



Young Women's Groups In Our Schools

A Resource for Educators

Produced by the Status of Women Committee
of OSSTF District 12



TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHY START A YOUNG WOMEN’S CLUB?	3
GETTING STARTED	4
SELECTING A FOCUS FOR YOUR CLUB	5
ACTIVITY IDEAS	6
RESOURCES – ORGANIZATIONS	8
RESOURCES – INTERNET	11
RESOURCES – VIDEO	12
APPENDIX A – SAMPLE ANNOUNCEMENT	13
APPENDIX B – MOVING TOWARDS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT	14

WHY START A YOUNG WOMEN'S CLUB?

How often have you heard young women in your school call each other 'bitch' or 'whore', and then giggle with pleasure? How often have you watched as young men in the school address the young women similarly and the young women don't even flinch? If you were to ask the female students of your school whether or not they are feminists, how many would answer in the affirmative and how many would cringe, linking the term feminist to man-hating, bra-burning, hairy-legged, unfeminine women?

The District 12 Status of Women Committee is concerned that young women in our schools are no longer even aware of what sexual harassment is; they do not understand the concept of sexual objectification; they have pop culture role models who do not challenge, but rather perpetuate old stereo types of what a successful woman looks like and how she behaves. We also believe that the lack of understanding about the importance of the women's rights movement among our students is dangerous to maintenance of women's rights in the future, and dangerous to our student's safety in schools right now. If young women don't know their rights and what is and is not acceptable, how can they protect and respect themselves and how can they ensure that the rights so basic right now aren't one day taken away again?

As Canadians, many of our social values have been shaped by pivotal decision-making at the national level. The inclusion of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms into our Constitution is arguably the most progressive decision ever taken by a federal government with regards to the protection of fundamental human rights for all Canadians, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or race. Many young people, however, are unaware of the fact that the legislation of these rights was preceded by decades of social activism on behalf of committed social activists.

As education workers, we are in a unique position to both shape the values of young people and to help them appreciate the struggles women and other gender identity groups continue to face both here in Canada, and right in their very own schools as well as elsewhere around the world.

It is the hope of the District 12 OSSTF Status of Women's Committee that you will be able to use this resource document to reach out to a broad group of students who are interested in women's issues and their impact on our daily lives. Above all, we hope this resource document will form the basis of a student-centered learning community in which open discussion about gender-based issues is encouraged.

GETTING STARTED

Starting up a Young Women's Club in your school may be easy, or more challenging, depending on the culture at your school.

Talk to Your Administration

As with any new initiative in your school, begin by broaching the subject with the member(s) of your Admin. Get them on board first. To do this, you may want to have a plan in mind for the kind of club you envision, and the kinds of activities in which it might engage, keeping in mind that you want to remain flexible and open so that the students who get involved also have an opportunity for input.

Engage Interested Students

You may already be aware of students who have expressed an interest in the issues that such a club might explore. If this is the case, invite those students to a meeting at lunch, before or after school, and broach the idea of starting a club with them. They are likely to enthusiastically bring ideas about how to attract other students into the club. We have included template posters and announcements for you to use to call for interested students, but feel free to allow the students to create their own!

Create Interest Where None is Immediately Apparent

If you are in a school where you are unaware of any interest in such a club other than your own, or you are in a school where you know there is a need, but the culture is such that the club may be looked with suspicion, you have a greater challenge ahead of you.

In this circumstance, you may want to start with a series of announcements to generate some interest in the topic/issue. See Appendix A for some examples.

After the series of announcements, set a meeting date and time and see who shows up. It may be only one or two people. It may be lots. It may be that no one shows. If you are set on highlighting women's rights issues in your school, it may mean you need to use this resource document to plan events for students in order to begin to educate them before a club is established. Those events may eventually lead to the establishment of a club.

Once you have established your membership, you need to establish what kind of club you and the students would like to have.

SELECTING A FOCUS FOR YOUR CLUB

Status of Women clubs may have many different goals and purposes. In the beginning you will have to think about a specific focus for your club. Ideally, this planning should engage the students involved. Your focus may shift from time to time as students change, or the needs of your school community change. Having a specific focus will help you to plan your meetings and to plan the specific types of activities you might want to be involved in.

In particular, you might want to consider whether your club will be for girls only. For some, the “safe space” of a girls-only club may be desirable. For others, including all genders may help to facilitate discussions between genders in a safe space. Alternatively, you can set aside certain meetings that are for girls only, or welcome to everyone. It is important that no one feel excluded on the basis of gender and that whatever decision you make, you are supported by your school community.

You will also want to consider what format your club will take. A useful step to take at your first meeting is deciding what kind of club you and your students would like to have, and to plan some initial goals and initiatives for the upcoming year. For some, a club in which to discuss and learn more about issues related to gender and sexuality in a safe space is all that is desired. For others, a more active and visible role may be needed. The following are some suggestions for various formats of clubs. Of course, you should feel free to incorporate elements from any or all of these suggestions and create your own unique focus.

