WOMEN’S CENTRES TO THE RESCUE:
An Examination of the Contributions Women’s Centres Have Made to Communities Throughout British Columbia

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate the way in which feminist-based organizations—specifically women's centres—have sought to fulfill the unmet social needs of women and children living throughout British Columbia. This thesis achieves this end through a number of different means. A literature review provides background on feminist planning and an overview of the history of the women's movement in Canada. An examination of B.C. women's centres, which includes a close look at the similar and unique services offered, demonstrates the positive contributions made by centres. A case study, which thoroughly reviews the history of one specific centre (the North Shore Women's Centre), shows how women's centres evolve over time in order to meet the changing needs of the women in their communities. An analysis explores the opportunities and constraints that the members of women's centres have faced in trying to carry out their various activities.

This thesis has been based on, and has utilized, the goals and methodologies created by feminist planners. In doing so, it takes women's needs, interests, and experiences into account, and aims to make a contribution to knowledge that women can use to improve their lives.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The overall purpose of this thesis is to make a contribution to contemporary planning literature, in particular, feminist planning literature, the goal of which is to “emancipate women from subordination, and to embrace equity, equality and empowerment” (Moser 1993: 89).

Specifically, this thesis aims to fill a gap which, as Sandercock and Forsyth identified in their 1992 paper, currently exists in feminist planning literature. This gap is the connection between feminist planning theory and feminist activism (54). This connection is important given that women’s community activism throughout history has significantly influenced the planning of the social environment, even though this contribution seems to have been invisible to the planning profession. For example, women’s activism in the early nineteenth century led to improvements in housing, sanitation, and health conditions in inner cities. More recently, women in the 1960’s began to organize and be active in the planning and delivery of services which were supportive of women’s needs, such as women’s centres.

This thesis attempts to connect feminist planning theory to feminist activism primarily through a literature review, survey, case study, and analysis of the various contributions, opportunities, and constraints B.C. women’s centres have faced since they were first established in the early 1970s. The literature review consists of an overview of the feminist planning tradition which includes an examination of its origins, goals, methodologies, as well as an identification and discussion of the issues which have not yet been fully addressed by feminist planners. Following this overview, there is an investigation into the literature surrounding women’s community organizing, particularly during the women’s liberation movement. Emphasis here is placed on women’s struggles to organize and create community services. The direction of the thesis then relates the theoretical discussion to the development of women’s centres. The North Shore
Women's Centre is critically examined and is the case study for this section. In the final chapters of the thesis there is an assessment of how women's centres have served as providers of essential community services. This assessment bridges feminist planning theory and feminist community activism.

1.1 Motivations for Research and Problem Statement

The motivating factors that have led me to pursue a thesis concerning feminist activism and planning have been both personal, practical, and academic.

Personally, I am interested in women's community organizing and service delivery as I have been actively involved with women's centres, specifically the North Shore Women's Centre, for nearly four years. During this time I have observed and assisted numerous women, who have come to the centre looking for assistance or support, in dealing with their various concerns, issues, and problems. Often these women feel a sense of powerlessness as they do not believe that they can effectively change their present situation for the better. Fortunately, I have also observed many of these same women become empowered as they partake in the services and programs offered by the centre and become hopeful that they can take control over their own lives. During this time I have also become aware of the unique services women's centres provide throughout British Columbia and I am increasingly impressed with their dedication and commitment to improve women's situations throughout the province. Since I began planning school, I have come to associate the activities being pursued by women's centres with community development, in that by improving women's situations the whole community will benefit.
Practically, I would like to offer women's centres throughout the province with a document which illustrates the various and unique contributions that centres make to communities. Through this, centres will hopefully gain new ideas and insights into possible new programs and services. This thesis will be of particular use to the North Shore Women's Centre as it will provide for them an opportunity to trace, through their history, their strengths and weaknesses. They can thus use this information to assist them to determine how they can become more effective in the future.

Academically, I was motivated to write this thesis because there is presently very little written in the field of planning which examines how voluntary, community organizations address the needs of community members which have been overlooked by the planning process. This is especially true when those organizations have been created and operated by women. This motivation is important given the increased emphasis placed on volunteerism in the last two decades. The growing importance of volunteerism has corresponded with the government downloading (and hence, decreased funding) of social services.

As an outcome of these personal, practical, and academic motivations three questions have arisen which guide the remainder of this thesis:

- What contributions do women's centres make to communities throughout British Columbia (both past and present)?
- What opportunities have centres traditionally taken advantage of to help them carry out these contributions (e.g. government funding), and what constraints have they faced which have deterred them from providing other services?
- Finally, what is the forecast for women's centres in the future?
1.2 Methods of Research

Multiple research methods\(^1\) were used throughout this thesis. These methods included a number of qualitative research techniques as well as secondary research.

1.2.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods have been used by feminist researchers as a way to permit women to express their own emotions, understandings, and experiences fully and on their own terms (Jayarante and Stewart 1991: 88). The qualitative research methods which were used to gather information throughout this thesis included interviews, surveys, fieldwork, and case studies. These are examples of non-hierarchical methods which have the potential for a more humane and less mechanical relationship to form between the researcher and the researched, as they tend to be personally involved with one another (88).

a) Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were one of the principal means through which data was collected. These semi-structured interviews involved asking open-ended questions in an environment where the research participant felt relaxed and comfortable, for example in their living room (Reinharz 1992: 18). Moreover, in each interview simple and plain language was used. Given this, oral traditions were seen as a legitimate way to convey information and thus encouraged (Forsyth and Sandercock 1992: 52).

Research participants included government representatives, staff members, board members, and volunteers (Appendix A will include a full list of participants). The length of each interview varied depending on the individuals' time commitment, the number of interview participants
involved (that is, if the interview was conducted with one person or a large group of people), and available research time. Given these limitations, each interview lasted from one half hour to three hours. During each interview notes were made and the discussion was tape-recorded in order to ensure accuracy. It should be noted, however, that a tape recorder was not used if participants were uncomfortable with the intrusion. An overview of the questions asked at each interview is also included in Appendix A.

As these interviews were conducted with women with whom I have developed a relationship over the past year, a level of trust had already been established. This trust was important as the participants were less hesitant to share their ideas, thoughts, and memories (Reinharz 1992: 19). They were also more likely to disclose "the truth" as opposed to orientating their answers to what they believed I (the interviewer) wanted to hear (28). Listening was thus an important part of each interview (Forsyth and Sandercock 1992: 52).

b) Surveys

In January of 1997, approximately twenty-seven women's centres, located outside the Lower Mainland, were sent letters requesting specific material including brochures, annual reports, statistics, and newsletters. After several months, those centres that had not yet sent their materials were given a reminder telephone call. Of these solicited centres, twenty sent responses. Additionally, visits were paid to eleven women's centres located in the Greater Vancouver area over a two day period. During these visits, I was able to observe the various women's centres, ask questions, and gather relevant material which I required.

---

1 In feminist literature the use of multiple research methods in a single study is called triangulation (Reinharz 1992: 197).
The material gathered and collected from these various women’s centres was used in several comparison sections of this thesis.

c) Fieldwork

Fieldwork or ethnography is a multi-method research approach which includes observation, participation, archival analysis, as well as interviewing (Reinharz 1992: 46).

As I have been immersed in the activities of the North Shore Women’s Centre for close to four years, I can be classified as what Jo-Anne Lee calls “an insider” (1993: 20). As an insider, I have come to learn what the centre is about, who the women involved in its functioning are, and I have learned a great deal about its internal structure. As a researcher, I have continued my participation as a volunteer; however, my role as an observer has been heightened, and as such, I have attempted to look more objectively at the activities taking place within the centre.

In terms of archival analysis twenty-three years of newsletters (that is, over 120 issues published between 1975 and 1997), and other documentation was thoroughly examined. In addition, a group interview with the founding members of the centre was extremely useful in making the past more visible, thus adding to my level of understanding about the centre.

d) Case Study

The use of a case study was the final qualitative feminist research methodology which was employed in this thesis. Case study refers to “research that focuses on a single case or single issue...” (Reinharz 1992: 164). Case studies are “used to illustrate an idea, to explain the process of development over time, to show the limits of generalizations, to explore uncharted issues by starting with a limited case, and to pose provocative questions” (167).
The case studied for this thesis is the North Shore Women's Centre. This particular centre was chosen for a number of reasons. First, it has a long and rich history in the community. Second, it has been an active and well-respected centre within the larger feminist movement in B.C. Third, the centre is innovative in its programming and services and has often been an example for other centres. Finally, my personal experience at the centre makes this an ideal case to study.

1.2.2 Secondary Research

Secondary research materials, in the form of government documents, publications produced by women’s centres (such as annual reports and brochures), and newspaper, magazine, and journal articles have been used extensively throughout this thesis. These materials provided an excellent background to, and have complemented, much of the information gathered in the qualitative research stage.

1.3 Organization of Research

The chapters included in this thesis flow from the general to the specific. Chapter 2 is the literature review. In this chapter, an overview of gender sensitive planning as well as an examination of the history of women’s community organizing for feminist services in Canada is provided. In chapter 3, I introduce the concept of women’s centres in British Columbia. This includes a definition of women’s centres, the history of centres in B.C., as well as a look at the funding, structure, and services offered. In chapter 4 there is a comparison of women’s centres across the province which is intended to reveal the uniqueness of each centre and its role within different communities. Chapter 5 presents the case study for the thesis – the North Shore Women’s Centre. This chapter begins with an historical overview of the centre, followed by a look at the various contributions it has provided. Chapter 6 analyses the contributions made by
women's centres to the communities in which they are situated. Chapter 7 is the final chapter. In this chapter the future of women's centres is considered, with particular emphasis on new directions and recommendations.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is composed of two separate, yet connected, sections. In the first section an overview of the gender and planning tradition is presented. This includes an examination of its background, goals and purposes, methodologies, as well as its areas of weakness. The second section proceeds with a discussion of the history of the women’s movement and how it has contributed to social change since the beginning of the early nineteenth century. Included in this is an overview of the various strategies women utilized as well as a look at the obstacles they faced.

2.1 Gender and Planning

For the past thirty years, feminist thinkers within the planning field have sought to change what they perceive to be the reality of the planning profession. Since the early twentieth century, this reality has been created by theorists who have “implicitly adopted the male life as the norm” (Gillian 1982: 6). Consequently, by planning for a “public” which has been defined in male terms, planners have tended to plan for the needs and desires of only a small segment of the population and have, in turn, marginalized and ignored the needs of other groups such as women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities (MacGregor 1995: 33).

In an effort to broaden this “one sex” view of urban society, feminist planners, both academics and professionals, have made it a priority to learn about “women’s experiences, representations, and aspirations” in order to “straighten out” our biased knowledge (Piche 1986: 159). In doing so, feminist planners have been “challenging planning at its intellectual roots” by suggesting new theories and methodologies based on new ways of knowing (MacGregor 1995: 36). Some say it is the ultimate aim of feminist planners to include and validate the viewpoints of oppressed and marginalized groups through more participative and inclusive approaches; to separate women
from the "masculine cloth;" and to create a new reality of planning which is inclusive, rich, and diverse (Gillian 1982: 6 and Fainstein 1992: 27).

Planning is all about creating realities (or rearranging existing reality) and imposing these on space, often obliterating others true realities and needs in the process (Greed 1994: 11).

2.1.1 Background

The planning tradition has evolved throughout the last century, taking on a variety of different meanings. As a result, many have come to view the profession as problematic, as even professional planners themselves often have difficulty defining their identity (Leavitt 1981: 219).

In her 1993 book, Moser attempts to make sense of the history of planning and, in doing so, categorizes the planning traditions into three broad groups – classical, applied, and transformative.

Classical traditions are concerned with physical and spatial problems of city growth. These started around the 1890s with emphasis on urban design, town planning and land-use planning, followed, from the 1930s onwards, by regional planning and transport planning. The planning methodology most widely identified with these traditions was the traditional survey-analysis-plan. The methodology comprises straightforward stages from survey to analysis, both of which social scientists undertake. Implementation of the plan follows. The methodology assumes a consensus on values and policy directions in the management of change, encapsulated in the notion of the 'public interest' (Healey 1989 in Moser 1993: 84).

Applied traditions were developed during the 1950s and 1960s. The concern of the applied traditions shifted from the spatial and physical domain to the underlying economic, social and governmental systems that generated contemporary patterns of growth. They subsequently resulted in social and economic planning traditions, at both project and corporate levels. With
their primary concern the promotion of rationality in planning, applied traditions base themselves on a procedural planning theory. These can derive from a general systems model that ascribes to planning certain societal tasks to be pursued through a problem-solving technology.

The applied traditions characterized planning as a set of rational procedures and methods for decision-making. The so-called rational comprehensive methodology of procedural planning consists of several logical stages. These start with problem definition, and develop through data collection and processing. The formulation of goals and objectives and the design of alternative plans follows. Finally, there are the processes of decision-making, implementation, monitoring and feedback (Healey et al 1982 in Moser 1993: 84-85).

The transformative traditions are still currently undergoing evolution and are yet to be fully established. Examples of these approaches include development, cultural and environmental planning, and gender planning. Equally underdeveloped are the planning methodologies associated with these traditions, which require far more ‘transformative’ procedures than is the case in existing methodologies. These approaches are marked by their potential ‘transformative’ impact on the way we perceive and wish to experience life in all its aspects. Consequently, their emergence is longer, more controversial and less firmly articulated than previous cases (Safier 1990: 7 in Moser 1993: 86).

The involvement of women in these ‘transformative’ planning traditions coincided with the beginnings of the contemporary women’s liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. This movement, which drew its strength from the transformation of issues from the personal to the political, and from the private to the public, occurred in part because women were beginning to meet with one another and speak to each other about issues which concerned them, such as
violence against women, pay equity, child care, health, and numerous other issues which marginalized women in society (Dahl 1989: 13).

Women planners, both academic and professional, inspired by this movement, applied the principles of oppression to the urban situation and created the ‘women and planning movement’ (Greed 1994: 7). Through this, they discovered the extent to which gender inequality and other forms of social and environmental injustices were being perpetuated in the built environment (MacGregor 1995: 26). They critiqued the sexist assumptions made by professional planners in the management and design of neighbourhoods, buildings, and public spaces, claiming that they served only a small segment of the population – namely white, affluent men (26). For example, some of the literature which flourished in the 1970s and early 1980s focused on the disadvantages faced by women (white, middle-class women) in such areas as transportation, economic development, and housing (Sandercock and Forsyth 1992: 40). Dolores Hayden, a prominent feminist architect, argued that large, energy-consuming dwellings created in the suburbs during the 1920s had an isolating effect on women and did not adequately suit their changing needs, or the needs of their families. The inadequacy of the suburbs in meeting women’s needs became particularly evident when married women began to join the paid labour force in greater numbers (in the 1970s and 1980s). Women found that the lack of services in their communities such as child care, public transportation, and commercial and retail stores extremely limited their employment choices and opportunities. Hayden, in her writings, proposed alternative neighbourhoods and cities which were ‘non-sexist’ and served the needs of all residents equally (Hayden 1980).

The examination of the marginalization women face in the built environment has become more focused in the late 1980s and 1990s in that there is now growing research into how different
women are affected by the built-up area. This shift has taken place as it has been realized that white, middle class women face different oppressions than women of colour, immigrant women, women with disabilities, older women, single parent families headed by women, low income women, etc. in the planned environment (Liggett 1992: 24 and Sandercock and Forsyth 1992: 52).

Although the history of the women-in-planning movement has experienced some evolution in its focus, the goal of the movement has remained relatively constant, thus contributing to its stability and strength.

2.1.2 Goals and Purpose

The goal of gender and planning research literature has been described by Caroline Moser as:

the emancipation of women and their release from subordination with the aim of achieving gender equity and empowerment through meeting practical and strategic needs (1993: 87).

Denise Piche has also offered a similar definition:

research for women…tries to take women’s needs, interests and experiences into account and aims at being instrumental in improving women’s lives in one way or another (1986: 160).

These goals are rooted in three assumptions which are central to all feminist work:

1) the position that women are exploited, oppressed or devalued by society;

2) an interest on the part of the feminist thinker in changing the conditions of women’s lives; and

3) the assumption that traditional, still dominant theory, research and practice ignore or justify the inappropriate and/or exploitative treatment of women (Acker et al. in Ritzdorf 1992: 13).
Feminist planners can thus be seen as taking on an advocacy role for women, focusing on issues pertinent to women's lives. These include: "the feminization of poverty, protection of abused women, equal pay for comparable work, and the provision of an infrastructure of social services allowing women greater choice of job locations and hours" (Fainstein 1992: 28). Consequently, it is hoped by feminist planners that once these issues become resolved, women will see themselves as stronger and believe their specific needs to be as equally valid and necessary as those of men (Gillian 1982: 149).

With the desire to improve the situation of women, feminist planners are, in fact, trying to change values and world views, which is more than an act of research but is a political act as well (Milroy and Andrew 1986: 176 and Eichler 1989: 4). This act is often seen in the planning profession to be in conflict with traditional practices:

- in the planning profession, to be a feminist or interested in women's issues is to reject explicitly much of the professional socialization in one's training (Leavitt 1986: 185).

Where these conflicts are most evident are in the methodologies adopted by feminists versus those used by traditional planners.

### 2.1.3 Methodologies

Among feminist planners there is a strong rejection of traditional planning methodologies, as is demonstrated in the literature:

- Rational comprehensive planning techniques, ... are inadequate as the methodology for gender planning (Moser 1993: 87).

- Feminist theory rejects the pretense of value-free research ... arguing that the supposedly value free, neutral science model is actually male defined (Ritzdorf 1992: 14).

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2 Leavitt believes that this is one of the reasons why many professional female planners are reluctant to label themselves as a "feminist."
The tendency in the social sciences has been to validate only scientific and technical knowledge and dismiss all other kinds of knowledge. Feminists are increasingly critical of the traditional dualism that pits reason against passion and rationality against politics, as if reason excludes passion, as if politics, by definition, were irrational (Sandercock and Forsyth 1992: 51).

As is evident, the criticisms against traditional planning (classical and applied) methodologies focus on the fact that they are too scientific, technical, "rational," value-free, and that they ignore diversity and human experience.

What feminist planners call for instead is a methodology based on "connected knowing," which:

- emphasizes relationship, rather than separation between the self and the object of research, and for discussion of the politics of theory and method and of the origins and implications of theoretical hierarchies (Sandercock and Forsyth 1992: 51).

The development of methodologies which purposefully do not separate the research from the people who are being researched allows feminist planners to learn first hand about the diversity of women’s needs, interests and experiences (Milroy and Andrew 1986: 180 and Piche 1986: 159). Additionally, by becoming involved with women at the grassroots level, feminist planners can help bring women out of their "silence" and subordination by encouraging them to become involved in the creation of services and policies which may affect their lives and the lives of their children (Gillian 1982). This approach "recognizes the diversity of human experience; and that there are a variety of ways of knowing and constructing knowledge" (Gurstein 1996: 200).

Sandercock and Forsyth in their 1992 article *A Gender Agenda: New Directions for Planning Theory*, summarizes the five basic principles of a feminist methodology as follows:

1) to continuously and reflexively attend to the significance of gender and gender asymmetry as a basic feature of all social life, including the conduct of research;

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3 It is realized I have (and feminist planners in general) *rationally* chosen to adopt methodologies which differ from those used by traditional planners. Rationality, therefore, is a trait possessed by most planners, despite their differing philosophies.
2) to accept the centrality of consciousness raising as a specific methodological tool and a general orientation, or way of seeing; 3) to challenge the norm of objectivity that assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated and that personal experiences are unscientific; 4) to be concerned with the ethical implications of feminist research, and recognition of exploitation of women as objects of knowledge; and 5) to focus on the empowerment of women and transformation of patriarchal social institutions through research (52).

Although feminist planning methodologies are well developed, and are being adopted in the planning process with success (e.g. through public participation and consensus-based decision making), there are still a number of areas within the feminist planning literature which require further development.

2.1.4 Feminist Planning – What’s Missing

As the feminist planning movement is still relatively new, its theories are not yet fully developed. Consequently, it has had little influence or impact on a number of areas within the traditional planning field. This absence, for example, is notable in education on the history and culture of planning. In addition, feminist planning needs to concentrate on research that focuses on the relationship between feminist activism and feminist planning theory.

a) History and Culture

Most gender specific analysis presently conducted pursues questions of rights and equality in the urban environment, which in many cases has led to action and change. For example, the women and safety movement has resulted in the creation of Safe City Task Forces in most urban cities throughout Canada. However, an effect of this emphasis on equality has “been to pigeonhole the gender-specific literature as a mopping-up operation. As merely a corrective to previously unrecognized and misguided injustices, the literature may seem irrelevant to the sort of planning theory developed for the long haul” (Milroy 1991: 3). This can only be corrected if theories,
standards, and ideologies that have been developed by men are re-written to include gender as a category of analysis.

A gender-conscious approach to the writing of history produces a new set of questions about the history of city planning ideas and practices and develops a different sense of historical change (Sandercock and Forsyth 1992: 54).

If this is accomplished, then women may no longer be seen as victims but as true players in the development of the history of planning.

b) Relationship to Feminist Activism

Within the feminist planning literature, research which relates feminist planning theory to feminist activism is absent. This link is extremely important, as it has often been through the hard work and dedication of grassroots women that real social changes, which have in turn affected the organization of the planned environment, have come about. This is evident in rural and suburban communities which have suffered from a lack of social services and facilities, such as affordable housing, adequate public transportation, and employment opportunities.

This thesis attempts to help develop this link between feminist planning theory and activism. In doing so, it will reveal how women, frustrated by the lack of services available, have come together with the purpose of creating social changes within their communities. Before coming to this, however, an investigation of the history of women’s organizing is necessary in order to fully appreciate and understand the magnitude and significance of women’s struggles for change.
2.2 Women Organizing For Change

Urban protest movements have been seen to occur as a reaction to a crisis (Castells 1983: XVI). These crises, according to Manual Castells, often develop around three major themes:

1) Demands focused on collective consumption, that is, goods and services directly or indirectly provided by the state;

2) Defense of cultural identity associated with and organized around a specific territory; and

3) Political organization in relation to the state particularly emphasizing the role of local government (1983: 4).

The women's movement is an example of collective action which has led to significant social, economic, and political changes (i.e. women have demanded from the state direct services which would serve to improve women's conditions in urban society). In fact, the women's movement is believed to be one of the most significant and successful social movements in Canada.

The women's movement in Canada has a long history and is generally seen to have occurred in two waves. The first wave began in approximately 1880 and lasted until 1910. The second wave began in the 1960s and is still developing today, albeit in a less visible form. Both of these waves began as a result of the work of women who had come together, in unity, to change a particular aspect of their reality and to improve the social conditions of their communities for themselves and for their families (Dominelli 1990: 39). These women developed a number of strategies to assist them in their struggles and, as a group, they overcame many obstacles and achieved many victories, such as the establishment of environments which are responsive to their specific needs.
2.2.1 The First Wave

Mackenzie (1986:17) says that women’s organizing in the early nineteenth century emerged following the transformation of the pre-capitalist economy to the capitalist economy which began in Canada in approximately 1880. In this period of change, rural and artisan activities, which took place in the home and involved the hard work of all family members, were replaced by large-scale industry. Industry was located inside the cities and involved the construction of factories which, in turn, manufactured commodities more efficiently and effectively than ever before. Although the monetary benefits for those who owned the means of production were unprecedented, for the workers and their families – particularly those who could not afford to move out of the cities – poverty and ill-health became the norm.

In an effort to help improve the living conditions endured by many of these families, middle class women, many of whom belonged to the upwardly mobile entrepreneurial class, began a number of charitable and social organizations and clubs. Through these, they investigated the systematic stresses associated with slum life. These reformers assumed that poverty and vice were rooted in individual flaws, and therefore the betterment of the city could only be achieved through the moral reconstitution of families and individuals. One of the strongest women’s organizations which emerged at this time was the Women’s Temperance Union which was the first truly national women’s organization. The campaigns in which these women involved themselves included prison reform, child labour laws, working women’s protective legislation, women’s suffrage, and the establishment of kindergartens (Gittell and Shtob 1980: S68-S69).
Occurring at approximately the same time was the settlement-house movement. The women who were central to this movement attempted to shift the focus of public attention from the individual causes of poverty to the social and economic conditions producing it (Gittell and Shtob 1980: S69).

The major innovation of the settlement house over previous voluntary associations in the city was the idea that volunteers would live in the neighbourhood, using the house as a centre of education and culture for the poor (S70).

