



DisAbleD Women's Network (DAWN) Canada
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DisAbleD Women's Network of Canada

Annual Report

2017-2018

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National Executive Director's Report

During the 2017-2018 fiscal year DAWN Canada continued to put women and girls with disabilities on the map, through our four main areas of work: research, education, policy, and advocacy.

On the research front, we were pleased to have been awarded a modest grant from the Office for Disability Issues to examine the key issues women and girls with disabilities in Canada are facing. The research, which is currently underway, will equally examine academic as well as community and activist resources, and will be conducted with input from our three partner organizations, People First of Canada, *Realize*, and the Acquired Brain Injury Research Lab. This research responds to a major gap; to date, the available information about women and girls with disabilities has never been gathered or analyzed in a comprehensive way. The final research report will be released in fall 2018.

Our most effective policy intervention this year emerged out of our violence-prevention project "Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women". After reviewing over 100 national and provincial legislation and policy documents related to responding to violence against women, we found that none of them included the specific needs of women with disabilities and Deaf women. At best, women with disabilities are only mentioned in footnotes of the documents. To respond to this, we developed an ongoing and successful social media platform called "More Than A Footnote" which we are using to bring this issue to the attention to policy makers provincially and nationally.

In November 2017, we were delighted to move our head office to a new accessible location. Our offices continue to be housed within the Maison Parent-Roback, a feminist collective to which we belong. We now have adequate space for all seven members of our staff, as well as room to host a "Youth The Future" job placement program. This project, the only one of its kind in the country, supports young women with disabilities ages 15 – 30 to become job-ready. We are supporting this project through a partnership with the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW).

This year, we continued our work on Girls Without Barriers. Funded by the Canadian Women's Foundation, this project which focuses on creating accessible programming for 9 to 13 year old girls with disabilities and Deaf girls.

Advocating for women and girls with disabilities is important in making sure that our issues are included in the broader human rights sector. This year, we intervened to ensure that disability rights were a key agenda item at the Canadian Human Rights Commission's national symposium. As a result, I was able to convene and moderate a panel which discussed the importance of a human rights framework that goes beyond disability accommodations and that takes into account the intersection of various grounds of discrimination.

More details about our successes this year in each of our four pillars of action - research, education, policy, and advocacy and our current projects can be found within the pages of this report. Our accomplishments once again reflect the hard work and dedication of our staff and board to Canadian women and girls with disabilities and Deaf women and girls.

Key Accomplishments April 2017- March 2018

DAWN Canada's work is focused around four areas – research, education, policy and advocacy. This is a summary of our key accomplishments in each of these areas over the past 12 months.

Research

We work with academic and community based researchers to ensure that women and girls with disabilities are included in both feminist and disability research, through the use of an intersectional approach.

Ground-breaking Research on Women and Girls with Disabilities

Our interventions on Canada's implementation of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, in particular the absence of any significant data on Canadian women and girls with disabilities resulted in a call for research proposals on this subject from the Office for Disability Issues. We applied for and were selected to conduct this research, which we began in November 2017.

It will include a statistical analysis, literature review and environmental scan. We have also intentionally identified populations that are under the radar and not typically included in statistical accounts of women with disabilities. These include brain injured women, women living with episodic and chronic illnesses or pain, and women with intellectual and learning disabilities. We have sought partnerships with People First of Canada, *Realize*, and the Acquired Brain Injury Research Lab to ensure that these populations are represented in the research. This important research will begin to create, for the first time, a complete picture of the situation of women and girls with disabilities in Canada. The final research report will be released in fall 2018.

Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women in Canada

As part of our project, Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women in Canada (LPS), DAWN Canada conducted a review of legislation and policy at the national level and in three provinces – Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, along with an environmental scan of the violence related programs and services in each of the three provinces. After reviewing more than 100 federal and provincial documents related to violence prevention and violence against women, women with disabilities were either completely absent, or were mentioned only in the footnotes. This important finding led to the development of our “More Than A Footnote” awareness campaign described below.