You may find the template entitled Moving Towards Student Engagement attached to this document as Appendix B to guide your discussion.

Discussion and Education Forum

With this focus, your club may simply be about having a safe space for students to meet and discuss various gender and sexuality issues. Your club may want to consider: composing a list of discussion topics ahead of time; viewing documentaries; reading articles and/or books on gender related issues; inviting guest speakers; having students generate their own ideas for discussion based on current events, etc...

Awareness and Consciousness Raising

With this focus, your club may be about taking some of the issues discussed and work to create awareness in the larger school community. Your club may want to consider activities like: putting posters up in the school; announcements on the PA; your club’s participation in school assemblies; hosting display tables in the cafeteria, etc.

Activism

With this focus, your club may be interested in actively creating or participating in public awareness campaigns, or engaging in volunteer work in the community. Your club may want to consider activities like: hosting fund-raisers, food-drives or clothing drives for local women’s charities; participating in established national and international events such as the Canadian Breast Cancer Association’s Run for the Cure, or the White Ribbon campaign; volunteering at a local women’s shelter, etc...

ACTIVITY IDEAS

General:

- ✚ Have students make regular announcements about women's issues/current issues affecting women.
- ✚ Meet regularly to discuss issues and plan events.

International Day of the Eradication of Poverty (October 17)

- ✚ Have students make a series of announcements about topics such as women's earning compared with men's, women and poverty, equal pay legislation, etc.

Sample Announcement:

"Young women heading into the workforce be warned: you may think it's an even playing field when you get there but be prepared to earn less than the men from your graduating class and in the cubicles next to you. Did you know that according to Statistics Canada women earned 85 cents for every dollar paid to men and that this pay gap was the exact same size in 2005 as it was five years earlier?"

Additional Facts for announcements:

- ✚ "One in seven women (2.4 million) in Canada lives in poverty."
- ✚ "When mothers are poor, so are their children: more than one million children live in poverty in Canada³ and poverty is strongly linked to poor scholastic achievement."
- ✚ "Income level is a key determinant of health and women and children living in poverty are more susceptible to poor physical and mental health."
- ✚ "Women living in poverty are more likely to experience violence and abuse."
- ✚ "Part of the reason that the wage gap is still as big as it is in Canada is because women make up 2/3 of minimum wage earners. In Canada, minimum wage earnings do not provide people with a fair income. In fact, minimum wage earnings fall well below the poverty-line."
- ✚ "Even after taking into account government transfers and tax credits, almost one-quarter (24%) of Canadian women raising children on their own and 14% of single older women are poor in 2009."

National Women's History Month (October)

- ✚ Run an in-school poster contest highlighting achievements of women
- ✚ Have students plan for and make daily announcements highlighting Canadian women of note.

December 6 Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women

- ✚ Run an in-school poster contest for students highlighting action on violence against women leading up to December 6
- ✚ Plan an all-school assembly highlighting the December 6 massacre, its victims and issues of violence against women.

ACTIVITY IDEAS *continued*

Black History Month (February)

- ✚ Feature women of colour; invite woman of colour to speak about being a woman of colour in today's world

Valentine's Day

- ✚ Organize workshops/assemblies using guest speakers from Metrac/White Ribbon Campaign focusing on safe dating and 'no means no' message

International Women's Day (March 8)

- ✚ In addition to PA announcements highlighting Women of Accomplishment throughout history, have students create display cases featuring achievements of women in various areas of work in each academic department e.g. female athletes outside of phys ed office; female science accomplishments outside of science office, etc.

Asian History month (May)

- ✚ Feature women of Asian descent and their accomplishments
- ✚ Invite a guest speaker of Asian descent to talk about Asian women

Dates of Interest

Your committee may wish to organize events around one or more of these dates:

- ✚ October 17: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
- ✚ November 25: Day for Elimination of Violence against Women.
- ✚ December 6: National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.
- ✚ December 10: International Human Rights Day
- ✚ February 14: Saint Valentine's Day
- ✚ March 8: International Women's Day
- ✚ April 28: Workers day of mourning.
- ✚ May 3-7: Education Week
- ✚ June 1-4: Sexual Harassment Awareness Week
- ✚ June 21: National Aboriginal Day

RESOURCES – ORGANIZATIONS

The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC)

<http://www.metrac.org/>

METRAC is a not-for-profit, community-based organization that works to prevent and end violence against diverse women, youth, and children. METRAC has three main program areas: Community Safety, Community Justice, and Community Outreach and Education.

METRAC Community Outreach and Education Program

<http://www.metrac.org/programs/programs.htm>

The Community Outreach and Education Program of METRAC reaches out to diverse communities with innovative public education initiatives about violence against women, youth, and children.

