



Integrating art into violence prevention

Fall 2011 Newsletter

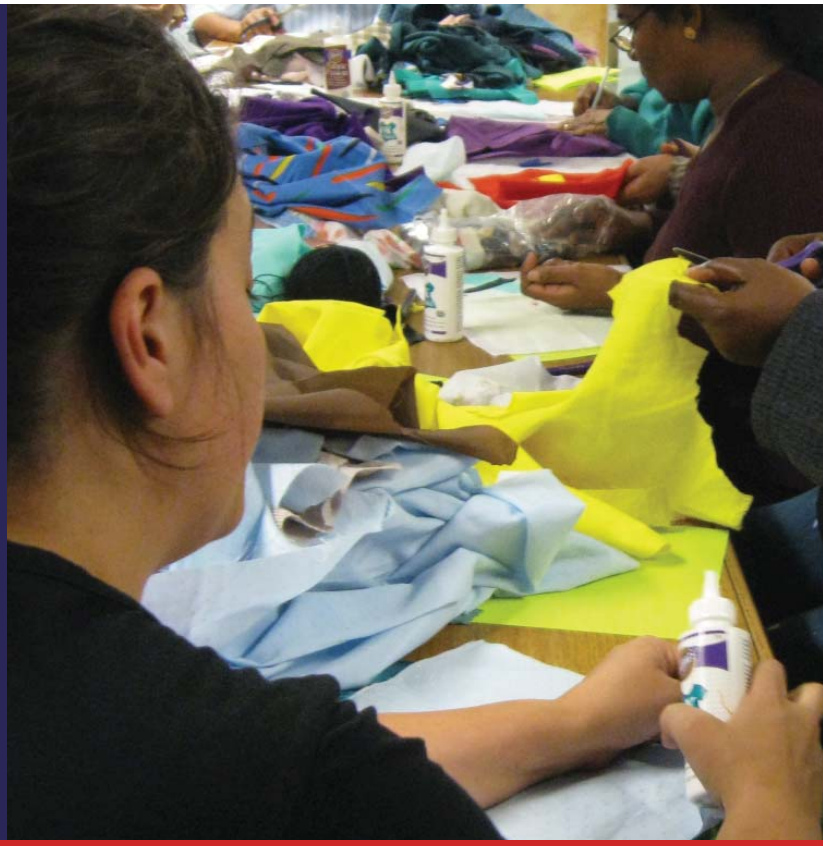


158 Spadina Road, Toronto, ON, Canada, M5R 2T8
Phone 416-392-3135 | 416-392-3021 (TTY)
Toll-free phone 1-877-558-5570
Fax 416-392-3136 | Email info@metrac.org
Web www.metrac.org | www.owjn.org

www.facebook.com/metracorg
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www.metrac.wordpress.com

METRAC is a community-based, not-for-profit organization that prevents violence against diverse women and youth. Since 1984, this mandate has been undertaken through public education, training, safety initiatives, partnerships, research and policy in three program areas: justice, outreach and education and safety.

Image: Fabricating Change community art workshop



METRAC's Team

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- Tamar Witelson, Legal Director

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- Angela Musceo
- Helen Yohannes

Placement student

- Tricia Bennett

New on www.metrac.org:

- **Youth Alliance Project report:** *Improving the System: Police Policy and Practice on Sexual Assault against Young Women*
- **Don't Need Saving:** *Aboriginal Women and Access to Justice* video (Wolf Dog Productions)
- **Battling Shadows** video (Hisayo Horie)
- **www.challengesexualviolence.org**, home of **What It Is**, game on sexual violence

Message from the Executive Director

Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director

“The arts, the music industry, theatre, literature, film, print and broadcast industries provide a society with a sense of what it means to be a woman or man, poor or privileged, Aboriginal Canadian or African Canadian.” (*Challenging racism in the arts: case studies of controversy and conflict* by Carol Tator, Frances Henry and Winston Mattis, 1998, p. 5)

I am pleased to have this opportunity to address you, METRAC’s friends and new supporters. The year 2011 is almost over and despite staffing shortages and heavy workloads, METRAC has had a big impact across the City of Toronto and in regions beyond. Enclosed, you will find stories of our accomplishments since our spring 2011 newsletter. This issue features our success in integrating art practices into violence prevention work to educate about violence towards women and youth and foster change.