Middle class women provided working class and immigrant women with an opportunity to learn practical vocational skills, such as sewing and cooking, as well as an opportunity to learn about history, culture, and art. Settlement house workers also formed close ties with labour and helped to create and organize the Women’s Trade Union League. This union was responsible for “much of the lobbying for federal investigations of women in industry, support of striking women workers, agitation for protective legislation for women, and the training of women as leaders” (S71).

The Canadian women (most of whom were white, English-speaking, and urban) involved in the movement during this period (late 1800s), felt that they had a duty to participate in the public sector and to help those that were less fortunate (Phillips 1991: 762). Through their efforts, great changes were made around the health and safety of families in urban areas. As well, by becoming involved in political activities, such as women’s suffrage, the regulation of women’s working hours, child labour laws, property rights, and equality rights, these feminists changed the position of all women in the urban environment.

This movement, which subsequently subsided in the 1920s, continued to some degree through the universities (the Canadian Federation of University Women) and through the efforts of

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4 This period was referred to as the settlement-house movement as reformers often “settled” in poor immigrant
professional and business women (the Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs).

However, it was not until the mid-1960s that the women’s movement once again gained momentum and strength.

2.2.2 The Second Wave

The contemporary women’s movement, or the “second wave” women’s movement, has been a potent force for social change in Canadian society for more than three decades (Wine and Ristock 1991: 2). The movement was started in Canada in the early 1960s by primarily middle-class women who were issue-oriented, politically diverse, and who wanted to participate in the political, economic and social changes that were happening at the time, such as the Peace and Civil Rights Movements (Fitzgerald et al 1982: 16 and Adamson et al 1988: 37). Accordingly, for the first few years, the women’s movement was quite diffuse as women’s participation was often blended into other social movements (Boneparth 1982: 17). Indeed, it was not until 1967 that women’s liberation emerged as a separate activist movement in Canada (Adamson et al 1988: 42). It was at this time that women, angered and enraged about their oppressions, analyzed the causes and proposed strategies for change. Despite their rage, women felt some relief that they could now, finally, make sense of their personal histories and make real changes in society.

Although there was some recognition that women’s lives varied, the emphasis at this time (between 1967-1971) was placed on women’s shared similarities and experiences — subordination and marginalization — and on their shared values, such as nurturing, cooperation, connection, love, and mutual service (Miles 1991: 57). From this, the theme “sisterhood is universal” was established and became one of the central credos of the movement. As well, the feminist view that “the personal is political and the political is personal” was used to guide neighbourhoods (Hayden 1981: 164).
much of the activity that feminists engaged in. In essence this meant that women’s oppressions, which were heretofore hidden in their personal worlds (such as domestic violence), could be brought out and exposed, and that real political changes could be established in order to put an end to those oppressions. The issues women rallied around at the time were deemed to be “soft issues” as they often revolved around family life (Dominelli 1995: 134). These included violence against women, child care, the recognition of women’s unpaid labour, pay equity, sexual harassment, the feminization of poverty, health, reproductive rights, safety, education, as well as a number of other issues. Furthermore, women were also organizing as a means of contesting a culture that denied the significance of women’s experiences and gender subordination in history, the planned environment, in the legal system, politics, and in all other areas which were created and developed based solely on the experiences of men (Rowbotham 1992: 295). Women wanted more than simply to be “let in” or assimilated into male society and humanity. Instead, many wanted real liberation which recognized women’s distinction as well as their equality with men (Miles 1991: 58). Thus, the second wave feminists sought:

- to transform social relations in egalitarian directions rather than merely adapting women into the roles created by men for men. The argument is no longer about women making it in men’s world, but about women creating a new world for both men and women, regardless of age, “race,” sexual orientation or disability. The principles guiding this vision is one of egalitarian social relations replacing hierarchical patriarchal ones. A world which celebrates diversity and sees it as a source of enrichment rather than inferiority (Dominelli 1995: 135).

a) Strategies

Although many different strategies were adopted by women involved in the liberation movement, three seem to be of particular importance judging from the frequency with which they are mentioned in the literature. These strategies are consciousness raising, networking, and access to local government.
Consciousness Raising. Consciousness raising groups were made up of eight to ten women and had no established leader (Adamson et al 1988: 42). These groups were a powerful tool for women who were organizing since they encouraged women to open up to and support one another, and to discuss the issues which affected their lives and women's struggles in general, such as health, body image, and violence (Dominelli 1990: 4). By establishing a commonality of interests, women were then encouraged to think about acting politically in order to make real changes happen in their lives (Adamson et al: 45).

One of the real benefits of these groups was the empowering effect that they had on women. Empowerment occurred because women were not only becoming educated on issues which affected them, but they were also, for the first time, able to talk to other women who shared experiences similar to their own, and thus to realize that they were not alone in their struggles (Reddin 1991: 162). These consciousness raising groups highlighted the differences between the way men and women worked together, as well as their different ways of discussing, interacting, supporting one another, and reaching agreement.

Networking. Networks were developed by women in response to issues that confronted them, not as isolated individuals, but as member of households, and more importantly as members of the communities in which those households were located (Ackelsberg 1988: 303). These networks were often woman-centred and performed a major function in providing women with social and psychological support (Genovese 1980: 254). Networks were usually a partial, rather than a complete substitute for extensive formal services and were "an important way for women to gain mastery over environments which otherwise narrow[ed] their options" (254). The activities some networks were involved in included public education, advocacy, and services to women such as child care (Andrew 1992: 13).
**Local Government.** As traditional roles of women were changing, they began to participate, to a greater extent, in other aspects of society, particularly at the local government level (Butler and Phillips 1981: 279). This participation occurred in two ways. First, women attempted to individually influence the opinions of decision-makers. And, second, women became a part of the process by becoming elected or appointed officials. Another way in which women influenced the decision making structure without becoming a part of it was by attending public meetings and writing letters.

This involvement with local governments was – and continues to be – critical given local government’s involvement in social policy areas such as safety, education, social welfare (through the provision of community services), and, more recently, health (Andrew 1995: 103). This role in social policy, moreover, is likely to broaden with greater federal and provincial downloading on the municipal government. Consequently, with more women on the “inside” of the local political arena, greater progress can be made in terms of the creation of policies and services which would directly benefit women (Boles 1987: 20).

**b) Obstacles**

Soon after the establishment of the women’s liberation movement, several obstacles which threatened the movement’s success began to surface. These obstacles included anti-feminist sentiments as well as growing division within the movement.

**Anti-Feminist Sentiments.** Anti-feminist sentiments, and the corresponding negative stereotype cast on women by the public, damaged the movement in a number of ways. For example, women fighting for a cause or an issue were often ignored and accused of being “just a bunch of feminists” (Reddin 1991: 155). As well, these sentiments affected feminists’ ability to attract
new members. And finally, these sentiments caused women involved in the movement to be afraid to speak out. Many women feared that they would be seen as “angry man-hating feminists,” and some were also frightened by the aggressive and sometimes violent attitudes held by a small number of the movement’s opponents (Reddin 1991: 158).

**Divisions Within the Movement.** Since approximately 1972, the women’s movement in Canada has been characterized by fragmentation and political diversity (Fitzgerald et al 1982: 19). This fragmentation centres around a number of concerns. First, there are concerns by women of colour, immigrant women, low income women, First Nations women, lesbian women, women with disabilities, etc., that the white, middle-class women who dominate the movement perceive all women to be homogenous (Creese and Strong-Boag 1992: 5). This presumption is problematic in that it ignores the uniqueness of women’s oppressions and experiences, as well as their different needs. A second concern is that some women do not agree as to which problems, unique to women, deserve the greatest attention (i.e. is access for women with disabilities more important than access to low-cost child care for single mothers?). As well, there is a lack of agreement on how various issues should be resolved (Rowbotham 1992: 7). For example, some activists believe that women should concentrate their energies entirely at the grassroots level, while others feel that efforts should be focused on changing legislation and policies at the government level (Boneparth 1982: 17). The effect these concerns and others have had on the women’s liberation movement has been to further divide feminists into three streams – liberal, radical, and socialist.\(^5\) These streams, though they are in agreement concerning basic demands (women’s equality), differ in their philosophy and strategies (Briskin 1991: 25).

The central theme of liberal feminism is equality of opportunity: each individual in society should have an equal chance to compete for the resources of that society in order

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\(^5\) Each of these streams has its roots in a long history that pre-dates the second wave of the movement (Adamson et al 1988: 9).
to rise within it as far as talents permit, unhindered by law and custom; wealth, position, and power should not be distributed on a basis of inherited qualities such as sex and race. Liberal-feminists strategy... concentrates on improving educational opportunities for women to give them tools to compete, on changing socialization patterns that shape a feminine personality uncomfortable with competing, and on removing legislation that actively discriminates against women.

Radical feminists identify women’s capacity to give birth to children as central both to women’s experience and to the material basis of their oppression... radical feminists identify fundamental emotional, social, and political differences between men and women... radical feminism validates the differences between women and men and in fact argues that we need a anti-militaristic, non-hierarchical co-operative society organized on the female values of life-giving and nurturance. Strategically, radical feminism has been largely responsible for the development of a woman-centred culture... that provides a contrast to ‘male-stream’ institutions and culture.

Socialist feminists analyze women’s oppressions through four intertwining categories: gender, class, race, and sexual orientation... socialist feminists challenge the power relations of that system [social and economic system] and argue that equality of opportunity can never be attained in Canadian society as long as there are fundamental differences in wealth, privilege, and power based on class, gender, sexual orientation, and race (Adamson et al 1988: 10-11).

Organizationally, these streams can be viewed as being institutionalized or mainstream (liberal) versus disengaged or grassroots (radical and socialist). The former is represented by feminist’s efforts to work within and to influence the institutional arrangements of the Canadian state through lobbying for changes in legislative and judicial decisions, and by engaging themselves in elected positions and similar activities (Wine and Ristock 1991: 7). The latter refers to more autonomous, community-based grassroots activism that resists the connection to the state’s influence. Incidentally, the Canadian political climate has been described by Wine and Ristock as one of “radical liberalism” as it is seen as a synthesis of institutional and grassroots organizing.

Despite their differences, however, these groups of feminists have been able to present themselves to the public as one. Moreover, together, they have been able to work to create real and significant changes to Canadian society.
c) Accomplishments

The accomplishments that the women's liberation movement achieved in Canada, since the late 1960's, have been unprecedented. Women have changed the public consciousness, affected government legislation, empowered themselves and women outside the movement, and created a number of organizations and services which focused specifically on the needs of all women.

Public Consciousness. An important victory for feminists has been their ability to make a change in the public consciousness (Adamson et al 1988: 4). They have increased the acceptance of women's rights and raised awareness of women's inequality. Through this, the choices made available to all women are now greatly expanded as society (that is, Western society) no longer expects women to be housewives and caregivers (although if women choose these roles, that is acceptable). This increased ability to make choices is reflected in the growing numbers of women enrolled in post-secondary education, especially in non-traditional fields such as the sciences.

Government Legislation. The government's response to the pressures exerted on it by the women's liberation movement has been to change legislation in areas which specifically affect women's lives (Fitzgerald et al 1982: 19). For example, through women's efforts, birth control, contraceptives, and abortions have become more readily available. Women have also campaigned around issues such as day care, violence against women, the recognition of women's unpaid labour, sexism, stalking, the oppression of women in institutions and universities, and pay equality, etc., and achieved some government changes in each of these areas.
Empowerment. Through their work in the movement, women were able to achieve for themselves a sense of empowerment:

Empowerment begins when women change their ideas about the causes of powerlessness, while they recognize the systemic forces that oppress them, and when they act to change the conditions of their lives (Bookman and Morgen 1988: 4).

Their involvement allowed them to play a more active role in public life, increasing their skills and confidence, and turning them from victims to active participants looking for solutions to neighbourhood problems (Rabrenovic 1995: 92). The power women achieved for themselves in the early years of the movement subsequently affected the generations of women that followed. Women in new generations feel more confident about their skills and abilities, and some women even have a sense that their options are limitless.

Organizations and Services. As a way of making women’s community work visible to the larger society, feminists secured spaces in which they could speak, tell their own stories, and develop forms of community organizing which were less hierarchical and alienating than those based on the organizing strategies favoured by men (Dominelli 1995: 134). Some of the organizations and services created for women by women included health and counselling services, rape crisis centres, women’s shelters, abortion clinics, housing projects, bookstores, theatres, and businesses (Boneparth 1982: 17 and Peterson et al 1978: 524). Feminists also played a key role in establishing Women’s Studies Departments in colleges and universities, through which courses focused on women were taught (Adamson et al 1988: 5).

One of the most popular types of grassroots organizations established in the early to mid-1970s was the women’s centre (Adamson et al 1988: 54). These centres grew out of a demand for a place for women to “talk to each other,” as well as a place which provided leadership opportunities and resources to help women to move toward personal growth (Hapgood and
Women's centres were created by various groups of women (i.e. rural, urban, women of colour, immigrant women, lesbians, etc.) and thus served a wide variety of needs. Women's centres were, and continue to be, the place where women can come together, discuss issues, educate and empower themselves, point out inequalities, and make change. Because of their history, stability, and ability to make changes in communities throughout Canada, they will be the focus of the remainder of this thesis.

2.3 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the gender and planning literature. This was necessary as this literature recognizes the existence of women's oppressions in built and social environments. Moreover, through this review it was discovered that a gap, which ties feminist planning theory to women's community activism, currently exists in the research. This link is important and has been one of the central themes upon which this thesis has been built. Consequently, the last section of this literature review briefly attempts to explore the rich history of women's activism in Canada.

The following chapter will begin to further explore this history of organizing through the examination of one of the most effective social change agencies that have been created – the women's centre. Particular emphasis will be given to those women's centres located in the province of British Columbia.
3. INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN’S CENTRES

Women’s Centres are part of a rich tradition of women coming together to share their experiences and develop strategies to promote women’s rights (Brown 1991: 1).

In the early 1970s, women’s centres first emerged in British Columbia as central meeting places for feminists to share their experiences and work together for change:

Women’s centres provide the women’s movement with a base, a place to work from; a place to work into (Ellis in Le Francois 1979: 6).

Women’s centres have since come to be regarded as important social service agencies as they provide much needed services and programs to women living throughout the province.

Moreover, in providing these programs and services, women’s centres have been able to improve the status of women within their communities and society as a whole. These achievements, however, have not come about without difficulties as women’s centres continuously face barriers which threaten their existence, such as insecure government funding and political opposition.

This chapter will focus on the evolution of women’s centres throughout British Columbia. This includes a broad examination of their history and location, funding sources, structure, organization, clientele, and similar services offered.

3.1 Definition of a Women’s Centre

The Ministry of Women’s Equality, Government of British Columbia, defines women’s centres as follows:

women’s centres are community-based centres where women can get information and support. While no two centres are alike, typical services may include information and referral, support groups, advocacy, public education, job entry programs, child care services, crisis counselling, housing registries, clothing exchanges and subsidized meal programs (1994/95: 32).
3.2 History

In the mid-1960s, some thirty-one women's organizations across the country formed the Committee for Equality of Women in Canada (Paitiel 1972: 1 and Wine and Ristock 1991: 5). This group (comprised largely of white, middle-class, professional women), with the assistance of Judy LaMarch (the only female cabinet minister at the time), pressured the federal government to examine the status of women in Canada (Wine and Ristock 1991: 5 and Phillips 1991: 763). As a result of this pressure, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson established the Royal Commission on the Status of Women on February 16, 1967 (Status of Women Canada 1995: 2).

The purpose of this Commission was to:

inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada, and to recommend what steps might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society (2).

The seven member Commission (five women and two men), which was chaired by Florence Bird, submitted its report three and a half years later on September 28, 1970. The Report was tabled in the House of Commons on December 7 of the same year.

The Report contained 167 recommendations, 122 of which were defined exclusively in terms of federal responsibility (the remaining 45 recommendations fell under provincial and territorial jurisdiction) (Findlay 1988: 5). These recommendations focused on the following areas: Women in the Canadian Economy; Education; Women and the Family; Taxation; Poverty; Participation of Women in Public Life; Immigration and Citizenship; Criminal Law and Women Offenders; and Machinery to Promote Women's Equality (Status of Women Canada 1995: 2).

This Report, which came to be seen as "a blueprint for social change" in Canada, was viewed as a major victory among liberal, anglophone feminist groups. For example, the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union in a submission to the Royal Commission stated:
This Royal Commission affords the opportunity to individuals and organizations to let their voices be heard and to emphasize once again that women across the provinces of Canada know from their everyday experiences that they are discriminated against and that they will insist that something be done about it (1968: 2).

With the Report in place, the next step for women’s groups across Canada was to organize collectively to monitor government response to the Report and to urge other women to join in the struggle for change (Findlay 1988: 5). Early in 1971, B.C. became the first province in the country to hold a “Status of Women Conference,” and it was at this conference that the first status of women centre was conceived in Vancouver (Secretary of State 1984: 4). By late 1971, status of women groups and women’s centres\(^6\) were being founded in both urban and rural areas on the belief that:

While changes in the law are crucial to achieving equality for women, these must be supplemented by the work of women in the community. As long as women are treated unequally in society, they will require compensatory services such as those offered by women’s centres (Provincial Coordinator for the Status of Women 1975 in Le Francois 1979: 5).

Other important factors which led to an increase in the numbers of women’s centres created throughout B.C. and Canada in the early-to-mid 1970s include: the creation of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women\(^7\) in 1972; the declaration of 1975 as International Women’s Year; and the provision of federal government funding also in 1975 (Phillips 1991: 763). Each of these factors provided women with the encouragement and incentive they needed to come together and create real changes around the status of women in Canada. Currently, within the province of British Columbia, there are approximately 38 women’s centres, many of which have been in operation for ten years or more (Sanderson 1990: 1). The Ministry of Women’s Equality has grouped these centres into six different regions as indicated in Figure 1.

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\(^6\) Status of women centres have as their primary activity the promotion of the status of women through public education, research, and lobbying. Women’s centres provide drop-in services and a resource centre to the community as well as increase public understanding on women’s equality issues (Sanderson 1990: 2).

\(^7\) This groups, which serves as a national watchdog umbrella group was created to oversee the implementation of the Royal Commission’s 167 recommendations (Phillips 1991: 763).
Of the 38 women’s centres located throughout the province, 32 are included within this study.

Those centres include the following (centres are listed by region):

**Area 6 (Northwest Region)**
35. Terrace Women’s Resource Centre Society

**Area 5 (Peace River in the northern section and Cariboo/Chilcotin Region in the south)**
32. Chetwynd Women’s Resource Centre
31. 100 Mile House & District Women’s Centre Society
30. Contact Women’s Group Society (Williams Lake)
29. Quesnel Women’s Resource Centre

**Area 4 (Kootenays Region)**
24. Fernie Women’s Resource and Drop-in Centre
23. Cranbrook Women’s Resource Centre
21. Boundary Women’s Resource Centre (Grand Forks)
20. Nelson & District Women’s Centre

**Area 3 (Thompson/Okanagan Region)**
27. Kamloops Women’s Resource Centre
26. Penticton & Area Women’s Centre
25. Vernon & District Women’s Resource Society
22. The Golden Women’s Resource Centre

**Area 2 (Lower Mainland and the southern tip of Vancouver Island)**
38. Ridge Meadows Women’s Centre (Pitt Meadows)
19. Howe Sound Women’s Centre (Squamish)
18. Philippine Women’s Centre (Vancouver)
17. Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre (Vancouver)
15. Sunshine Coast Women’s Resource Centre (Sechelt)
14. South Surrey/White Rock Women’s Place
13. Vancouver Lesbian Connection
12. Richmond Women’s Resource Centre
11. Port Coquitlam Area Women’s Centre Society
10. Surrey Women’s Centre Society
9. Indian Homemakers’ Association of B.C. (Vancouver)*
8. North Shore Women’s Centre (North Vancouver)
7. Vancouver Status of Women
4. Victoria Status of Women Action Group

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*Please note that the locations of the women’s centres in Vancouver (18, 17, 13, 7) may not be exact.*
Figure 1 – B.C. Community Women’s Centres (Ministry of Women’s Equality 1994/1995: 29).
3. Port Alberni Women’s Resources Society
(The Cowichan Spirit of Women – Women’s Resource Centre in Duncan is also located in this region but is not shown on the map)*

Area 1 (northern section of Vancouver Island)
6. The Campbell River Area Women’s Centre
5. Westcoast Women’s Resource Society (Ucluelet)
2. Comox Valley Women’s Resource Centre (Courtenay)

* Indicates centres that are not funded by the Ministry of Women’s Equality.
(For a full overview of these women’s centres, including the addresses, and telephone numbers please refer to Appendix B)

Each of these centres was created, and continues to function, with the assistance of various governmental and non-governmental funds. Each of these funding sources will be described in the following section.

3.3 Funding

Funding for women’s centres across British Columbia has been provided through three main sources: government (federal, provincial, and municipal); centre-initiated activities such as casinos and bingos, memberships, fundraising events, and donations; and larger non-profit organizations such as the United Way.

3.3.1 Government Sources – the Federal Government

In response to the recommendations made by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, the Women’s Program was created in 1973 within the federal Department of the Secretary of State. The Program, which in the beginning was staffed by feminists committed to give women access to the decision making process, was created to support the activities of women’s groups working to achieve economic and social equality (Findlay 1988: 6 and Status of Women Canada 1995: 8). The initial funding for the Program was quite limited ($223,000 in the first year) with budget increases only occurring when special events, such as International Women’s Year, arose
Because funds were scarce, grants targeted to women's centres were directed towards projects and were often short-term in nature (less than a year).

In 1981, the Women's Program made a formal commitment to support women's organizations by providing them with operational funding:

... with the renewal of the Women's Program, the commitment to provide operational funding has since been incorporated as an element of the program and should therefore be used to reinforce a network of women's organizations capable of articulating and taking action on women's issues (DPA Group Inc. 1986: 3).

This commitment was reflected in the substantial increase in funding to groups dedicated in the establishment of equality for all women. This funding, incidentally, was to be used exclusively to pay for centres' advocacy, public education, and lobbying activities (the funds were thus not intended to be used to pay for direct services such as child care). With these funds, centres became more secure and established as they were able to hire full-time staff people and set-up permanent offices. Additionally, this new funding allowed a number of new centres to be created in the early-to-mid 1980s, such as the British Columbia and Yukon Association of Women's Centres (B.C. & Y) which served as an umbrella organization for all centres in the province.

The funding provided by the Women's Program continued until 1989, whereupon it was reduced by 30% in the name of deficit reduction (Pollak 1990b: 3). Further, in 1989, a cap was placed on funding for women's organizations. Since this time no new centres have been granted federal funding (Status of Women Canada 1997).

On February 23, 1990, the Minister of the Department of the Secretary of State (under the Progressive Conservative Government), Gerry Weiner, slashed 1.6 million dollars from the Women's Program which accounted for 100% of funding for almost thirty centres in B.C. (Pollak 1990a: 10 and Pollak 1990c: 3). Weiner based his decision to pursue funding cuts on the
belief that the services provided by many women’s centres were inconsistent with their original mandate. With this cut, however, came massive protests by both women and men across Canada. This situation was finally resolved when the Capilano-Howe Sound MP, Mary Collins, the then Minister of the Status of Women, announced that 1.2 million in transitional funding would be extended to 74 women’s centres across the country (Becker 1990). This funding was to be directed to centres funded under the Women’s Program for one year. Funding for an additional year was also made available to centres that managed to secure provincial funding support (Becker 1990).

Financial support continued to be provided to the Women’s Program until 1993 when the Department of the Secretary of State was dismantled (Holmes 1996). Later that year, funding responsibility was transferred to Human Resources Development Canada which renewed the Women’s Program on a permanent basis (Status of Women Canada 1996a: 2). Then, in 1995, as a result of federal re-organization of programs for women, the government “lumped” all of the programs provided for women by the various government departments into one department – Status of Women Canada (Holmes 1996). One of the reasons given for this move was to strengthen the federal government’s capability to address issues of concern to women (Status of Women Canada 1995: 8).

\[a) \text{Status of Women Canada}\]

Currently, Status of Women Canada funds women’s centres through the Women’s Program and Regional Operations Branch (refer to Appendix C for an overview of the organizational structure of Status of Women Canada). Twenty-three centres are presently funded throughout British

\[9\] Women’s centres had been involving themselves in the provision of direct services which was the responsibility of the provincial government (Pollak 1990b: 3)
Columbia and the Yukon (Holmes 1996). Each of these centres receives approximately $14,000, a figure that has steadily been decreasing by 20 to 25% over the last five years (Fry 1997).

