**AMPLIFY Fall 2018 Newsletter**

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**BLOG**

## [It’s a New Dawn: Playing Rock Music and Learning about Ableism](https://www.canadianwomen.org/blog/its-a-new-dawn/)

By Nelly Bassily and Airin Finkelstein

(This blog was originally published on Canadian Women’s Foundation’s [website](https://www.canadianwomen.org/blog/its-a-new-dawn/))

*“Greta was no stranger to danger. They could not believe they had to go back to the 21st century. But they were here on a mission: to dismantle the patriarchal and exclusionary systems of oppression.*

*You see, Greta was from the year 3000, where society developed so that people born with disabilities could freely navigate in the world and thrive in it. Women with disabilities were considered to have a sacred and unique perspective on the world.”*

These are the opening lines of a futuristic story on ableism used during a workshop at [Rock Camp for Girls and Gender Non-conforming Youth (RCFG\*)](https://girlsrockmontreal.com/) in Montreal.

It’s a hot, balmy Montreal summer and for one week, girls and gender non-conforming youth from the ages of 10 to 17 have taken over the 8th floor of Concordia University’s John Molson School of Business music department. RCFG\* doesn’t just teach guitar riffs, drum beats, and piano chords, they also make space for youth to gain confidence and understand social justice – especially as it relates to racism, feminism, queer and trans issues and of course, disability.

As part of our Girls Without Barriers project funded by the Canadian Women’s Foundation, we partnered with RCFG\* to make this rad, one-week musical camp one that is as friendly and inclusive as possible to girls with disabilities, while also teaching youth who don’t identify as living with a disability what it means to be allies to their young friends living with disabilities.

**Learning Allyship**

Leah is 14 years old. As a first-time RCFG\* camper, she listens intently and participates in the DAWN-run workshop on ableism. Greta – a character DAWN created to tell the *Back-to-the-Future*-like journey of dismantling ableism – teaches the campers about why everyone should care about ableism.

*“Before going to sleep that night, Greta thought about all the work that needed to be done. Whenever they felt worried, they pulled a piece of paper out of their pocket that said:*

*“Understanding disability and ableism is the work of every revolutionary, activist, and organizer – of every human being. Disability is one of the most organic and human experiences on the planet. We are all aging, we are all living in polluted and toxic conditions and the level of violence currently in the world should be enough for all of us to care more about disability and ableism.”*

 *– Mia Mingus*

*This idea is what drove them, and they would work ceaselessly until the day, which they knew was undoubtedly coming, where all people would know this message.”*

Leah left the workshop feeling like an important ally to her friends living with disabilities.

“Something I learned [in the workshop on ableism] is, not only should you be there to help and support friends with disabilities, it’s also important to *not* speak for them, but to give them the space to speak for themselves,” she said.

“I also think it is important to talk about ableism because even though it may seem like things are better for people with disabilities, there is always learning and work to be done to help people with disabilities have better, more accessible environments, and shift non-disabled people’s perspectives about disabled people away from pity to power.”

In a room parallel to where Leah learned about ableism and allyship,14 year old Siobhan was participating in a caucus discussion on disability.

The caucus on disability is meant to be a safe space for all the youth who identify as living with a disability at camp to come together and share their needs, wants, frustrations, fears, and desires from a place of solidarity across disabilities.

As a youth who says she has a complicated relationship with an invisible disability, Siobhan says the disability caucus allowed for youth and adults with disabilities to share their struggles.

Jasmine, another camper who also participated in the disability caucus, says: “Not everyone experiences disability the same way. I only have the experience with my mental illness so it was interesting to see how others lived with their disabilities.”

**Tuning Up Against Ableism**

At the end of the week one of camp, all the youth were ready to rock on stage!

Songs composed, lyrics learned, chords rehearsed, and tempo and rockstar outfits on point, the girls performed with their bands. And the knowledge they gained during camp permeated in their song lyrics.

As the band, Counting Sheep, sings in the song they composed:

*You can be who you want to be.*

*And if you like, you can come with me.*

*No sexism!*

*No racism!*

*No homophobic speech! (3 x times)*

*Fantasy.*

*Fantasy world.*

*You and me*

*You and me will fly so high*

*In the sky*

*Fly so high with you*

Girlhood can be tough, especially for girls and gender non-conforming youth with disabilities, but by building an understanding of ableism and how to deconstruct it, these rock stars are hitting the right note.

**Nelly Bassily** is an intersectional feminist, sexual rights, and anti-racism activist and media maker with over 12 years of experience in the non-profit sector. She is currently a project officer at DAWN Canada and focuses her work on young women with disabilities and young Deaf women.

**Airin Finkelstein** is a queer and invisibly disabled writer, theatre maker, and naturalist skill enthusiast who is currently pursuing their master’s degree in drama therapy in Montreal. They hope to help create a space where people can interact in a playful and empathetic way so that they can learn to relate to themselves in this way (or vice versa).

