

A n n u a l R e p o r t **2 0 0 5 - 2 0 0 6**

National Association of Women and the Law

Real Equality Now!





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

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

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

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

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

For the last 32 years, NAWL has focused its efforts on women's equality rights in Canada. Since that time, in coalition with other women's and equality-seeking organizations, we have achieved many victories including:

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



GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION

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

NAWL's work is carried out jointly through a small staff in Ottawa and more than 100 active volunteers. NAWL has a nationwide membership of lawyers, law students, academics and other individuals who share a commitment to gender equality. The organization's policies are formulated in public forums convened during NAWL's biennial conferences.

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



NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE

Louise Langevin, Quebec, QC

Kerry Lynn Okita, Calgary, AB

Alana Patterson, Halifax, NS

Chantal Richard, Ottawa, ON

Yvonne Peters, Winnipeg, MB

Regional Representatives

Ontario: **Alison Dewar** (Ottawa, ON)

Prairies: **Sarah Lugtig** (Winnipeg, MB)

Québec: **Louise Riendeau** (Montréal, QC)

Atlantic: **Louise Aucoin** (Moncton, NB)

BC/Yukon: **Maneesha Deckha** (Victoria, BC)



NAWL STAFF

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MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE

NAWL's financial challenges continued in 2005/2006, once again raising the issue of the effectiveness of project funding over extended periods of time. Despite these challenges, NAWL continued with its work to achieve women's equality through law reform in the areas of pay equity, maternity parental benefits and family law, including the issue of religious arbitration of family law matters.

The January 2005 federal election provided an opportunity for NAWL to continue working with other women's equality-seeking organizations to draw attention to key issues facing women in Canada. Our work with the Coalition for Women's Equality continued. We were successful in seeing the establishment of a Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Status of Women, to which we made a number of submissions and presentations, but our efforts to see Status of Women Canada strengthened were not successful, either before or after the election.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend thanks to the members of the NAWL team that made it all happen — to National Steering Committee members, NAWL members, donors, working group members, and most especially to the staff.

In particular, we would like to acknowledge the work of NAWL's Executive Director, Bonnie Diamond, who retired in February 2006 after nine years in this position. In November 2005, Bonnie received the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Person's Case for her courage, commitment and generosity as a steadfast champion of women's human rights. Bonnie's skills will be sorely missed at NAWL, and we wish her well in her future endeavours.

PAY EQUITY:

NAWL continued with its work to achieve substantive pay equity in Canada. In January 2005, NAWL drafted a "Call to Action" for the Pay Equity Network (PEN), which was endorsed by more than 250 local, provincial and national groups in Quebec and the rest of Canada. The Call to Action was launched on Valentine's Day 2005, when each MP received an oversized Valentine's Day card, reminding them that "Pay Equity is at the Heart of Equality."

MATERNITY PARENTAL BENEFITS:

In the Spring and Summer of 2005, NAWL developed a popular education tool on maternity and parental benefits. Throughout the Fall, we conducted a pan-Canadian education and consultation tour on strategies for improving the federal maternity and parental benefits regime.

ARBITRATION, RELIGION AND FAMILY LAW

In May 2005, NAWL hosted a conference entitled "International Perspectives on Religious Arbitration in Family Law," at which delegates from more than 50 women's equality-seeking organizations heard from 5 women involved with Women Living Under Muslim Laws. One of the outcomes of this conference was the development of a Declaration on Religious Arbitration in Family Law that formed the basis of the position taken by the No Religious Arbitration Coalition, established in June 2005 to fight Ontario's *Arbitration Act*.

NAWL played a key role in the work of the Coalition, and was very involved, with other women's equality-seeking organizations in Ontario, with lobbying provincial politicians to bring an end to religious arbitration of family law disputes.

In September 2005, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty announced his intention to end the use of religious arbitration in family law matters, and in February 2006, the provincial government passed *Bill 27, The Family Statute Law Amendment Act*, which established a new regime for the private arbitration of family law issues that required such arbitrations to be "conducted exclusively in accordance with the law of Ontario or of another Canadian jurisdiction."

While this was a provincial issue, NAWL became and remains involved because of the significant women's equality rights at stake and because the matter of the use of religious arbitration may well arise in other provinces in the future.

BUDGET CONSULTATIONS:

NAWL actively participated in the drafting of the Coalition for Women's Equality brief on the federal budget, and participated in the federal budget consultations held by the Minister of Finance in September 2005.

NAWL'S BI-ANNUAL CONFERENCE:

More than 300 women from across Canada and Quebec attended NAWL's conference held in April 2005 in Vancouver. Entitled "Women's Rights and Freedoms, 20 Years (In)Equality," the central focus was an examination of the (in)effectiveness of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in supporting women's equality. Through both plenary sessions and 44 workshops, participants heard from leading feminists in different areas of women's equality work and discussed strategies for next steps in this work.

POPULAR LEGAL EDUCATION:

Over the course of 2004 and 2005, NAWL developed a two-day popular legal education project for feminist activists and trade unionists with the theme "Women, Work and Equality." The training and consultation sessions were tested in Spring 2005 in Winnipeg and were delivered in the Atlantic region in the Fall of 2005.

OUTREACH:

In 2005/06, NAWL directed resources to redesigning and updating its website so it could function more effectively as a communications tool for women's equality. The new website now provides readers with easy access to NAWL's publications, position papers, past issues of Jurisfemme and important information about the issues on which NAWL is working.

Jurisfemme:

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CHARITABLE TRUST FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

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

The Charitable Trust is composed of five members appointed by NAWL's National Steering Committee. The Trustees are responsible for decisions regarding the allocation of funds. The Trust sponsors an annual essay contest for students at post-secondary institutions. The winners of the 18th annual Essay Contest are Maude Page-Arpin for her essay "*La divulgation des dossiers therapeutiques des plaignantes en matiere de crimes sexuels: La preuve scientifique ou service des myths sociaux?*" and Angela Cameron for "*Sentencing Circles and Intimate Violence : A Canadian Feminist Perspective.* » who each received a \$500 prize.

NAWL congratulates Ms Page-Arpin and Ms Cameron for their work to advance women's rights and wishes them continued success in their education.

THANK YOU

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS WHO HELPED FUND PROJECTS

Women's Program, Status of Women Canada
Barreau du Quebec
Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Court Challenges Canada
Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario
Law Commission of Canada
Tides Foundation
University of Ottawa, Research and Trust Funds
Walter & Duncan Gordon Foundation
Women's Future Fund

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

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