Two types of financial assistance are provided through the Women’s Program: Project and Program funding. These funds are directed to women’s groups as well as other equality-seeking groups in order to address issues of Economic Equality (i.e. employment equality and unpaid work); Social Justice (i.e. legal equality and violence against women); and Access and Participation (i.e. equitable access to services) (Status of Women Canada 1996a: 3). These activities are carried out through advocacy, public education, and lobbying.

In an effort to be more flexible and responsive to women’s groups, Status of Women Canada, under the direction of the Honourable Hedy Fry (the Minister responsible for the Status of Women), initiated a three month consultation process in order to gain input into the direction of future funding for the Women’s Program in 1996 (Status of Women 1997: 7). The results of this consultation process were announced by Hedy Fry in a news release dated March 14, 1997. In the release, Fry announced that:

Changes to the framework and funding mechanism of the Women’s Program will be phased-in over two years. With these changes, the program will be more flexible and responsive to the diversity of women’s realities in Canada (Status of Women Canada 1997).

Under this new funding mechanism two significant changes will be made. First, Program and Project funding will be combined into one pot of money beginning April 1998. This money will be available to any women’s centre (including those centres established after 1989) pursuing projects which focus on the areas of improving women’s economic status, systemic violence against women and the girl child, and social justice. Second, beginning in the 1998-1999 fiscal

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10 Project funding is provided to women’s voluntary organizations to defray the costs necessary to carry out activities related to the funding areas of the Women’s Program. Program funding is provided to women’s voluntary
year, multi-year funding will be introduced. Status of Women Canada hopes that these changes will increase accountability, create greater equity, and provide centres with greater flexibility (Status of Women Canada 1997).

Many women’s organizations throughout B.C. and Canada are opposed to this new funding mechanism calling it “a major step back for women’s organizations who fought for funding around a broad agenda of women’s rights” (Thobani in Coulter 1997: 3). Groups feel that the federal government has pursued this initiative as a way to gain even more control over the types of services and programs delivered by women’s organizations. Furthermore, these groups feel that if the federal government truly wanted to make their funding more accessible and equitable, that they should increase the amount of funding provided to women’s groups.

3.3.2 Provincial Government

Core funding of women’s centres by the B.C. provincial government did not begin until 1991 when the New Democratic Party was elected and formed the Ministry of Women’s Equality.11 Women’s centres are now funded through Community Programs, a branch of the Program Division of the Ministry (refer to Appendix D for an overview of the organizational structure of the Ministry of Women’s Equality). The total funding provided for women’s centres in B.C. is $1,479,021 (Ministry of Women’s Equality 1994/95: 15). This money, which is distributed evenly amongst 38 centres ($41,272.46 each), has remained constant over the past several years (Minister of Women’s Equality Implementation/Communication Plan).

organizations to maintain their organizational infrastructure in order to carry out a clearly defined program of activities related to objectives and funding areas of the Women’s Program (Status of Women Canada 1996a: 4).

11 Before this time short-term funding was provided by various provincial departments for specific projects.
Funding provided by the provincial government is targeted to the centres’ operational expenses. For example, centres could use this money to help pay for salaries, rent, equipment (either rented or leased), office supplies, materials and resources (to be used for the library), publicity/publication, travel, professional development, organizational support, child care, and special projects (Ministry of Women’s Equality - Funding Criteria: Appendix II). The Ministry of Women’s Equality also gives women’s centres funding to do “Project Development” work in their communities (Dornan 1996). Centres receiving this funding must pursue projects that fall under specific categories chosen by the Ministry for that year. For instance, the theme for this year (1997) is Violence against Women.

a) Consistency of Services

The Ministry of Women’s Equality has always striven to create consistency in the services provided by women’s centres. This was first accomplished by the B.C. and Yukon Association of Women’s Centres (B.C&Y), and will now be pursued through the Cross-Ministry Contract Reform Project.

B.C. and Yukon Association of Women’s Centres. The original concept of the B.C.&Y was to be a network for women centre coordinators to brainstorm, lobby for change, and support one another (Le Francois et al 1979: 121). However, in 1990, when the federal government cut funding to women’s centres, the role of the B.C.&Y changed. The Association was now pressured to act as a strong advocate and lobby the Social Credit and New Democratic Parties for funding. When the New Democratic Party (NDP) was elected, they asked the B.C.&Y to play a “gatekeeper” role for the funding of women’s centres (Shannon 1996). What this entailed was that centres that wanted to qualify for operational funding had to first become members of the
B.C.&Y. In this way the government chose to define what a women’s centre was through membership with B.C.&Y, which presented itself as an association of feminist, equality-seeking groups (Jaffer and Macdonnell 1993: 3).

Although this arrangement continued for a couple of years, internal pressures and in-fighting, caused strain within the provincial umbrella organization. Consequently, by 1995, the fragile B.C.&Y had both its status as a “Society” and its funding revoked by the provincial government (Chambers 1996).

**Contract Reform**. The Cross-Ministry Contract Reform Project was first established in May 1994, in response to a recommendation “made by the Korbin Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and Public Sector in June 1993, which pointed out the need for a coordinated and efficient government contracting framework that addresses ongoing services provided by community agencies” (Contract Council 1996: 3).

For women’s centres this means that contracts, which currently must be renewed annually, will be replaced by continuous service contracts (“Continuing Agreements”) which will extend for three years or more (Ministry of Women’s Equality Information Sheet). Centres that choose to negotiate must comply with agency and program standards and cooperate with a service evaluation process that addresses outputs and service outcomes. In other words, centres across the province will have to offer a consistent set of services, with the recognition that some flexibility will be allowed to meet the unique needs of women in diverse communities (Neilson 1996). This will not only enhance accountability to the public, but it will also make it easier for

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12 B.C.&Y was first established in the early 1980s by the federal government in their effort to organize “rural” women’s centres (Shannon 1996).

13 The in-fighting was between white, middle class liberal feminists and minority women’s groups (women of colour, immigrant women, First Nation women, and women with disabilities). The struggle in part, surfaced over disagreements concerning the allocation of funding (Shannon 1996).
the province to measure the performance of each centre, which will, in turn, lead to greater
stability and greater assurance of continuity for women’s centres. Contract reform will be phased
in over three years, with full implementation to take place in April 1998 (Ministry of Women’s
Equality Information Sheet).

3.3.3 Municipal Governments

Most municipal governments provide support to their local women’s centre. This support is
either monetary, in the form of grants, or comes in the form of low-rent office space.

3.3.4 Centre-Initiated Activities – Casinos and Bingos

Through the B.C. Gaming Commission, casino licenses are issued to women’s centres and other
charitable organizations once a year. With this license centre volunteers and staff are given the
opportunity to participate in a “Casino Night.” The location, as well as the number of evenings
granted to the organization (usually from one to three evenings), are pre-determined by the
Gaming Commission. Funds accumulated from the casino must go through the “Pooling
Process” before they are distributed to women’s centres:

Pooling – each day’s revenue is accumulated into a monthly total. That total is divided by
the number of days in that month, to arrive at a daily share. Each licensee will receive
one share for each day that they were licensed in that month in that location (B.C.
Gaming Commission 1996)

Although questioned ethically by some women’s centres, most centres have chosen to pursue
casinos and bingos as they are extremely profitable.

3.3.5 Donations, Memberships, and Fundraising Events

With the exception of the larger women’s centres in urban or suburban areas, most centres raise
between $300 and $1000 from their membership and about the same from donations (Sanderson
1990: 18). Fundraising is also common but usually does not raise large amounts of money and is often very difficult for women's centres to pursue.

3.3.6 Other Sources – United Way

Only a few centres receive United Way funding. Access to these funds is limited given the United Way's limited capacity to take on new organizations (Sanderson 1990: 18).

3.4 Structure

Generally, women's centres across the province are non-profit societies, have volunteer boards (or steering committees) of between 3-12 women, are staffed by one full-time and one part-time employee, have between 10-80 volunteers, and have a small membership of between 20-200 women (Sanderson 1990: 4). Centres are usually open 4-5 days a week for a large part of the working day, although some centres also have evening and weekend hours in order to accommodate the needs of working women.

3.5 Organization

Women's centres are usually organized as non-hierarchical, collective structures (Ristock 1991: 42). This involves:

(1) rotation of leadership roles, (2) sharing of service roles, (3) consensus decision-making, (4) a commitment to decentralization (small, close-to-home groups), (5) a concern for accessibility in terms of the “costs” of participation, (6) “egalitarianism” — flat pay scales for staff, [and] (7) a rejection of electioneering on the grounds that “money (or being articulate) wins elections” (Vickers 1991: 83).

These practices have been adopted because they are seen to promote “internal egalitarianism” (83). Additionally, it is felt that these practices empower and unite the women involved as they obtain experience and knowledge in different areas.
Incidentally, these practices have been adopted by women’s centres with varying degrees of success. By and large, centres have adopted the egalitarian practices in the beginning (that is, when the centre first opened) but have since switched to more hierarchical structures where the roles are defined. This move was made, in part, because the consensus-decision making process was often time consuming and affected the expediency in which services and programs were delivered. Furthermore, issues around power and competition often surfaced and “festered,” leaving behind a strain on the organization (Ristock 1991: 45).

3.6 Clientele

Both individual women and community agencies use the services offered by women’s centres. Community agencies, such as schools, colleges, hospitals, court services, health services, alcohol and drug agencies, churches, and other service agencies use women’s centres for such purposes as: client referral, resource information on women’s issues, and if they need speakers for workshops (Sanderson 1990: 6).

It is individual women, however, who constitute the largest number of drop-in visits or telephone calls. Generally, the women who utilize these services are in crisis, facing social difficulties, battered, are single mothers, and/or face barriers in relation to language, race, age, poverty, or mental and/or physical disabilities. Sanderson indicates that women come to the centres because:

- they are assured of dealing with women who visibly support women and understand women’s issues,
- they fear or distrust institutional services,
- they seek someone to intercede on their behalf in a matter involving an institution or bureaucracy,
- they are seeking help for depression, alcohol abuse, unemployment, parenting difficulties, loneliness, etc.,
- they are fleeing an abusive situation,
- they are seeking the companionship of other women,
• they lack the skills or self-confidence to explain their difficulties or needs to less sympathetic people, and/or
• they are seeking information on community services (1990: 6).

However, other women who are not facing crisis situations also use the services provided by women’s centres. For example, female students researching feminist topics and community women who simply care about women’s issues use women’s centres on a regular basis.

### 3.7 Services and Programs

As a result of strict\(^{14}\) government guidelines, women’s centres throughout B.C. offer a number of similar services and programs. Each of these programs and services have been designed to educate, empower, and promote women throughout the province. They are all necessary and effective, and contribute to a sense of commonality amongst all women’s centres.

These services and programs include: information, referral, drop-in centre, advocacy, lobbying, peer counseling, newsletters, community involvement/development/networking, workshops, volunteer training, summer practicums, special events, offering/renting of space to women and community groups, and administrative support.

#### 3.7.1 Information and Referral

Women’s centres are often the first place a women will contact, either by phone or in person, when they are searching for information on community agencies or services. Centre staff and volunteers, through a supportive dialogue with the client, will assess their clients’ needs and make the appropriate recommendations as to what agencies or professionals the client should connect with. They will also follow-up with the client if necessary. Services most frequently requested by women include counseling, legal issues, single motherhood and related issues.

\(^{14}\) Guidelines are strict as they stipulate what programs and services women’s centres can or cannot offer.
(housing, poverty, and parenting), abuse and violence, basic needs (food and shelter), employment, welfare rights, and other personal concerns. This service is vital for women as it is frequently the first step they make towards recovery and healing.

3.7.2 Drop-in Centre

With the exception of status of women centres, each women’s centre offers a drop-in service. The drop-in provides a place for women to meet and talk to one another over a cup of tea or coffee. Women who live in rural areas find this an invaluable “home away from home” – a place to go, with their children, just to relax (Nelson & District Information Brochure).

3.7.3 Educational Resource Centre

The purpose of educational resource centres, which includes resource files and a library, is to educate women belonging to the centre and to raise awareness about issues of specific concern to women. Information is available in a variety of forms such as books, magazines, periodicals, newspaper clippings, audio cassettes, and video. This information covers a wide range of topics including parenting, health, lesbian issues, and domestic violence. Additionally, a selection of feminist literature, both fiction and non-fiction, is available.

3.7.4 Advocacy

Advocacy involves helping people help themselves (Contact Women’s Group Society Information Brochure). Centre staff and volunteers provide clients with the information and support needed to assist women to get what they need from “the system,” i.e. legal system, social services, and other agencies. The extent of this assistance varies between centres. Some centres, for example, provide women with letters of support, while others go as far as to directly involve
themselves in their clients' issues. For instance, at many rural centres, staff and trained
volunteers support women by accompanying them to court. Additionally, centre staff and
volunteers can also act as a liaison between their client and government agencies.\textsuperscript{15}

3.7.5 Lobbying

Women's centres are in contact with all levels of government lobbying for individual women as
well as for the larger feminist cause. Some of the issues for which women's centres have lobbied
include gun control, sexist attitudes and discrimination in the law, violence against women,
prostitution, exploitative media (print and television), health issues, child care, welfare rights,
and economic equality. Through lobbying efforts, women's centres promote women's rights on
the local, national, and international level and ensure that women's voices are heard and their
concerns addressed.

3.7.6 Peer Counseling

Peer counseling involves women coming together, in an informal and relaxing environment, to
discuss the issues that affect their lives. The goal of this program is to provide women with a
supportive peer environment which, in turn, assists them in overcoming personal barriers so that
they may participate fully in community life. This program can be very empowering for women
as it allows them to share, perhaps for the first time, their thoughts, concerns, and hopes and
realize that they are not alone in their struggles (Kowbuz 1993: 67).

\textsuperscript{15} Members of the Indian Homemakers' Association, for example, act as a liaison between native women prisoners
and the court and other agencies (Information Brochure).
3.7.7 Newsletters

All centres offer their membership a newsletter which reports on local and national news relevant to women (North Shore Women’s Centre 1996b: 5). Newsletters are often produced solely through the efforts of volunteers and are published on a monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly basis. Often newsletters become a source of communication between the members of a women’s centre as they provide women with a place in which to express their views and thoughts (in the form of letters, poetry, drawings, and other personal means) on particular issues.

3.7.8 Community Involvement/Development/Networking

Over the past several years, networking and collaboration with local agencies, organizations, and governments has become an important part of women’s centres’ activities for a number of reasons. First, with decreasing government funding, sharing resources (such as, photocopiers and fax machines) with potential allies cuts down on centres’ spending costs. Second, through networking with other organizations, women’s centres can share and learn different skills and strategies (i.e. in terms of fundraising). Third, women’s centres can plan new programs with the staff of other agencies or organizations that will benefit community women. In this way, resources (human and other) can be shared among the groups, and the onus of providing a new program will not fall on the hands of only one organization. Fourth, by becoming involved in community networks, women’s centres are given the opportunity to be “the voice of all women,” in the community. Fifth, through networking, the work of women’s centres can become known and respected within the community. And sixth, by becoming involved in committees and Task Forces established by local governments, women’s centres can play a role in creating real changes within their community.
3.7.9 Workshops

One of the most effective ways that centres can promote self-education among members is through workshops and discussion groups. The most frequently cited topics for these include self-esteem and assertiveness training, women’s health and holistic healing, body image, stress/anger management, women and money, job re-entry, women in relationships, consensus decision-making, sexual harassment, and legal issues. Workshops and discussion groups are typically held on a monthly, and even weekly basis, and are often led by a facilitator that has some knowledge on the subject.

3.7.10 Volunteer Training

Volunteers play a tremendous role in the operation of women’s centres. They often: work in the drop-in centre providing women with information and referrals; complete administrative tasks; participate on committees; offer peer support to the clients; supervise children; maintain resource files; become board members; as well as a range other activities. Because they play such a large role in the centre, most volunteers are asked to participate in training programs. Through the training programs, volunteers learn valuable new skills such as communication, listening, counseling, organizational, and computer skills. They also discover how to make appropriate referrals and recommendations to clients, and they receive some basic education on women’s issues.

3.7.11 Student Practicums

Many women’s centres have sought, whenever possible, federal funding for summers student positions (i.e. Challenge Grants). By doing do, they have been able to provide selected community women with important experience in research and community consultation.
3.7.12 Special Events

On an annual basis most women's centres participate, in one way or another, in the following special events: International Women's Day, the December 6 Vigil (commemorates the women who died in the Montreal Massacre), Take Back The Night (draws attention to violence against women locally, nationally, and globally), and Women's History Month (involves the planning of events that honour women's herstory). It is important for women's centres to celebrate these days together as it demonstrates to the public their solidarity, strength, and desire for change.

3.7.13 Offering/Renting of Space to Women and Community Groups

A number of centres offer their space and facilities to women forming self-run discussion groups or community groups. This space is either donated to women or rented at a reasonable fee. At the Cranbrook Centre, for example, a meeting place is provided for the following groups: Battered Women's Support Group, Alanon/Alateen (substance dependency groups), and the First Nations Youth Group (Information Brochure). And at the Kamloops Centre both DAME (Disabilities Action Movement for Equality of Women) and Women on Welfare meet at the centre on a weekly or bi-weekly basis (Information Brochure).

3.7.14 Administrative Support

For the members of women's centres, the opportunity to use infrastructure, to which they would otherwise have no access, is very important. For instance, fax machines, photocopiers, typewriters, and computers are available to women for free, or at a reduced cost.
3.8 Summary

This chapter has been concerned with the evolution of women's centres in British Columbia. This has involved an examination of their history, funding sources, structure, organization, clientele, and similar services offered.

The following chapter will focus on the specific contributions women's centres have made to their communities. This will be accomplished through an examination of the unique services and programs offered by the thirty-two women's centres included in this study.
4. COMPARISON OF WOMEN'S CENTRES ACROSS B.C.

In this chapter the uniqueness of women's centres throughout B.C. is revealed. This is accomplished through the identification of the numerous programs and services created by each centre in response to women's varied needs. Additionally, the women's centres included in this study will be categorized according to the services they provide. The purpose of this categorization is to expose the specific contributions women's centres make to communities throughout the province.

Please note that all of the information included in this chapter has been taken directly from the materials provided by the women's centres. Accordingly, some information may be absent (because it was not included in the sent material) or inaccurate (i.e. a centre may no longer provide a particular service or program).

4.1 Unique Services

The following section examines and compares some of the unique services and programs that have been created through the hard work and dedication of the members of women's centres throughout British Columbia. These services and programs are grouped under the following headings: health, poverty, education, employment, parenting, crisis services, special interest groups, multicultural services, recreation, proactive legal work, and women's community economic development. Table 1 is used as a reference point in the discussion of each of the following sections.
4.1.1 Health

The physical, psychological, and spiritual health of women is a real concern for the staff and volunteers at women’s centres in all regions of the province. Good health not only contributes to the energy, strength, and confidence of women, but it also enables them to move forward and take control of their lives.

a) Physical Health

The Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre, which is located in the heart of the poorest neighbourhood in Canada, offers a number of services aimed at improving the physical health of the women and children living in the area. Every week both a doctor and a nurse come into the centre (on different days) to provide assistance, referrals, resources, and an attentive ear. Additionally, a representative from AIDS Vancouver comes to the centre on a weekly basis to answer questions women may have as well as to offer support (1997: 7).

b) Psychological Health

Addictions, depressions, and low self-image are a problem for many women. As such, numerous women’s centres have created support groups throughout the province to assist women through an often difficult recovery process. An alcohol and drug support group has been formed at the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre. The Westcoast Women’s Centre (in Ucluelet) and the Nelson & District Women’s Centre have established smoking cessation groups. Centres which address body image and eating disorders include the Westcoast Women’s Centre and the Port Coquitlam Women’s Centre. Also in Ucluelet, a post-partum depression group has been formed to provide emotional assistance and support to new mothers.
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<th><strong>Women's Centre (Listed By Region)</strong></th>
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<td>100 Mile House &amp; District Women's Centre</td>
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<td>South Surrey/White Rock Women's Place</td>
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c) *Spiritual Health*

A number of medium-to-large rural women’s centres, as well as centres located in urban areas, have come to recognize that spiritual health is an important element of one’s complete well-being. As such, they provide a number of holistic healing programs to assist women to regain their spiritual strength. For example, the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre and the Sunshine Coast Women’s Centre hold weekly and monthly healing circles. And at the Campbell River Area Women’s Resource Society and the Nelson & District Women’s Centre, emotional empowerment sessions are offered. These involve women coming together to learn and share different relaxation techniques such as massage, meditation, aromatherapy, and other forms of healing.

4.1.2 Poverty

The feminization of poverty has been recognized, since the beginning of the second wave of feminism, to be a far-reaching problem among women. As such, many centres have initiated a number of services to aid women in poverty and their children. In Chetwynd and Campbell River, food banks have been established. The centres collect donations (food and personal hygiene products) from members and local businesses and distribute them to residents of the community who are living in poverty. The Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre runs, on a daily basis, a lunch program where hot meals are served to women and their children for free. Clothing exchanges and “free stores” are available at Cranbrook, South Surrey, the Indian Homemakers’ Association, and the Downtown Eastside. Moreover, in Ucluelet a *Together Against Poverty Group* has been formed as a way to bring together low income people for support and to seek creative ways of living (surviving) on a low income (1997: 10).
Centres focusing on poverty for the most part, located in fairly isolated rural areas as well as in the core of Vancouver. Unlike larger towns and suburban communities, where poverty is often hidden and unnoticed, the centres that offer programs and services that deal specifically with poverty are exposed to it on a daily basis. For example, in small towns such as Cranbrook where the unemployment rate is high (12.6%), women's average income is 51% less than the average income of men, 79% of all single parent families are headed by women, and 80% of all part-time workers are women (1997: 1). As such, many women are suffering extreme hardships as they have limited incomes. The Vancouver women's centres are particularly exposed to poverty given that most of their clients are those that have been neglected and overlooked by the government and associated social services. These women include prostitutes, homeless women, women with mental and physical disabilities, as well as women suffering or healing from the problems associated with addictions (alcohol or drug abuse).

4.1.3 Education

In addition to workshops and discussion groups, a range of educational programs are delivered through women's centres. In Ucluelet, a 12 week session course called *Working Together for Change* has been designed to bring women together to discuss common concerns and issues, and to learn skills (such as community organizing) and act upon them (1997: 2). The Golden Women's Centre has a similar self development support group. The focus of this group is to build women's self esteem, assertiveness, and positive responses to day-to-day life (Information Brochure). Comox offers courses on self-esteem, assertiveness, and facilitation skills several times a year (Information Brochure). The North Shore Women's Centre and the Port Coquitlam Women's Centre, both offer non-credit courses, on a yearly basis, in cooperation with their local community colleges. The Downtown Eastside Women's Centre holds a weekly learning group
where women explore different ways of learning (1997: 7). And finally, the Vancouver Status of Women publishes annually the *Vancouver and Lower Mainland Single Mother's Resource Guide*. This invaluable resource guide, which lists a range of services needed by single mothers (such as low cost housing), is distributed to women's centres and other women-serving organizations across the Lower Mainland (1994/1995).

Although educational programs appear to be delivered by a variety of women's centres throughout the province the exact nature of each of these programs is quite distinct. For example, rural women's centres seem to offer programs which focus on improving women's self-image and on providing women with the tools needed to better their position in society (e.g. facilitation skills). The educational programs offered by urban centres, on the other hand, actually focus on improving women’s learning skills, and literacy levels. These programs are necessary given that many of the women who use these programs do not find traditional learning institutions to be accessible. Finally, suburban centres, whose clients are primarily middle-class and educated, offer courses which could help their members understand more clearly the issues that affect their lives.

4.1.4 Employment

Employment programs offered by women's centres are directed at women wanting to get back into the workforce (after raising children, for example), women looking for alternative careers, and women on welfare.

The C.A.P.S. (*Career Action Planning Skills*) program is offered through 100 Mile House. This program is directed towards adults wanting to re-enter the workforce or to discover new career goals (*Information Brochure*). In Terrace, *New Venture* (a program to help women wanting to
start a business) and the *Women in Trades* program (a program for women who wish to receive training in non-traditional jobs), have been created (Correspondence). In South Surrey, *Taking the Next Step*, a pre-employment training group for women on welfare, is offered four times a year to the membership (Information Brochure). In this program, women participate in workshops such as “Dealing with Anger” and “Coping with Stress.” These courses are designed to help give women the confidence they need to find jobs and “stick them out.” Finally, the North Shore Women’s Centre recently began the *Job Search Centre*. This centre assists women who are currently seeking employment or who are preparing to return to the work force.

