

AWHL Byline

20th Anniversary Issue



The Assaulted Women's Helpline Celebrates 20 Years of Excellence

Volunteers, Staff, and Partners Improve the Lives of Thousands of Women Across Ontario

Inside this issue

My Journey with the Helpline	2
Memories of a Former Staff Member	3
My Story	4
Let's Hear It ... from our Volunteers	5
Helpline Photo Album	6
Community Page	7

Twenty years ago this month the phones began to ring. Today, with each call, the potential to prevent a woman from being maligned, humiliated, confined, beaten or murdered continues to be realized.

AWHL commends each of its volunteers, staff, and partners for helping to prevent violence against women. Through your efforts, hundreds of thousand of women and their families have escaped a life of violence inflicted on them by a current or former partner. We are proud of the excellent service you have provided over the years and the part you have played, whether direct or indirect, in improving the lives of women in Ontario.

The Helpline began as an idea within our community and grew to become the first crisis service of its kind in the province. Shelters for abused women that handled many crisis calls (and still do) found it difficult to handle the immediate needs of their clients, both in person and on the telephone.

In 1985, the Community Information

Centre, the Distress Centre and the Metro Toronto Region for Interval and Transition Houses submitted a joint funding proposal for a 24 hour a day coordinated service to the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Full funding was granted and the Assaulted Women's Helpline was born providing service to the Greater Toronto Area.

In its first year, AWHL staff answered more than five thousand calls. Over the years, the Helpline has increased its services and now provides counselling in 154 languages and has two dedicated TTY lines for the hearing impaired. In 2002 AWHL expanded its service area to cover all of Ontario and now fields more than 40,000 calls per year.

Through this expansion we have greatly improved the accessibility of our services. But it is important that we must continue to work with our sister agencies and the public to ensure that violence against women issues is



(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

continue to be on the government's agenda because violence against women continues to be a serious issue in Ontario and across the country.

Between 1999 and 2004, according to a recent Statistics Canada report, 653,000 women have experienced some form of violence at the hands of a current or previous spouse or common-law partner. The report also indicated that female victims were more than twice as likely to be injured as male victims, three times more likely to fear for their life, and twice as likely to be the targets of more than ten violent episodes.

With our continued efforts we will reduce these numbers and one day eradicate violence against women permanently. On behalf of the Helpline's Board of Directors, I want to thank each of you for improving the lives of women in this province.

Margaret Haynes
Chair-Board of Directors

My Journey with the Helpline

My journey with the Assaulted Women's Helpline began as a volunteer board member almost 8 years ago. Initially, I became involved in honour of a friend who was a survivor of some horrific abuse and was unaware that there were resources she could turn to. I wanted to participate in raising awareness about the Helpline to reach more women, like my friend.

I ended my term as a volunteer board member to have a baby. As many new moms do, I took that time in my life to really evaluate what was most important. I knew returning to my 10-year private sector career in advertising and marketing wasn't going to be 'enough'. It was 3 1/2 years ago that I did what most of my peers thought was crazy ... I cut my corporate salary in half (while doubling my hours worked) to become the Manager of Resource Development raising awareness and funds for the life-saving service that AWHL provides.

Violence against women is still a topic that is too often kept behind closed doors. There is such an opportunity to really make a meaningful impact by working with an organization like ours to help break the silence and to change attitudes. We are in a sector where raising funds is very difficult, but every dollar makes a big difference in our ability to help more women.

It is an honour and a privilege to be working along side the amazing board, management, staff and volunteers at AWHL. I am motivated and inspired by the courage of our callers and I am grateful for the chance to be part of a woman-centric organization that has grown so much in the last 20 years.

