

Family Services à la famille Ottawa

Position paper on Gender Equalityⁱ

Family Services à la famille Ottawa (FSFO) is a community agency, grounded in a history of responding to the needs of people in our community. We work with individuals, communities, and families who are currently in distress or at risk. We assist people to build on their strengths and to move forward by providing counseling, education, and advocacy within a context of systemic change.

Family Services à la famille Ottawa has long believed that gender equality is a crucial ingredient for families to thrive. As an organization we believe that in spite of decades of effort, gender inequality still persists to a significant level and our work must continue to address these issues. Without gender equality, female single parents may continue to earn less money than male single parents who do the same job, and therefore be less able to financially care for their children.ⁱⁱ Without gender equality, transgender individuals may continue to suffer ill treatment in hospital settings, and experience neglect that puts their health and their lives at risk.ⁱⁱⁱ Without gender equality, some women may continue to be forced to accept physical violence and intimidation as part of their family life.^{iv}

Family Services à la famille Ottawa believes that men and women must share the responsibility to create gender equality. FSFO is committed to advocating for gender equality to clients, community, and government through our counseling, education and family advocacy programs. FSFO acknowledges the multitude and intersections of oppressions that may also impact upon women. "Barriers to equality are rooted in long-standing attitudes and traditions not only about women, but also about race, age, sexual orientation, disability, colour, etc. In particular, the life situations of women outside the dominant culture—women with disabilities, Aboriginal women, women from visible minorit(y communities), elderly women, lesbians, (single) mothers, women in poverty—are quite different from the mainstream. For them, the path to equality has been, and continues to be, even more difficult"^v.

Achieving gender equality will not only improve women's economic stability, but will also improve their emotional and mental health and that of their children.^{vi} Over time, gender equality will help to dramatically shrink the staggering rates of poverty that women, seniors, families, and single mothers experience and reduce the risk of addiction and woman abuse (commonly referred to as domestic violence) that affects their lives.^{vii}

FSFO commits to:

- Reflect gender equality as a priority in its policies and practices
- Continue to provide programs which address the consequences of gender inequality, such as counseling children and parents, transitional support, violence prevention, and group therapy
- Continue to offer and enhance advocacy workshops in the community to educate individuals on how to advocate for self and others
- Provide election toolkits and information sessions on how government policy impacts upon issues such as equality
- Maintain and expand partnerships with community agencies and coalitions like Minwaashin Lodge and the Ottawa Coalition To End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW)
- Continue to support community campaigns to end woman abuse, create universal access to childcare, alleviate poverty, increase the minimum wage, and increase social assistance rates

Gender Equality and Human Rights

Canada has committed to equality internationally by ratifying “all the major international human rights treaties including... the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and United Nations Declaration on Violence Against Women”.^{viii} Internationally, there is an increasing body of knowledge indicating that gender-based violence is widespread and common. It occurs in a broad context of gender-based discrimination with regard to access to education, resources, and decision-making power in private and public life.^{ix} These declarations that Canada has signed make it clear that no matter what, women in our country have the right to experience lives free of rape, wife abuse, sexual abuse of children, and other harmful practices that are contradictory to the above mentioned human rights treaties.

As a Nation, our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms commits to provide all citizens with “the right to equal treatment before and under the law; and to equal benefit and protection of the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability.”^x Canadian courts have also recognized other grounds of discrimination that are not specifically set out in the *Charter*, such as sexual orientation and marital status^{xi}. All citizens of Canada are entitled to these rights under law and have the right to recourse under section 24 of the Charter if these rights are violated.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, “it is public policy in Ontario to recognize the dignity and worth of every person and to provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination that is contrary to law, and having as its aim the creation of a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person so that each person feels a part of the community and able to contribute fully to the development and well-being of the community and the Province...”^{xii}

Ottawa’s *City for All Women Initiative* (CAWI) is developing a gender equality guide.^{xiii} Their main goal is to “strengthen the capacity of the full diversity of women and the City of Ottawa to work in partnership so as to create a more inclusive city and promote gender equality”.^{xiv} The City of Ottawa has also recognized the importance of gender equality in its 20/20 plan, where it states that “the City must approach communications, collaboration, and service delivery in a way that takes gender into account”^{xv}.

Despite these international, national, provincial, and local commitments to gender equality, the reality of gender inequality for women and children in our community persists. Unfortunately there is a lack of data on the experiences of all women in our communities. Thus there continues to be gaps in research on women experiencing multiple oppressions. “Significant data gaps still exist and there is much we don’t know. For example, the experiences of Aboriginal women, older women, immigrant and visible minority women, and women in same-sex relationships regarding intimate partner violence and sexual assault are often hidden”^{xvi}.

