



West Kootenay Women's Association (WKWA)

Annual Report 2020/2021

WKWA Vision

"Women's equality in a world free of oppression"

The West Kootenay Women's Association gratefully acknowledges that the Nelson & District Women's Centre rests on, and operates within, the traditional and unceded territories of the Sinixt (Lakes), the Syilx (Okanagan), and the Ktunaxa Nations.

Purposes of the Society (from our Constitution):

- To promote equitable treatment of women, in the belief that every woman has the right to control over her social, economic and physical circumstances.
- To work together with women of every race, class, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, age, size, spiritual or political belief.
- To supply and render service of a charitable and educational nature to women.
- To establish resources for women.
- To co-operate with other organizations which have objectives similar to the objectives of the Association.
- To operate as a non-profit organization to administer and employ its property, assets and rights, for the purpose of promoting, or aiding in the promotion of, the welfare of all women.
- To receive, acquire and hold gifts, donations, legacies and devices.

Nelson & District Women's Centre Staff (as of Nov. 18/21)

Terri-Lynn Wilkinson, Executive Director
Michelle Bachman, Drop-in Coordinator
Megan McMichael, Volunteer Coordinator
Bronwyn Hughes, HER Project Coordinator
Isabel Vargas, Intercultural Conversations Coordinator

West Kootenay Women's Association Board of Directors (as of Nov. 18/21)

Donna Macdonald, Director & Chair (appointed July 2020)
Yvette Janzen, Director & Past-chair (elected December 2019)
Vita Luthmers, Director & Treasurer (elected December 2019)
Sarah Albertson, Director & Secretary (elected December 2019)
Mary Whitlock, Director (elected December 2019)
Kerry Marsland, Director (appointed March 2021)

Please Note: This annual report covers activities of the Nelson & District Women's Centre from April 1st, 2020 to March 31st, 2021, corresponding to our past fiscal year. However, we will also report on important events and happenings from April 1 to the date of this AGM.

Overview of the Year

The fiscal year 2020-2021 was dominated by two themes: COVID and change.

Like most organizations, we were strongly impacted by COVID and the resulting public health orders. Nonetheless, we continued to stabilize the organization, provide services to the women of our community and recruit staff as well as board and committee members. Zoom was a big help in keeping us connected.

A major focus was on recruiting and hiring an Executive Director. In August 2020, Andrea Carter accepted the position and was with WKWA until the end of December. We appreciate her success in acquiring COVID funding for the Women's Centre, which provided resources to buy food and other supplies for clients, new washable furniture, top-quality air filters, PPE supplies, and more. In January the E.D. search resumed, and we were successful in hiring Terri-Lynn Wilkinson in July 2021.

We want to acknowledge and thank Drop-In Coordinator Michelle Bachman for holding the fort through these unsettled times. She provided a warm and welcoming environment for women who came to the Centre, either in person or via the phone. And come they did.

Board changes began in April 2020 when four Directors who were elected in December 2019 resigned. We thank Sawah Danniels, Avery Alder, Devon Brown, and Amanda Phoenix for their contributions while on the Board, along with Shamim Pourfarshomi and Nancy Rosenblum who resigned in October. In July 2020 Donna Macdonald was appointed to the Board.

More changes came in 2021 with the appointment of Liz Babcock in March. Unfortunately Liz reluctantly had to resign in July. Thank you, Liz, for your contributions and ongoing support. As well, our treasurer Shonna Hayes resigned in March 2021, and we feel much appreciation for her work on the Women's Centre's finances. Happily, that same month Kerry Marsland was appointed and welcomed to the Board for a term extending to the 2022 AGM.

Board Committees

Throughout the year the work of the Coordinating Collective was helped immeasurably by community members who participated in committees, such as Finance, Governance, Facilities, Fundraising and Community Relations. These volunteers donated their time and expertise and we appreciate their commitment and involvement; without them we would not have accomplished as much as we did.

Programs

The Drop-In Resource and Referral Program at the Nelson & District Women's Centre is a core project of WKWA. The Women's Centre provides a safe space for women to receive a number of critical services including: free access to food, clothing, and personal hygiene supplies; peer counselling and referral to other community resources, such as the transition house or the Advocacy Centre; educational and skill-building opportunities; and access to a feminist library and computers. This program is funded through our major funder, the BC Gaming Commission.

During the reporting period, the Women's Centre was physically closed, and services were provided by phone or email, or at the door. We provided food hampers, clothing, support, and referrals to the many women who came to the Centre. We noted an increase in the number of senior women whose ability to meet their needs was affected by COVID restrictions. In December we began to assist women via appointment.

Our ability to offer programs was severely restricted, but we did offer Art Therapy and Trauma Yoga via Zoom. Gentle Flow Yoga through a partnership with Intuit Studio partnership is a recent addition.

Rooted in Community is an ongoing free 10-week volunteer training program that ran this year from March to May. This program is the backbone of developing and training our volunteers who play such an important role in the ongoing work of the Centre. We maintain a list of dedicated volunteers who do everything from picking up food donations, organizing the free store, working in the garden, preparing food, shovelling snow and many other essential chores at the Women's Centre. Many thanks to Beth Seed for providing the training and creating a manual to guide future RIC programs.

Our House

The closure provided the opportunity for some serious house- and shed-cleaning, and also for capital projects such as replacing the sewer line (no more ugly floods), and installing a new hot water heater and a new energy-efficient furnace.