Employment programs appear to be given much relevance in isolated rural communities given that these communities are plagued with high unemployment. Consequently, the employment programs offered by rural women’s centres concentrate on providing women with the skills needed to secure higher paying jobs in non-traditional fields. Employment programs in suburban centres, however, focus more on providing women, who have been out of the workforce for some time, the tools they need (e.g. computers) to assist them to find new jobs.

### 4.1.5 Parenting

Parenting programs, child care programs, and support groups for single mothers, form a significant part of the programming for a number of centres included in this study.

#### a) Parenting Programs

In Fernie two programs are currently being offered which target pregnant women and new mothers. *Better Babies* is directed towards pregnant women who are at risk of having low weight babies. A registered nurse and counsellor meets with expectant mothers and offers them support, education (e.g. on proper nutrition and vitamin supplements), and a free lunch. Each person
receives several one-on-one visits from the counsellor and the nurse to learn how to “eat for
two,” cut down or quit smoking, limit alcohol or drug use, and learn ways to handle stress
(Information Leaflet). The second program entitled Nobody’s Perfect Program for Parents is
meant for parents whose youngest child is five years old or younger. The program provides
information on parenting techniques and facilitates group discussion on topics such as “Learning
to Understand Your Child,” and “Children’s Health, Safety, and Behaviour” (Information
Brochure). The group, which runs for six sessions, is co-facilitated by a health nurse and the
coordinator of the centre (Correspondence).

The Contact Women’s Group Society provides a comprehensive parenting program called
Kidcare Outreach Program. This program, for pregnant and parenting young people, fosters
independence and promotes healthy family profiles in the community (Information Brochure). In
Terrace, four programs for parents have been created in the last two years: One Stop Access
(parenting and child care program); Nobody’s Perfect (for parents with children from infancy to
two years); How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk; and Street Proofing our
Kids (an anti-abduction and sexual assault prevention program for children) (Correspondence).
The Indian Homemakers’ Association also offers a program for parents called Traditional
Parenting Skills Program. In this program women learn about traditional family roles and
traditions; the role of medicinal herbs, plants, and foods; the importance of physical health; the
meaning of important aboriginal belief systems and activities (e.g. medicine wheel, and
potlatch); and how to trace personal family trees (Information Brochure). And finally, in
Ucluelet, the program Kids at Risk is offered. In this program parents and the caregivers of
teenagers gain information and discuss topics such as drugs and alcohol, suicide, and violence
Parenting programs are predominately found in small rural communities. These programs seem to be directed at young mothers who have limited experience and knowledge in the area of parenthood. Other programs which concentrate more on communication with children are also found in rural areas. These programs are likely to have extreme benefits in rural communities as these women probably have few other outlets where they can receive this type of information.

b) Child Care Programs

As affordable and high quality child care is relatively scarce in most communities (particularly rural communities), a small number of women's centres have developed creative programs to help fulfill women's child care needs. In Richmond the Baby-Sitting Exchange has been in operation since 1977. Mothers will baby-sit for each other, and instead of using money to “pay” for baby-sitting, they will exchange points. For example, if a mother baby-sits for two hours she will receive eight points from the person for whom she baby-sat. At a later date, she can “cash in” her points with the same person or with another woman in the program in exchange for her baby-sitting needs (1996: 2). Two play-groups a month are usually held so that mothers and their children have the opportunity to get to know each other, exchange ideas, and offer support.

Contact Women’s Group offers both Kidcare Daycare and the Child Care Support Program. Kidcare Daycare is a daycare program for children from infancy to 36 months. The daycare, which holds up to 12 children at a time, is staffed by qualified Early Childhood Education staff who ensure that the children are provided with a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment (Information Brochure). The Child Care Support Program does not provide direct child care services. Instead, the program provides a base of resources that enhance and encourage positive community involvement in working towards quality child care. For example, through the Program information and education for child care providers is distributed throughout the area;
additionally, parents are provided with information about choosing a quality child care provider (Information Brochure). The Terrace Women’s Centre offers a similar service.

c) Single Mother Support Groups

Single Mother Support Groups have been founded at a number of women’s centres including the Vancouver Lesbian Connection, Westcoast Women’s Centre, Terrace Women’s Centre, Port Coquitlam Women Area Women’s Centre, Richmond Women’s Centre, and the North Shore Women’s Centre. These groups offer single mothers support, education, resources, and a social network. Moreover, these groups serve to give women strength and help them deal with the difficulties associated with single parenthood.

Support groups for single mothers appear to be offered most frequently in suburban areas, followed by small rural communities, and large urban centres. The importance of these groups in suburban communities may be do to the fact that single parenthood is still often looked down upon, particularly in areas that appear to be dominated by traditional nuclear families.

4.1.6 Crisis Services

In B.C., 59% of women over the age of 16 have reported experiencing at least one incident of physical or sexual violence. Furthermore, in their lifetimes, approximately one in two B.C. women is a victim of sexual assault, one in three of spousal assault, and one in five of other types of physical assault (Ministry of Women’s Equality 1994/1995: 5).

Women’s centres have developed a number of programs and services to help women experiencing physical and sexual violence to cope, heal, and recover. These include counselling, support groups/education, and transition houses/safe houses.
a) Counselling

Just under one half of the centres in this study indicated that they offered counselling services. Those centres that offer counselling which deals specifically with sexual violence and abuse, adult survivors of sexual abuse, and children who witness violence include: Port Alberni, Golden, Ucluelet, Quesnel, 100 Mile House, Williams Lake, South Surrey/White Rock, Surrey, and Port Coquitlam. Through counselling, victims are provided with support, reassurance and referrals which will help them work through the physical, emotional, and psychological injuries resulting from the abuse. Counselling services are provided free of charge and often require an appointment because of the demands placed on the service.

Family counselling is another form of emotional assistance offered by women’s centres. The Indian Homemakers’ Association, for example, has offered this type of counselling since 1986. Participating parents learn skills in parenting, crisis management, budgeting, and relationships (Information Brochure).

Overwhelmingly, centres which provide counselling services to women who have been victims of violence and abuse are located in isolated rural communities. This may be contributed to two factors. The first is that women living in rural communities tend to face a higher degree of violence than women living in urban or suburban communities (Holmes 1997). And second, there are few, if any other services available which provide counselling services to women for free. A trend can also be noticed in terms of the suburban centres that offer crisis counselling. The centres that provide these services are located in the outlying areas of the Lower Mainland where the options available to women seeking these types of services is more limited.
b) Support Groups/Education

Special support groups targeted to victims of violence, as well as education programs aimed at stopping violence before it starts, have been initiated mainly by outlying suburban centres and small rural centres. In Surrey, the program *Specialized Victim Assistance* has been created for survivors of violence, sexual violence and child sexual violence who are involved with the criminal justice system (Information Brochure). South Surrey/White Rock offers *Survivors of Abusive Relationships*. This is an ongoing weekly drop-in support group for women who are in, or have been in, an abusive relationship. The group provides a safe place for women to share their experiences and learn to feel better about themselves. South Surrey/White Rock also offers *Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*. This group, which is for women who have been sexually abused as children, looks at the effects of their abuse in a safe and confidential atmosphere. 100 Mile House offers self-help support groups (i.e. *Women in and out of Abusive Relationships* and *Adult Survivors of Sexual Abuse*) and a dating violence program. The dating violence program provides education about dating violence through an interactive approach with adolescents in high schools (Information Sheet). Lastly, the Howe Sound Women’s Centre offers the *Children Who Witness Abuse Program*. Children and adolescents involved in this program receive individual and group counselling and have access to a 14-hour crisis line (Information Brochure).

c) Transition Houses/Safe Homes

Transition houses as defined by the Ministry of Women’s Equality provide:

a safe and secure living environment for women and their children leaving abusive relationships. In addition to meals and accommodation, transition houses also provide supportive counselling, child care, assistance in obtaining financial support, and housing and legal assistance if required (1994/1995: 32).
Centres that provide or help manage transition houses include the Westcoast Women’s Resource Society, the Howe Sound Women’s Centre (Pearl’s Place), Port Alberni Women’s Resource Society, and the Port Coquitlam Area Women’s Centre Society.

Safe houses are:

a network of homes (including private homes, rental apartments, and motel/hotel units) providing temporary accommodation for women and their children leaving abusive relationships in communities where no transition house exists (Ministry of Women’s Equality 1994/1995: 32).

Those centres offering safe houses include 100 Mile House and the Golden Women’s Resource Centre. A 24-hour crisis line is also available through each of these programs.

It is by no surprise that the majority of transition houses and safe homes, operated by women’s centres, are located in rural and isolated communities. As few other crisis services are available in these areas, women’s centres have had to take it upon themselves to protect the women and children living in their communities. The one centre that offers this type of service in a suburban area is located in a far-reaching community of the Lower Mainland where few other women-specific services exist.

4.1.7 Special Interest Groups

All women’s centres strive to be accessible to all women living within their community. As such, many centres have developed programs which are targeted to specific groups of women or “special interest groups.” These groups include young women, mid-life women, women with disabilities, lesbian women, and First Nations women.
a) Young Women

Youth groups or drop-ins directed at young women have formed at the Vancouver Lesbian Connection, the Westcoast Women's Resource Society, and at the Richmond Women's Centre. Furthermore, a couple of rural centres also offer programs for girls and young women which deal specifically with career planning and self-image. In Vernon, for example, a program called Ms. Infinity has started. This program promotes math and science to young women in grades 9 and 10 (Information Brochure). Terrace has a similar program entitled Girls in Science which is a summer program that encourages girls to go into occupations that demand science and technology backgrounds (Correspondence). Terrace, moreover, offers the program Girls in the '90s which is a self awareness and assertiveness program for girls. These rural centres likely offer these programs as they are concerned with making young women more aware of their various life options.

b) Mid-life Women

Special programs for women that are forty and over are important given that this is a time in a women’s life when she experiences many new changes such as menopause, the departure of older children, and the caregiving of older parents. Drop-in groups for mature women have been formed at the Sunshine Coast Women's Centre (Mature Women's Network), Richmond (Women in Mid-life Support Group), and Ridge Meadows (Forty and Forward). The North Shore Women’s Centre, in addition, is beginning to explore possible programs that could be offered to older women through the Mid-life Women: Strategies for Action Project (1997b: 4).

The services directed towards mid-life women are located primarily in suburban areas. One possible reason for this is that there may be a higher proportion of women reaching middle age living in these more affluent communities (including the Sunshine Coast).
c) Women with Disabilities

In both Terrace and South Surrey/White Rock, programs have been developed for women with disabilities in an effort to become more accessible to this often neglected group. Accessible Terrace is a project started as a way to assess how accessible businesses and services are to people with disabilities (Correspondence). And in South Surrey/White Rock, the Living with Disabilities drop-in has formed. This group has also developed a series of community workshops to tackle some of the concerns of women with disabilities (Information Brochure).

Services directed toward women with disabilities is sparse. This may be due to the fact that in most communities social service agencies that are specific to people with disabilities are available.

d) Lesbian Women

A number of outlying suburban, rural, and urban women’s centres have made positive efforts in trying to attract lesbian women to their centres. Lesbian drop-in and support groups are held at Port Coquitlam (Lesbian Discussion Group), Ridge Meadows (Lesbian Social and Discussion Group), South Surrey/White Rock (Dyke Talk), Terrace (Lesbian Drop-in), and Campbell River (Lesbian and Gay Groups) The purpose of each of these groups is to create a forum for lesbian women to come together, socialize, and make new friends and connections. Additionally, in South Surrey/White Rock a program called Lesbians Exploring Relationships has been formed. In a 12-week series of workshops, women examine issues such as control, intimacy, power, sexuality, and abuse (Information Brochure). Lastly, all of the programs and services established
by the Vancouver Lesbian Connection are directed, specifically, to the needs and interests of lesbian women.\(^\text{16}\)

e) First Nation Women

Only one urban centre and two rural centres offer programs to First Nations women.\(^\text{17}\) The Indian Homemakers’ Association of B.C. dedicates itself entirely to the promotion and development of the well-being of Aboriginal women living throughout the province (Information Brochure). They achieve this through the delivery of a series of programs and services directed towards the needs and interests of First Nations women. The Port Alberni and Golden women’s centres both offer healing/support circles where women can come together for support, advocacy, networking, and to plan activities that serve to raise community awareness with regards to issues that effect Aboriginal women.

4.1.8 Multicultural Services

With the exception of the Philippine Women’s Centre, whose programs and services are directed toward the specific needs of Philippine women, only three centres offer services to immigrant women – Richmond, Port Coquitlam, and the North Shore Women’s Centre.

The Richmond Women’s Centre\(^\text{18}\) holds an English Conversation Class and has created the Friends & Neighbours multicultural group. The purpose of the latter group, which meets every week, is to mix with women of different cultures, make friends, and form a support network for one another (1995/1996: 4). The Port Coquitlam Area Women’s Centre holds English as a

\(^{16}\) It is likely that other urban and suburban centres refrain from offering lesbian-specific programming because they are located in close proximity to the Vancouver Lesbian Connection.

\(^{17}\) Possibly, Aboriginal women throughout the province have formed their own support groups outside of the women’s centre.
Second Language groups. And the North Shore Women's Centre is currently involved in the Immigrant/Refugee Women's Access Project. Through this, the centre will examine the accessibility of North Shore Services to immigrant women (1997b: 4).

Multicultural services are found exclusively in urban and suburban centres. This can be attributed to the fact that the immigrant population living in Greater Vancouver is quite high (especially when compared to the rural regions). Consequently, suburban and urban centres have made efforts to include these groups of women in their programming as they form an important part of the community.

4.1.9 Recreation

Gathering in groups to share, laugh, have fun, and forget, at least briefly, the difficulties and stresses of life forms an important part of the programming for some women's centres, especially those located in urban areas. The Downtown Eastside Women's Centres takes the lead in this role as they provide their members with different "crafty" workshops every day of the week, except Thursdays. For example, on Monday women can participate in ceramic and tile painting; Tuesday they can learn how to make dream catchers; Wednesday women can work on the Centre banner in the morning and learn beading techniques in the afternoon; and on Friday women can learn how to sew and do alterations (1997: 7). These activities are important given that most of the women that use the centre cannot afford to partake in extra-curricular activities in the same capacity as suburban or rural women.

18 The Richmond Women's Centre in 1985 established Les Femmes Parlent Francais. This group often speaks to newcomers to B.C. and directs them in their new life. This group also does translation and interpretation for individuals and groups (1995/1996: 4).
Other forms of recreation include coffee houses (Vancouver Lesbian Connection and the Downtown Eastside); potluck lunches held either on a daily or weekly basis (Port Coquitlam and Ridge Meadows); and weekly outings, such as picnic lunches (Downtown Eastside).

Additionally, the Vancouver Lesbian Connection has entertainment night (featuring music, poetry readings, and other activities) twice a month (1997: 3).

4.1.10 Proactive Legal Work

Centres that have programs that deal specifically with legal issues are concentrated in urban areas. The Victoria Status of Women Action Group, for example, runs a unique program called the Court Monitoring Program which benefits the women of Victoria and society at large. In this program, trained volunteers go into the courts and monitor for gender bias as well as other biases such as classism, racism, and homophobia. The cases most often monitored through the program are concerned with incest, sexual assault, criminal harassment (stalking), and other such issues. Volunteers scrutinize the treatment of women who are survivors of violence, the interpretation of new laws, precedent-setting cases, conviction rates, and sentencing rates. The information gathered goes into a database which allows the centre to produce statistics on: gender bias in the legal system, conviction and sentencing rates, and the treatment of women and children who are survivors of violence. The centre also uses the statistics to lobby government for change in the legal system, to highlight what is and is not working, and to raise public awareness of violence against women and children. Furthermore, if there are any concerns regarding legal procedure, policy, or issues, letters will be written and meetings will be arranged with such persons as the Attorney General, the Minister of Justice, or court staff in order to draw their attention to the problem and advocate for change (Information Brochure).
Other centres involved in proactive legal work include the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre and the Vancouver Lesbian Connection. Each of these centres holds legal advice clinics on a regular basis.

4.1.11 Women’s Community Economic Development

Women’s community economic development (CED) is "about women working together to improve the quality of their lives and their communities" (Alderson et al 1993: 1). Two centres included within this study have pursued, with much success, CED activities: the Philippine Women’s Centre and the Sunshine Coast Women’s Centre.

a) The Philippine Women’s Centre

The Philippine Women’s Centre has become a role model for Women’s CED activity throughout the province and Canada. The activities in which they have been involved include a catering service, the Centre store, the Paluwagon or Savings Circle, the educational loan fund, and the emergency loan fund.

The catering service is the most established CED activity at the Centre. This activity has given the women a number of valuable skills, as well as generating income for the Centre. The skills the women have gained include planning, organizing, professional meal preparation, and food serving skills. They have also learned effective ways of designing menus, and how to deal with people in a professional and business setting (1994: 2).

The Centre also has an in-house store which sells a variety of products from books to jewelry and crafts from the Third World, especially the Philippines. By purchasing their products, the Centre builds solidarity with the poor women of these countries. Also, this connection provides a communication link and outlet through which these women can share their stories (1994: 3).
The Paluwagon or “Savings Circle,” which is currently going through its third cycle, is based on trust and personal responsibility. Any number of women can join the money pool and contribute from $50 to $100 every month. At the end of each month, one member will receive the pool (so, if there are ten members contributing $50 each, the person would receive $500). This process will continue until each member has received a sum of money, after which the cycle begins again (1994: 3).

The educational loan fund is a project which began in 1994, under the “Making Women Count in CED” project. This fund provides loans to women as a way for them to upgrade their skills. The only limit to the loan is that the person who receives the money must pay it back (in installments) and must become active in the activities of the Centre. So far, one woman has completed a “Nursing Aid” course through the program (1994: 3).

The emergency loan fund, started under the same project as that mentioned above, loans large amounts of money to women in critical situations. So far, only one member has received the loan. It was used to pay a loan shark back for money borrowed during a family crisis (Elmore 1996).

b) Sunshine Coast Women’s Centre

At the Sunshine Coast Women’s Centre, the Internet is now the vehicle through which CED activities are initiated. The centre recently began a telecommuting enterprise in order to help deal with the high unemployment experienced in the area. Part of the vision includes the installation of 3 to 4 computers in a Local Area Network (LAN), all of which would be linked to the Internet. Eventually this will be developed into a self-supporting business with the ultimate
goal being the development of a computer centre which will include a combination of public drop-in space and private offices.

As a way of preparing local women for this project, the centre has begun a program called *WebWomen of the Sunshine Coast*. Through this project, women are learning “how to surf the Net,” as well as enhancing their computer and job skills (Website). The Centre has also received funding from the province to pursue a project called the *Tech.Kno Project*. For this project the centre is assessing employers’ future needs and interests in telecommuters who will be based on the Coast. The centre will become involved in this by providing training for potential workers.

Both of these centres have been innovative in trying to secure for women they serve, who are faced with high unemployment, alternative career options. Moreover, particularly for the urban centre, these activities have contributed to the actual survival of the centre in that they received no government funding in the first several years of their existence.

### 4.2 Typology

By examining the unique programs offered by women’s centres throughout the province, one can begin to categorize the centres according to the contributions they make to the various communities throughout the province. The categories include community development, social development, personal development, and community economic development. Please refer to Table 2 for a summary of these contributions.
4.2.1 Community Development

Centres that focus on community development are involved in the provision of direct services. Often these centres will identify gaps in the services and programs for women and children in the community and will play a catalyst role that eventually results in the delivery of that service. Centres that seem to concentrate on community development are located in rural towns and villages and in urban areas. It can also be noticed that the smaller and more isolated the town or population is, the more direct services it provides. For example, both the Westcoast Women’s Centre and the Downtown Eastside Women’s Centres provide a range of direct services.

Table 2: Summary of the Various Contributions of B.C. Women’s Centres

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<th>Rural</th>
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<td>Community Economic Development</td>
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* Specific refers to those women’s centres that cater to a unique clientele (Downtown Eastside Women’s Centre, Philippine Women’s Centre, Vancouver Lesbian Connection, and Indian Homemakers’ Association.

** General refers to centres that serve women in their own geographic communities and outlying areas.
4.2.2 Social Development

Those centres that concentrate on social development are concerned primarily with offering public education programs, developing resource centres, and undertaking research and needs’ assessments.

Although all women’s centres across the province contribute to the social development of their communities, suburban centres (particularly those that are located near the urban core) and urban centres (status of women centres), have made it their priority. Suburban centres, including the North Shore and Richmond, have taken on this role as they want to reach out to the specific groups of women living in their communities (i.e. mid-life women and immigrant women). The urban centres that focus on social development include the status of women centres located in Vancouver and Victoria. These centres have been mandated by the federal and provincial governments to function in this role.

4.2.3 Personal Development

Women’s centres that concentrate on personal development focus on improving the emotional and spiritual well-being of the women that use their centres. It is primarily outlying suburban, rural, and urban centres that dedicate themselves to this role.

4.2.4 Community Economic Development

Centres that engage in community economic development (CED) are interested in improving the economic well being of the women that live within their communities. Only two centres included in this study are currently involved in the delivery of CED activities. The first is located in the urban centre while the second is positioned in a medium-sized rural town.
4.3 Summary

Whether they are large or small, urban or rural, or located in the north or the south, women's centres have contributed to the community, social, personal, and community economic development of communities throughout British Columbia. Women’s centres have accomplished this by identifying the unmet needs of women and children (such as child care) living in the various regions of B.C. Once these needs are identified, the staff and membership of women’s centres work, as a team, to rectify the situation by creating new programs and services. These programs and services, which are constantly evolving with the changing needs of women, are generally delivered by the women’s centres themselves. Consequently, centres have become as diverse as the needs of women living throughout the province.

Although each of the contributions women’s centres have made to communities has been extremely beneficial, these roles may diminish in the future. That is because governments at all levels, through the use of strict funding guidelines, are restricting women’s centres’ abilities to carry out unique programming. Consequently, by focusing on accountability and efficiency, governments may destroy the unique role of centres as essential social service providers. The repercussions of this may be disastrous, particularly in small rural communities where few, if any, alternative social agencies exist.

The purpose of the next chapter is to explore, even further, the unique and evolving contributions that women’s centres make to communities. This will be accomplished through an examination of the North Shore Women’s Centre.
5. CASE STUDY - NORTH SHORE WOMEN’S CENTRE

The North Shore Women’s Centre (NSWC) was one of the first women’s centres to emerge in British Columbia following the release of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The goal of the centre was to provide a base through which positive changes in society could be made (NSWC January 1978: 1). These changes included equal opportunity for women, freedom of choice, and the elimination of sexist assumptions which divide an individuals' ability and worth according to their sex (NSWC November 1978: 1). The members of the centre, who aimed to initiate this transformation in society, were the leaders of the feminist movement on the North Shore. They were enthusiastic, energetic, and somewhat optimistic as they believed that they “were going to change the world in six months” (McQuarrie 1997).

After nearly twenty-five years, the centre’s philosophy and goals continue to reflect this desire to challenge sexism and create a society where all women and men are equal:

**Philosophy**

The purpose of the North Shore Women’s Centre is to improve the social, economic and political status of women and to encourage and support self empowerment by acting as a resource and a catalyst for change, from a feminist perspective.

We believe that women have the right to:

- self-determination in all aspects of their lives
- equal access to society’s resources
- safety and security of their person
- fairness in the administration of justice
- freedom from all forms of discrimination.

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19 The North Shore includes the City of North Vancouver, the District of North Vancouver, and the District of West Vancouver.
Goals

1. To provide women with access to resources (information, referral, advocacy) to assist them with life choices.
2. To actively address violence against women at all levels of the community.
3. To challenge sexism and all other forms of discrimination against women at all levels of the community.
4. To work towards the elimination of the feminization of poverty (Information Brochure).

The centre has not only wished to achieve this equality for all women – regardless of cultural background, socio-economic status, age, or ability – on the local level, but on a provincial, regional, and international level as well.

The chapter is organized into two sections. Section I presents an overview of the centre’s organizational structure, funding, membership, clientele, and volunteers. Section II examines the changing role of the North Shore Women’s Centre. This is accomplished using the typologies which were first introduced in Chapter 4 – namely: community development, community economic development, and social development.

