

# **ANNUAL REPORT 2015 / 2016**

## **National Association of Women and the Law**

nawl | anfd

2339 Ogilvie Road, P.O. Box 46008, Gloucester, ON K1J 9M7



# MANDATE & ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY

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

When it was fully operative, NAWL worked on its own and in collaboration with other women's equality-seeking organizations to impact law and public policy on a wide range of issues, achieving a number of 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

In 2006, NAWL was defunded when the federal government [removed](#) 'advocacy,' 'equity' and 'access to justice' from Status of Women Canada's (SWC's) mandate, thereby preventing it from funding feminist research and advocacy work.

In October 2007, NAWL announced that it was forced to lay off staff and shut down its national office. NAWL has continued its federal law reform efforts over the past nine years thanks to private charitable fund-raising efforts and the unwavering dedication of volunteers. During this period, NAWL organized a national forum for young feminists, developed and published an alternative guide to law school as well as an easy-to-read information booklet for women regarding their socio-economic rights in the family law context. NAWL has also co-authored law reform briefs and appeared before Parliamentary Committees during this time. Unfortunately, however, after nearly a decade of struggling to stay alive as a purely volunteer organization, NAWL is at the end of its resources and, without a source of stable operational funding, will be unable to continue in existence.

In July 2016, Status of Women Minister Patty Hadju announced that the federal government would be restoring the eligibility of advocacy activities for funding within projects supported by Status of Women Canada's (SWC's) *Women's Program*. NAWL had been working in collaboration with others (FAFIA, CRIAW, LEAF, DAWN and NWAC) behind the scenes on this since November and so we were very pleased about the critical shift in policy. Shortly following the announcement, we submitted a draft proposal to SWC based on a project idea we've been working on for some time to rebuild feminist capacity to engage in the law reform process - NAWL's traditional area of strength and expertise. Following preliminary conversations with SWC, we are cautiously optimistic about the project's fundability.



## GOVERNANCE, DEMOCRACY & PARTICIPATION

NAWL is an incorporated non-profit organization that is governed by a National Steering Committee made up of a maximum of 12 volunteers. Since its founding in 1974, NAWL has used its unique research and educational strategies to raise public awareness about legal issues affecting women.

NAWL has a nationwide membership of lawyers, law students, academics and other individuals who share a commitment to gender equality.

NAWL briefs and papers have traditionally been 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

Jane Bailey  
Anne Levesque (Co-chair)  
Lisa Cirillo  
Sasha Hart

Martha Jackman  
Cheryl Milne  
Amy Salyzyn (Co-chair)



## NAWL CONSULTANTS

**Interim Executive Consultant**  
Julie Shugarman

**Administrative Consultant**  
Pam Mayhew



## MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE

In 2015-2016, NAWL continued operating with a skeletal structure. While committed to remaining administratively sound, the National Steering Committee decided that, in keeping with the direction set in 2013, we would spend as few resources as possible given an inability, without state funding, to do the research and advocacy work the organization was designed to do. Following Status of Women Minister Patty Hadju's July, 2016 announcement that advocacy funding would be restored under the *Women's Program* (see page 2), NAWL is cautiously optimistic about the future of the organization.

Despite an extremely reduced structure, in 2015/2016 **NAWL continued to work toward its vision of providing feminist law students with the skills necessary for advancing systemic law reform remedies** at the federal level.

Since our last Annual Report, the NAWL Charitable Trust for Research and Education, with generous support from Shirley Greenberg, completed work on the development of its open access, bilingual **online Feminist Law Reform Course**. After a decade of federal government disinterest in, if not outright hostility to, democratic values of equality and inclusion, the NAWL online course is designed to rebuild the skills necessary to advance equality rights and to encourage public re-engagement in the Canadian legislative process.

The course includes over 80 edited video clips that have been developed, closed captioned and in some cases subtitled, for various modules. Among those featured in the course videos are award-winning author and Informed Opinions co-founder, Shari Graydon; University of Ottawa law professors Natasha Bakht and Carissima Mathen; PSAC Women's and Human Rights Officer, Andrée Côtée; Canada Without Poverty Executive Director Leilani Farha; Ethics, governance and public policy expert Penny Collette; and now Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, the Honourable Caroline Bennett. The video clips are accompanied by suggested readings, discussion questions and assignments. Course modules cover a broad range of topics, including:

- Foundational concepts in equality law and policy
- Funding the law reform process
- The federal law reform process
- Lobbying
- Members of Parliament
- Parliamentary Committees
- Writing Opinion Editorials
- Filing Access to Information Requests
- Media Relations
- Working in Coalition

This free and highly practical course in law reform advocacy will be **launched in the fall**. It is our hope that **the course will strengthen the capacity of law students, civil society activists and women's organizations to advance women's equality in Canada**.