Family Services à la famille recognizes the need to work across cultures, and acknowledges the perceived challenges in balancing respect for the Charter value of equality between men and women with the desire to be respectful of cultural diversity. Accordingly, gender

equality is a fundamental value within Canada and one that Family Services à la famille fully supports. This core value will be respectfully shared with clients, staff, and the community.

Gender Inequality and Poverty

According to the Gender Gap Index, Canada ranks 18th out of 128 countries surveyed in 2007^{xvii}. Countries that ranked above us include Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Spain, and Ireland^{xviii}.

As noted above, one of the ways that gender inequality plays out is through economic disparities. Economic disparities between men and women continue to exist in Canada, with men making significantly more annual income than women, and women and children living significantly more in poverty. Some statistics:

- In Ottawa, in 2001, 83% of single parent households were headed by women ^{xix}
- 1 in 5 children live in poverty in Ottawa.^{xx}
- 37% of Canadian mothers with paid employment raise a family on less than \$10 per hour^{xxi}.

The strain of constantly living from paycheque to paycheque is devastating: imagine having to choose between paying for utilities, buying healthy food, or paying for a school outing for your child. Children who live in poverty have been documented to have poorer health, poorer academic achievement, and more difficulty socially.^{xxii}

“Gender equality and the well-being of children are inextricably linked. When women are empowered to lead full and productive lives, children and families prosper.” ^{xxiii} It is the belief of Family Services à la famille Ottawa that with gender equality, fewer families would be living in a chronic state of financial anxiety. As a result, they would be better able to manage the day-to-day stresses of family life, and would less likely be in need of services like ours.

Gender Inequality and Woman Abuse

Violence against women is another area in which the results of gender inequality are all too clear. In 2002, Status of Women Canada stated that “violence against women is a complex matter that is linked inextricably to women’s equality in society”. ^{xxiv}

- Every year, at least 30 women die in Ontario at the hands of their male partners.^{xxv}
- Fifty-one percent of women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual abuse since the age of 16.^{xxvi}
- “Aboriginal women are three times more likely to have experienced spousal abuse than non-Aboriginal women, and they are twice as likely to have experienced it than are Aboriginal men.”^{xxvii}

In 2006, Family Services à la famille Ottawa’s Anti-Violence program provided services to over 162 women and 60 children. Last year, fifty-three percent of women escaping abusive situations were admitted to shelters with their children, and 65% of these children were under the age of 10.^{xxviii} According to the Federal Family Violence Initiative, “More than three quarters of Canadians believe that family violence should be an *urgent priority* for the federal government as well as at the community level. The majority see family violence as *more serious* today than a decade ago...They see direct impacts on health as well as

psychological effects. There is broad recognition of the intergenerational effects of family violence resulting in poor development of children, youth crime and school bullying”^{xxix}.

Canada pays a high price for the violence which results from gender inequality. A 1995 study estimated the annual direct costs of violence against women in Canada to be “Can\$187 million for the criminal justice system, for police \$294 million for the cost of counselling and training, totalling more than Can\$187 billion a year”^{xxx}. Taking into consideration the annual rate of inflation one can only surmise that the current economic impact of violence has increased considerably over the past 13 years.

Amnesty International has stated that “violence at home wrecks the lives of women in every country in the world”, including Canada. Violence in the home includes battering by intimate partners, isolation, intimidation, threats, economic deprivation, sexual abuse, and marital rape. It is often all these things, taking the form of “routine physical, psychological and sexual violence.”^{xxxi}

As noted in the previous section, gender equality and the well-being of women and children are inextricably linked. It is the belief of Family Services à la famille Ottawa that with gender equality, fewer women and children would live in chronic states of fear, violence, and intimidation. As a result, they would be free from the debilitating power and control cycles that perpetuate violence against women, free to live productive lives and to raise healthy, well-adjusted children.

In Conclusion

Families, in all their forms, are the heart of our community.^{xxxii} Many women and children in our community are living in conditions that are the result of gender inequality, conditions that render them unable to meet their families’ basic needs.

Family Services à la famille Ottawa believes that men and women must share the responsibility to create gender equality, and that it is our duty as a provider of services to families to advocate for a society that is gender equitable and acknowledges the multitude of oppressions that may also impact upon women and their families.

We have long believed that gender inequality is the systemic cause of multiple social problems. Addressing the impacts of gender inequality is deeply rooted in our history as an agency. We continue to be committed to addressing gender inequality which results in disproportionate levels of poverty, violence, sexual abuse, and teen pregnancy. Family Services à la famille Ottawa believes all families should live free from violence and poverty. We encourage all community members and agencies in Ottawa to recognize their role in preventing and eradicating gender inequality.