5.1 Section I

In this section a historical overview of the centres organizational structure, funding, membership, clientele, and volunteers will be examined. For a more detailed look at the history of the centre please refer to Appendix E.

5.1.1 Organizational Structure

The board of the North Shore Women’s Centre has greatly evolved over the years. It has moved from a hierarchical working board to a collective structure and back to a hierarchy.
For nearly eight years (1973 to February 1981), the board members were solely responsible for the operations of the centre. The centre did not have the funds to hire a full-time staff person. Board members’ responsibilities included organizing activities, coordinating volunteers, writing funding applications, communicating with other women’s groups, networking within the community, soliciting new members, working in the drop-in, and creating the newsletter. The positions on the board reflected these responsibilities as there was essentially one board member who was assigned to each task. The board positions included a chair, vice-chair, secretary, treasurer, office coordinator, pub night coordinator, newsletter editor, publicity person, membership coordinator, pub night refreshments coordinator, and members at large. Although this structure was hierarchical, the board members had to work together as a team to ensure that the centre was run smoothly and efficiently. As well as being involved in the functioning of the centre, the board members also involved themselves in a number of committees. For example, there was a letter lobbying committee, a fundraising committee, and a personal committee, as well as a number of ad hoc committees which were formed to deal with specific projects (NSWC December/January 1981: 5).

The structure of the board remained relatively consistent, changing only to accommodate new committees or board positions, until the fall of 1987. At this point, the board committed itself to learning how to transform the centre into a collective. Members attended a facilitator’s training course which focused on new collective methods of working with one another:

We continue to feel that we are beginning – beginning to understand how to work collectively – beginning to understand how to make decisions in harmony with our values and ability to carry them out – beginning to realize we have the power to improve our lives, our community, and conditions for women (NSWC September/October 1988: 3).

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20 In February of 1981 the centre gave its volunteer coordinator a salary making her the centre’s first part-time employee. Before this time the centre had incentive workers to help staff the office. The incentive worker, who was paid by the Department of Human Resources, worked approximately 40 hours per month on a temporary basis.

21 In a collective structure, the board members, staff, and volunteers, together share the responsibilities associated with the operation of the centre (Sequoia Associates 1995: 22).
For the next two years, the centre operated with the “Coordinating Collective” in place, sharing power with all members with a focus on achieving empowerment, cooperation, and win-win situations. The members of the centre also dedicated themselves to actions such as listening, participating, cooperating, understanding, affirming, sharing, respecting, taking responsibility, being accountable, taking care of oneself, and having fun (NSWC Spring/Summer 1989: 1). In 1990, the Coordinating Collective was growing weaker. This was contributed to a number of reasons including financial strain (in February of 1990 the Department of the Secretary of State eliminated core funding) and a lack of energy on the part of the membership to continue to maintain this type of structure.

In June of 1990, when federal funding was reinstated, the board once again became a hierarchical working board. A return to this structure was necessary, as both the physical form and the spirit of the centre had to be rebuilt and this could not be done under a consensus format (NSWC June 1990: 3).

As the centre became more stable in the ensuing years, the board became less concerned with the day-to-day functions of the centre and involved themselves only in those areas which they deemed appropriate. As such, the board members created standing committees for the following areas: fundraising, public education, programs, volunteers, letter lobby, newsletter, and personnel (NSWC December 1992: 15). Presently, the appointed board is even less immersed with the functioning of the centre. Instead, they are mostly involved at the policy level. That is, they set policies, ensure that the centre is operating within its mission and vision, and strike committees only when it is appropriate to do so (Sequoia Associates 1995: 10).
5.1.2 Funding

Until 1992, the North Shore Women’s Centre had to depend almost exclusively on funding provided by the federal Department of the Secretary of State’s Women’s Program.\textsuperscript{22} Table 3 presents a breakdown of the funding received by the centre from the Women’s Program between 1974/1975 and 1997.

Table 3: Summary of Federal Funding Provided by the Women’s Program to the North Shore Women’s Centre (1974/1975-1997)

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<td>500</td>
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<td>13,200</td>
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This funding was provided by the Department of the Secretary of State 1974/1975-1993, Human Resources Development Canada 1993-1995, and Status of Women Canada 1995-present. \hspace{1cm} Where the amount was not known (N/A) was used.\hspace{1cm} Sources: DPA Group 1986: 28 and 1995, 1996, and 1997 Annual Reports from the NSWC.

Between 1975 and 1983, the limited funding received by the centre was primarily used to pay for expenses such as rent,\textsuperscript{23} phone bills, postage, printing, child care, transportation, office supplies, and the library (NSWC April 1979: 3). Then in 1984, when the centre was given its first large operational grant, a portion of the money went to pay for a full-time coordinator (NSWC June 1984: 4). The centre also used some of this money to help pay for a larger, private, and more accessible office space.

After 1992, the women’s centre’s budget increased substantially as they began to receive funding from a number of new sources. For example, the Ministry of Women’s Equality began to fund

\textsuperscript{22} Other sources of funding that the centre received between 1975 and 1992 included membership fees, fundraising, and donations.

\textsuperscript{23} The centre had to pay limited rent during this period as office space was provided to them for a minimum cost from sympathetic organizations (Highlands Church and Delbrook Community Centre). For more information on the centre’s office space, please refer to Appendix E.
the centre at an amount of approximately $40,000 per year. The centre also began to receive funding from the City and District of North Vancouver and the District of West Vancouver (about $4000 per year in total). Furthermore in 1992, the centre applied for, and was granted, its first casino license. This additional funding allowed the centre to hire a staff person for the resource centre. Additionally, the centre used this funding to help off-set the high cost of their new office space (which the centre is continuing to rent at a cost of over $16,000 per year), as well as to compensate for decreasing federal funding.

The current breakdown of the centres’ revenue for the 1996/1997 year is as follows:

Table 4: Breakdown of the North Shore Women’s Centre’s Revenue for 1996/1997

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<th>Municipal Grants:</th>
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<td>District of North Vancouver, City of</td>
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<td>North Vancouver</td>
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<td>District of West Vancouver</td>
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<td>Provincial Grant</td>
<td>41,272</td>
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<td>Federal Grant</td>
<td>13,808</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donations and Membership</td>
<td>2500</td>
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<td>Other (Bank Interest, Summer Student</td>
<td>2122</td>
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<td>Program)</td>
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<td>Total Revenue (excluding casino monies)</td>
<td>63,902</td>
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</table>


5.1.3 Membership

The membership of the women’s centre is made up primarily of white, middle-class, and heterosexual women. This membership does not reflect the present demographics of the North Shore community. The large Iranian and Chinese populations living in the area, for example, are not well represented. Over the last several years the NSWC has tried to attract these women by offering them services and programs which meet their unique needs. However, as a result of a lack of resources (financial and human) and ineffective marketing, the centre has been only marginally successful in its efforts.
5.1.4 Clientele

On average, the North Shore Women's Centre has served (by phone and in-person) between 250 and 300 women per month since 1994. Women have come to the centre as workshop participants, to use the centre's computer (for resume/letter preparation), to utilize the library, for research purposes, and to use the drop-in/resource centre\(^{24}\) (NSWC 1995a: 9). Additionally, a number of women come to the centre to discuss and share their views and opinions with like-minded women. This has ultimately led to the formation of a number of friendships and informal support groups at the centre. The importance of these friendships can be reflected in the quotes of some of the founding members of the North Shore Women's Centre:

... I had been living overseas... in a very cosmopolitan kind of situation... and I found coming back here that suddenly the focus narrowed right down and that the female community seemed to be focused on babies and making coffee, and it was driving me absolutely crazy, and then I discovered the women's centre and all of a sudden the world opened up again as I found there were other thinking females... (Campbell 1997).

... I always joked and said that if the women's movement hadn't come along I would have ended up in Riverview. But going to Explorations and finding people that actually thought the same way as you did,... was incredible (McQuarrie 1997).

... so then I walked through the door into the North Shore Women's Centre, I didn't know that I would meet this community of women who would be part of my "dance through the music of time"... people started out with babies moving on through to retirement age, it's been absolutely fabulous... People just go away for months, drop out, come back, everybody comes back together... Walking though that door and meeting all these women was the best thing that's happened to me (Lawrence 1997).

Having been involved in the women's centre over a long period of time, I have found it to be beneficial to my health. It has helped me to sort out my own views on things by exchanging ideas. I am able to get validation for my own feelings (NSWC May 1991: 11).

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\(^{24}\) The services requested most frequently by clients include: crisis counselling; career counselling and training programs; support groups; legal information (welfare or U.I. appeals); support during separation or divorce; single mothers support; parenting; abusive relationship issues; poverty issues, including affordable housing; and health queries (NSWC 1995a: 9 and NSWC 1997a: 12).
5.1.5 Volunteers

Volunteers (including board members) have clearly played an important and meaningful role in the functioning of the centre. For example, before the centre received operational funding from the Secretary of State in 1984 to hire a full-time staff person, it was up to the volunteers to carry out the programs, services, and activities of the centre. Additionally, during times of economic restraint (i.e. in 1990 when the federal government eliminated the centre's core funding), volunteers, particularly the founding members, have come into the centre en masse to try to keep the centre alive.

The number of volunteers involved with the centre has fluctuated over the years as a result of a number of factors, including the changing location of the centre (e.g., the centre in the past 23 years has moved a total of six times, each of these locations has been different in terms of its centrality and visibility in the community); the marketing of the centre to the public; as well as women's changing career patterns (i.e., as women's careers become more demanding they have less time or energy to volunteer). Despite these factors the centre maintains a pool of active volunteers. For example, in 1995, 60 volunteers donated an average of 2.5 hours per week, equaling 7800 hours per month (NSWC 1995a: 13). These volunteers keep the library in order, produce the newsletter, and deliver Women's Wednesdays (a series of workshops). Additionally, volunteers have been involved in planning and strategizing, financial management, fundraising and resource development, computer expertise, as well as a number of other activities. Each volunteer has had to participate in training programs. In these programs, volunteers learn about the operation of the centre, the policies, as well as the various positions that are available to them. The typical path that a North Shore Women's Center volunteer follows is included in Appendix F.
With this background in place, Section II examines the various contributions the centre has made to the women who have used the centre over the past twenty-five years as well as the community at large.

5.2 Section II

The changing role of the North Shore Women’s Centre in the community is examined through a review of the different services, programs, and activities initiated by the centre during three time periods: 1973-1986/87, 1987-1990, 1990-present. Each of these periods represents a unique era and period of change for the centre:

- 1973-1986/87 the centre was involved in numerous community development initiatives,
- 1987-1990 represented an experiential time when the members engaged in new community economic ventures.
- 1990-present the centre has taken on more of a social/ personal development role.

Please note that Tables 5 and 6 are used as a reference point for the following sections. These tables represent the Direct (Table 5) and In-direct (Table 6) services and programs offered by the centre between 1973 and 1997.

5.2.1 Community Development (1973-1986/87)

During the 1970s, few people were aware of the multitude of issues which effected women. This could be reflected in the fact that scarcely any organizations (non-governmental and governmental) provided services which assisted women to cope with their unique situations. Consequently, the women’s centre during this period was very active as it sought to fulfill two different roles. The first was to educate and raise awareness around women’s issues in the community, while the second was to plan and establish new services which would improve the well being of North Shore women. The members of the centre achieved this community
development role by initiating a number of new and unique services. These included both direct services and in-direct outreach services.\textsuperscript{25}

\textit{a) Direct Services}

The direct services provided by the centre included a child care program and a transition house.

\textbf{Child Care.} The first, and only child care service to be initiated by the centre was called \textit{Park-A-Tot}. \textit{Park-A-Tot}, which was started by one of the board members, was first funded by the centre in October 1977. The child care service was held at a local elementary school and was licensed by the provincial government through the North Shore Health Unit. The centre received short-term funding for the project which allowed them to hire a staff person who was needed to run the group. The program ended when the funding ran out at the end of December 1977.

\textbf{Transition House.} In 1977 the members of the women’s centre decided that the North Shore was in desperate need of an adequate transition house:

\begin{quote}
    an emergency refuge shelter where women and their children could go to if circumstances arose that made their home unsafe (NSWC November 1977: 8).
\end{quote}

A sub-committee was thus set-up immediately and met on nearly a weekly basis over the next year, trying to bring this project out of the planning stage. In order to gain support for the project, the committee sent out questionnaires to all doctors, lawyers, churches, and social agencies on the North Shore. The North Shore Division of the United Way responded to the centre’s request for support and a meeting between the two groups was arranged. Another committee was then established to document and investigate, more closely, the need for a transition house. This committee was made up of members from the women’s centre, the United Way, two non-profit

\textsuperscript{25} The centre also provided, however, educational and empowerment services as is evident in Table 5. These included Consciousness Raising Groups and Transactional Analysis Groups. For a full overview of these activities, please refer to Appendix E.
### Table 5 - Direct Services and Programs Offered by the North Shore Women's Centre Between 1973-1997

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<tr>
<td><strong>Services</strong></td>
<td>Monthly social gatherings which featured entertainment, speakers, and group discussions</td>
<td>Child care drop-in</td>
<td>Committee planned and established the Emily Murphy House for women and children</td>
<td>Members discussed the changing role of women in local high schools</td>
<td>Program was reestablished</td>
<td>Centre held all-candidates meetings for all federal, provincial, and municipal elections</td>
<td>Centre initiated a desktop publishing business</td>
<td>Centres offers space and facilities for women's groups</td>
<td>Volunteers assist low income women with their income tax in April</td>
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### Table 6 - In-Direct Services and Programs Offered by the North Shore Women's Centre Between 1973-1997

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organizations called Chesterfield House and North Shore Family Services, the police, a social planner from the District of North Vancouver, and a probation officer. By the spring of 1978, the committee submitted funding proposals to the Ministry of Human Resources as well as the Department of National Health and Welfare. In May of 1979, the committee received $5200 from Human Resources as well as an expense budget (for furniture and beds) of $2860. Shortly after receiving the funding, the committee incorporated itself as a registered society, thus becoming the North Shore Crisis Services Society (NSWC April 1980: 4-5). The transition house, which became known as the Emily Murphy House, opened its doors in September 1979.

b) Outreach Services

The centre sought to accomplish its educational outreach role by providing the following services: Pub Night, Schools Program, Political Involvement, and Television Program.

**Pub Night.** Pub Night was by far the most popular and successful program offered by the centre from 1973 to 1981. Pub Nights were organized by board members and took place once a month at the North Shore Neighbourhood House. The Nights featured singers (e.g. Rita McNeil); speakers, such as Rosemary Brown, who was B.C.'s first feminist-socialist MLA; film nights; and discussion groups on a variety of topics relevant to women such as “life planning for women.”

Pub Nights were successful for the following reasons: first, they provided the members of the centre with an opportunity to socialize and get to know one another in a comfortable environment; second, as they were open (and free) to all community women, they provided the centre with the opportunity to gain new members; and third, through these nights, women were becoming more educated and aware of feminist issues.
Subsequently, Pub Nights became somewhat controversial in the community as a number of men felt that it was inappropriate for a group of women to discuss political issues “over a beer.”

And the men were really angry at the time because “Pub Night” was something they did, not what women did... women were supposed to stay at home and look after their kids and bring their husbands a beer (Alias 1997).

Indeed, some women who attended had to lie to their husbands about where they were going:

I remember when a European woman came to Pub Night, she didn’t tell her husband that she was going, she made up some other reason why she was going out (McQuarrie 1997).

Pub Nights came to an end in 1981 because the women’s centre was forced to change venues. Although it was rent free, the new venue prohibited the use of alcohol on the premises. Thus Pub Nights had to be changed to “Women’s Night” (NSWC September 1981: 9). This new format was not as successful, and the program ended in June of 1984.26

The Schools Program. In October of 1979, the members of the centre were invited by a local high school to participate in a program called Preparation for Living which was being offered by the Home Economics teacher. The members that participated discussed with classes of 16 to 17 year old girls, over six sessions, topics such as career planning, marriage, having children, where women stand in the law, being a working mother, and alternative lifestyles. By 1981, the members of the centre were still involved in the program and were delivering their speeches to teenage girls in high schools throughout North and West Vancouver. The members felt that this program was extremely necessary as it made young women more aware of their life options.

The program which ended in 1981, was temporarily reincarnated in 1983 when the centre received a small grant from the Department of Labour to prepare a pilot project for schools. The aim of this program was to bring about awareness of the current employment problems facing

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26 Pub Night was reincarnated shortly after this and lasted for approximately another year.
women and to suggest possible solutions. This pilot project became known as the *Careers Day Program* (NSWC November 1983: 10). In February 1984 the project got underway in two local secondary schools (NSWC February 1984: 1). The *Careers Day Program* lasted for approximately one year.

**Political Involvement.** Not only have the staff and volunteers of the women's centre been concerned with educating their membership on women's issues, they have also been interested in educating their local politicians as well (especially in the first ten years of the centre's existence). The centre has achieved this through a number of different measures including one-on-one conversations, by hosting all-candidates meetings, as well as by encouraging some of their members in their struggle to be elected into local government positions (i.e. school trustee and alderman). The most successful of these educational tactics have been the all-candidates meetings. For all federal, provincial, and municipal elections, held between 1977 and 1984, the centre sponsored these meetings in order to reveal the various parties' views on issues which concern women. The largest all-candidates meeting sponsored by the centre was held in February 1980. At this meeting over 150 women attended to listen, question, and inform the MLA's about the issues which concerned them.

**Television Program.** Between roughly 1979 and 1987, the North Shore Women's Centre hosted a program called *Having It All* on the local community television station, "Community 10". The program, which initially began as a way to celebrate International Women's Day, featured the members speaking on issues such as combining marriage, family, and career (NSWC March 1979: 11). By approximately 1981, the format of the program had changed. Instead of doing an actual program on the television, the centre was now taping *Women's Nights* (previously *Pub Nights*) and showing it every third or fourth week of the month (NSWC March 1983). In 1985,
the program was renamed *Click*. Some of the issues and concerns highlighted on the program included women and self defense and abortion (NSWC June 1984: 5).

**Other Activities.** The centre's involvement in the development of the North Shore community can also be reflected by its advocacy initiatives, its involvement in other community groups, as well as through its newsletter.

In terms of its advocacy role, the centre fought to: eliminate sexism in local schools; make therapeutic abortions available at the community hospital; and stop the sale of violent pornographic material on the North Shore. The centre's participation on numerous community groups (i.e. Capilano College Women's Studies Committee, North Vancouver Teachers Association, concerned Day Care Parents' Association, North Shore Association for Choice on Abortion, and the Canadian Coalition Against Media Pornography) also demonstrated the centre's concern for improving the social conditions for all residents living in North and West Vancouver. The newsletter, which was being produced on a monthly basis, moreover, served as an effective outreach tool as it was made accessible to a large number of North Shore residents (i.e. the members distributed it to highly accessible public places, such as the library). Please refer to Appendix E for a complete listing and description of the centre's advocacy and community involvement activities as well as for a description of the evolution of its newsletter.

**5.2.2 Community Economic Development (1987-1990)**

The period between 1987 and 1990 represented a period of major transition for the centre (this is evident in Tables 5 and 6) as it began to be operated according to a collective structure. Under this coordinating collective the members of the centre began to explore the possibilities of creating new and interesting services which would improve the economic well being of women...
living in the community. Subsequently, the centre engaged in its first (and last) community economic development initiative.

The initiative was a desktop publishing business which was given the name *North Shore Publishing Services*. This project was funded by Canada Employment and Immigration at a total of $72,323. This money was used to pay for a full-time project manager, three staff people, as well as a computer, laser printer, and desktop publishing software. In addition to creating a volunteer program, policy and procedures manual, and an information brochure for the centre, the business also marketed their services to non-profit groups, women’s organizations, and service-oriented professionals. The first contract received by the centre was from the North Shore Information and Volunteer Centre. The centre was asked to produce a directory of North Shore agencies and organizations (NSWC September/October 1988: 4).

Unfortunately, the business collapsed a year later. Some of the reasons that can be contributed to this failure include the following. First, the staff who were responsible for the project lacked the necessary skills and expertise needed in order to carry through such a large business venture. A second reason perhaps has to do with the fact that the business required a more structured environment to succeed, other than that which was provided by the collective.

\[a) \textit{Other Activities}\]

With such a large business venture taking place at the centre, the members had little time to commit to other activities, such as advocacy or community involvement.\(^{27}\)

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\(^{27}\) The centre did involve itself in one community group during this period – The Society for Children’s Rights to Adequate Parental Support. This group struggled to improve the enforcement of child support and attempted to change societal attitudes of parents toward their children after divorce (NSWC Autumn 1987: 8).
5.2.3 Social Development (1990-present)

Since the time that the centre received its large funding cut by the federal government in 1990, it has become very inward looking in terms of the services it has decided to pursue as is evident in Tables 5 and 6. These services seem to be focused on educating and empowering the membership, specifically. Additionally, the direct services that the centre has sought to provide to the wider community have focused on specific groups of women, rather than attempting to reach out to all women in the North Shore Community.

a) Educational Services and Programs

The educational programs the centre has focused on, for nearly the past seven years, include library, support groups, seminars and courses, workshops, and bursaries.

Library. Although the centre has always maintained a library in recent years it has become a real source of pride for the membership as it has grown tremendously. The library is presently filled with over 1000 sources. Additionally, the centre has a filing cabinet full of newspaper clippings of over 130 women-related topics.

Support Groups. The women’s centre, since 1977 has offered numerous support groups. However, the offering of these groups has often been sporadic, and it was not until 1991, that the centre began to hold a number of regular groups which actually endured for a number of years. These more recent support groups offered by the centre include: Single Mother’s Support Group (1992); Women for Sobriety (1993) – support group for women with problems of addictions; Sexual Assault Recovery Anonymous or SARA (1994); Menopause Support Group (1994); Motherless Daughters (1994); and Crone Talk (1995) – a discussion group for older women. Only one of these support groups continues at the centre: the Single Mother’s Support Group.
For a more complete overview of the support groups held at the center since 1997 please refer to Appendix E.

**Seminars and Courses.** The North Shore Women’s Centre has continuously offered, for over 20 years, annual non-credit courses and seminars (which are specific to women) in conjunction with Capilano College. Examples of some of the courses offered include: *Basic Auto Mechanics* (1976); *Journey into Self* (1978); *Employment Skills* (1979); *Images of Women in the Media* (1990); and *Women, Work, and Stress* (1996).

**Workshops.** Although one to three session workshops have been held regularly at the centre since its opening (focusing on topics such as assertiveness training and women’s health), it was not until 1990 that a regular series of workshops began to be offered. From approximately 1990 to 1993 these workshops were referred to as *Women’s Night*, then in 1994 the name of these nights changed to *Women’s Wednesdays*. *Women’s Wednesdays* have been held at the centre every third Wednesday of the month and have focused on topics such as: family planning, post menopause and aging, body image and eating disorders, keeping yourself safe, women’s spirituality, financial planning and investing, and exercise and healthy eating.

Other consecutive workshops held at the centre have included *Trials of Eve* (1991) and the *Saturday Legal Series* (1996). In the *Trials of Eve* series, women examined 12 mixed media drawings which traced women’s place in the arts since the time of the Garden of Eden (NSWC May 1991: 4). The *Saturday Legal Series*, which was co-sponsored by the People’s Law School, included a number of legal workshops on such topics as separation and divorce, writing your own will, same sex couples and the law, and starting a small business.
Bursaries. In 1992, the centre established the *North Shore Women's Centre Award* at Capilano College. The monetary reward has been used to assist mature women returning to post secondary education. The award was established in memory of Elizabeth (Betty) Cave, a founding member of the centre, as well as the centre’s first salaried, part-time coordinator. 1997 marks the fifth consecutive year that the award has been given out. Four mature women in good academic standing received awards this year at an amount of $300 each. This program is in line with centre’s commitment to increase women’s access to and participation in all activities (NSWC 1997b: 4).

Specific Outreach Services. The services the centre has provided to specific groups of women in the community include the *Room of One’s Own Project*, the *Income Tax Preparation Program*, and the *Job Search Centre*.

The *Room of One’s Own Project*, created in 1994, offers space and facilities to women forming self-run discussion groups or social action groups (NSWC 1997b: 4). The premise of the program has been simple: women’s groups can propose to use a room in the centre during the drop-in hours for the cost of an annual membership ($15) (NSWC 1995b: 5). Some of the groups that have taken advantage of this program have included a social action group for women who have been in abusive relationships and a group that was preparing to lobby the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program.