Applying a Critical Feminist Disability Framework in Violence Against Women Research

Women with disabilities are often excluded from the disability rights movement because of issues related to gender while at the same time being excluded from feminist organizing because of a lack of acknowledgment related to the specificity of their experience. In response to this exclusion feminists with disabilities have developed their own framework, a Critical Feminist Disability (CFD) framework. Under the Community-First: Impacts of Community Engagement (CFICE) at Carleton University, DAWN Canada completed a research paper that puts forth the idea that the CFD framework can operate as an intersectional lens that is highly relevant to Violence Against Women research. The report was completed in January 2018 and will be released in the upcoming fiscal year.

Needs assessments of Girls and Young Women with Disabilities

Two of our current project which focus on girls and young women with Disabilities also include important research components. *Girls Without Barriers*, a four year project funded by the Canadian Women's Foundation, is aimed at 9-13 year old girls with disabilities and includes a needs analysis as an important first step in addressing the dearth in evidence-based information about girls with disabilities. A second project, *Youth the Future*, also includes a need assessment of young women with disabilities aged 15-30, and seeks to understand the wrap around services needed for them to develop the life and job skills necessary to transition into the labour market or return to school. This project is being led by our partner, the Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW).

Education

We undertake various activities that help raise awareness of issues of concern to women with disabilities. These include attending and presenting at conferences and events, conducting training or workshops, and using our social media platforms to conduct awareness campaigns.

Poverty Reduction and Disability

DAWN Canada was part of a panel at the Cities Reducing Poverty 3rd annual poverty reduction summit in April 2017 where we spoke to the intersection of disability, race and poverty reduction from a human rights lens.

We also participated in a Roundtable on accessibility and poverty reduction hosted by Jean-Yves Duclos - Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, held in April 2017.

Criminal Justice System Review

In June 2017, DAWN Canada participated in a Criminal Justice System Review (CJSR) consultation with Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould on the issues of concern to women with disabilities who are victims and survivors of crime.

Accessibility Training for Service Providers

Using our curriculum tool “Our Health Matters” we conducted a workshop on health equity with health care workers at Sunnybrook Hospital’s new accessible maternity unit in Toronto.

Intersectional Training for Women’s Organizations

In February 2018, we hosted a “Journée de réflexion sur l’intersectionnalité”, a workshop on intersectional feminist practice at the Maison Parent Roback, a feminist collective which houses our national head office and many other women’s organizations in Montreal. We led a discussion on ways in which we could create practical opportunities for implementing feminist intersectional practices among members of our collective.

Bringing a Feminist Disability Perspective to the Violence Against Women Sector

In November 2017, we presented a workshop at the Ending Violence Association (EVA) BC annual training forum which drew close to 400 participants from all across British Columbia. DAWN Canada shared the findings of our project on addressing systemic violence against women with disabilities and Deaf women. Using our More Than a Footnote platform, we launched a call to action aimed at ensuring that women with disabilities and Deaf women are represented in violence-related policies, programs and services.

More Than A Footnote Social Media Platform

One of the most exciting outcomes of our project on addressing systemic barriers to ending violence against women with disabilities was the launch of our ongoing social media platform in December 2017 to bring attention to the many ways that women with disabilities and Deaf women have been excluded from violence prevention policies and programs. The platform is described in detail at the end of this report.

Policy

DAWN Canada continues to challenge and engage policy-makers in the review and development of policies so that they are intersectional, inclusive, and informed by community-defined needs.

Government of Canada's Advisory Council on Gender-Based Violence

As a member of the federal government's Advisory Council on Gender-based Violence, DAWN Canada's National Executive Director is able to provide input on all major violence-prevention initiatives funded by the government of Canada. Members of the council provided input to the RCMP on its report and recommendations stemming from the sexual assault case file review designed to inform key areas of the federal Strategy on Gender-Based Violence.

Policy Briefs to Government of Canada

DAWN Canada submitted a brief and appeared before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) in view of its study of Bill C-337, An Act to amend the Judges Act and the Criminal Code related to sexual assault.

In November 2017, DAWN Canada's National Executive Director was a witness to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women Canada (FEWO) for their study of violence against young women and girls in Canada.