**DAWN NEWS**

* **A Fond Farewell: Carmela Hutchison Retires from DAWN Canada Board**

On behalf of the Board, Staff and Membership, it is with great appreciation for her many years of leadership and service that we announce the retirement of our President, [Carmela Hutchison](https://dawncanada.net/media/uploads/page_data/page-258/2016-2017_annual_report_eng.pdf) from the Board.

Carmela joined DAWN Canada as our Interim President in 2006 and was elected as President in 2007, a time when the organization was going through a major transition. She addressed governance issues within the organization by leading the process of establishing a national head office in Montreal, hiring a national executive director, and making DAWN Canada officially bilingual. These steps, along with renewed bylaws and sound financial management helped to stabilize DAWN Canada’s operations.

From this position, DAWN Canada has been able to significantly increase its capacity, including hiring more staff, securing more federal and provincial funding, and attracting more women with disabilities to the board.

Beyond governance, Carmela has led DAWN Canada’s board with a strong vision for the organization while maintaining a deep commitment to women with disabilities and Deaf women. She has led initiatives for policy change and advocacy on some of the most critical issues for women with disabilities, including violence prevention, housing, employment, and Medical Assistance in Dying.

Carmela Hutchison is one of the leading feminist disability activists in Canada. Her contributions to people with disabilities extend well beyond DAWN Canada. She has also served Canadians with disabilities as the president of the Alberta Network for Mental Health, and as an executive member of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities. Her volunteerism spans more than two decades and includes a broad range of complex and compelling issues. She has made further contributions through knowledge transfer and service in the areas of peer support and mental health, poverty, addictions, disaster planning and tourism.

Carmela’s legacy to Canadians with disabilities, especially women with disabilities will continue to be felt far into the future.

We wish Carmela a warm and fond farewell.

* **Thank you to our summer students: Airin, Renée and Tamara**

During this summer, we had Airin Finkelstein, Renée Yoxon and Tamara Medford as summer students. We would like to thank them for the hard work and for their contributions to our DAWN Canada’s activities. We are happy that both Tamara and Renée are able to continue to support us on a part-time/contract basis.

* **CIRFF Paris conference**

DAWN Canada participated in the Congrès international des recherches féministes dans la francophonie (CIRFF) which was held from August 27th to 31st 2018 in Paris. During this event, Sonia Alimi, Research Coordinator at DAWN Canada, participated on a panel whose theme was “Renouvellement des modes de production de nouveaux savoirs féministes”. She presented DAWN Canada as an example of an organization which integrates intersectionality in its culture and practices.

* **L’Alliance des femmes de la Francophonie Canadiennes** **event and AGM**

L’Alliance des femmes de la Francophonie Canadiennes (**AFFC)** held their AGM on September 28-30, 2018 in Ottawa, Ontario. Selma Kouidri, DAWN Canada’s Inclusion Coordinator for Quebec, moderated a roundtable on "Handi-Féminisme : Regard intersectionnel sur la diversité et l’inclusion," which focused on adopting an intersectional lens in feminist discourse.

* **Pan-Canadian Voice for Women’s Housing Symposium**

Karine Myrgianie Jean-François, Senior Project Manager at DAWN Canada, participated to this symposium. Funded by CMHC, Status of Women Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada, the symposium brought together community and government organizations to discuss barriers facing women in accessing housing. During two days of workshops and conversations, delegates discussed solutions for better access to housing for all women.

* **2018 Disability Intersectionality Summit**

Nelly Bassily, Project Officer, and Karine Myrgianie Jean-François, Senior Project Manager at DAWN Canada attended the second biennial [Disability Intersectionality Summit](https://www.disabilityintersectionalitysummit.com/) on October 13th, 2018 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. This summit brought together marginalized people with disabilities (LGBTQIA, incarcerated people with disabilities, etc.) to talk about the multiple oppressions they experience. It is organized by and for people with disabilities.

* **Gender Equality Network of Canada (GENC) meeting in Vancouver**

The Gender Equality Network of Canada (GENC) is a national network of more than 130 women leaders from across Canada, initiated by the Canadian Women’s Foundation and funded by Status of Women Canada. Launched in September 2017, it brings together women leaders to advocate for policy changes, build inclusive intersectional leadership, and take collective action to advance gender equality in Canada. Bonnie Brayton moderated a panel discussion on “Inclusive, Integrated and Intersectional Practice: Build it and they will come!” Several other women leaders with disabilities were also in attendance, including Doris Rajan, Joyce Fosssella, Susana Deranger, Fran Odette, Nihal Elwan, and Barb Goode.