In 1995, the Centre initiated the *Income Tax Preparation Program* for low income women. Volunteers who have participated in a short course offered by Revenue Canada (and paid for by the centre) have provided free income tax preparation for low income women, such as single mothers. The volunteers are at the centre two times per week during the month of April (Dornan 1996).
Finally, the *Job Search Centre*, which was initiated this past year (1997), assists women who are currently seeking employment or preparing to return to the work force (NSWC 1997b: 5). The centre provides women with resources (such as, office equipment and information on job search skills) and referrals to employment counsellors or job finding clubs.

**Other Activities.** Although the centre's advocacy role has continued to diminish, its involvement in outside community groups has actually increased, especially in the last three years. These committees, however, are very different from those that the centre was involved with from 1973 to 1986. The earlier groups, for instance, sought to improve specific issues in the community, such as sexism, abortion, and pornography. The groups the centre is currently involved with, on the other hand, focus on broader and more far-reaching concerns such as safety, health, and housing. Moreover, these current groups, unlike the earlier groups which seemed to be more grassroots as they were started by local community members, are now being initiated, more frequently, by local governments. Additionally, more groups are currently being established which focus specifically on networking and not on social change. It is likely that these groups have formed in reaction to dwindling government funds. The groups the centre has become involved with in recent years have included: North Shore Regional Health Board, the North Shore Together Against Violence Coalition, North Vancouver Safe City Initiative Steering Committee, and the North Shore Community Services Network. Recently (1997), the centre has also become involved with a number of like-minded groups in two specific projects: the *North Shore Mid-Life Women’s Project* and the *Immigrant/Refugee Women’s Access Project*. Each of these focus on accessing specific groups of women within the community which fits into the social development role of the women’s centre.
The centre’s lobbying efforts have also been given more prominence since the early 1990s (although it is something the centre has been involved in for more than 20 years). Some of the more recent issues which staff and board members have written letters on include gun control, safety and rights of domestic workers, pro-choice legislation, women’s health issues, and Bill C-277 on making female genital mutilation being practiced in Canada a criminal offense (NSWC 1997a: 7). Please refer to Appendix E for a more complete list of the issues lobbied against by the members of the centre, as well as the committees the centre has been involved with since 1974.

5.4 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to reveal, even further, the relevance of women’s centres to communities located throughout British Columbia and to illustrate the degree to which women’s centres have evolved in response to women’s changing needs. This was achieved through the examination of the various contributions the North Shore Women’s Centre has made to the community in three separate time periods. These contributions include community development (1973-1986/87), community economic development (1987-1990), and social development (1990-present).

With a firm knowledge and understanding of women’s centres established, the contributions that women’s centres have made to B.C. communities can now be analyzed. Specifically, the ensuing chapters will examine the research questions proposed at the beginning of this thesis. These include:

- What contributions do women’s centres make to communities throughout British Columbia (both past and present)?
• What opportunities have centres traditionally taken advantage of to help them carry out these contributions, and what constraints have they faced which have deterred them from providing other services?

The final question:

• What is the forecast for women's centres in the future?

will be addressed in the Chapter 7.
6. ANALYSIS

In the first part of this analysis the specific contributions that women's centres have made to B.C. communities will be explored. Following this, the opportunities and constraints which have permitted or deterred women's centres from carrying out their numerous contributions will be considered. In most sections, the experiences of the North Shore Women's Centre will be drawn in to illustrate some of the more salient issues.

6.1 Contributions

Throughout this thesis, particular emphasis has been placed on the important contributions that women's centres have made throughout the province. In Chapter 4, for example, it was noticed that by providing unique services and programs, the various women's centres included in this study made specific contributions to the communities in which they are situated. In Chapter 5, it was further discovered, through the case study, that these contributions are not static. Rather, they continuously evolve as a result of a number of factors including changes in the organization of the centre, funding, as well as a result of the different needs of the clientele. The intent of this section is to further examine the specific contributions women's centres make to communities. These include community development, social development, community economic development, and personal development.

6.1.1 Community Development

It is for their role in community development that women's centres have received the most recognition, as has been indicated in the literature (Le Francois 1979, Brown 1991, Secretary of State 1984). In this role, women's centres are viewed as a catalyst, as a preventative service, as a resource, and as an educator.
a) Catalyst Role

As a catalyst, women's centres tend to identify gaps in the services for women and children within a community and play a catalyst role that eventually leads to the provision of missing services. In some cases, the women's centre will offer this knowledge to service providers and decision makers with the hope that they will fill the gap with the appropriate service. However, more often than not, it is the women's centres themselves that must take the lead role and deliver the missing service. Women's centres will usually continue to carry out this service to the best of their ability (given their limited time and resources) until they can persuade another social service agency (e.g. Family Services) to take it over. The missing services that women's centres have identified have included transition houses, child care and parenting programs, education and employment services, health services, and poverty services.

This catalyst role is most important in communities where few other women-specific services exist, such as rural town and villages. Moreover, it seems that the smaller the community is, the more direct services the centre is required to provide (such as in Ucluelet). In fact, most small communities tend to expect women's centres to deliver these services without considering the limits of the centres' resources. This tends to put much strain on women's centres as they struggle to fulfill these various expectations.

It has also been noticed that centres located in the urban core (i.e. the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, the Philippine Women's Centre, the Vancouver Lesbian Connection, and the Indian Homemaker's Association) play a significant role in community development, despite the fact that numerous other social agencies exist in the area. This is because these centres have tended to cater to very specific groups of women (namely the poor, immigrants, lesbians, and Aboriginal women) that have been neglected by "the system." Consequently, the women's centre
has come to be the only place in the urban core upon which these neglected women and their children can rely. In this way women’s centres play a very nurturing role in their desire to provide these women the basic necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter, and entertainment).

Through the case study, it was also discovered that women’s centres that presently do not play a major role in the delivery of direct services, usually did so at some earlier point in their history. For example, in the early 1970s, the North Shore Women’s Centre was very active in this role; e.g., they initiated several new programs and services. This illustrates that the roles women’s centres play are not static. Indeed, women’s centres are constantly evolving, providing women with the services which are required in their communities at particular points in time.

b) Preventative Role

Women’s centres across the province tend to be the first point of entry for many women in need at a time when their problems are still manageable. In this way, women’s centres tend to play a preventative role. That is, centre staff and volunteers help women work through their problems, thus preventing women from having to access more costly social and health services in the future. For example, a women experiencing domestic violence may come to the centre for advice and support. Staff and volunteers would then likely direct her to a transition house or another accessible (low cost) counselling service. Through these resources, the woman would hopefully gain the strength she needed to leave the abusive situation, thus reducing future potential health care costs. Consequently, in terms of a social service provider, many refer to women’s centres as being “dirt cheap.”

Women’s centres are often the first point of entry for women accessing social services for a number of reasons. First, the centres are seen to be safe, which is important, especially for women who have experienced mental or physical abuse. Second, women are assured that staff
and volunteers will support them and try to understand them and will not ridicule them or make
them feel that their problems are insignificant. And third, women that fear, are intimidated by, or
distrust patriarchal institutional services, find solace in women’s centres knowing that these
centres are created and based on the experiences of women.

This preventative role is particularly relevant for women living in small and isolated rural
communities. In these areas, there are few other available social services which can assist
women to work through their problems. Moreover, if social services do exist, they are usually
traditional and male-centred in their focus, and thus lack the support women need to help them
to cope and survive. Consequently, many women living in these areas view women’s centres as
cornerstones or place of refuges within their communities.

c) Resource Role

Community agencies and organizations tend to view women’s centres as a valuable resource. For
example, many organizations often refer their clients (whose problems are still of a manageable
nature) to women’s centres for counselling, advice, companionship, support groups, and other
services. Additionally, community agencies and organizations use women’s centres when they
require specific information on women’s issues or when they need a speaker to discuss, for
instance, how a certain issue effects women (e.g. transportation and housing). Furthermore,
community planners in local and provincial governments have frequently solicited the members
of women’s centres to participate in focus groups, workshops, and advisory committees. In doing
so, planners try to ensure that women’s viewpoints are considered before any project is initiated.
For example, two years ago, I participated on the North Vancouver Safe City Initiative on behalf
of the NSWC. My role on this committee was to ensure that women’s safety needs would be
considered in the design of future planned environments.
d) Education Role

Educating the community in general about the issues that concern women has become a very important part of the activity of women’s centres. Through education and knowledge, community members have become more sympathetic to, and understanding of, the unique services women require. For instance, before women’s centres were developed in the early 1970s, transition houses, sexual abuse centres, and child care centres were almost unknown in Canadian communities. Moreover, through education, women’s centres have also made other social service agencies aware of the need to make their services more responsive to women’s specific needs. For example, health clinics and hospitals have since been established with the sole purpose of assisting women with their special health needs (e.g. the Women’s Health Collective and the Menopause & Women’s Health Information Centre).

Beyond this, women’s centres, through their education role, have instigated a number of changes in government legislation and policy. The North Shoe Women’s Centre in the early-to-mid 1980s, for instance, created a number of changes regarding the sale of pornographic material. They achieved this by demonstrating to the community the negative impact that violent pornography was having on women. The centre led the fight to have all pornographic material sold in grocery or corner stores placed in a location out of the reach of children. Additionally, they sought to have the covers of these magazines hidden from public view as they often displayed nude women in provocative poses. The centre also exposed a local video store for selling and renting violent pornographic videos. The owners of this establishment were thereafter charged and convicted on three counts of possessing obscene video tapes (NSWC Nov/Dec 1985: 10). During each of these struggles, the women’s centre, for the most part, was supported by the local community.
6.1.2 Social Development

Most centres participate in, or offer, activities which contribute to the social development of communities located throughout the province. These activities include the offering of public education programs, the developing of resource centres, and the undertaking of research and needs assessments on women’s equality issues.

a) Public Education Programs

As became evident in Chapters 3 and 4, women’s centres offer numerous programs and services which have the specific goal of educating their membership, as well as other women in the community. These educational programs include newsletters, workshops, and lectures. Through these forums, women gain vast amounts of information on the issues that effect their lives, as well as the lives of women at the regional, national, and international levels. With knowledge, women can begin to take control of their lives and make the changes needed to improve their situations. Consequently, knowledge has a very empowering effect. For example, the North Shore Women’s Centre, in offering a series of workshops on legal issues, has provided women with new knowledge with regards to their rights and entitlements in divorce, their welfare and unemployment rights, and their rights in child support.

b) Resource Centres

Resource centres, which include a library and resource files, are a well-used and necessary feature of all women’s centres. Like the public education programs, resource centres have an empowering effect on women. For example, by reading or watching a video about a topic which affects her life (e.g. health, abortions, and body image) a woman can gain new knowledge which may assist her in making very important decisions.
c) Research and Needs Assessments

As community demographics evolve, women's centres need to continuously conduct research and needs assessments in order that they may be able to provide women with the appropriate programs and services. This role is necessary given that the status of all women should be promoted and understood in each community as women are all equal. Moreover, women's centres that do not conduct this type of research may be accused of being elitist in that they are not attempting to reach out to various groups of women. The North Shore Women's Centre, for example, is currently involved in two projects which have the purpose of looking into the specific needs of immigrant/refugee women and mid-life women – two prominent and growing groups in the North Shore community. The knowledge the centre gains from these projects will be applied to all of their future programs and services. These projects are significant in that, if they are successful, the centre could potentially attract a number of new women, thus expanding its membership. These types of projects also benefit the women being researched, given that these women may potentially gain new services and support systems to help them cope with their various life situations.

6.1.3 Community Economic Development

Although only two of the centres included in this study are currently participating in community economic development activities28 (Sunshine Coast and the Philippine Women's Centre), the potential effect of these activities on the future well-being of women's centres is unprecedented. For instance, through these activities, women's centres can assist individual women in the community to gain economic independence by providing them with important employment opportunities. Furthermore, if an activity is successful, women's centres themselves will benefit
since the money raised could help them to become self-sufficient. Accordingly, women's centres would be able to decrease their dependence on dwindling government funds.

Notably, most women's centres already have the infrastructure necessary to initiate these types of services. This infrastructure includes computers, fax machines, and other such equipment. Moreover, since women's centres are involved in a number of community groups, they also have a pre-established network of agencies and organizations to which they may turn for advice, assistance, and support. All Women's centres require, therefore (besides, of course, money and staff), is the necessary training. The importance of this training cannot be underestimated, given what happened to the North Shore Women's Centre in 1987 when they attempted to begin their business, *North Shore Publishing Services*.

### 6.1.4 Personal Development

Personal growth and development is often experienced by those who use women's centres. The centres help women to build skills, gain confidence, and establish support systems and friendships. Each of these benefits is far-reaching as each contributes to a woman's determination and sense of strength. This role in personal development is particularly important for women living in small, male-oriented, rural communities. In these areas, numerous barriers continue to exist for women (e.g. lack of child care and transportation) which have the effect of making some women feel isolated and oppressed. Consequently, since few (if any) other social service agencies tend to exist in communities, greater numbers of women tend to make use of the women's centre. Here women find refuge, solace, friendships, and a sense of unity. This not

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28 The goal of CED is to gain greater community control over the resources of the community through the creation of stable employment, the investment of capital and the utilization of local resources. Examples of CED initiatives include housing projects for low income women or a restaurant (Alderson and Conn 1988: 1).
only contributes to a women’s sanity, but it also gives her the courage to try to better her situation.

\[ a) \text{ Skills} \]

The practical skills women gain by volunteering at women’s centres cannot be underestimated. These skills include, but are not limited to, computer, organizing, leadership, social criticism, peer counselling, event coordinating, public speaking, and networking skills. Volunteers are presented with an opportunity to become involved in a number of different activities at the centre. Accordingly, they are also presented with an opportunity to build on various personal skills. If a woman wants to develop a particular skill, she can choose to volunteer in those activities which build on this attribute. For example, when I first became a volunteer at the centre, my goal was to improve my public speaking skills. I subsequently joined a number of committees in which I would be urged to give my opinion on various matters. In time I began to gain confidence and to feel comfortable speaking before a group of people. Moreover, women who volunteer at the centre in order to gain employment skills are also very successful. For instance, over the past several months, at least three active volunteers at the North Shore Women’s Centre (who were unemployed when they first joined) began new, paying jobs. Accordingly, the skills women gain also provide them with new found confidence in their abilities.

Women’s centres also offer women in the community employment opportunities which further contribute to their skills and expertise. Employment opportunities are usually short-term and are funded in part by the federal government. Typically, these jobs are filled by students who are younger (in their 20s) and do not have a great deal of relevant work experience. Women Centres
thus give these women an opportunity to build their resumes and gain useful skills. A description of the employment opportunities offered by the NSWC is included in Appendix E.

b) Confidence

Confidence is what makes us strong and determined. With confidence, women can become empowered, take control over their lives, make decisions that take their personal needs into account, and change aspects of their lives that they are unhappy with. Consequently, women's centres invest a lot of time and energy in those services and programs which will seek to build a woman’s confidence level. These include counselling (including peer counselling) and support groups. Each of these activities focus on reassuring women that they are not alone in their personal struggles, and that what they are experiencing is not unique. In this way, women feel safe enough to tell their stories without worrying that their feelings will be undervalued. Moreover, by listening to the stories of other women, each member is able to gain new ideas and new perspectives on her own situation.

c) Sense of Achievement

Many women join women’s centres because it makes them feel that they are making a useful contribution to society. Once involved in the centre, however, this feeling is usually converted into a desire to improve the status of all women and thus to create a society that is fair and equitable. This metamorphosis usually occurs when women, upon joining the centre, begin to educate themselves (through reading, participating in workshops, or by talking to other women) about the multitude of concerns that affect women’s lives. This is particularly important in an affluent community such as the North Shore, where problems such as poverty and violence are well hidden. Consequently, those women who initially join to feel useful may begin to participate in activities which can potentially lead to real changes. For example, a woman may
decide to participate in a march (e.g. Take Back The Night) on behalf of the centre or involve herself in a committee either within or outside the centre.

d) Support Groups/Friendships

One of the most significant benefits women's centres offer their members is the potential to form new friendships and support groups with women who share similar ideas and philosophies. For myself, as well as for other women involved in the activities of the NSWC, this sense of community and unity is very gratifying. Indeed, the women's centre is one of the few social service agencies that one can walk into and immediately sense a feeling of safety, comfort, and support. It is a place where one can just “hang out.” It is also a place where one can talk to other women about feminist ideas and ideals, without fear of being judged. Notably, all women's centres, despite their differences, seem to have created a welcoming and supportive environment in which even a complete stranger can feel as if she is “at home.”

With a sense of the contributions women's centres have made to communities throughout the province established, the opportunities and constraints women's centres have been faced with are now explored.

6.2 Opportunities

The opportunities that women have been able to take advantage of, which have, in turn, helped them to carry out the activities of their centres since the 1970s, have been critical. In fact, without these opportunities, it is likely that women's centres would not endure today. These opportunities include, but are not limited to the following: a rich history of women's organizing; change in public consciousness; sense of empowerment; sympathetic governments; the creation
of national and provincial organizations; access to local governments; access to charitable dollars; and the potential for collaboration.

6.2.1 History of Women's Organizing

As was demonstrated in the literature review, there has been a long history of women coming together with the purpose of changing the social conditions of their communities. This desire for change was first apparent in the early nineteenth century when women campaigned for prison reform, child labour laws, and women's suffrage. Then, in the 1960s, with the women's liberation movement, women with an increased desire to challenge their oppressions again set forth to change and improve their situations. Consequently, women's centres (which were an outcome of the movement) have been able to use this past history show the public the relevance and impact women have had on communities. Moreover, centres have been effective in demonstrating to communities the need to continue to challenge their oppressions. Women's centres still reflect and demonstrate to the community the important contributions women have made throughout history by holding special events. For example, Women's History Month is celebrated annually by most centres in the province.

6.2.2 Change in Public Consciousness

One of the real victories of the women's liberation movement was its ability to educate the general public about the numerous oppressions which impacted women's lives. Through education has come a change in public consciousness. Individuals have become more sympathetic to women’s needs to create societies where all people are considered equal. Consequently, when women began to organize and form women’s centres (as they required a base for their movement), they received little resistance from the masses. Moreover, in the
ensuing years, when members of the centre pointed out the need for additional women-specific services such as transition houses, rape crisis centres, and child care services, there was still little opposition. In fact, many individuals and organizations were, and still are, willing to assist the centres. For example, when the North Shore Women’s Centre tried to gain support for their idea to establish a transition house, they received an overwhelming response. This is reflected in the committee that subsequently formed and formally established the transition house. This committee included a number of non-profit organizations, the police, and a social planner.

6.2.3 Sense of Empowerment

Through their work in the liberation movement, many women began to experience (perhaps for the first time) a sense of empowerment. This greatly contributed to women’s desire to change their situations, and thus end their oppressions. Accordingly, this made women eager to create agencies such as women’s centres, which they could organize and control. This sense of empowerment is still experienced today by the women who use the centres and keep them functioning.

6.2.4 Sympathetic Governments

Government commitment towards improving the status of women was first noticed when Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson’s liberal government established the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1967. Since this time, succeeding Liberal, NDP, and Progressive Conservative Governments, have demonstrated their support to women’s groups by providing them with much needed resources. The most significant of these resources has been funding. Status of Women Canada had the Ministry of Women’s Equality essentially sustain most of the women’s centres across the province. In fact, without these government entities most women’s centres would not
be able to afford to rent an office, pay the salaries of staff, or initiate essential programs and services.

The recent establishment of continuous funding (three years) by both the federal and provincial governments will hopefully continue to benefit women’s centres. Through this funding mechanism, women’s centres will be able to initiate long term goals, knowing that their funding will not be drastically reduced by the next year. Moreover, continuous funding will also benefit centres as staff, or board members, will not have to spend as much time filling out long and tedious applications.

Municipal governments have also gone far in supporting local women’s centres. For example, many municipalities (such as the City and Districts of North and West Vancouver) provide annual funding to their local women’s centres. Additionally, other local governments support their centres by providing them with low (or no) cost office space. The municipalities of Port Coquitlam and Pitt Meadows, for instance, lease their local centres an entire house for the nominal fee of $1.00 a year. The money these centres save in rent is likely used to pay for additional services and programs.

6.2.5 Creation of National and Provincial Women’s Organizations

The national (National Action Committee or NAC) and provincial (B.C. & Yukon Association of Women’s Centre) women’s organizations have proven to be of great assistance to women’s centres. These organizations (whose memberships are made up of the members of women’s centres and other feminist groups) often advocate and lobby the federal and provincial governments for greater security in funding as well as more funding for women’s centres.
6.2.6 Access to Local Governments

In the last ten to fifteen years, women's access to local government has continued to increase, particularly in rural areas (Holmes 1997). This access has come about as more women have become active in the local political arena (e.g. as counsellors, school trustees, or committee members). With this increased access, women can more easily ensure that all city policies and activities reflect women's concerns. Moreover, with more women operating at the local government level, support and assistance for the activities initiated by women's centres is more or less assured. This interaction with the local government will become even more significant in the future as municipalities are increasingly bestowed with more federal and provincial social responsibilities, such as health.

Changing legislation at the federal and provincial levels has also benefited women's centres and the larger women's movement. These changes, which include somewhat stricter criminal penalties for rapists, child molesters, and stalkers, indicate to the public that women's centres, through their advocacy and lobbying actions, are achieving results.

6.2.7 Access to Charitable Dollars

Monies generated through casinos and bingos have proven vital to many women's centres. For example, last year (1996), 34% of the money generated by the North Shore Women's Centre came from a single casino night. This money is more than double that provided by the federal government, and almost equal to that provided by the Ministry of Women's Equality (it should be noted that the funding generated from casinos varies from year to year).
6.2.8 Potential for Collaboration

The potential to collaborate and share resources with other women-focused social service agencies may become lucrative to women's centres in the future, especially if government funding continues to dwindle. By working together, groups will not only be able to share equipment and office space, but they will also be able to exchange creative ideas and expertise. Other benefits of collaboration include decreased spending on the part of the individual agencies, and a greater possibility of receiving special project funding from the provincial government (i.e. the Ministry of Women's Equality looks favourably at organizations committed to working together).

6.3 Constraints

The constraints and barriers endured by women's centres have greatly affected the productivity and efficiency of all centres throughout B.C. These constraints and barriers include anti-feminist sentiments; fragmentation within the movement; funding; strict government guidelines; onerous paperwork; non-sympathetic governments; lack of resources; inability to fundraise; stress and burnout; internal pressures and disagreements; volunteer recruitment; changing demographics; the threat of amalgamation; and ineffective provincial organizations.29

6.3.1 Anti-Feminist Sentiments

Despite the many achievements of women's centres and the women's liberation movement in general, many individuals have been, and continue to be, threatened by women's new found power. These individuals claim that the movement is disruptive and led by bitter, angry women

29 These constraints are not limited to women's centres but are also a reality of most other non-profit organizations in Canada.
who are out to destroy the family, church, and all that is “good and right” (Brown 1991: 1). The goal of the backlash has been to maintain and sustain the status quo by promoting women’s submission through fear and intimidation. Consequently, women who fight for their issues are frequently attacked and ridiculed. This backlash has had a significant effect on women’s centres. First, it affects recruitment, as many community women fear being labeled “feminist.” Second, the backlash has made many of the women working in the centres hesitant to voice their concerns in the community for fear of negative feedback. And third, opponents, believing that women’s groups should not be granted government funding, often criticize governments for wasting valuable public funds. This type of opposition has had some effect, especially at the federal level where funding for women’s centres has been decreasing since the early-to-mid 1980s. These anti-feminist sentiments were felt by the North Shore Women’s Centre when they first began to hold their Pub Nights in the early 1970s. Many men felt that it was not a woman’s place to drink beer and discuss politics. Rather, they felt that women should be at home attending to their homes and families.

6.3.2 Fragmentation Within the Movement

As became evident in the literature review, there have been intense internal struggles within the feminist movement. This fragmentation has plagued women’s centres. For example, there are often times when women within various centres become divided over such issues as: the degree of feminism the centre should adopt (e.g. extreme versus soft); reliance on government funding (i.e. should the centre become institutionalized or try to remain grassroots); and the issues or actions which should be given priority. Despite its homogeneity, even the North Shore Women’s Centre has been divided at various points in its history. For example, in the late 1970s, a small
number of the members believed that the centre should become more radical. Other members, however, felt that this would not be appropriate as it would scare off potential new members.