METRAC Respect in Action: Youth Preventing Violence (ReAct)

<http://www.metrac.org/programs/outreach/outreach.htm>

ReAct is one initiative of METRAC's Outreach Education Programs. Every year, ReAct delivers peer-to-peer violence prevention workshops, training sessions, and speaking engagements to thousands of youth, educators, and youth workers across the Greater Toronto Area. The ReAct model has been reproduced as a best practice for engaging youth on the issue of violence against women, youth, and children.

ReAct speaker booking form can be found at:

<http://www.metrac.org/programs/outreach/downloads/react.request.form.pdf>

Free Violence Prevention Resources

METRAC has a wide selection of free violence prevention resources available, some of which were published or updated with the support of the Ontario Government. They address issues that diverse women, youth, and children face. To order high quality, colourful paper versions of some of these violence prevention materials, visit their Order Our Publications page at <http://www.metrac.org/resources/downloads/resources.order.form.pdf>

METRAC Free Publications List

Anti-Oppression, Equity, and Rights

Dating Violence

Getting Help

Healthy Relationships

Legal Issues for Girls and Women

Reports and Research

Sexual Assault

Sexual Harassment

Violence Against Women and Girls

RESOURCES – ORGANIZATIONS *continued*

White Ribbon Campaign Education Action Kit

http://www.whiteribbon.ca/educational_materials/

The White Ribbon Campaign's Education and Action Kit, used by hundreds of thousands of teachers and students in 3000 schools across North America, has undergone its most important rewrite and redesign in ten years. The Kit combines in-class lessons with school-wide projects to raise awareness about violence against women, and to promote ideals about gender equality and healthy relationships. It is designed as a positive resource for both females and males.

Legal Education Action Fund (LEAF)

<http://leaf.ca/>

The Women's Legal Education and Action Fund is a national charitable organization that works toward ensuring the law guarantees substantive equality for all women in Canada. Providing resources for legal education is one way LEAF demonstrates our commitment to making legal rights in women's lives. We have organized our educational programs and material according to thematic areas of life (e.g. work, home, community, etc.). Each program includes information on LEAF's equality analysis pertaining to that area of law. The modules within these thematic areas are directed to particular audiences on a specific topic.

LEAF and Your Body

<http://leaf.ca/educational-programs-resources/leaf-and-your-body/>

Leaf and Your Body is an educational kit that provides resources to the community about laws that impact women's relationships with their bodies. This includes issues such as abortion rights, human assisted reproduction, sexual harrassment and sexual assault. One of LEAF's most successful educational programs describes the wide-reaching relevance of the Ewanchuk decision through a workshop called No Means No. LEAF and Your Body explains consensual relationships and the role of gender discrimination in sexual assault and the impact of both on women in Canada.

LEAF at Work

<http://leaf.ca/educational-programs-resources/leaf-at-work/>

Leaf at Work contains information on the application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the many types of discrimination women experience in the workplace. Although many issues pertaining to sexism at work are formally addressed in the law this fact does not correspond to the reality of many women's lives. Pay inequality, sexual harrassment, discrimination in government benefits and hiring are still all too common, leading to devastating impacts including eventual loss of income and women's vulnerability to poverty.

LEAF and the Community

<http://www.leaf.ca/about/branches.html>

Leaf and the Community works to expose systemic discrimination in the law as it effects all aspects of our communities. It provides a detailed and engaging analysis of: institutional barriers to health care, the criminalization of youth, discrimination in accessing government benefits and poverty issues.

RESOURCES – ORGANIZATIONS *continued*

LEAF at Home

<http://leaf.ca/educational-programs-resources/leaf-at-home/>

Leaf at Home addresses equality rights issues in the home including different gender roles both during marriage/ intimate partnership and what happens after such relationships break down. The equal sharing of the economic consequences of relationship breakdown and court orders for child and spousal support help to ensure greater fairness for women at home. Women generally face greater economic hardship after relationship breakdown than men. It is essential that courts recognize the different circumstances of women.

YWCA - Girlspace

<http://ywcagirlspace.ca/>

YWCA GirlSpace is an online community and content site for pre-teen and teen girls that focuses on self, personal achievement and building on self esteem. Check out our web forums, blog, post your photos, take a quiz, chat with friends and upload events to our online calendar. Best of all, connect with other girls in YWCA GirlSpace programs across Canada.

YWCA - A Girls' Guide to Knowing Her Rights

<http://ywcacanada.ca/data/documents/00000083.pdf>

A PDF booklet that can be used as a resource from which to begin to engage in discussion about the rights of women under the law.

YWCA Guide on Girls and Healthy Relationships

<http://ywcagirlspace.ca/articles.php?subject=3>

An excellent place to begin a discussion about healthy, safe relationships.