In addition to completing work on the Feminist Law Reform Course, in 2015/2016 NAWL participated in the selection of the second **recipient of the Alison Dewar Scholarship in Equality, Labour and Human Rights law at the University of Ottawa**. The scholarship, founded in 2014, provides financial support for a female student enrolled in the Common Law faculty who is interested in pursuing a career in some combination of women's equality and union-side labour, workers' rights, or human rights law. This year's recipient is Nhi Huynh.

*"... I represent a number of groups that are severely underrepresented within Canadian law practices. Despite this, I hope to build more bridges and expand the space we give to women's equality. I owe my opportunity to study law to the strong women that came before me, and I want to continue widening that path for women, especially LGBTQ and racialized women, who wish to pursue their passions in a respectful and nurturing workplace. — Nhi Huynh*

Nhi described herself as having a deep committed to women's equality rights and a "keen interest" in employment, labour and human rights law. In her role as Chair of the University of Ottawa's Task Force on Respect and Equality she gathered students' ideas on how to improve the university's internal processes "so that women can thrive in an environment free of harassment and sexualized violence."

In 2015/2016, NAWL continued to receive and respond to a number of requests to sign letters, co-author briefs, join various coalitions and make submissions before Parliamentary Committees. In the last year, NAWL has also taken an active leadership role in the work to ensure federal government funding for advocacy was restored. The following provides a sample of some of these activities:

- NAWL joined other women leaders in signing the “Respect Women” letter in the final days of the Election in October, 2015 calling on “all leaders and public figures in the country to refrain from allowing the issue of the niqab to in any way create an atmosphere of intolerance and xenophobia in this country.”
- NAWL contributed information about our organizational history for the archival website *Rise Up: A digital archive of feminist activism in Canada 1970 to 1990*.
- Shortly after the election last fall, NAWL authored letters to the Minister of Justice and the Minister for Status of Women explaining the importance of state funding for feminist law reform advocacy and research. NAWL also co-authored a letter calling on the Federal government to restore funding for women’s equality advocacy and research with FAFIA, CRIAW, NWAC, LEAF and DAWN.
- In collaboration with FAFIA, NAWL met with the Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women and the Department Head, to discuss the importance of reinstating funding for feminist law reform expertise in Canada. NAWL also authored its own letters to the Ministers of Justice and Status of Women on this issue.
- NAWL took an active role at the AGM of the Court Challenges Program of Canada.
- NAWL responded to an invitation by the Director of the University of Ottawa Human Rights, Research and Education Center to participate in the development of a strategy to promote and achieve Canada’s long-overdue adherence to the American Convention on Human Rights.
- Finally, in the Spring of 2016, NAWL had representatives making submissions before two Parliamentary Committees, the Special Committee on Pay Equity (on proactive federal pay equity legislation), and the Standing Committee for Status of Women (on the impact of cyber-bullying on women and girls). Written submissions to these Committees can be accessed on the NAWL website.

**Thank-yous:** NAWL’s work in 2015/2016 was made possible by the ongoing generous support of unions, law professors, law students and volunteers. We would not have been able to continue our work without the commitment of these groups and individuals. We would also like to thank:

Derek Hogue from Amphibian Design for masterfully building our Feminist Law Reform Course site and continuing to ensure the integrity and security of NAWL’s main website, which he rebuilt for us three years ago. The incredible creative team at the Public Design studio for working with us on the design of the Feminist Law Reform course website. Mariane Gravelle, Genevieve Boulay, Sandrine Emmanuel, Heather Mason and Sandra Gaballa for their invaluable expertise and support, transcribing and close-captioning over 80 video clips for the online course. Julie Lassonde for her translation work on the website. Tamir Israel, the staff lawyer at CIPPIC, for continuing to provide us with stellar pro bono legal advice on intellectual property issues. Karen Cooper, our generous and highly skilled non-profit and charity lawyer, for her ongoing patience and advice regarding the activities of the non-profit as well as the Charitable Trust.

Pam Mayhew, for her invaluable work to help ensure NAWL’s administrative viability and the members of NAWL’s National Steering Committee who continue to dedicate themselves to ensure that NAWL has every opportunity to survive as an organization. To Julie Shugarman, whose deep integrity, innovative thinking, passion for women’s equality and tireless efforts have kept NAWL alive in the face of immense pressures and challenges and have inspired us all not lose hope. Without all of you, none of this would be possible.



## 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 six members appointed by NAWL’s National Steering Committee. The Trustees are responsible for decisions regarding the allocation of funds.



**THANK YOU!**

***THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS FOR THEIR INVALUABLE  
SUPPORT:***

Shirley Greenberg  
Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions  
Shirley E. Greenberg Chair for Women and the Legal Profession  
NAWL Members and Donors