International Initiative for Disability Leadership (IIDL) Conference

Our National Executive Director participated on a panel discussion on « Social Inclusion and Labour Market Attachment of persons with disabilities » at the International Initiative for Disability Leadership (IIDL) conference in October 2017. Her presentation was focused on the absence of women with disabilities in Canada in social development policy.

Public consultations on Proposed Accessibility Legislation

As an active member of the Alliance for an Inclusive Canada, we hosted consultations with women with disabilities and Deaf women to get feedback and input on proposed federal accessibility legislation, which were included in the final report that the Alliance submitted to the government of Canada.

Monitoring Compliance with UN treaties

Despite limited resources, we have been developing the ability to monitor Canada's compliance with three UN treaties (the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and to contribute to civil society reports with support from our partners.

We have used our More than A Footnote platform to successfully leverage those civil society reports and the subsequent UN Committee Reports to Canada in a number of ways.

Universal Periodic Review

We are one of only a handful of disability organizations involved in Canada's Universal Periodic Review and played a key role in Canada's current review.

UN CSW - 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women

In March 2018, DAWN Canada presented at a side event during the 62nd session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women on disability, violence, and survival of rural women globally.

UN New York Conference of state parties

DAWN Canada was part of the Canadian civil society delegation that attended the 10th Conference of States Parties on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in June 2017.

Advocacy

We are committed to ensuring that the voices of women with disabilities and Deaf women are represented at decision-making tables in the areas that matter to us most.

Women with Disabilities as Victims of Trafficking

In June 2017, DAWN Canada's National Executive Director was selected as part of a Canadian delegation to participate in the International Visitor Leadership Program at World Learning on an educational tour entitled "Healing the Wounds of Trafficking: A project for Canada" hosted by the United States Department of State.

The Canadian delegation learned and exchanged knowledge about trafficking with a particular focus on the vulnerability and needs of people with disabilities as victims of trafficking.

Changing the Conversation: A Disability Lens for All Canadians

This webinar, hosted by the Office for Disability Issues, included representatives from various government departments. DAWN Canada presented on how to address societal barriers to accessibility and inclusion from an intersectional perspective by applying a disability lens in government initiatives.

Beyond Accommodations Panel Examines Intersectional Human Rights

DAWN Canada's National Executive Director moderated a panel at the Canadian Human Rights Commission's national symposium (held in September 2017) on the importance of a human rights framework that goes beyond disability accommodations and that takes into account the intersection of various grounds of discrimination.

National Policy Roundtable on Violence Against Women with Disabilities

DAWN Canada hosted a national policy roundtable on violence against women with disabilities in Ottawa in December 2017. Close to 40 participants representing the disability and women's sectors, academics, government policy makers and labour were present. At the event, DAWN Canada presented the key outcomes of our review of Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women in Canada (LPS), a project funded by Status of Women Canada. We also presented our More Than A Footnote awareness campaign.

Provincial Policy Roundtables on Violence Against Women with Disabilities

DAWN Canada also hosted roundtables with leaders and stakeholders in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia to discuss the outcomes and next steps related to the LPS project. Two sessions were held in British Columbia, one during a quarterly meeting of the Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) and a second at the November EVA BC conference described above.

The Quebec and Ontario roundtables were held in Montreal and Toronto respectively in spring 2018. About 30 representatives of different community organizations attended the Quebec event. In Ontario, the Honourable Tracy MacCharles, Ontario Minister Responsible for Accessibility, as well as representatives from Justice Ontario, the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, and the Ministry of Community and Social Services were in attendance. The roundtables challenged policy makers to put women with disabilities at the center of their violence prevention programs.

Identifying Barriers in Access to Justice for Victims with Disabilities

Bonnie Brayton was a panelist at a webinar on Barriers to Justice for Victims with Disabilities hosted by the Policy Centre for Victim Issues of the Department of Justice in December 2017. As an organization with a national scope focus on the issues facing victims with disabilities (especially women), DAWN's perspective was of great value to the discussion.

Our More Than A Footnote Advocacy Platform

One of our success stories this year was the creation of a social media advocacy platform that emerged in the final year of our anti-violence project [Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women in Canada](#) (LPS).