YWCA Taking on Violence in the Lives of Young Women – A Leader's Kit

http://members.ywcacanada.ca/public_eng/online_catalog/index.cfm?Heading1_link=publications&Heading2_link=publications_young_women&Heading3_link=publications_young_women&Heading4_link=publications_young_women&Hlinks=3

This is a free, practical resource kit and activity program for youth leaders who work with girls and young women ages 12 to 15. This program doesn't require professional training or long-term study or commitment to use. It brings together basic information on violence in the lives of young women plus activities that will help you to provide young women with a range of strategies to deal with it.

RESOURCES – INTERNET

<http://www.media-awareness.ca>

The Media Awareness Network (MNet), is home to one of the world's most comprehensive collections of media and digital literacy resources. There is an excellent database of resources and lesson that specifically relate to gender issues, media and representation.

<http://www.themissgproject.org>

The Miss G__ Project for Equity in Education is a grassroots young feminist organization working to combat all forms of oppression in and through education, including sexism, homophobia, racism and classism. The website also features a resource section for educators who wish to incorporate women's and gender materials in their schools.

<http://www.womensbookstore.com/>

The Toronto Women's bookstore is a non-profit bookstore dedicated to promoting anti-oppression politics and feminist politics. Their mandate includes being an information provider and community resource for events, political actions, women's health care, anti-violence advocacy, and anti-oppression politics for individuals and community groups, and to organize events and courses that reflect the communities they serve

<http://www.shamelessmag.com/>

This is the website for *Shameless magazine: For Girls Who Get It*. *Shameless* is Canada's independent voice for smart, strong, sassy young women. The website features award winning articles that can be used for discussion as well as an award winning blog. The magazine features issues such as: profiles of amazing women, discussion of hot topics, DIY guides to crafty activities, sports dispatches, the latest in technology, columns on food politics, health & sexuality, advice and more.

www.becauseiamagirl.ca/

This engaging and interactive website for Plan Canada's *Because I Am a Girl* campaign that promotes awareness of girls' issues on a global scale and advocates for a brighter future for girls and the elimination of poverty around the world by investing in girls. The website provides several resources, tips for supporting the campaign on a local level, videos, a blog and more.

RESOURCES – VIDEO

Sexy, Inc. National Film Board.

Sophie Bissonnette's documentary uses experts' hard-hitting criticism to analyze the hypersexualization of our environment and its noxious effects on the young. The film condemns an unhealthy culture that bombards children with sexualized and sexist images and suggests way we can counteract this worrying phenomenon. 60 minutes. Available at <http://films.nfb.ca/sexy-inc/> for free viewing.

Breakin-In: The Making of a Hip-Hop Dancer. . National Film Board

This Canadian film goes behind the scenes to find the truth behind the highly sexualized images often found in the world of hip-hop music. This edgy POV documentary follows Linda, Michelle and Tracy - three young Black women as they compete for roles in hip hop music videos. Through their eyes we see how this world has impacted their personal values, their career ambitions and their concepts of beauty and self-image. 60 minutes. Available from www.nfb.ca for free viewing.

Appendix A – Sample Announcements for Getting Started

- ✚ Did you know that while almost as many women as men are currently university graduates, female representation among those with a degree declines sharply among those with postgraduate training. In 2001, women made up 52% of all those with a Bachelor's or first professional degree, whereas they represented just 27% of those with an earned doctorate? Come discuss these and other issues affecting you at the first meeting of _____ today after school in room _____.!
- ✚ Did you know that employed women are far more likely than their male counterparts to lose time from their jobs because of personal or family responsibilities? Come discuss these and other issues affecting women and men today after school at the first meeting of _____ today at lunch in room _____. Working together we can help do something about gender inequality!
- ✚ Did you know that, according to a recent Statistics Canada report, in 2003 women working full-time still only made 71% of what men working full-time did? In fact women make up a disproportionate share of those with low-incomes. Come out to the first meeting of _____ today after school in room _____ and learn about issues affecting young women today and what you can do improve gender equality.

***All statistics taken from *Women in Canada: A Gender Based Report*. Government of Canada. 2009. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc-cel?catno=89-503-X&lang=eng>

Moving Towards Change for Women in our School

What are the major issues facing women our school?

What are the major gender-equity issues in our school?

What would we like to do to address these issues? (Choose one or more of the above-named issues and make a list of activities you might like to undertake. Then prioritize those activities.)

When and where should we hold our meetings?

Date	Time	Room	Teacher Supervision

Action Plan

Action	People Responsible	Resources	Allies/ Support	Outreach	Date

Evaluation

<p>What was successful about the project?</p>	<p>What were the signs of success that you saw?</p>
<p>What would you change for next Time?</p>	<p>What did you enjoy most about the project?</p>