

ABOUT Women

Fall 2005

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Black Women in Manitoba Yesterday and Today

When Esme Stewart immigrated to Canada from Trinidad in 1962, she was

prepared to deal with a new country and a new culture. What she wasn't prepared for was the overt racism she encountered at work and in the community.

Before moving to Montreal, Stewart applied to the Protestant School Board for a teaching position. "I got the impression, through the correspondence, that everything was fine and there would be no difficulty in getting a position."

In the last letter she received, Stewart was asked to send a picture, which she did. She never heard back from the school board. Upon her arrival in Montreal, she spoke to the assistant superintendent, who denied receiving any correspondence from her, and told her all the teaching positions were filled early in the year and nothing was available.

The following year, Stewart moved to Winnipeg, where she taught at several schools in Winnipeg School Division #1. She was the only black teacher at that time, and though the division treated her well, she often felt unwelcome in the schools.

"I would go to the staff room," she recalls, "where there were many empty chairs, but when I sat down, someone would say: 'That chair belongs to Mr. So-and-so; he sits there.'"

She experienced similar treatment when she and her husband tried to rent a house. "We would go to a house and see a sign, For Rent, and we'd be told that it's already rented." Because of the difficulty renting, the couple had no choice but to buy a house so they could remain in Winnipeg.

Despite the many challenges Stewart faced, she never backed down. She quickly made a name for herself in the education community for her excellent teaching methods and for innovative programs she created to enrich the learning experience for students and their parents. In 1972, Stewart started the first parent group in Winnipeg School Division #1. In 1977, she became the first black woman principal in the division.

Today, Stewart's myriad accomplishments are numerous. They include lecturing in North America and overseas, and designing educational programs to deal with issues like literacy. She also organized youth conferences on multiculturalism, advocated for immigrants' rights, founded the Black Educators Association of Manitoba (BEAM), and received numerous awards and commendations.

Stewart notes things have changed tremendously for black people over the past several decades, but believes racism is still a factor, particularly when it comes to promoting black employees to senior positions.

"It's difficult to mandate attitudes," says Stewart, "even in certain stores and businesses today, you don't see black faces."

Did you know...?

- Between 1996 and 2001, the number of black people in Manitoba increased by 18.9 per cent, making the black community one of the largest visible minority populations in Manitoba.
- In 2001, 19.7 per cent of black Manitoba women attained a university degree, compared to 20.3 per cent of all Manitoba women.
- In 2000, the average salary for a black woman in Manitoba was \$22,900, while the average salary for all Manitoba women was \$21,000.
- The Ethnic Diversity Survey (September, 2003) reveals almost half the black Canadians surveyed said they had experienced some form of discrimination or unfair treatment in the past five years.

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Minister's Message



As we prepare to celebrate Women's History Month 2005, I am pleased to welcome you to this edition of About Women.

This year's theme – the history of Black women in Manitoba – is reflected in our cover story about the experiences of two Black women who immigrated to Manitoba in 1962 and in 1985.

An update on the Women's Directorate's highly successful Power Up program talks about the directorate's recent trip to the North to address barriers faced by women there who wish to participate in the program. As well, we hope you enjoy the article on the Murdo Scribe Centre, established to meet the education, career development and employment needs of our inner-city residents.

The newsletter also highlights some changes to government legislation, such as the significant changes to the Pension Benefits Act, and information related to increased funding for early childhood educators and the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force Report.

This year we are celebrating Women's History Month with a lunchtime reception at the Legislative Building. I invite you to join me October 4, 2005 from 11:45 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. in Room 254 of the Legislative Building. Space is limited, so please call the Women's Directorate at 204-945-3476 if you plan to attend.

I look forward to meeting you on October 4!

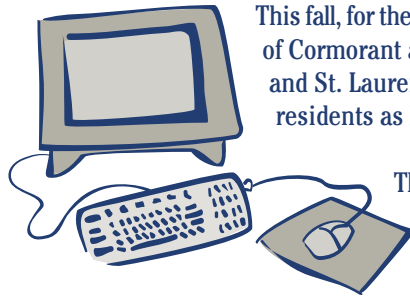
Nancy Allan
Minister responsible for the Status of Women

Power Up goes up north

Power Up began in 1999 as a two-year program, but its overwhelming popularity led to ongoing funding for this computer training initiative. The program helps women throughout Manitoba, who have limited exposure to computers, prepare for today's computer-savvy marketplace by offering training in basic computer and Internet skills.

Power Up courses have been offered in Winnipeg, Altona, Arnes, Ashern, Brandon, Carman, Dauphin, Swan River and many other Manitoba communities. While the program shows steady growth in southern and rural Manitoba, few courses have been offered in northern and remote areas of the province. To address that fact, Women's Directorate staff travelled to Flin Flon and Thompson this past spring to provide information on the program and learn about making participation easier for women in northern regions.

Northern agency representatives attending the meetings learned a great deal about Power Up, including the fact that necessary expenses like child care and technical support would be covered in their funding. This northern/remote initiative has already met with success. This fall, for the first time, Thompson YWCA LEAP program and the community of Cormorant are offering Power Up courses. The communities of Fairford and St. Laurent have shown interest in offering the training to their residents as have Lake Manitoba and Little Saskatchewan First Nations.



