



AMPLIFY

A Voice for women & girls
with disabilities

Summer 2017

DAWN CANADA NEWSLETTER - ISSUE 2 / VOLUME 1

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Human trafficking and disability – Looking for a light in the darkest of places

By Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director

Human trafficking is not generally associated with disability by the average person, nor is it for many who work in the field. It is usually understood in a fairly predictable context such as forcing Deaf and disabled children to beg, or abducting and in some cases disabling /dismembering children for this purpose. As horrific as this is, it is only part of what is a very dark reality for people, particularly women and girls with disabilities, in Canada and around the World.

Labour and sex trafficking are both on the rise and people with disabilities fit the bill for what the perpetrators see as low risk and high gain by exploiting them thousands of times over. I have spent this week in Washington, DC with a delegation

of extraordinary fellow Canadians as a participant in the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) hosted by the US State Department. This groundbreaking project called Healing the Wounds of Trafficking is linked to the US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Program. When I was selected to participate in the IVLP and was told the focus would be on human trafficking and disability, I had a notion of what this would mean in the context of our work at DAWN Canada, despite the very limited data and research that exists about human trafficking.

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So much of the time I do my work as an advocate for women and girls with disabilities in a policy vacuum. My fellow travellers, on the other hand, are at the front lines of this work in Canada.

Two are Police officers. Constable Anthony Morissette of the R.C.M.P. and Captain Peter Moriera of the Toronto Police Service both represent the very best of their profession. Isabelle Nelis is a brilliant Criminologist with the Quebec City Police Service Department. And then there is Larissa Maxwell, Director of the Salvation Army Canada's ground-breaking programs for survivors of human trafficking.

I have listened, learned and shared in their company with appreciation and deep respect. Being with the people that encounter some of these women and girls in the very worst of circumstances is grounding (as it turns out) for each of us.

A large number of the women and girl with disabilities who are trafficked in Canada and around the world however are still not showing up in any data sets that will lend themselves to the policy reforms that could lead to change. Women with mostly invisible disabilities (Traumatic Brain Injury, intellectual or psychosocial disabilities) are the most affected in sex trafficking. Add being Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, migrant or undocumented and you've got the picture.

These are the victims of slavery and they are in front of your eyes as you walk down the streets and in the homes of your neighbours in places like Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and beyond.

DAWN Canada begins 32 years of service as I file this blog. More than three decades of focus on violence against women and girls with disabilities and Deaf women, and yet I am completely undone by the sheer magnitude of these victims and their suffering. How to be hopeful?

At each of the meetings in Washington this week we met people who are part of that how and they are attached to the vast resources made available by the U.S. Government. As I follow my Canadian colleagues virtually for the next two weeks as they continue this exchange, in Baltimore, in Charlotte, in Cleveland, in Kansas City, and finally Las Vegas, many more interactions will occur with folks in State and local law enforcement, and local NGO's who, like my colleagues are at the front lines of human trafficking.

The opportunities for bilateral engagement abound and it's clear that we bring a strong Canadian perspective to this darkest of forms of violence against our most vulnerable. It is through the critical mass of all these people, through their leadership and ours – that we can find hope 🍁



DAWN news



Trafficking: Impact on people with disabilities

Bonnie Brayton is honoured to have been selected to participate in the [International Visitor Leadership Program at World Learning](#) #IVLP educational tour "[Healing the Wounds of Trafficking: A project for Canada](#)" hosted by the United States Department of State and Administered by World Learning. Participants on the IVLP are individually selected by US Embassy personnel.

From June 19 to July 7, 2017 a 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. The two-week program includes an overview of US efforts to combat human trafficking, including US initiatives to protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Site visits and presentations by various government and non-governmental agencies such as the Polaris Project, National Disability Rights Network, Police, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC), Office on Trafficking in Persons and Office on Violence Against Women will also form part of the agenda 🇨🇦

Federal AccessAbility Legislation consultations

As a member of the Alliance for an Inclusive and Accessible Canada, the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada invited individuals to discuss measures that the government of Canada can take in order to improve accessibility in our country. This initiative is among others taken to have different views about the new coming Federal AccessAbility Legislation 🇨🇦



Developing Responses to Violence against Women with disabilities and Deaf women



DAWN Canada is about to begin the third and final year of our project [“Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence Against Women with Disabilities”](#) (LPS).

DAWN Canada designed the project to bring together community partners to address gaps in policy and service provision that contribute to the high rates violence experienced by women with disabilities and Deaf women. Consistent with DAWN Canada’s intersectional approach, the project is inclusive of women with all types of disabilities, of all backgrounds and identities, including immigrant, racialized, from the LGBTQIA community, Indigenous, and minority language.