- ⁱ “Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to national, political, economic, social, and cultural development. It also means that both women and men benefit equally from the results of that development”. {The Global Development Challenge} http://www.international.gc.ca/foreign_policy/human-rights/lwe1-equal-en.asp
- ⁱⁱ Campaign 2000 – *Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada* (Toronto, 1999)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Vancouver Coastal Health, Transcend Transgender Support & Education Society and Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition (2006). *Transcare Medical Issues: Getting Trans Competent Care How to Work With Your Nurse or Doctor*. [Available online]:
<http://www.vch.ca/transhealth/resources/library/tcpdocs/consumer/medical-general.pdf>
- ^{iv} Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation, Final Report of the Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group, (2003), p.4 [Available online]: <http://www.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/reports/spousal.html>
- ^v Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends* (2006), p.8.
- ^{vi} Women, Mental Health and Mental Illness and Addiction in Canada: An Overview By the Ad Hoc Working Group on Women, Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addictions (2006). [Available online]: <http://www.cwhn.ca/PDF/womenMentalHealth.pdf>
- ^{vii} Women, Mental Health and Mental Illness and Addiction in Canada: An Overview By the Ad Hoc Working Group on Women, Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addictions (2006). [Available online]: <http://www.cwhn.ca/PDF/womenMentalHealth.pdf>
- ^{viii} CIDA’s Policy on Gender Equality, (1999). [Available online]:
<http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/CIDAWEB/acdicida.nsf/En/EMA-218123616-NN9>
- ^{ix} United Nations Population Fund, *Violence Against Women and Girls*. [Available online]:
<http://www.unfpa.org/intercenter/violence/intro.htm>
- ^x Department of Justice, *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). [Available online]:
http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/fs/2003/doc_30898.html
- ^{xi} Department of Justice, *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). [Available online]:
http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/fs/2003/doc_30898.html
- ^{xii} Ontario Human Rights Code, Preamble. [Available online]:
http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90h19_e.htm
- ^{xiii} Diversity in Ottawa: A City of Ottawa Snapshot. [Available online]:
http://ottawa.ca/city_hall/snapshots/diversity_en.html
- ^{xiv} City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) Promoting an inclusive and women-friendly Ottawa that respects diversity. [Available online]: <http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/EN/home.html>
- ^{xv} Ottawa 20/20 Human Services Plan, [Available online]:
http://ottawa.ca/city_services/planningzoning/2020/hs/2_3_en.shtml
- ^{xvi} Statistics Canada, *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends* 2006, p.12.
- ^{xvii} World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2007). p.54.
- ^{xviii} World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report* (2007). p.54.
- ^{xix} Statistics Canada (2001), Census.
- ^{xx} Child and Youth Health Network for Eastern Ontario – *A workbook on Child Health and Poverty* (2006)
- ^{xxi} Campaign 2000 - *Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada* (Toronto, 1999)
- ^{xxii} Child and Youth Health Network for Eastern Ontario – *A workbook on Child Health and Poverty* (2006)
- ^{xxiii} Unicef - *The State of the World’s Children 2007: Women and Children, the Double Dividend of Gender Equality* (2007)
- ^{xxiv} Status of Women Canada - *Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile* (December 2002)
- ^{xxv} Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women. [Available online]:
<http://www.octevaw-cocvff.ca/?q=en/node/24>
- ^{xxvi} Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women – *Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile* (2002), page 10.
- ^{xxvii} Family Violence and Homelessness A Review of the Literature, p.23 (2006). [Available online]:
http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/pdfs/fv-2007-homelessness_e.pdf
- ^{xxviii} Transition Homes in Canada: Ontario Fact Sheet, Transition Home Survey (2003/2004)
- ^{xxix} Family Violence Initiative Five Year Report (2005), p.28.
- ^{xxx} United Nations Fact Sheet, (2006). [Available online]:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/launch/english/v.a.w-consequenceE-use.pdf>

^{xxx} Amnesty International Violence in the Home, (2007). [Available online]:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/campaigns/stop-violence-against-women/issues/implementation-existing-laws/violence-home>

^{xxxii} including lesbian/gay/bi/trans/two-spirit/trans families, Aboriginal families, families of choice, foster families, kinship families, adoptive families, new Canadian families, and families headed by teens. Two-Spirit A re-claimed concept from several North American Aboriginal cultures that refers to Aboriginal persons who are born one sex and fulfill roles across sex and gender lines, as well as additional roles reserved for Two Spirit people. Some say they maintain balance by housing both the male and female spirit” Around the Rainbow Toolkit page 10. [Available online]: <http://www.around-therainbow.com/index.php?unique=276>.