Being responsible property-owners requires attention to maintenance and repairs. In January 2021, a thorough home inspection was carried out by a local professional inspector. It wasn't great news, but it wasn't terrible either! As a result of this inspection, the Facilities Committee has set priorities for action. Currently, the top one is replacing the front stairs and railings. We're seeking funding for that.

Funding and Projects

The Centre was successful in obtaining the following grants:

B.C Gaming Grant for the Drop-in Resource and Referral Program and capital expenses to repair the sewer line, replace the hot water tank and purchase the new furnace.

BC Multicultural grant for Intercultural Conversations Project. This was delayed, with the funders' permission, until we hired an E.D. A coordinator is now in place and the project will begin early in 2022.

A \$25,000 COVID recovery grant from the Canadian Women's Foundation.

A \$15,000 grant from the Community Foundations of Canada for the HER (Healthy, Empowered, Resilient) project for 14 to 18-year-old girls. Again this was delayed, with permission. A coordinator is now in place and the project will begin early in 2022.

Two summer youth positions were partially funded by Canada Summer Jobs – the Garden Coordinator and the Community Engagement Coordinator.

Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) payments were received from the federal government to subsidize wages during COVID.

Osprey Community Foundation provided funds to assist with our community engagement.

Through a productive partnership with the Nelson Community Food Centre, we received funding to purchase supplies and equipment to assist in refurbishing our garden space. The Food Centre also provided volunteers and expertise to our Garden Coordinator. The Kootenay Food Co-op chipped in money for supplies as well. It was a very successful project: volunteers were engaged and food was grown and shared – all despite the heat dome and the smoke!

Events

International Women's Day, March 8, 2021

In celebration of International Women's Day (IWD), the Women's Centre hosted its first virtual event, and it was a great success. MLA Brittney Anderson joined former-MLA Michelle Mungall to talk about being women in politics. Jenny Robinson and Judy Brown provided some great music. And the door prizes – oh my!

AGM, 2019-2020, March 18, 2021

We were allowed to delay our 19/20 AGM into early 2021, and successfully held that AGM via Zoom.

Appreciations

Heartfelt thanks to:

- the Kootenay Bakery Cafe, Kootenay Co-op and Silverking Soya Foods for ongoing donations of food.
- the Harrop-Procter Community Co-op for a lovely new desk for our new E.D.
- Otter Books for book donations for our library.
- West Kootenay Telus Community Ambassadors for their donation to purchase basic supplies for women-in-need.
- many individuals, organizations and businesses for their cash and in-kind donations. In particular, we are grateful to be remembered by two legacy donors who provided generous gifts to the Women's Centre.

To the many supporters, volunteers and staff who continue to stand by the Women's Centre – thank you dearly for remaining steadfast in your conviction that the Women's Centre is an important resource that continues to fill many needs in our community.

Unfinished and In-Process Business

Although this report technically only covers the period to the end of March, 2021, we have additional information we think you'd like to have, particularly related to work-in-progress.

At the 2018 and 2019 AGMs, several proposals submitted by members were approved. Many have been completed as was reported at the 2019/2020 AGM on March 18, 2021. The following are still in progress.

From 2018

- A bylaw and policy review of WKWA documents. This remains a priority and will occur after completion of the community engagement process (see below).
- Development and implementation of a communication policy. This remains a high priority for the Board and Community Relations Committee.

From 2019

- Bylaw changes regarding election of the Coordinating Collective and regarding member discipline. The Board intends to include these in the comprehensive review of WKWA bylaws.
- Conduct of a well-planned and facilitated engagement process to discuss WKWA's mandate, including who we serve, what programs and activities are priorities, potential partnerships with other community groups, etc.

We have continued to work, as resources permitted, on the engagement process. In the summer of 2021, we hired a student (under Canada Summer Jobs) to conduct a community survey. We heard back from about 200 West Kootenay women. The survey results showed strong support for many of the services and programs currently offered, with the Drop-In, Girls

Empowerment workshops, referrals, and food and clothing provision topping the list. More education and training was supported, as was greater feminist activism.

In terms of who the Women's Centre should serve, the results were quite mixed. Some respondents supported a much greater focus on non-binary, in-transition and two-spirit persons, as well as trans men. Others urged the maintenance of the focus on women, with other programs/services provided when possible.

The survey was not intended as a vote or referendum, but as important baseline information to guide the Board's process. In addition, it is clear that further consultation is needed with particular groups: young women, elder women, Women's Centre users, and other organizations in Nelson.

The Board has continued to work with the CBT Non-Profit Advisors program and on October 16 had a day-long meeting facilitated by a consultant. The outcome of this was a decision that our Strategic Plan for the next three years would be completion of an Organizational Review. This will include three areas: Governance (including our mission and mandate); Administration; and Programs/Services.

With the consultant's help, we began to develop a "road map" to identify all the aspects that need to be reviewed, what their current status is, and their priority level. That map is still to be completed, with details of what/who/when, but three high priorities were identified for action following the AGM. They are:

1. Review and update our mission/purposes/values and principles: who are we here to serve and how?
2. Create and implement recruitment processes for both the Board and Board committees to increase the diversity of volunteers and build community support.
3. Continue with Board Committee work, particularly Community Relations and Fundraising.

With the assistance of our consultant, work will begin early in the New Year, to complete the "road map" and start on the three priorities above. Until this Organizational Review is completed, the Centre will primarily continue to deliver the current programs, services and projects.

We understand that some members are anxious for change at the Women's Centre and we ask your patience as we work through this review process. Ultimately the Board will develop recommendations for amendments to WKWA's Constitution & Bylaws, and those amendments will be voted on by the membership at a general meeting.