Since the project began in the fall of 2015, regional working groups have been meeting in three provinces, Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, to deepen their understanding and develop responses to secondary or systemic violence experienced by women with disabilities and Deaf women when they try to access violence-prevention services.

The working groups are composed of a broad range of stakeholders, including Violence Against Women (VAW) organizations such as shelters, victims services, and police, along with disability organizations, Indigenous organizations, regional health authorities, federal and provincial policy makers, and university faculty members.

The responses that are being developed by the working groups have been informed by the preliminary findings of a review of federal policies and legislation related to gender-based violence and disability, as well as a review of related legislation, policies and programs in Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia.

The review reveals that at all levels, women with disabilities are mostly absent from violence-prevention discourse and policy.

“When vulnerable groups are identified, people with disabilities are included, but women with disabilities are not. There is no acknowledgement, never mind response, to the fact that the intersection of gender and disability results in unique experiences of violence and abuse,” says Bonnie Brayton, DAWN Canada’s National Executive Director.

Brayton describes this as the “un-gendering” of women with disabilities in the development of responses to violence, a practice which she finds “deeply disturbing.”

“While we recognize the distinct issues faced by marginalized genders (women, trans people,

non-binary people), the absence of women with disabilities as a category is indicative of how deeply rooted systemic bias against women with disabilities really is,” she says.

DAWN Canada’s Senior Project Manager Karine Myrgianie Jean-François noted that while the federal government is working on [Federal Accessibility Legislation](#) and has announced a national [Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence](#), the systemic impact of these initiatives is unknown.

“As well, a national strategy doesn’t result in coordinated services,” Jean-François points out, “because direct service provision is the responsibility of the provinces.”

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DAWN Canada's review also concluded that most political and legislative efforts were developed to address Intimate Partner Violence. However, women with disabilities also experience abuse from caregivers or attendants, which falls outside of the definition of Intimate Partner Violence. "This is another example of bias," says Jean-François. "We've been asking VAW partners and stakeholders to move to a more inclusive definition – Inter Personal Violence would work much better."

"When vulnerable groups are identified, people with disabilities are included, but women with disabilities are not..."

The regional working groups are now developing response frameworks which will outline the priority areas for addressing the gaps in violence service responses for their respective regions. The response frameworks will be shared publicly with policy and decision-makers during provincial roundtables that will take place between the fall 2017 and winter 2018. The British Columbia roundtable will be held on November 16th, scheduled to coincide with the Ending Violence Association of British Columbia's [annual professional development conference](#) for violence-prevention stakeholders. The Quebec roundtable will take place in Quebec City on December 4th, 2017 to coincide with the [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#).

The Ontario roundtable will be held in Toronto in early 2018.

"Women with disabilities face different and sometimes intersecting oppressions," Brayton says. "From Indigenous women to racialized women with disabilities, to women living in rural and remote communities. All these women have the right to access appropriate services and programs, yet not a single program, or policy or service is focused on addressing this in Canada. We will not accept simply being a footnote at the end of a report."

Funded by Status of Women Canada, the LPS project will be completed in April 2018. For more information, contact Karine Myrgianie Jean-François at projects@dawncanada.net 🇨🇦



"...Most political and legislative efforts were developed to address Intimate Partner Violence."

Resources



Use the National Accessibility and Accommodation Survey (NAAS) to audit the accessibility of your spaces.

Download it here:
<http://bit.ly/2qbUF5l>

NAAS

In 2007, DAWN Canada conducted a National Accessibility and Accommodation Survey (NAAS) of women's shelters and transition houses to determine the level of accessibility to women with disabilities and Deaf women. More than 10% of shelters responded to the survey. Today, the NAAS is still used as an audit tool by women's shelters 🇨🇦

Upcoming fall events

September 18th, 2017: Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director of DAWN Canada & Jewelles Smith LPS Project Coordinator for BC, attended the [Gender Equality Network meeting](#). The network, made up of 150 women leaders from a variety of sectors, organizations, and communities across the country, will address systemic barriers to gender equality in Canada.

September 27th, 2017: Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director of DAWN Canada, will be the moderator of a workshop at the Canadian Human Rights Commission's conference ["Beyond Labels"](#)

October 2017: DAWN Canada's Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Every year, DAWN Canada conducts a campaign to raise awareness about Breast Cancer for women with disabilities.

November 16th & 17th, 2017: Bonnie Brayton & Jewelles Smith will present a workshop on Legislation, Policy & Service Responses to Violence against Women with Disabilities and Deaf women at Ending Violence Association BC (EVA BC) [annual Training Forum](#): 🇨🇦



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