Sandra Diaz
Manager of Resource Development
Assaulted Women's Helpline
sdiaz@awhl.org
416-364-4144 x236

<http://www.awhl.org>

Memories of a Former Staff Member

I started work at the Assaulted Women's Helpline in the fall of 1990 and worked there, part time, for the next twelve years. Then, the office was a windowless room with two desks. On my first shift alone I received a call from a woman telling me she was phoning to say good-bye after several years of contact with the Helpline. My rescue mode and my panic mode held hands and neither did a very good job of listening, really listening to what this person had to say. She wanted to be heard. I wanted her to live. I had no history, no way of knowing if she'd made these calls before. I kept her talking as long as I possibly could as the stone in the pit of my stomach grew heavier and heavier, along with my heart. I didn't sleep much that night when my shift ended. I wondered what I had gotten myself into and whether I could really handle the job I had been offered.

I had worked in a shelter for abused women for five years. My responsibilities included among others: counseling women, making presentations to politicians and funders, persuading Housing Coops to provide apartments for shelter residents, attending Board Meetings on behalf of Staff, sitting around the dining hall late at night sharing stories and running residents' meetings. I had thought, foolishly, it would turn out, that the Helpline would be easier. I would not be responsible for thirty women and children. I would not have to work all night except when I chose to. I could concentrate on the immediate problems the women presented on the phone and would not have to help them manage so many aspects of their lives over weeks and months. I would be invisible, known only by my voice and whatever name I chose to use on the line.

The reality was, of course, very different. Having only my voice, the pressure to say the right thing was immense. Women hung up on me on occasion. There were moments when I was sure I had ruined someone's relationship with the line by being firm with a caller or by saying something that triggered her. I would learn that most women called back, that the line, by virtue of its very existence, provided women a place to receive vital information about options and services or, simply, a reason not to give up. I quickly came to appreciate the courage it took to pick up that phone for the first time, to reach out for information, to try to articulate what felt wrong in their relationships but perhaps could not yet name. Some simply needed a reality check, confirmation that they were not crazy. The things that scared them, the things abusive partners said and did were not benign and too often were, in

fact, criminal.

Sometimes I had to vent my frustrations after a call. (This was in a new, much larger space with windows and a central gathering place.) Barriers that prevented women from escaping from their situations were immense more so after the Harris government reduced welfare benefits, reduced access to Legal Aid and stopped the construction of low cost housing. Shelter beds were hard to come by. Occasionally women told me they wanted to leave but had no place to store their furniture which they had worked so hard to buy. I wondered why we did not have a way of providing small amounts of cash so women could extricate themselves from dangerous or unbearable circumstances. Out of this anger and frustration the December 6th Fund was born, a revolving loan fund for abused women. I attended meetings of a variety of coalitions on behalf of the Helpline, a source of solace for women and a gold mine of information about the issues that challenged them.

Periodically a woman or a relative thanked me and I knew I had done a good job. Sometimes they didn't want to hear what I had to say but I knew I had done a good job. I got better at hearing the underlying message behind a woman's initial questions or bewilderment. Some days I came home renewed by what I had been able to do to support a woman on her journey. Other days I felt overwhelmed by the number of women who could not get through, or women who had begun to despair due to legal challenges, immigration road blocks or economic barriers. I always knew that, done well, this was the hardest job imaginable.

When I began to have to cope with a number of crises in my own life and family, I realized that it was time to move on. Twelve years had passed since I began work at the Helpline and while I did not work there full time, ever, I felt I needed to step back. I am grateful for the people I met through this work, the battles we fought together on so many fronts, the challenges of this demanding work and all that I learned doing it, I am glad that the service has continued to grow because it is such a vital first step in liberating women from the awful toll that abuse takes on their lives and the lives of their children. But I am also sad that this service remains so necessary.

In Sisterhood,
Lee Gold

My Story

I left my house with my two very young children in a cold late autumn night. My heart was beating hard and my mind was full of questions. What should I do next? Where would we sleep tonight? I knew that I could not go to my mother's house because it would be the first place for him to look for us. I did not want to burden her with my problem but I needed to call her and let her know that we are okay. Were we really okay? I was asking myself.