This issue features our success in integrating art practices into violence prevention work

From our games to fabric art installations – all are creative expressions whose power has been harnessed to advance safety, justice and equity for women and youth affected by violence. The THRIVE Coalition’s Fabricating Change Project brought together artists, women and transpeople of diverse backgrounds and ages to create art and weave stories, foster creative expression and self-confidence, restore hope and renew the spirits of participants. This project demonstrates the power of interdisciplinary partnerships in violence prevention work and the application of art to build intergenerational bridges; break down isolation; enable participants to integrate their understanding of and experiences with violence; and identify solutions for change.

We also launched a new video directed by Audrey Huntley (Wolf Dog Productions), *Don’t Need Saving: Aboriginal Woman and Access to Justice*. It speaks to the resiliency and determination of Aboriginal women to overcome continuing harms of the *Indian Act*. The video challenges everyday barriers to accessing justice

based on systemic disparities and discriminatory attitudes toward Aboriginal women experiencing violence. Importantly, it offers practical solutions for transforming attitudes in service relationships. This initiative was completed with strong leadership by and participation from Aboriginal women and communities.

The Youth Alliance Project is another art-infused initiative for which a report with recommendations was released, focused on strengthening police responses to and collaboration with young women in Toronto. Twenty-five young women of diverse backgrounds participated in photo journaling and creative arts to express their thoughts about youth-police relations, support services and the impacts of sexual assault and gender-based violence against youth.

Organizationally, we have been quite busy. There is a new strategic plan in place for the year 2011 to 2014. As a result, we held several meetings to map out integrated plans for achieving better results in programs and administrative systems. We continued working on finalizing new human resources and financial policies. Internally, we continued to build staff capacity through participation in a number of training initiatives.

This is an exciting time for METRAC as several new staff members have joined the organization. I would like to warmly welcome Tamar Witelson, Legal Director; Darcel Bullen, Justice Projects Coordinator; Joanna Hayes, Legal Information Coordinator; Sony Mathew, Bookkeeper; Talayeh Shomali, Coordinator of Sustainable Development; Shequita Thompson, SchoolED Project Coordinator; and Karen Darricades, SchoolED Project Coordinator. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all staff, ReAct Facilitators, volunteers and students for making METRAC a great organization. Special thanks to our Board of Directors for their volunteer time and support.

We hope this issue provides important food for thought until our return in spring 2012. To our funders, donors, partners, volunteers, students, community members and all our friends, we wish you peace, good health and joy for the new year.