This fragmentation is also evident among women's centres. More radical centres will often criticize other centres for not taking on a strong enough feminist stance. For example, the Port Coquitlam Women's Centre was castigated for accepting federal funding and for becoming institutionalized in the early 1970s (Le Francois 1979: 66).

6.3.3 Funding

The instability of government funding, at all levels, is a source of frustration and strain for centres across the province. Instability arises because centres are constantly unsure if their yearly funding applications will be approved. Consequently, they cannot plan long-term programs or services since they do not know if they will be able to afford them.

This instability in funding has been evident since the mid-1980s. The federal Progressive Conservative Government came to power in 1984 and immediately implemented a policy of government restraint. This resulted in federal cuts and caps on all social programs, including the Women's Program. The constraint program was most apparent in 1990, when the Department of the Secretary of State cut the funding to women's centres across the country. With funding cut, many centres, particularly those in rural areas, were forced to close their doors since they had no alternative funding source. Even larger, urban and suburban centres were greatly affected. These centres were forced to decrease their hours, lay off staff, and eliminate the bulk of their programs and services. The spirit of all centres was also damaged during this time as members lost their energy and enthusiasm. For the North Shore Women's Centre, this spirit was not rekindled for at least two years.
6.3.4 Strict Government Guidelines

Most women’s centres feel that strict government funding guidelines imposed on them by the federal and provincial governments has stolen their grassroots component away from them. That is, their ability to cater to the women in their community by providing them with the unique programs and services they require has been taken away. Furthermore, as future governments become more concerned with accountability and efficiency, centres will become even more restricted. For example, both Status of Women Canada’s new funding mechanism, as well as the Ministry of Women’s Equality’s Contract Reform policy emphasize that centres must provide a consistent set of services (with some leeway). This has caused much recent reaction among feminist groups who feel that governments, by attempting to gain even more control over them, are trying to institutionalize their work even further.

6.3.5 Onerous Paperwork

Currently, women’s centres must apply to governments, at all levels, for funding on a yearly basis. Moreover, they must also complete evaluation reports at least once a year. This process is time-consuming, onerous, and takes away from staff and/or board members valuable time and energy which could be spent planning new programs and services. Moreover, for centres that are unable to decipher the complicated forms, it can also be very stressful and cause increased tension within the centre. Notably, some of this stress may be relieved in the next several years, given that both the federal and provincial governments have promised to introduce “continuous funding.” However, with continuous funding, governments will likely require that centres complete lengthy evaluation forms on a much more frequent basis. In this way, governments can prove to the public that women’s centres are being held accountable and are therefore not wasting valuable funds.
6.3.6 Non-Sympathetic Governments

Government cuts and restraints are most likely to occur when governments who do not believe that they should fund "special interest groups" are in power. This includes the Reform Government and the Progressive Conservative Government to some degree. The North Vancouver Reform MP Ted White, for example, feels that:

The future well being of women's centres, in the light of decreased federal funding, clearly lies in the hands of the women's centres themselves, and the communities in which they are located. Greater self-sufficiency, and possibly complete independence are the future reality (Correspondence).

Statements like these are made by the members of the Reform Party who believe that women have already achieved full equality. Sharon Hayes, the former Reform MP for Port-Moody Coquitlam, stated in 1996 that:

Reform believes equality under the law and an equal opportunity for all people to participate and contribute to society, and principles that will build our country. Rights based on irrelevant and unreasonable criteria claimed by one group at the expense of another fundamentally negate human rights (A19).

The rights which Hayes believes to be unreasonable include the right to child care, the right to end the feminization of poverty, and the right to have transition houses (and other similar services) for women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

The Reform influence is becoming a growing reality in British Columbia, as was evident in the last federal election when over 90% of the B.C. seats in the House of Commons were filled by Reformers. The current political environment has therefore left women's centres apprehensive and unsure about their future.

6.3.7 Lack of Resources

One major constraint which often limits the ability of staff and members to carry out the activities of their centres is a lack of time and resources. For example, at the North Shore
Women's Centre, staff members have been unable to participate in a number of community groups, as well as other initiatives being pursued by governmental and non-governmental organizations, because they are often too busy. Accordingly, by limiting their involvement in the community, the centre has missed opportunities to become involved in lucrative and funded projects which focus on women. Additionally, the limited exposure of the centre in the community also serves to lower its profile. This is demonstrated by the fact that a number of non-profit groups on the North Shore are unfamiliar with the centre’s work. The present board at the centre is determined to change this situation and improve the centre's community image.

6.3.8 Inability to Fundraise

Ideally, women's centres want to reduce their dependency on government funding and become more self-sufficient. Unfortunately, very few centres have been able to achieve this goal for a number of reasons. First, because women's centres have become so dependent on government funds, they have invested little time and energy in learning important fundraising skills. Second, it is very difficult for women's centres to “be creative” in fundraising given limited time and money (Shannon 1997). Third, centres are having to compete for non-governmental funds with higher profile, established, and mainstream institutions and organizations such as hospitals and universities. Consequently, they find it difficult to compete for charity dollars (Johnstone 1996). And fourth, the main group upon which women’s centres must rely for their charity money is their own membership clientele. The majority of these women do not have the financial ability to adequately sustain the centres.
6.3.9 Stress and Burnout

Stress and burnout are frequently suffered by those who work in nurturing professional environments such as women's centres. Staff and members are constantly worrying about funding. Due to employee and volunteer shortages, staff usually work long hours and are unable to take sufficient time for themselves. Working with women in crisis is often emotionally draining. Tensions which arise between the members of a centre (e.g. between the board and staff) are likely to result in increased strain and stress. And finally, women's centres are under increasing pressures from communities to provide needed social services. The struggle to fulfill these needs, while still trying to carry out other activities, can be very stressful.

The symptoms of burnout include fatigue, a lack of energy, and depression. Often, those who suffer from the condition are unable to continue to work, and thus have to take a medical leave of absence or resign from their position altogether. This, in turn, affects the operations of the centre, especially if the woman who has “burnt out” is active. For example, a key staff person from the North Shore Women’s Centre recently had to resign from her position due to burnout. For several months following her resignation, the centre was in a state of disorder as the board members were having a difficult time finding a replacement.

6.3.10 Internal Pressures and Tensions

A difference in personality, a disagreement over the future direction and goals of the centre, as well as a lack of clarity around the membership (particularly staff and board members) roles and responsibilities, often causes a great deal of pressure and tension within women’s centres. Frequently, the repercussions resulting from these tensions and pressures can be harmful to the stability of the centre. For example, members may choose or be forced to resign or take a leave
from the centre. The North Shore Women’s Centre recently experienced such internal pressure over disagreements on how to handle a difficult staff situation. The pressures led to the resignation of half of the board members.

6.3.11 Volunteer Recruitment

Women’s centres are finding it increasingly difficult to rely on volunteer labour to perform core talks and programs. Volunteer time is scare as women have become increasingly busy trying to balance the various demands placed on them by work, family, and the community. Accordingly, most of the women who presently volunteer at centres are in a transitional phase of their life. That is, they are between work, schooling, motherhood or other life passages. These women are thus unable to commit themselves to continuous and long-term (more than six months) volunteering because of the unpredictability of their lives (NSWC 1997a: 15).

At the North Shore Women’s Centre (as is likely the case at other women’s centres) they are also receiving more applications from volunteers requiring special supervision, such as immigrants with English as a second language; women with very limited job skills in pre-employment programs seeking practicums; and those with serious mental or physical disabilities or mental health issues (15). Although the centre supports, in philosophy, the idea of providing access to volunteers from all backgrounds and capabilities, it is impossible for them to give these women the extra training, support, or supervision they require because of limited staff and resources.

6.3.12 Changing Demographics

Although changing demographics are positive and serve only to make communities richer through diversity, these changes do create a certain degree of strain for women’s centres. This strain results from the fact that women’s centres must continuously change the focus of their
work in order to adequately meet the needs of new groups of women living in the area. This constant evolution is, at times, quite challenging given the centres’ lack of resources (staff and funding). Consequently, centres will frequently be forced to forsake a more established program in order to make room for a new activity.

6.3.13 Threat of Amalgamation

In 1996, the Community Social Services Employers Association discussed the potential amalgamations of agencies (such as women’s centres, rape crisis centres, and transition houses) in order to achieve administrative efficiency (Huang 1996: 10). This greatly concerned these social change agencies as they feared they would lose their autonomy, mandate, and philosophies. Although this threat has subsided, women’s centres worry that it will surface again as governments become increasingly fixated on efficiency and accountability.

6.3.14 Ineffective Provincial Organizations

Since the early 1990s, the B.C. & Yukon Association of Women’s Centres has become fragile and ineffective. The repercussions of this have been quite significant. For example, the members of women’s centres in B.C. no longer have a forum through which they can share their ideas. Furthermore, without a strong provincial organization the image of women’s centres as a strong united group is lost. This affects the legitimacy of women’s centres as the public perceives them to be fragmented and disorganized.

6.4 Summary

Women’s centres across British Columbia have been active in the development of communities. For example, they have initiated new services, educated and empowered women (and entire
communities), and contributed to the economic base of communities. Women's centres have been able to achieve this as they have been afforded a number of opportunities since the early 1970s, such as funding or access to local governments. However, centres have also faced numerous constraints that have restricted them as well. These constraints, which include strict government guidelines and onerous paper work, have caused much strain and frustration in the work performed by the members of women's centres.

The following chapter is the conclusion of this thesis. This chapter focuses on the contributions women's centres have made to the gender and planning tradition and the value of women's centres in planning. Future directions for federal, provincial, and municipal, as well as women's centres are also explored.
7. CONCLUSION

Women's centres have been actively and successfully involved in the planning process in communities across B.C. since the early 1970s. This final chapter explores how this has been accomplished as well as the value that this planning has had in communities. Additionally, the future directions for federal, provincial, municipal governments, and women’s centres are considered.

7.1 Contributions to Gender Sensitive Planning

This thesis has been written on the basis of principles promoted by the gender approach to planning. For example:

- It assumes that women are exploited, oppressed, or devalued in society;
- It takes the needs, interests, and experiences of women into account;
- It has tried to reveal how traditional planning practices have ignored women’s needs; and
- By revealing the important social service role that women’s centres have made to communities, it is hoped that this thesis will lead to the long term stability and growth of centres in British Columbia. With women’s centres firmly established, the situation of all women will continue to improve.

Moreover, through this thesis, I have hoped to help fill a gap which currently exists in the gender and planning literature. That gap is the link between feminist planning theory and feminist activism. I have tried to accomplish this by demonstrating how grassroots women have, throughout history, come together in order to improve their lives and the lives of their families. Women’s centres are part of this rich tradition, and were used to highlight the extent and value of women’s roles in the planning of communities.
7.2 The Value of Women's Centres in Planning

Through their various contributions – community development, social development, personal development, and community economic development – women’s centres have contributed to the planning of communities throughout the province.

7.2.1 Community Development

Women’s centres, in identifying women’s and children’s unmet needs in communities and in seeking to fulfill these needs, have been carrying out a recognizable process of community development planning. This process is characterized as follows:

a) members of the community must fully organize and participate fully in the organizations or institutions they create;

b) community members must share responsibility for the identification of community problems and for designing solutions to these problems;

c) the role of outsiders must, when possible, be limited to the provision of needed funds, materials, and technical expertise so that the community retains control over the planning of its own future;

d) community development is a learning process, and community development initiatives must be used to enhance the planning, administrative, and technical skills of the community; and

e) extensive and open discussion should be the norm, and community consensus should be sought whenever possible (McMillan 1991: 5).

The differences between this form of planning and that developed by women’s centres include the following. First, the “community” upon which women’s centres focus is formed primarily of women and children. Second, women’s centres are cognizant of the changing needs of women in their community planning process. Therefore, the programs and services they create are constantly evolving in order to meet those changing needs. And third, the ultimate aim of the
community development planning carried out by women's centres is to change the patriarchal nature of societies and thus to create communities which are fair and equitable to all people.

7.2.2 Social Development

Through education, women's centres cause all people (individual women and whole communities) to become aware of the numerous oppressions which affect women in their daily lives. This knowledge is empowering and affects the planning of communities indirectly. For example, a woman who learns of her extreme disadvantages in the housing market may organize a lobby group (made up of other women and men facing similar situations) and pressure governments to create more accessible and low cost housing alternatives. Moreover, governmental and non-governmental agencies, by becoming more aware of women's issues, may also begin to plan and fund services which seek to fill women's needs. These include women's health collectives, and rape crisis centres.

7.2.3 Personal Development

The skills and confidence women gain through their participation in women's centres also contributes to the planning process in a number of ways. First, women who feel more competent may begin to actively participate in the planning process (i.e. by sitting on council-struck committees or by attending council meetings). Second, women, by gaining skills, can begin to make positive contributions to society (i.e. through labour). And third, women, as they gain power by gaining confidence, will in turn demand that local, provincial, and federal government planners take their needs into account in the formulation of future activities and policies.
7.2.4 Community Economic Development

By involving themselves in community economic development initiatives, women’s centres can make a positive social and economic contribution to communities. For example, they can provide important employment opportunities; generate income in the local community (as well as provide an alternative economic base); and create essential services within the community which would otherwise not exist (i.e. housing for single parents or community kitchens).

7.2.5 Other Contributions

Together with the above contributions, community planners can also learn the following from women’s centres:

- how to remain flexible and provide for the multitude of people’s needs in communities;
- how to survive despite the existence of numerous barriers and constraints; and
- how to incorporate important collaborative and feminist techniques for consultation and outreach (particularly to the more vulnerable women and men living in society).

If these important contributions that women’s centres make to the planning process are to endure, federal, provincial and municipal governments, along with women’s centres themselves, must actively pursue a number of new directions. Each of these will now be briefly examined.

7.3 Directions for Federal and Provincial Planners

Federal and provincial governments must continue to recognize and support the important social service role that women’s centres provide to women living throughout both B.C. and Canada. Moreover, this support must continue until all women have achieved full equality and a fair and just society is created. This future society would be concerned with: the creation of a well-developed services network dealing with issues of violence against women; the establishment of high quality and affordable child care; the implementation of a housing policy which would be
sensitive to all persons needs, despite differences in class, race, gender, and sexual orientation, and the formation of public spaces which are friendly to all people, including women, children, the disabled, and the elderly (Andrew 1992: 109-110).

The means through which federal and provincial governments can demonstrate their support for women's centres include the following:

1. Federal and provincial governments should work collaboratively with women's centres— together they can define what services and programs are necessary and should be given priority in specific communities;

2. While accountability must be present, federal and provincial governments should work with women's centres, and other non-profit organizations, to determine the format of funding applications in order to ensure that they are not overly bureaucratic (i.e. complicated, incomprehensive, and lengthy);

3. Federal and provincial governments should consult, more frequently, the opinions of the members of women's centres in future funding priorities, policy orientation, research, and other initiatives. This would require governments to develop less hierarchical and more collaborative and egalitarian forms of consultation;

4. Federal and provincial governments should continue to provide all women's centres with continuous funding and should, whenever possible, increase the amount of funding made available to women's centres;

5. Federal and provincial governments can provide training (i.e. in fundraising, community economic development, and the Internet) and the tools (i.e. computers, modems, and software) needed to assist women's centres to become more self-sufficient; and

6. Federal and provincial governments should ensure that the future amalgamation of women's centres with transition houses and rape crisis centres does not materialize.

7.4 Directions for Local Governments and Municipal Planners

As the area of impact for women's centres, as well as other social service agencies, is the local community, it is important that local governments and planners continue to form close relationships with these groups. These relationships will become increasingly crucial, moreover,
as local governments continue to be down-loaded with the social responsibilities of the federal and provincial governments.

The relationship planners can maintain with women’s centres, and other social service agencies, include the following:

1. Municipal planners should recognize the important role social service agencies, like women’s centres, play in communities;
2. Local governments should give community agencies legitimacy by formalizing their role in the local planning process;
3. Municipal planners should involve the members of the community, whenever possible, in the community planning process;
4. Municipal planners should make themselves accessible to local agencies and provide them with support, advice, and assistance whenever possible;
5. Local governments should continue to support, monetarily, social service agencies;
6. Local governments should provide free maintenance (internal and external) to the spaces local agencies occupy; and
7. Municipal planners should seek out lower cost public facilities (such as municipal-owned housing) which could be occupied by women’s centres and other agencies.

7.5 Directions for Women’s Centres

The future ability of women’s centres to act as social change agencies may be jeopardized given decreasing government funding at all levels. The end result may be detrimental to women living throughout the province, given that women’s centres have not yet achieved their ultimate goal: to create a fair and just society where all people are equal. The continued existence of inequality in society is reflected in the fact that over one half of women in B.C. continue to experience physical and sexual violence; 82% of women head single parent families, many of whom are living in poverty; and the unavailability of low cost day care continues to limit women’s options (Ministry of Women’s Equality 1994/1995: 3). Thus, the directions women’s centres choose to
follow individually, or as a collective, in order to achieve greater self sufficiency and harmony is critical. Some possible recommendations (suggested through the various interviews conducted) include greater reliance on the Internet; definition of roles; focus on moral support; focus on collaboration; positive community image; strong umbrella organization; community economic development; private foundations; and new women’s movement.

7.5.1 Greater Reliance on the Internet

The possibilities associated with the future use of the Internet by women’s centres seems limitless for a number of reasons. First, it can serve as a mechanism to reduce the isolation of women’s centres, particularly those located in rural regions. Second, it can prove to be an effective means through which the members of centres can communicate with one another and exchange creative ideas. Third, the Internet may be an extremely effective lobbying and advocacy tool. For example, it will allow for a near instantaneous response on the part of women’s centres to various government departments on relevant issues. Moreover, if all centres respond to issues at once, they will appear to be united and strong, and thus governments will have a more difficult time “dodging” their issues (Holmes 1997). Fourth and finally, the Internet as proved by the Sunshine Coast Women’s Centre, can be an effective means through which future employment can be generated.

7.5.2 Definition of Roles

The first step the members of a women’s centre must take, if they wish to remain effective, is to ensure that each person’s role in the centre is clarified. This has been one of the more significant problems faced by the NSWC. Board members and staff are continuously in disagreement over what their role in the centre should be. This clarification can be achieved through the creation of
more specific job descriptions and through the participation in board development courses. Additionally, members must also, as a team, establish and agree upon the future direction of the centre. If this is achieved, then the future stability and longevity of women's centres will be enhanced.

7.5.3 Focus on Moral Support

The high levels of burnout and stress experienced by the members of women's centres (particularly by the staff) should be a major concern for entire memberships if they wish to secure the long-term stability of their centres. This can be achieved in a number of ways. For example, board members can be less optimistic (and more realistic) about the limits of their staff. That is, they should not assign staff impossible mandates and should assist staff who are over-worked. It is perhaps more important that members are more nurturing and supportive of one another. This can simply involve acknowledging the work performed by individuals (though kind words or even a small token) and offering constant encouragement and moral support.

7.5.4 Focus on Collaboration

Trends indicate that women's centres may have to collaborate more vigorously with other non-profit groups in their community. This will benefit centres as they will be able to exchange and share ideas, resources, and costs with various agencies. Additionally, agencies can together apply for funding for specific projects (e.g. the North Shore Women's Centres' Mid-Life Women: Strategies for Action Project). By doing so, they will be able to share both workload and staff time. One potentially harmful effect of this collaboration, however, is amalgamation. Strong and more wealthy organizations can potentially "take over" women's centres and hence steal away from them their unique philosophies, structure, and image. Consequently, women's centres must
be cautious in their collaborations and continuously define for themselves, and other groups, their identity.

7.5.5 Positive Community Image

Some believe the future of women's centres will rest in the members' ability to create for their centre a positive image in their respected communities. This can be accomplished through greater networking and involvement in the community; positive media coverage; by offering more extensive programs and services to the various groups of women in the community; and by dispelling the myths associated with feminism. It is hoped that this improvement in the image of women's centres will also allow them to more readily and easily access community funds.

7.5.6 Strong Umbrella Organization

Women's centres across Canada should work together and create strong umbrella organizations at either provincial or regional levels. The role of these organizations would be to represent the interests of all women's centres, to allow for networking opportunities to be created between centres, and to act as strong advocates and lobby groups. In B.C. this new organization could either be resurrected from the remnants left over by the B.C. & Y Association of Women's Centres, or it could be a newly created body.

7.5.7 Community Economic Development

Women's centres seem to be considering, more seriously, the prospect of involving themselves in community economic development initiatives. They see these activities as an exciting new way to contribute to the economic and social development of their communities, as well as to gain self-sufficiency. Some exciting projects which women at the various centres (Port
Coquitlam and South Surrey/White Rock) stated that they wished to pursue include a women’s bank, community kitchens, community gardens, health food stores, and housing cooperative.

7.5.8 Private Foundations

The creation of a women’s fundraising institution, such as the “Women’s United Way” could be an effective way for women’s centres to achieve self-sufficiency. This institution would be women controlled – meaning women would shape the structure, raise the money, and allocate the funds (Lederer 1991: 40). Furthermore, if such a foundation were to be created by women’s centres themselves, the centres involved would be guaranteed funding on a long-term basis.

7.5.9 New Women’s Movement

The idea of women’s centres coming together and working as a movement could be a potential prospect for the future. In this movement, women’s centres would no longer be focusing on the specific needs of the individual women in their communities, but would, instead, focus on issues which affect all women. The centres organized in this “Grassroots Feminist Movement” would draw their strength from their unity, thus abandoning much of the conflict which currently divides them (e.g. the division between minority women and white, middle-class women). It would then be up to the women to decide where centres are most needed and what services should be provided.

7.6 Summary

The purpose of this thesis was to make a contribution to contemporary planning literature, in particular, feminist planning literature. Specifically, it aims to fill a gap which, Sandercock and Forsyth identified exists in feminist planning literature. This gap is the connection between
feminist planning theory and feminist community activism. This connection is important given that women's community activism has traditionally had much influence over the creation of essential social services in most Canadian communities.

This thesis has sought to connect feminist planning theory to feminist community activism primarily through a thorough examination of one of the most successful grassroots social change agencies created – the women's centre. Through a survey, case study, and analysis the general and unique contributions women's centres have made to communities were explored. These contributions have been made primarily in the offering of various services and programs to women throughout the province.
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APPENDIX A - LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

FOUNDING MEMBERS OF THE NORTH SHORE WOMEN’S CENTRE
Group Interview Wednesday June 11, 1997 (approximately 3 hours)

Participants: Tina Alias, Margaret Campbell, Faye Cooper, Julia Covell, Shirley Freund, Lee Grills, Andrea Kiss, Ann Marie Lawrence, Carol McQuarrie, Margaret Roy, Tia Strachan, and June Thompson

Questions:

• How did it all begin? That is, who initiated the idea? How did you all come together?

• Why did you think that a ‘Women’s Centre’ was a necessary service for the North Shore? i.e. were there gaps in the services offered to women

• What was your first year of meetings like? (where were they held, how many women were part of it, how often did you meet, what were the issues discussed?)

• What barriers or conflicts did you encounter (if any) when you first began to plan the Women’s Centre?

• Were there any opportunities that you could take advantage of to help you establish the Centre?

• Was the community supportive of the idea of a Women’s Centre?

• Did you receive any financial support for the Centre? What were the sources of this support? How long did it take you to establish more permanent funding?

• Where was the original location of the Centre?

• What were the services and programs offered (lobbying, drop-in, information & referral, special projects)? How many staff and volunteers did you have to help carry these out?

• What was your membership like? Were North Shore women using the Centre?

• What was the structure of the Centre? How did it operate? (leadership, meeting procedures, committee groups, etc.)

• Was there a lot of networking going on with other Centres throughout the Lower Mainland? (were Centres supportive of each other?)

• What were the Centre’s greatest achievements? (i.e. Emily Murphy House)
• What contributions do you think the Women's Centre has made to the North Shore Community?

• What do you think is the future of the North Shore Women’s Centre?

**PATTY HOLMES:**
PROGRAM OFFICER B.C. & YUKON, STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA
June 13, 1997 (approximately 1.5 hours)

*Questions:*

• What contributions do you think women's centres make to the communities in which they are situated? What do you think their role or purpose is in communities?

• What do you think communities would be like without women’s centres?

• What do women’s centres need to do in the future to increase their effectiveness?

• What kinds of obstacles exist which prohibit centres from carrying out their activities?