After reviewing over 100 provincial and national documents related to violence prevention and violence against women, we discovered that none of them included the specific needs of women with disabilities and Deaf women. Often, women with disabilities are subsumed into the larger group of people with disabilities, which effectively renders our experiences and needs as women invisible. While DAWN Canada recognizes the distinct issues faced by marginalized genders (women, trans people, non-binary people), this *ungendering* of women with disabilities shows how deeply rooted ableist attitudes are negatively affecting women with disabilities and Deaf women.

Alternatively, some policies and programs related to gender-based violence acknowledge "vulnerable groups" in the preamble and then list these vulnerable groups, such as women with disabilities, in a footnote. This exclusion of women with disabilities

has left us as a footnote in the minds of policy makers and absent from programs and services. The result is that there are no violence-related programs, funding, or services focused specifically on women with disabilities.

As a response, we developed “More Than A Footnote” which began as a social media campaign and call to action. We launched the campaign in December 2017, using postcards, posters, video messages, Facebook, Twitter and email to raise awareness of the ways women with disabilities and Deaf women are ungendered and footnoted in violence-prevention policies and programs, even those designed to address violence against women. We also had regular calls to action, which asked supporters to join targeted campaigns aimed at a specific province or issue.

The campaign soon evolved into a permanent social media platform using #MorethanfootnoteWWD as a hashtag, as we began to realize that it could be used effectively outside of the LPS project.

We continue to use this platform to bring attention to other areas in which women with disabilities are footnoted or otherwise absented from policies and programs. We plan to use it as an on-going vehicle for sharing information and resources, mobilizing allies and supporters around issues, and facilitating dialogue with policy and decision makers.

Summary of Funded Projects

Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women (LPS)

DAWN Canada is currently in its third and final year of *Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women*, a project that was designed to address systemic violence against women with disabilities and Deaf women. The project sites included three provinces: Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia. It is funded by Status of Women Canada.

In the previous phases, we examined existing legislation, policy and services related to violence prevention to uncover the underlying gaps that lead to systemic forms of violence and to highlight examples of good practice. This third phase led us to develop an advocacy platform called “More Than A Footnote” (as described above) to raise awareness of this project’s central finding: that women with disabilities and Deaf women are absent from Violence Against Women policies. This awareness campaign was used to share the project findings with stakeholders and decision makers at a National Roundtable in Ottawa, and at provincial roundtables in Quebec and British Columbia. A Toronto roundtable is also scheduled for April 2018.

Girls Without barriers

Girls Without Barriers is aimed at increasing programming for 9-13 year old girls with disabilities and Deaf girls, and also increasing their participation in existing girl-serving programs. This four year project is currently in its second year and is funded by the Canadian Women’s Foundation. There is a lack of programming for this cohort, as well as a lack of data and information. This project will therefore also include a needs analysis to better understand their issues.

Do The Rights Thing

This year we began a new project with our key partner, the Canadian Council for Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW). Funded by Status of Women Canada, *Do the Rights Thing*, aims to develop responses to the systemic barriers to services and employment experienced by women with disabilities and Deaf women. This project will also demonstrate the social and economic benefits of equitable hiring and inclusive service provision.

The project also has three local implementing partners, the British Columbia Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS), ARCH Disability Law Centre and the Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal.

Through this project, we will work with employers, human rights organizations, women with disabilities and Deaf women, and other stakeholders to create practical tools, educational materials, and public awareness campaigns on the human rights obligations of employers and service providers.

Youth the future - Focusing on Women

We are currently in the second year of this three-year pilot project in Quebec entitled *Youth the Future – Focusing on Women*, in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW). Funded by Employment, Skills & Development Canada and focused on young women with disabilities and young Deaf women, this project aims to provide skills training and job preparation and the opportunity to gain real job experience. During the second year of this project, we recruited 3 groups of young women with disabilities who participated in job preparation workshops. Of the total twenty-nine women who participated in the program during this fiscal year, 17 are employed and three returned to school. This is an innovative project and the only one of its kind in the country.