After leaving a quick message on my mom's answering machine to tell her what went on and that we were fine. I promised to call her back as soon as I can. I stood at the phone booth with my baby in one arm and my daughter held on to my leg turning the pages on the White Pages. I did not know what I was looking for. The mall was going to close soon. I had to leave this place. I tried hard to control the tears that started to swell up my eyes. I did not want people in the mall to know my business and I had to be strong for my children. Out of desperation, I turned to the Emergency Page in the phone book and there it was "Assaulted Women's Helpline" and its numbers. I reached in my jacket pocket to get my last quarter to make the call. The line was busy. I tried, and tried and tried many times and finally "Assaulted Women's Helpline, My name is..., may I help you?" I was hesitant. What am I going to tell this person? I don't even know her! What would she think of me? What kind of mother would take her children out in the cold in the night?

Perhaps, she sensed my hesitation. A voice came again "You can take your time. I am here. You can talk to me when you are ready. I only need to know if you are in the safe place to talk". "I am in the mall and at the payphone. I have two small children and no where to go. I have no money on me." "May I ask you a few questions so that I can better help you? I know you and your children may be tired and I will try to make it quickly....."

"I came home from work late to find most of the furniture in the living room was up side down. The dishes were broken. My baby was naked and in need of a change of diaper. My 4 years old ran to me when she saw me from behind her bedroom door. The babysitter did not show up tonight. He called my office and there was no respond. I must lie to him about having to work late. I must sleep around with all those filthy men at work. He is not my babysitter. Why should he

have to be with the kids while I am whoring around? I took my children into the bedroom to put clothes on the baby. While I was trying to comfort my daughter, he came into the bedroom and started to pull me while I was carrying the baby out into the living room. He pushed me against the wall and told me that "don't think that I am afraid to kill all of you". My daughter started to cry and he went to grab her but she ran into the kitchen. While running after her, he stepped on a piece of broken glass and got a deep cut. He shoved the three of us into her bedroom and closed the door behind him. He came back to take my purse with him. I heard the water running from the bathroom. I heard his mourning from the pain of the cut. I told my daughter to put on her slippers and as many sweaters as she could. With my baby in my arm, I grabbed the diaper bag and held on tightly to my daughter's hand, we headed quietly for the front door. As soon as we got out, we started to run. I heard his voice screaming from the porch and ordered us to come back. He tried to chase after us, but he could not because of the cut on his foot. He called my daughter to come back to him but she was listening to me and keeping on running. The baby was getting cold. I did not have time to get his jacket. I covered him with my jacket. I decided to head to the neighbourhood mall. I thought that he would not touch us with lot of people around and we needed a place to keep us warm until I figured out what to do next. I don't really know what I can do now without any money. I don't even have a credit card with me"

"You are very brave and you have done every thing right. It is very late now and you and your children have been through a lot. The first thing we need to do is to find a safe place for you to stay at least for tonight. Do you ever hear of shelter for abused women?" "No" I replied. "It is a safe place for women and children who are leaving abusive relationship to stay. They are women like you. At the shelter, there will be staff that can help you. Do you want to go there, at least for tonight?" "Yes, please" "Do you have a pen to write down the shelters' numbers?" "No, I don't" "Don't hang up, I will call shelters to see if they have beds available for you and your children"

"Shirley Samaroo House has space for you and the counselor by the name of V. is expecting your call. If you don't have any more quarter, you can place a col-

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

lect call. The staff there will accept the charge. She will need to speak to you before admission, but I don't think there will be any problem". She gave me the shelter numbers and asked me to repeat it many time. "Good luck to you. If you need more help, please call us back. We also accept collect call. Good bye for now". With so much was happening that night, I don't even remember her name. Perhaps, it is not important to her that I know her name. Perhaps, it is more important for her that I am okay and that services such as the Helpline exist to support women like me in our journey of fleeing from violence.