Message from the Board Co-President

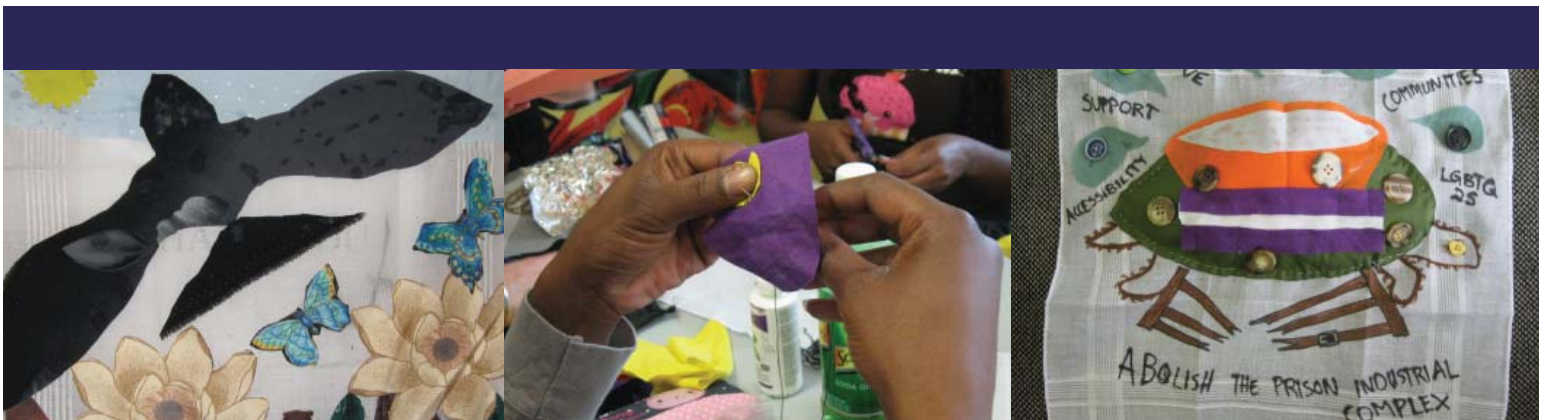
Kripa Sekhar, Board Co-President

I recently joined METRAC's Board of Directors and am delighted to be a part of this phenomenal organization working to end violence towards women and youth. During my short time on the board, I have found METRAC to be a vibrant, active organization doing very important work with individuals and communities of every stripe, as well as with organizations and service providers. Board membership has enabled me to connect and work with others who strongly believe in social justice and peace for women. Thus far, it has been a humbling experience.

I have quickly learned that METRAC's team works extremely hard and is a powerful force behind the agency, always conscious of staying true to the vision and mandate of the organization. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend our heartfelt thanks to them for the work they do daily. I am fortunate to be part of a very spirited group of women on the board, who from the start have shown commitment to improving the quality of their participation and engagement and setting more realistic meeting times to achieve maximum effectiveness. Members have prioritized strengthening organizational human resource and finance policies

to ensure clear, consistent standards and processes to guide their work. Amongst other accomplishments, the board has completed a very successful training day on their roles and responsibilities. The board has also conducted a review of METRAC's banking services to lower charges and create a more efficient, effective payroll system.

In closing, I would like to remind you of three things. First, the THRIVE Coalition is hosting a fabric art exhibition to showcase results of the Fabricating Change Project. Go to page 7 for details and please join us. Second, www.challengesexualviolence.org was recently launched to promote **What It Is.**, METRAC's digital game challenging sexual violence against youth. Please visit the site and stay tuned for exciting developments there. Last, funding cuts to vital organizations like METRAC and other supports for vulnerable women and youth across Toronto are looming. Please take the time to continue supporting METRAC by donating, and sharing your concerns with local City Councilors so that we can continue building safer communities for women, youth and everyone.



Images: Fabricating Change community art workshops and art pieces

“I liked the possibility of exploring the topic and expressing ourselves.” (Fabricating Change art workshop participant)

The Medium is the Message

Karen Darricades, SchoolED Co-Coordinator

Forum Theatre/Theatre of the Oppressed

Developed by Brazilian theatre artist Augusto Boal in the 1960s. Forum Theatre, an active elaboration of image theatre, invites “spectators” to explore, show, analyze and transform the reality in which they are living. It can be used in amazing ways when exploring and transforming power as well as practicing new ways of being and doing. *Image: METRAC-led anti-oppression theatre activity at York University.*



Collage

A tool for facilitating critical thinking and responding to media representations of violence, power and cultural identity. Its accessible cut and paste concepts are familiar to participants of all ages and abilities and offers the creator the ability to retell and re-contextualize media messages and cultural narratives. *Image: the Youth Alliance Project uses collage to show information about violence and young women.*



Zines

Low-budget, independent publications. As mass media are driven by a contentious relationship with advertising, zines give creators freedom to produce and spread messages through alternative means. *Image: ReAct zine, Youth Surviving and Thriving: Many Paths to Healing.*



Fibre arts

An emerging art practice of note. Traditionally relegated to “craft”, there is new appreciation and recognition of art that uses textiles and fabrics. Fabric is a great entry point into discussions about gender roles and our relationships to the tactile world of textiles in public and private spheres. *Image: THRIVE Coalition's Fabricating Change Project and art exhibit (p. 7).*



Video

An important tool capturing first-person stories and experiences. It can be used to spread awareness to audiences on a large scale using platforms like YouTube, Facebook, websites and email. *Image: Women Warrior by Angela Sterritt, included in the Wolf Dog Productions video, Don't Need Saving: Aboriginal Women and Access to Justice (p. 10).*



Video games

Present us with a virtual, interactive reflection of the risks and rewards of navigating our world. Games are excellent for unveiling the “rules” of social systems and encouraging players to rethink them. It is the interactive nature of gaming that allows us to be immersed in play and explore our agency and power in effecting change. *Image: screenshot of RePlay: Finding Zoe/ReJouer: Où est Zoé? game.*



Art Reaches us Together

Shequita Thompson, SchoolED Co-Coordinator

Infused into our daily lives, art surrounds us. To separate art from the work we do would harm the authenticity of our delivery. From our Justice Program's training to the classrooms ReAct and SchoolED programs go to, art is integral to our ability to understand and unpack violence. Utilized as a medium and entry point, art connects our audience to the cause. The goal of artists is to articulate their cause in a light that may not have previously been considered. At METRAC, we work from an anti-oppressive framework that seeks an integrated, in-depth analysis of the root causes of violence against women and youth. Embedded in the layers of programming that we deliver, art becomes a common link throughout the organization. It bridges the gap between programs and projects, creating a collective voice.

