages to being a registered charity, including enhanced fundraising, income tax exemption, GST rebates and other tax exemptions and rebates. Funk connected with other women's charitable organizations while working through this time-consuming process. Although it doesn't solve the on-going financial problems, it does ease the financial crunch a bit.

For more information on Original Women's Network, call 204-942-2711 in Winnipeg. ■

# A B O U T Women

is a publication of the Manitoba Women's Directorate that focuses on issues, concerns, information and activities of interest to women. It is available without charge upon request.

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