My journey of finding my strength, regaining my dignity and building a life free from violence for me and my children started from that moment. And it was fourteen years ago. Throughout my journey, I have many chances to express my gratitude to the caring and dedicated staff at the shelter. I have become their ally, friend, and colleague in the fight of ending violence against women. Some of them have shared and celebrated mine and my children's milestones. However, I have not been able to say "Thank You!" to the woman who answered my call on that dreadful night. Let me take this opportunity to thank You for listening to my story fourteen years ago. I thank You for your empathy, your encouraging words, your patient and for helping me getting to a safe place.

On the Assaulted Women's Helpline's 20th anniversary, I congratulate you on the job well done. It is sad that violence is still a reality in many women and children's lives. We all hope that one day, women and children in the province of Ontario are safe in their homes, on their streets, in their towns, in their cities and violence against women and children is the thing of the past. Until then, The Assaulted Women's Helpline is indeed a "Life Line" and it was my Life Line fourteen years ago.

Name withheld to maintain anonymity

Let's Hear It ... from our Volunteers

Juleth Richards

Volunteer

"Rosa Parks decided on December 1st, 1955 that she had as much right as the next person to sit on a bus. In doing so she gave a voice to millions of unjust people of colour. I volunteer at AWHL because they give women of abuse a voice and the support they need to stand up for their injustice".

Anjali Pathak

Resource Development Committee Board Volunteer

"I believe that those of us blessed enough to not have to endure these atrocities have a duty to help those who have no way out. The problem of violence against women in this country is a prevalent, yet hardly mentioned crime, and the greater awareness and involvement there is, the quicker we can make woman abuse a thing of the past."

Amanda Iacovetta

Volunteer

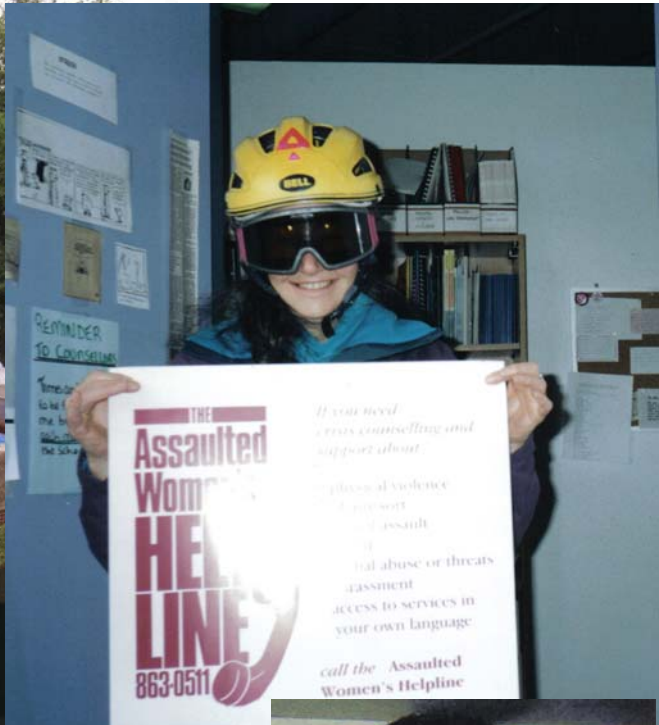
"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. The Dalai"

Melanie Ferris

Resource Development Committee Board Volunteer

"I volunteer with the AWHL because of the great work they do. Many of my family and friends have been victims of violence. I have seen its inter-generational effects and have been told not to talk about it. It is inspiring to be around the staff and volunteers at the helpline who are talking about this violence and encouraging women (and others) to do so."