The video *Don't Need Saving: Aboriginal Women and Access to Justice*, directed by Audrey Huntley, beautifully infuses art with an in-depth look at oppression, effects of colonization and genocidal policies that surround Aboriginal women. As the film says, "Our Two-spirited people, our women and our children are the centres of our communities. That's who we built around." Within the film, the art that is displayed personalizes the story to each viewer. Justice Projects Coordinator Darcel Bullen explains that "art does not have to simply be art for art's sake, but can be used purposefully by those

most affected by violence in ways to imagine something better, in order to do better."

METRAC has also taken art within the realm of gaming. Andrea Gunraj, Communications Specialist, says, "Video games are a form of interactive art that allows people to get engaged in a play experience. Sometimes, the play experience can be whimsical, but it doesn't always have to be." *RePlay: Finding Zoe/ReJouer: Où est Zoé?* was the first game METRAC created. Developed in partnership with TAKE ACTION Games and Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions (COPA) and funded by the Government of Ontario, it focuses on healthy relationships. But it's also interesting how the game has been recognized as a piece of digital art. *RePlay/ReJouer* has won two design awards and will soon be featured in the Bronx Council on the Arts' Toys and Games exhibit at Longwood Gallery in New York City.

Darcel Bullen says that art is such a foundational medium for anti-oppressive work because it can transgress barriers of language, education, geographic location and ethnicity. Art speaks a language that reaches the masses, touches many and changes few. It's paramount to the work METRAC does and will continue to inform our stance on violence against women and youth both locally and globally.

"[The game content is relevant] because I know people in that situation." (Youth focus group participant, informing design of the digital game, **What It Is.**)

*Image: www.challengesexualviolence.org, newly launched home to **What It Is.** digital game challenging sexual violence against youth*





“I feel like I’m learning and making an impact.” (Youth Safety Audit training participant)

Image: Limitless Dance performance at Bouncing Back: Celebrating Youth Resilience (August 30, 2011)

Fabricating Change

Andrea Gunraj, Communications Specialist

Fabricating Change is a collaborative fabric arts-based installation project. Piloted in 2010 by the THRIVE Coalition, it was inspired by the Migrantas project in Germany that uses visual art and graphic design to understand and share women’s experiences of migration (www.migrantas.org). THRIVE developed the project by working with local community groups and two talented artist facilitators, Karen Darricades and Meera Sethi. Karen, currently Schooled Co-Coordinator at METRAC, is also a textile artist, and Meera is a graphic designer and photographer. Both use art to promote social change and challenge violence and oppression.

Fabricating Change activities are simple. Women and transpeople aged 10 to 98 in community groups and shelters participated in art workshops, decorating plain white handkerchiefs with fabric and fabric accessories. But the pieces participants created are far from simple. They depict community members’ thoughts, emotions and reactions to issues of violence, change and freedom.

Historically, fabric is connected with women’s traditional domestic and work responsibilities. Women’s creativity in using fabric to make clothes, quilts, bedding and objects of beauty is rarely viewed as “real art”. Textiles for utilitarian uses created by women of colour and Aboriginal women, tend to be further devalued. On

the other hand, when their work is discovered and sold as art, racialized women and communities rarely benefit from the income. Globally, women and girls are core workers in the textile industry but their contributions are minimized by poor pay and working conditions.

Fabric is also a significant marker of gender. It forms the clothing girls and women wear, and represents allowances and restrictions placed upon their bodies. These imposed social values through clothing are codes that women might conform to, play with, negotiate and challenge. Fabric is connected to gender-based violence and the perception that what women and girls wear can act as an invitation to or justification for sexual violence. Clothing has also been used as an indictment against those who are victimized. It’s rarely neutral.

