

## The Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre Herstory – over 35 years of service

In May of 1983, the dream of a Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre (FGWRC) became a reality. The dream grew out of a small discussion group, whose members already knew one another through volunteer work, employment or participation in one of the downtown YWCA's women's programs. At the time, south Winnipeg was a rapidly expanding suburb, with about 12,000 adult women living in the area. The hope was that a resource centre in the Fort Garry area could offer a variety of services and be easily accessible for women in this part of the city.

From the beginning the dream of FGWRC was made possible thanks to women's leadership in the community – women who were passionate, dedicated and committed to their community and supporting the lives of women. A small group of women began the task of lobbying and making proposals to the appropriate government agencies – new tasks to all of them. Some officials feared that this 'feminist' centre would be destructive to families, but other community groups supported the women's proposals.

Through FGWRC, it was hoped that women would learn about themselves, be given the chance to make positive changes and take control of their lives. As Nora Crichton, one of the original founding sisters noted, there was never a shortage of capable women to take part in running FGWRC. "All sorts of talented women kept coming forth (to fill new roles and vacancies). That's the strength of the Centre."

The Centre was first located in Viscount Alexander School and was open on a part-time basis. Although less accessible than hoped, the school was available at no charge, and funds went for staff and program development. The next year, they were able to rent space in the Southwood Mall, with a noticeable increase in use. In 1986, the Centre opened with full time hours.

Shortly after the FGWRC first opened in May 1983, it began its first Outreach project, which ran until 1985. In 1988, FGWRC undertook a 2 year Health Promotions Project, with a focus on the needs of mothers. In 1994 the Outreach Program – housed at 104-3100 Pembina Hwy - became a part of the core programming of FGWRC. Since those early days change and growth has continued at FGWRC. FGWRC has moved locations two additional times (first to 1088 Pembina Hwy, and then to 1150A Waverley St.). The Outreach location has been redeveloped and expanded. There have been increasing and expanding programming, staffing and funding opportunities. In 2007, the Centre received funding for a Child Counselling Program (to provide supportive counselling to children who have witnessed and/or experienced domestic violence). The Child Counselling program operates out of 104-210 Ellen Street as well as the Outreach location.

The Centre – which has operated as a collective since 1989 - continues to find new ways to reflect the feminist principals of collaboration and shared power through its structures and working relationships. Volunteering and empowering women's leadership, a key part of the FGWRC ethos from the beginning has also evolved – moving away from the more "historical" volunteer programs (such as Peer Counselling, Newsletter and Special Events volunteers) as funding changed and evolved towards the current volunteer opportunities through service on the board and through the public education program.

And yet an enduring legacy of FGWRC is that so much remains the same from its' earliest days, despite the constant changing landscape. FGWRC continues to be rooted in the original vision of offering free support and resources to women and children of the community. FGWRC continues its legacy of being

adaptive and responsive to the needs of the community and providing excellence in service. The dream that became the FGWRC when its doors were opened 30 years ago has firmly taken root in the community in ways many could never have imagined. Thank you for your willingness to become part of the FGWRC story.

*\*\*\*This introduction was originally adapted from a 1994 article by Allison Campbell in "Making Waves"- the former FGWRC monthly newsletter - and has continued to be adapted over time, with deep gratitude and thanks to the original contributor.*