Helpline Photo Album



Community Page

Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)

"The Assaulted Women's Helpline has worked with OAITH for many years on issues affecting women and their children. As part of the Cross-Sectoral VAW Strategy Group, OAITH and AWHL worked closely with other women's and community groups to develop the Emergency Measures Campaign in response to murders of women in the summer of 2000. When the Assaulted Women's Helpline was considering a provincial crisis line for women, AWHL consulted with OAITH member shelters to seek input on the project. In the past two years, AWHL has provided meeting space and support for the OAITH Board of Directors and has donated funds to OAITH from the proceeds of the annual AWHL dinner and silent auction. We very much appreciate this important support. This year, OAITH and AWHL will partner in developing a training model for women's shelters Boards of Directors on creating inclusive service delivery in our agencies, based on an integrated, feminist, anti-racist/anti-oppression framework. We are honoured to continue our relationship with the Assaulted Women's Helpline in this way and to further our common work to end violence against all women and their children."

Nellie's

Congratulations on behalf of the Board, Staff and women and children of Nellie's to the Assaulted Women's Helpline on the occasion of your 20th Anniversary of dedication and commitment to ending violence in the lives of all women in our community. The Assaulted Women's Helpline is a vital service for women in our community. We are proud to be a member and a sister agency. The Helpline is a lifeline to women in our community who require shelter and community services. Our herstory with the Helpline goes back to the beginning 20 years ago. We have proudly partnered with the AWHL in a number of ways over many years in a number of ways including social justice work within the community, joint staff training, public education events and joint fundraising initiatives. Best wishes to you all and much love from your sisters at Nellie's!

Cindy Cowan
Executive Director
Nellie's

Safe Haven

- Reprinted with permission
WISH Magazine—November 2005 issue

Thank you for including the Assaulted Women's Helpline in your Get Involved page (awhl.org). It is because of AWHL that my son and I are alive today. The volunteers at the Helpline guided me away from a dangerous situation and assisted me in beginning a new life. Although domestic violence is an issue that society tends to shy away from, it's important that information about help reaches women in life-threatening situations. Every woman deserves to be treated with respect and dignity. And I thank AWHL for teaching me that."

- Roxanna, Toronto

First They Came for the Jews

First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the trade unionists
and I did not speak out
because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for me
and there was no one left
to speak out for me.

Pastor Martin Niemöller

Speak Out!
Break the Silence to end Violence against Women

ASSAULTED WOMEN'S HELPLINE

P.O. Box 369, Station B
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 2W2

Crisis Line

GTA : (416) 863-0511
Toll Free (Ontario) : 1-866-863-0511
Toll Free TTY (Ontario) : 1-866-863-7868
#SAFE
#7233 on your Bell Mobility phone

Administration

Tel: (416) 364-4144
Fax: (416) 364-0563

Board of Directors

Margaret Haynes
Chair

Martha Ocampo
Treasurer

Erin Lee-Todd
Chair - Province Wide
Liaison Committee

Jane Bakewell
Secretary

Denise Brown

Marjorie Valcin
Chair - Resource
Development Committee

Sherry Lewis

Sharon Simpson

Gloria Harris

Lisa Barnoff



Mission Statement

The Assaulted Women's Helpline offers a 24-hour telephone crisis line to all women who have experienced abuse.

We provide counseling, emotional support, information and referrals.

We recognize abuse as one example of women's social, political and economic inequality in the world.

The Helpline is dedicated to working towards equality for all women.

We're on the Web!
www.AWHL.org

Message from the AWHL staff team

We are a multi-disciplinary team of women committed to providing exceptional, respectful and appropriate service to women who have and are experiencing violence or the effects of violence, crisis and abuse. We are a diverse, dedicated group, striving to be part of the solution to eradicate all forms of violence against women, first and foremost through the provision of the crisis line service. The Helpline staff team is also committed to working in a coordinated way with community partners and sister agencies towards bridging gaps in service and identifying emerging issues or trends relevant to the women we work with.

Responding, acting, forging change!
Staff Team, Assaulted Women's Helpline

The Assaulted Women's Helpline is a non-profit agency funded by the Ministry of Community, Family and Social Services, and City of Toronto.

AWHL is a charitable organization and gratefully accepts donations.

Charitable # 127624443 RR0001.