On Friday November 25, kick-off day for the 16 Days of Action Against Gender Violence, a public exhibit of Fabricating Change art was launched at Queen Gallery (382 Queen Street East in Toronto). The exhibit runs until the close of the 16 Days of Action, Saturday December 10 (Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 11:30 AM to 6:00 PM; Thursdays 1:30 to 8:30 PM; Saturdays 3:30 to 6:30 PM). Join us as we celebrate the textures, colours and possibilities of change.

Community Safety Program Report

Michelle Davis, Safety Director



Image: Performance by a member of Parkdale Street Writers at the Bouncing Back event

Cooler and shorter days are upon us and that means our fall programming is in full swing! I am very happy to welcome Tricia Bennett to the Safety Program. Tricia is a student at George Brown College in the Assaulted Women and Children's Counsellor/ Advocate program. Tricia brings wonderful skills in advocacy and communications and is already making herself an invaluable part of the METRAC family. She supports the Youth Alliance team; works on a study of the benefits of engaging women survivors of violence in violence prevention work, a joint project with Women at the Centre; and co-facilitates METRAC's Safety Audit trainings and walkabouts.

To date this year, we have trained seven communities in METRAC's Safety Audit process, completed nine Safety Audit Report Cards and worked with six youth groups to do Youth Safety Audits

For the second year in a row and with funding provided by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, we held a very successful youth safety night event on August 30 at the 519 Church Street Community Centre. Bouncing Back: Celebrating Youth Resilience was a wonderful evening showcasing the ingenuity, creativity and resilience of Toronto's youth. Asam Ahmad, who is also a ReAct Peer Facilitator, worked tirelessly to pull together an event we're still talking

about! Thank you very much to Asam for his vision and skills in organizing the event. Thank you to artists who performed: LAL, Limitless Dance, Amai Kuda, Sun of Lost Lyrics, Parkdale Street Writers and others. I extend my appreciations also to AQSazine, Asian Arts Freedom School and the Youth Alliance who worked with youth to create art exhibited at the event.

Our project with Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada will end in December. More than 500 girls have used our audit tools across Canada to examine safety in their local communities. Through the Girls for Safer Communities Challenge, older girl members are being trained and supported to lead Safety Audits with younger girls in their neighbourhoods. We anticipate that more than 100 audits will have been completed by the end of 2011. Stay tuned to learn about the findings from these audits and the safety issues girls and young women have identified.

We continue to support community members around Toronto to lead Safety Audits. To date this year, we have trained seven communities in our Safety Audit process, completed nine Safety Audit Report Cards and worked with six youth groups to complete Youth Safety Audits. We have also made a number of presentations on women's safety and led a workshop on relationship violence at Toronto Community Housing Corporation's Women's Forum in August.

In its new report on sexual harassment in secondary schools across the United States, *Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School*, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) recommends our Youth Safety Audit process as a way for young people to address sexual harassment in their schools. AAUW found that 48% of secondary school students reported experiencing sexual harassment at school. This harassment happens online and in person and is statistically significant for girls, with 56% experiencing some form of harassment compared to 40% of boys. The report was released this fall and already we have been contacted by groups interested in our Youth Safety Audit process. To read the full report, please visit www.aauw.org/learn/research/crossingtheline.cfm. Thank you for your continued interest in and support of our work.

Youth Program Update

Keli Bellaire, Youth Program Coordinator

The fall continues to be a busy time for the program: many workshops to facilitate, curriculum to update, and projects to launch! In October, the ReAct team participated in a training about youth and the law, facilitated by Justice For Children and Youth (www.jfcy.org). We deepened our knowledge about the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* and rights that youth have and services they can access if they are suspended, expelled or charged. As well as our regular workshops, ReAct is also excited to be running monthly sessions throughout this school year with a girls group at Central Tech Collegiate Institute.

Since ReAct is all about deconstructing mainstream media and promoting youth-made media, we encourage everyone to check out the video *Battling Shadows* on METRAC's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/metracorg). It was created by Hisayo Horie and very own Peer Facilitator, Asam Ahmad, for the incredible Bouncing Back youth safety event he organized in August.

ReAct also kicked off the SchooLED anti-violence and leadership project! Coordinated by two brilliant women, Shequita Thompson and Karen Darricades, SchooLED is a weekly after-school program for high school youth to learn about violence, oppression and leadership

and to take action on these issues in their schools and communities. This year, SchooLED is running in two high schools and will be in three schools for 2012 to 2013. Through the project, we have our first opportunity to work with an external evaluator, the Centre for Community Based Research, who will help us assess the effectiveness of the project's structure, pedagogy and curriculum. This is a very exciting time of growth for the program and this evaluation will provide vital learnings and recommendations for moving forward with ReAct.