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* **Global Action on Gender-based Violence**

As part of the [16 days of Activism Against Gender-based violence](http://www.wiiscanada.org/16-days-2018/), DAWN Canada hosted a Twitter campaign on December 3rd 2018 - International Day of Persons with Disabilities. to raise awareness to the need to include women with disabilities in the discussion about gender-based violence. Our Communications Coordinator Hanane Khales attended a rally on December 6th, the [National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence](https://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/commemoration/vaw-vff/remembrance-commemoration-en.html) against Women in Canada to commemorate the anniversary of the murders of 14 young women at l'École Polytechnique de Montréal in 1989. Watch [here](https://www.facebook.com/FFQMMF/videos/435138057021341/?__xts__%5B0%5D=68.ARA2fwxBMaCI1uFH_59la-42L2cBpEYxIjarisiKQPMW-XndGGCru-5i4s1wxUq4tvfSvSwhSks0mikXDf9aPUC6y3CnzL4BbMjwkptf4S8bcO3tgyczkjriNjHVSAhhebv9BP7p_IhU1UPWyaeVV_ggxJ54zJb-xIY0LfrmydL3JDLroPRQvxMnQ-HmGQ-LaKaIw6mI5k_kp_MJGq54ZL3qUthv3q3DMCkRl98zFjpMxjD8sJE_vG38E-seVRTEgFmCTRWzrLZlLHiKLiD6FeU5oUfG4-eRkS8mvj7lSeOMH0jl8Y_OAckYpRVYfju_6blfdDYDYzuJG46mtu9EMKz3dNw&__tn__=-R) on Facebook Live.

* **National Conference on Disability and Work**

The Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work held a N[ational Conference on Disability and Work](https://www.ccrw.org/disability-and-work-in-canada-national-conference-2018/) on December 4 & 5, 2018 in Ottawa. Conference attendees, including Bonnie Brayton and Nelly Basily (DAWN’s Youth Coordinator) participated in a review of a proposed national strategy to improve the level of employment of persons with disabilities.

**PROJECT UPDATES**

* **Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf women (LPS)**

We have successfully completed our project “Legislation, Policy and Service Responses to Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf women.” This project could not have been successful without the work of our Provincial Project Coordinators, Jewelles Smith (BC), Yin Brown (Ontario) and Selma Kouidri (Quebec), and of course, the many organizations and individuals who gave their time as participants in our regional working groups. To find out more about the outcomes of this initiative, [watch](https://youtu.be/txFR5urQIFI) Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director of DAWN Canada, in this short video summary of the project. Project outputs and outcomes will also be available on our [website](https://dawncanada.net/projects/lps/) in the near future.

* **Girls Without Barriers:**

Currently in its second year, 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. As part of this project, DAWN Canada organized workshops in partnership with [Rock Camp Montreal](https://girlsrockmontreal.com/) in order to raise awareness of the specific needs of girls with disabilities, especially among their peers at the camp. Read more on page 1 above.

* **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.

The project 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. This project will also demonstrate the social and economic benefits of equitable hiring and inclusive service provision.

**USEFUL RESOURCES**

* **Canadian Women and Girls with Disabilities and Human Trafficking**

In June 2018, DAWN Canada prepared a [brief](https://dawncanada.net/media/uploads/page_data/page-63/dawn_brief_on_human_trafficking_and_women_with_disabilities_june_15_2018.pdf) on the impact of trafficking on women with disabilities and Deaf women for submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights for their study on human trafficking. The lead researchers for this brief were Sonia Alimi DAWN’s Research Coordinator and Mikayla Celine Aguie, a student from Duke University who was doing a summer internship at DAWN.

* **CDEACF collection - a unique collection of French language resources on women with disabilities**

DAWN Canada has a [collection](http://catalogue.cdeacf.ca/ListRecord.htm?list=folder&folder=1749) of French and English resources on women and disability, the first and only francophone collection on this topic in the world. The collection is housed in the Centre de documentation pour l’éducation des adultes et la condition féminine (CDEACF), a national organization based in Montreal.

* **Read our new Learning Brief on Housing and Women with Disabilities**

There is a clear lack of research related to disability and housing, and even less is known about the housing needs of women with disabilities in Canada. T[his new brief](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/vawlearningnetwork.ca/files/Learning-Network-Brief-35.pdf) was commissioned by DAWN Canada and developed by Western University’s Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, in collaboration with Doris Rajan (writer) and Fran Odette (reviewer). The brief highlights the need for research on disability and housing, especially data on women with disabilities facing barriers to housing.

* **Pardoning father who killed disabled daughter would set dangerous precedent**

Carmela Hutchison wrote a blog on why pardoning Tracy Latimer’s father legitimizes violence against women with disabilities. As she said: “We know that women and girls living with disabilities like Tracy still live at risk...In 45 per cent of all incidents of violent victimization involving women, the victim was a woman with a disability”. Read it [here](http://rabble.ca/news/2018/07/tracy-latimer%E2%80%99s-killer-does-not-deserve-pardon).

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**Disability and Rehabilitation Course in the School of Social Work - McGill**

On February 11th, 2019, Bonnie Brayton, National executive Director of DAWN Canada will be presenting DAWN’s mission and the vital contributions that we have made in the lives of women with disabilities during a three-hour session at McGill University - School of Social Work.

**Tracy Latimer archive**

The Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) is creating an archive about Tracy Latimer’s case. Tracy was a girl with disabilities who was murdered by her father because she was disabled. Stay tuned for more information on this archive in the next issue of our newsletter.