**KATHRYN WAHAMAA and ESTHER SHANNON:**
REGIONAL COORDINATORS, MINISTRY OF WOMEN’S EQUALITY
June 17, 1997 (approximately 1.5 hours)

*Questions:*

• What contributions do women’s centres make to communities? What is their purpose or role?

• Can you tell me about the role of the B.C. & Yukon Association of Women’s Centres?

• How can women’s centres increase their effectiveness in their communities?

• Additional Comments…

**DOROTHY WOLF:**
ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTH SHORE WOMEN'S CENTRE
June 19, 1997 (approximately 2 hours)

*Questions:*

• What do you think the role of the women’s centre is in the community? What contributions does it make?
• How can this role be made more effective?
• Do you have any ideas about what the future of the women’s centre might be?
• What have been your initial reactions to the women’s centre? What do you like about it, what do you not like?
• What is your perception of how the women that use the centre feel about it?
• What sorts of benefits are there for community women that use the centre. That is, what can a women expect to gain (in terms of confidence, skills training, etc.)
• How can the centre reach out to more women?
• Additional comments...

TINA HURD:
VOLUNTEER CENTRE COORDINATOR, NORTH SHORE WOMEN’S CENTRE
June 19, 1997 (approximately 1 hour)

Questions:
• What do you think the role of the women’s centre is in the community? What contributions does it make?
• How can this role be made more effective?
• What kind of programming should the women’s centre pursue?
• What do women come to the centre for, what are their needs?
• What is the centres role in the community?
• How do the women that use the centre feel about it?

ANN FROST:
BOARD MEMBER AND CHAIR, NORTH SHORE WOMEN’S CENTRE
June 26, 1997 (approximately 1.5 hours)

Questions:
• Why did you decide to become a member of the NSWC?
• What has this membership meant to you?
• What contributions do you think the centre has made to the community?
• What do you think is the Centres role in the community?
• How can the role of the centre be made more effective?
• How do you think the community perceives the centre?
• What direction do you think the centre should move toward in the future?

JOY SMITH:
BOARD MEMBER AND EDITOR OF THE NELLIE, NORTH SHORE WOMEN’S CENTRE
June 27, 1997 (approximately 45 minutes)

Questions:
• Why did you decide to become a member of the NSWC?
• What has the centre meant to you?
• What is the role of the centre in the community?
• How can the centres role be made more effective?
• What do we do for our clients?
• What is the future of the Centre?
APPENDIX B - LIST OF WOMEN’S CENTRES (including addresses and telephone numbers).
Centres are listed according to the list presented on page 33.

**Terrace Women’s Centre**
4542 Park Avenue
Terrace, B.C. V8G 1V4
Tel: 638-0228  Fax: 638-1141

**Chetwynd Women’s Resource Society**
Box 626-4901 South Access
Chetwynd, B.C. V0C 1J0
Tel: 788-3793  Fax: 788-3726

**100 Mile House & District Women’s Centre Society**
Box 1930
#102-475 S. Birch Avenue
100 Mile House B.C. V0K 2E0
Tel: 395-4093  Fax: 395-4012

**Contact Women’s Group Society**
Box 4094 - #70 South 1st Avenue
Williams Lake, B.C. V2G 2V2
Tel: 392-4118  Fax: 392-4145

**Quesnel Women’s Resource Centre**
690 McLean Street
Quesnel, B.C. V2J 2P6
Tel: 992-8472  Fax: 992-6160

**Fernie Women’s Resource and Drop-In Centre**
Box 2054
Fernie, B.C. V0B 1M0
Tel: 423-4687  Fax: 423-3633

**Cranbrook Women’s Resource Society**
20A-12th Avenue North
Cranbrook, B.C. V1C 3V7
Tel: 426-2912  Fax: 426-3373

**Boundary Women’s Resource Centre**
Box 903
334 Market Avenue
Grand Forks, B.C. V0H 1H0
Tel: 442-5212  Fax: 442-3600
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>City, Province</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Fax</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nelson &amp; District Women's Centre</strong></td>
<td>420 Mill Street</td>
<td>Nelson, B.C. V1L 4R9</td>
<td>352-9916</td>
<td>352-7100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kamloops Women's Resource Centre</strong></td>
<td>#7E-750 Cottonwood Avenue</td>
<td>Kamloops, B.C. V2B 3X2</td>
<td>376-3009</td>
<td>376-3080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Penticton &amp; Area Women's Centre</strong></td>
<td>#8-88 Duncan Avenue, West</td>
<td>Penticton, B.C. V2A 7J7</td>
<td>493-6822</td>
<td>493-6827</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Vernon &amp; District Women's Centre Society</strong></td>
<td>3406 28th Avenue</td>
<td>Vernon, B.C. V1T 6N6</td>
<td>542-7531</td>
<td>545-6406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Golden Women's Resource Centre</strong></td>
<td>Box 2343</td>
<td>Golden, B.C. V0A 1H0</td>
<td>344-5317</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ridge Meadows Women's Centre</strong></td>
<td>12229 Harris Road</td>
<td>Pitt Meadows, B.C. V3Y 2E9</td>
<td>460-0064</td>
<td>465-3807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Howe Sound Women's Centre</strong></td>
<td>38132-2nd Avenue</td>
<td>Squamish, B.C.</td>
<td>892-5748</td>
<td>892-5749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philippine Women's Centre</strong></td>
<td>451 Powell Street</td>
<td>Vancouver, B.C. V6A 1G7</td>
<td>215-1103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Downtown Eastside Women's Centre</strong></td>
<td>44 East Cordova Street</td>
<td>Vancouver, B.C.</td>
<td>681-8480</td>
<td></td>
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Sunshine Coast Women’s Resource Centre
5645 Wharf Street
Box 1443
Schelt, B.C. VON 3A0
Tel/Fax: 885-4088
Email: women_resources@sunshine.net
Website: http://www.sunshine.net/www/400/sn0470

South Surrey/White Rock Women’s Place
15318-20th Avenue
Surrey, B.C. V4A 2A2
Tel: 536-9611 Fax: 536-6362

Vancouver Lesbian Connection
876 Commercial Drive
Vancouver, B.C.
Tel: 254-8458 Fax: 254-8115

Richmond Women’s Resource Centre
110-7000 Minoru Blvd.
Richmond, B.C. V6Y 3Z5
Tel: 279-7060 Fax: 279-7069

Port Coquitlam Area Women’s Centre
2420 Mary Hill Road
Port Coquitlam, B.C. V3C 3B1
Tel: 941-6311 Fax: 941-9275

Surrey Women’s Centre Society
P.O. Box 33519, Surrey Place Mall
Surrey, B.C. V3T 5R5
Tel: 589-8373 Fax: 589-2812

Indian Homemakers’ Association of B.C.
208-175 East Broadway
Vancouver, B.C. V5T 1W2
Tel: 876-0944 Fax: 876-1448

North Shore Women’s Centre
3093 Lonsdale Avenue
North Vancouver, B.C. V7N 3J6
Tel: 984-6009 Fax: 980-4661

Vancouver Status of Women
Suite 301-1720 Grant Street
Vancouver, B.C. V5L 2Y6
Tel/Fax: 255-5511
Victoria Status of Women Action Group
Suite 200-506 Fort Street
Victoria, B.C. V8W 3S1
Tel: 383-7322 Fax: 388-0100

Port Alberni Women’s Centre
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Port Alberni, B.C. V9Y 2E3
Tel: 724-7111 Fax: 724-7113

Cowichan Spirit of Women: Women’s Resource Centre
301 Brae Road
Duncan, B.C. V9L 3T9
Tel: 746-6022 Fax: 748-8722

The Campbell River Area Women’s Centre
457-10th Avenue
Campbell River, B.C. V9W 4E4
Tel: 287-3044 Fax: 287-3038

Westcoast Women’s Resource Society
P.O. Box 868
1509 Peninsula Road, Ucluelet, B.C.
Tel: 726-2343 Fax: 726-2353

Comox Women’s Resource Centre
#103-780 Grant Avenue
Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N4
Tel: 338-1133 Fax: 334-9251
APPENDIX C - OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF STATUS OF WOMEN CANADA

Source - Status of Women Canada 1996b: 95
APPENDIX D - OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN'S EQUALITY

APPENDIX E - OVERVIEW OF THE NORTH SHORE WOMEN’S CENTRE

History

In the spring of 1973 a group of women on the North Shore were participating in a series of extension courses that were being offered by Capilano College, entitled *Explorations*. These courses, which focused on a variety of topics relevant to women at the time (i.e. alternative career choices), were held in different locations on the North Shore, such as high schools and churches (Todd 1997).

During the time that the *Explorations* series was taking place, female faculty members were discussing the possibility of starting a women’s studies program at the college. As a way of gaining support and assistance in their endeavour, the faculty members brought their ideas to the community women who were attending the series. The result - a ten member committee was formed (consisting of two faculty, two staff, two students, and four community women) to explore and initiate this program. The committee, feeling that they needed a base to work from, as well as a place through which courses could be offered, also decided to create a women’s centre at the college. This centre, as well as the women’s studies program, was initially supported and funded by the provincial NDP government.

Although the community women (who were still involved in *Explorations*) were supportive of the committee’s work, they also felt that the discussion of women’s issues should not be confined to an academic environment. Instead, they felt these issues should be brought into the wider community as it was there that women’s oppressions were taking place. Accordingly, it was decided by the women, during one of their evening classes which was being held at St. David’s Church in North Vancouver, that a women’s centre was needed within the community. The women resolved that in order to make this idea a reality, they must meet regularly, outside of the *Explorations* series, in order to discuss and plan their future actions. The women agreed to meet, on a bi-weekly basis, at a local community facility called the North Shore Neighbourhood House. With much enthusiasm, the women promptly established a working board and began to plan social activities, at least once a month, in order to “draw in” potential members. These activities included book readings, discussion groups, workshops featuring professional speakers, and entertainment. Incidentally, these social evenings, which were dubbed “Pub Nights,” were alternated with more structured business meetings (NSWC June 1975).

The women continued to meet on a regular basis at the North Shore Neighbourhood House for the next two years. By 1975, they had 29 paying members ($3.00 per year), a grant from the Department of the Secretary of State for an amount of $500 (in 1974), a constitution, a newsletter, and a name (Kiss 1975 Correspondence). They were also beginning to become more involved in the social development of the community. For example, in June 1975, the members attended a workshop entitled *Sexism, Schools, and Society*, which was held for North Vancouver teachers, parents, students, and the general public. After the workshop, the women who attended decided that there was a “need for parents, teachers, and students in North Vancouver to realize their collective power and accept the responsibility to change the school system and organize to

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30 The reason why courses had to be held in different locations on the North Shore was because the campus had not yet been fully completed (Todd 1997).
eliminate sexism” (NSWC June 1975). The committee that formed following this meeting received a four month grant from the Department of Education to investigate sexism in schools. The women’s centre was very much involved in this project and, in fact, became a close affiliate of the group (NSWC September 1975).

With this growing involvement in the community, the members of the North Shore Women’s Centre decided that an office space, which included a drop-in room, meeting place, phone line, and a paid staff person was necessary (NSWC September 1975). Thus, by September 1975, a space was secured and the centre was established (although the centre did not become registered as a non-profit society until 1980).

Office Space

The first office consisted of a single room in Highlands United Church in North Vancouver. Although this space was not located in a busy pedestrian area and was therefore not visible to women “passing by,” it did have many benefits. For instance, it was essentially rent free, as the women only had to pay a small utility fee; it had a very nice atmosphere; and the women had access to other rooms in the Church, including a large meeting room and a smaller room which they used as a play area for their children (McQuarrie and Lawrence 1997).

This first office space had an important effect on the development of they centre as it gave the members a secure base from which to work:

So when we had an office space that changed some of what we were doing because we never had a base before. With the office we started a referral service, we had a phone, we had a place where women could phone in and find out about what we had on file about a doctor, that type of thing (McQuarrie 1997).

The North Shore Women’s Centre remained in this space for the following seven years. On October 31, 1982 they moved into Delbrook Community Centre (in North Vancouver), where low rent office spaces were made available to local community groups. This office was a small room – “it was like a tiny bathroom” – however, it had the advantage of being located next to other agencies with which the women could network and share resources (Lawrence 1997).

By July of 1984, the office was moved again, this time to a centrally located space in the heart of the City of North Vancouver (on 15th Street off Lonsdale Avenue). This move was made as it was felt that a larger, private, and more comfortable space, which was accessible to greater numbers of women, was needed:

One of the most important roles a women’s centre has is providing a supportive environment for women to gather. We need a comfortable, pleasant place that belongs to us, where we can work, play, and share our experiences and knowledge (NSWC July 1984: 2).

Furthermore, from this space the women believed that they could “gain enough collective power and emotional and intellectual strength to effect the social changes desired” (NSWC July 1984: 2).
Four years passed before the centre was moved again, this time to a bright new office on West First Street (NSWC September/October 1988: 3). However, this location was short-lived. Less than a year later (in the spring of 1989), the centre moved back to a more centrally located office space which, like their previous office, was situated on 15th Street (NSWC Spring/Summer 1989: 1).

Finally, in April of 1993, the NSWC made a final move to their current location. This office, which is located on upper Lonsdale Avenue, is shared with the North Shore Crisis Services Society. The office is not central. However, it is quite large; it is located on a major public transportation route; it is wheelchair accessible; and it is situated next to a like-minded organization with whom the centre has been able to share both resources and ideas.

**Newsletter**

The newsletter has become the main line of communication between the members of the women's centre as it has provided a forum through which the members can express their ideas and thoughts via letters, articles, or poetry. Furthermore, the newsletter has proved to be an effective means of educating the membership on women's issues. This has been accomplished as the newsletter committee, over the years, has chosen interesting articles which would appeal to the realities of the lives of women on the North Shore (NSWC July/August 1979). Since 1975, the newsletter has undergone a number of changes:

- From 1975 to September 1977, the newsletter was called the *North Shore Women's Centre Newsletter* and was produced on a monthly basis.

- From October 1977 until about June 1978, the name of the newsletter was changed to the *North Shore Feminist*. The opinions and thoughts of the membership became much more prevalent in these issues which continued to be produced every month.

- In October 1978, the name of the newsletter was changed again, this time to *North Shore Women: Newsletter of the North Shore Women's Centre*. This change was made as members thought that the inclusion of the word "FEMINIST" in the title of the newsletter was intimidating to potential new readers (Lawrence 1997). The new name of the newsletter continued to be used until the summer of 1990. From 1978 to about October 1984 the newsletter was produced monthly; however, by 1985 it had changed to a bi-monthly format. In the fall of 1988, under the new collective structure, the newsletter became a major publication, taking on a magazine-like appearance. This new format only lasted one year.

- Finally, in the fall of 1990, following the federal funding cut, the newsletter began to be produced on a quarterly basis. The name of the newsletter had also changed to *The Nellie* after Nellie McClung who was an active campaigner in the drive for female suffrage in Manitoba and Alberta (NSWC December 1990: 1).

Since 1975, the newsletter has been produced by a volunteer committee. Although the production of the newsletter has often been stressful for the members (especially when it was
being produced on a monthly basis), it has also provided them with an opportunity to socialize, be creative, and have fun.

It seems to me that became a big social thing actually, addressing the newsletter, we used that as an excuse for all sorts of things (Campbell 1997).

**Consciousness Raising and Transactional Analysis**

Like other women’s groups in the 1970s, the North Shore Women’s Centre saw consciousness raising and transactional analysis groups as an important way to raise women’s awareness about the issues that affected their lives. Consciousness raising groups began to be formed in 1976 and lasted until approximately 1978. Members viewed these groups as:

> a group awakening of the potential of the inner self and the acquiring of greater awareness in today’s society (NSWC November 1976).

During the groups, women listened to different speakers, watched films, and discussed issues such as “What is Feminism Anyways?” (NSWC October 1977: 9).

Transactional analysis groups were held for approximately the same length of time as the consciousness raising groups. Transactional analysis was a therapeutic and practical way through which women could talk about their behaviour. Some of the issues women explored during these groups included communicating ideas and expressing feelings, as well as solving problems and making decisions (NSWC Information Sheet). Transactional analysis groups met on a weekly basis and were conducted by a trained facilitator.

**Advocacy**

The North Shore Women’s Centre has been an active advocate for social change within the community. This advocacy role was particularly evident in the first 12 years of the centres’ existence. During this time, the members advocated for the following issues:

- **1975-1977. Sexism in Schools.** Members of the centre became actively involved in a committee which was committed to the elimination of sexism in schools.

- **1977 - ? Coalition for a Fair and Responsive Media.** The centre joined the coalition as a way to deal with discrimination and misrepresentation in advertising.

- **1978-1984. Lions Gate Hospital Pro-Choice Advocates.** A number of the members joined (and urged others to join) the North and West Vancouver Lions Gate Hospital Society in an effort to secure a hospital board that supported therapeutic abortions. A pro-choice board was finally established in 1981.

- **1979. Pre-School Bathing Beauty and Mini He-Man Contest.** The centre, along with other interested groups, campaigned to have this event canceled and were successful.
• 1982. Sunshine Girl. Members protested the North Shore News for their exploitation of women as the “Sunshine Girl” (the “Sunshine Girl” feature displayed photographs of women dressed in provocative clothing). Although the “Sunshine Girl” is still a feature of the paper, the women and men it now displays are much more conservatively dressed than they once were.

• 1982-1985. Pornography. The women’s centre gained much recognition for its work against violent pornography, not only on the North Shore, but in the Greater Vancouver area as well. Their actions included media release in the local and Vancouver newspapers; demonstrations in front of a video store that sold and rented exploitative and obscene pornography in North Vancouver; television features; workshops; and a number of other activities.

Since the mid-to-late 1980s, the centres’ involvement in advocacy campaigns has diminished. This has likely been due to a lack of time, resources (including money and staff), and board involvement in the day-to-day activities of the centre.

Community Involvement

The centre’s extensive activity and interest in the North Shore Community can be demonstrated by its involvement in numerous groups and organizations. These groups have included:

• 1974. Capilano College Women’s Studies Committee. This committee was responsible for the establishment of the women’s studies program and the women’s centre at the college.

• 1976. North Vancouver Teachers Association of the Status of Women Committee. This was the committee that was responsible for looking into sexism in schools.

• 1977. Concerned Day Care Parent’s Association. This group of parents organized around concerns they had over day care.

• 1977. Coalition for a Fair and Responsive Media. This group examined discrimination and misrepresentation in advertising.

• 1980. North Shore Association for Choice on Abortion.

• 1983. Canadian Coalition Against Media Pornography. This was a national organization of concerned citizens who recognized that pornography and sex-role stereotyping violate the dignity and right to self-determination for women.

• 1987. Society for Children’s Rights to Adequate Parental Support (SCRAPS). This group operated through the centre and was committed to: (1) improving the enforcement of child support; (2) rationalizing the process of child support; and (3) changing societal attitudes about the responsibilities of parents toward their children after divorce (NSWC Autumn 1987: 8). Although this group dissolved in 1995, one of the SCRAPS board members joined the board of the NSWC as a way to continue on the work of SCRAPS at the centre.
- 1994. North Shore Regional Health Board. The centre wanted to be part of the New Directions in Health provincial initiative to ensure that health funding and priorities reflected women's health issues.

- 1995. Social Policy Reform Coalition. This committee of North Vancouver women's groups, planned a conference to respond to the reform of Canada's social safety net and its impact on women.

- 1995. North Shore Committee Against Violence Against Women in Relationships. The purpose of the centre's representation with this group was to assist in advocating against violence against women, and to affect policy changes in the area of domestic assault.

- 1995. North Shore Together Against Violence Coalition. This community-wide committee has the mandate of raising awareness and reducing tolerance for violence.

- 1995. North Vancouver Safe City Initiative Steering Committee. The purpose of this committee was to access the safety of North Vancouver City and to make recommendations for change.

- 1996. North Vancouver Housing Information Services Steering Committee. This group focuses on the housing needs of women.

- 1996. North Shore Community Services Network. This network is striving to provide free and immediate counselling services for women.

- 1997. North Shore Mid-Life Women's Project. The purpose of this project, which is currently being sponsored and housed by the centre, is to identify gaps in the current programs and services to mid-life women (between 45 and 65) in the community and to create action plans for change. The gaps will be identified through the stories told by mid-life women during small discussion groups.

- 1997. The Immigrant/Refugee Women's Access Project. The centre (and other groups) is currently receiving consultation, training, and support in developing programs that are more accessible and culturally appropriate for immigrant and refugee women.

**Support Groups**

A variety of support groups have been established at the North Shore Women's Centre throughout the years. These include: *Living is for Everyone* (1977) – this group offered emotional support and practical information for women who were widowed, separated or divorced; the *Young Women’s Group* (1978); *Support Group for Battered Women* (1979); a mother’s drop-in support group (1984); support groups for women and children who have experienced or witnessed mental or physical abuse (1991); *Single Mother’s Support Group* (1992); *Women for Sobriety* (1993) – support group for women with problems of addictions; *Sexual Assault Recovery Anonymous* or SARA (1994); *Menopause Support Group* (1994);
Motherless Daughters (1994); and Crone Talk (1995) – a discussion group for older women. Only one of these support groups continue to endure at the centre: the Single Mother’s Support Group.

Lobbying

Staff and board members have written numerous lobby letters on behalf of the centre on issues affecting women at the local, national, and even global level. These issues have included: changes to the Matrimonial Property Act (1977); the phasing out of cooperative housing for single parents by the Department of Human Resources (1978); putting rape in its legal place (1980); maternity leave (1981); the spread of pornography and sex-role stereotyping (1980s); and Bill 27 on Human rights 1983). More recently (between 1996-1997), the centre wrote lobby letters on gun control, safety and rights of domestic workers, pro-choice legislation, women’s health issues, student loan policies that are detrimental to single mothers and women from abusive relationships, and Bill C-277 on making female genital mutilation being practiced in Canada a criminal offense (NSWC 1997a: 7).

The issues, as well as the responses by the members and staff (through the letters), are presented to the membership through the centres’ various educational mediums, such as newsletters and workshops.

Employment Opportunities

The North Shore Women’s Centre has, whenever possible, sought funding from the federal government (i.e. Challenge Grants) to hire students to work on special projects over the summer months. These summer positions have been advantageous for both the centre as well as the students. For example, the centre not only gets the opportunity to assist women to improve their economic situation, but they also gain valuable research at a minimum cost. For the student, valuable and marketable skills are gained which are, in turn, transferable to the wider job market.

Examples of the jobs women students have been involved with over the years include the following:

- 1976 the centre hired four students to investigate part-time work for women on the North Shore. Specifically, the students were to find out how much part-time work was available, and how the business community felt about job sharing. They had to compile a list of businesses and jobs which had the potential for flexible hours (NSWC March 1976: 2).

- 1977, NSWC hired two students to investigate the possibility of expanding the centre’s programs to Horeshoe Bay (to the west) and Deep Cove (to the east). These two communities are located on the boundaries of the North Shore (NSWC May 1977: 2).

- 1978 two projects were completed by two students. The first student created a directory listing doctors and lawyers on the North Shore. In the directory, the student recorded various experiences women had had when dealing with these doctors and lawyers, with particular
emphasis on how women were treated as patients or clients. The second student documented, compared, and contrasted a sample of maintenance orders awarded in the B.C. Supreme Court, the Provincial Court and Family Court. The student studied how these orders related to the earnings of both spouses and to the number of dependents. From the project, the centre gained some knowledge of family law in B.C. and received information on the effectiveness of maintenance orders (NSWC April 1978: 13).

- 1979, a student was hired to compile a list of businesswomen on the North Shore which was reproduced and sold to the membership for $1.00. Three students were hired in 1983 to research the issues of pornography. One of the students did a survey of the pornographic material available at corner grocery stores and video stores, while another analyzed the contents of some of this material, and the third student tried to locate women who had been battered with reference to their husbands use of pornography (NSWC Summer 1983: 1).

- 1994 two students were hired. The first student, hired as a Program Supervisor, had the task of creating a Marketing Plan for the centre, under the supervision of the Director. The second student was then hired to be a Marketing Assistant and had the task of implementing key aspects of the plan.
APPENDIX F - PATH OF A NORTH SHORE WOMEN’S CENTRE VOLUNTEER

Produced by the North Shore Women’s Centre

Contact With NSWC

Receives Application Form

Application Received In Office

Application Reviewed; Decision To Interview

Interviewed

Placed In A Volunteer Position

Volunteer Orientation

Waiting List (if no present need)

Evaluation

Continued Involvement/ Different Volunteer Role/ Moving On

Letter of Thanks/ Reference

Assistance With Orientation