The Women's Directorate looks forward to working with existing, and future, partners to ensure Power Up continues to be accessible for all Manitoba women.

Increased funding demonstrates Manitoba's commitment to child care

In July 2005, a new plan was announced by Manitoba Family Services and Housing that will improve the quality of early learning and child care in the province by adopting workforce changes to meet the needs of child-care workers and early childhood educators now and in the future.

The plan provides \$11.5 million to increase wages and benefits of early childhood educators, including those who work with children with disabilities, putting annual salaries at \$27,000 to \$30,000. The plan also provides a \$2.9 million funding increase to recruit and train more staff. The increase includes \$1.4 million over two years to train more early childhood education students at Manitoba colleges. It also provides amounts for a tuition support program and a recruitment fund to attract qualified staff back to the field.

In April 2005, Prime Minister Paul Martin and Premier Gary Doer gave Manitoba's child-care system a boost with the signing of an agreement, Moving Forward on Early Learning and Child Care, the first of its kind in Canada. Over the next five years, Manitoba's share of the federal government's support is estimated at \$176 million. The province is committed to underscoring Manitoba's position as a leader in early child-care development.



New centre honours Murdo Scribe legacy

In June 2005, a new centre opened at 510 Selkirk Avenue bearing the name of Aboriginal Elder Murdock "Murdo" Scribe, a valued member of the province's education department and a significant contributor to the field of Aboriginal education. The Murdo Scribe Centre will carry on his legacy by working to meet the education and employment needs of inner-city residents through improved access to useful government services and programs.

On-site resources include the Aboriginal Education Directorate, Employment and Training Services, Partners for Careers and Manitoba Student Aid, a branch that administers student financial assistance. The benefit of having these services on-site is that government departments can work more closely with people and organizations at the community level.

The centre is a part of the provincial government's commitment to revitalize Winnipeg's core and better serve area residents. Services are available to the public and particularly aimed at unemployed individuals, youth, adult students and low-income families.



Black Women in Manitoba Yesterday and Today

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When Phyllis Reid-Jarvis immigrated from Jamaica in 1985, unlike Stewart, she felt welcome in her new country. Although she was one of only three black students in the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Human Ecology in 1987, and the sole black person interning at Health Sciences Centre, she always felt accepted and respected for who she was.



Now a registered dietician, president of PRJ Consulting & Health Services, and author of the book, *Solutions for Health... How to do More of What Works!*, the wellness consultant says, "I can't say I've ever experienced any overt racism, or was ever denied anything because of my ethnicity."

Reid-Jarvis feels discrimination today is more a women's issue than a black women's issue and maintains that socio-economic status plays a considerable role in how women are perceived and treated.

"People put a lot of emphasis on who you are, meaning what you do. So when you have a professional designation, you're looked at in a positive way. But when you're poor, suddenly your ethnicity, be it black, aboriginal, Asian, or whatever, really stands out."

Reid-Jarvis also believes that half the battle is not in the way others see you, but in the way you see yourself. All her life, she has stayed true to her culture, values and beliefs, and raised her two children to be proud of who they are. "You are different," she always told them, "but different can be good."

Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force releases final report

In October 2004, the all-party, Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force was formed to consult with Manitobans throughout the province for their views on how to keep our children and youth healthy and active. The task force looked at issues of nutrition, physical activity and injury prevention. The final report and recommendations were published in June 2005.

In the report, Manitobans said that young people need more access to nutritious foods and a broad range of healthy activities. They also said the province should work diligently with the federal government to improve the health status of Aboriginal people.

A total of 47 recommendations in 10 key areas included: increasing access to nutritious foods in schools, mandating physical and health education from Kindergarten to Senior 4, increasing access to good nutrition and opportunities for physical activity in low-income families, and furthering access to traditional foods and culturally focused physical activity in First Nations communities.



Pension Benefits Amendment

If you are over 55 and have money in a locked-in retirement benefit plan known as a Life Income Fund (LIF) or Locked-in Retirement Income Fund (LRIF), you can now apply to your financial institution for a one-time transfer of up to 50 per cent of the plan's balance to a creditor-proof Registered Retirement Income Fund (RRIF) that is not locked in.

This new legislation ensures protection for the rights and interests of spouses and common-law partners, both present and former. One can only make a transfer with the informed written consent of a cohabiting spouse or common-law partner. Further, those who have family support obligations will not be able to avoid responsibility by making a transfer.

The amendments will recognize court orders from other Canadian jurisdictions for the division of a pension between separated spouses or partners, and ensure all separated common-law partners (cohabitating a year or more) are able to apply for a court order to divide a pension.

This new legislation, part of the most extensive pension reform in 20 years, means more flexibility for Manitobans planning and managing their retirement plans. It offers greater control over retirement income, while still providing the appropriate protections to ensure a life-long pension.

ABOUT Women

About Women is a publication of the *Women's Directorate* that focuses on issues of interest to women and provides practical, timely information they can use. It is available without charge upon request.

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