Already in our first months, SchooLED is proving to be a major success. Here is what participants in one group (a girl-only group) have to say about why it is important to them.

- “Well, girls group is important because it gives you a quiet time out of your rough week to sit down and talk about how your week has been. It lets me calm my nerves and take stress out of my body.”
- “Because we get to reflect on different issues within the community and ways in which to improve it.”
- “Because [girls are] the only people that truly understand me. No matter the differences we have, we go through the same difficulties.”



“I think we need a place to come and talk about issues that we face every day as women.”
(SchooLED project participant)

Image: SchooLED after school project participants

Community Justice Program Update

Tamar Witelson, Legal Director



Image: Don't Need Saving video launch event at Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto

Much has happened at the Community Justice Program since our last newsletter – as of September, the Justice Program has been revitalized with a new team: Darcel Bullen, Justice Projects Coordinator; Joanna Hayes, Legal Information Coordinator; and myself, Tamar Witelson, Legal Director. We're off and running now. We've identified immediate priorities, we've been meeting commitments started last year and we've begun to look ahead at ways of invigorating and strengthening METRAC's legal information and education work.

We've begun to look ahead at ways of invigorating and strengthening METRAC's legal work

Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC): PBSC and METRAC have partnered again this year, building on a strong foundation from last year's project, successfully wrapped up by our past interim Legal Director, Estella Muyinda. This October, we welcomed 12 new volunteer law students from across the province whose work will help reinvigorate the Ontario Women's Justice Network (OWJN) website. Check it out and see how we're doing at www.owjn.org. Three senior year students will also bring legal information presentations to three shelters for women survivors of violence in the Toronto area.

Family Law Education for Women (FLEW): we've recently taken on primary oversight of the FLEW project from YWCA Toronto. Funded by the

Government of Ontario, FLEW maintains 12 booklets on key issues for women in family law and a series of materials prepared for specific communities. Materials are available on the FLEW website www.onefamilylaw.ca in 12 languages, Braille, large font, audio and ASL video format. They're also available from Service Ontario for free. The Justice Program team has been working with the project's French language counterpart, Action Ontarienne contre la Violence faite aux Femmes (AOcVF), to contact community workers and remind them about FLEW's varied resources. Working with Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO), we will be preparing a series of 10 family law webinars and providing FLEW materials to a new CLEO initiative, Connecting Communities, which aims to increase alliances between legal and community agencies.

Video launch: in September, we worked with Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto, Aboriginal Legal Corporation and the Law Foundation of Ontario to host a party to launch *Don't Need Saving: Aboriginal Women and Access to Justice*, a video on Aboriginal women's experience with the justice system by filmmaker Audrey Huntley of Wolf Dog Productions. The video is a hit with 1,700 views (and counting) on METRAC's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/user/metracorg) and screening requests from Ryerson University and University of Windsor Law School.

We have lots more on the horizon ... and we'll update you next newsletter!

Current & upcoming:

- **Legal Information Training:** December 8 and 15 at the 519 Church Street Community Centre
- **Fabric of Violence: Fabricating Change Art Exhibit:** November 25 to December 10 at the Queen Gallery (382 Queen Street East)
- **Legal information webinars:** stay tuned for January 2012

For information and registration, visit www.metrac.org/upcoming/upcoming.htm.

Volunteer Spotlight: Angela & Tricia

Shanon Kalra-Ramjoo, Volunteer

I had the opportunity to interview two dynamic women who discussed the positive role art plays in violence prevention education. In particular, when used to express current social issues, art can be viewed as a form of therapy – “art therapy.” Outside of her work as a ReAct Youth Peer Facilitator, Angela Musceo, facilitates arts-based activities in schools, communities, agencies and organizations on issues affecting youth. These include bullying and bullying between girls, gender-based violence, domestic violence, depression and the role of media. Angela notes that art therapy can help people express themselves. “Art brings people in a positive dimension and is a great way to get the message out there and appeal to a wide range of audiences.” Angela provides an example of the use of poetry in a workshop she led. One woman performed a poem on body image because of past discrimination she faced,

which was a particularly empowering experience. Angela feels strongly about the role of media and art in engaging and empowering youth because it is a means of speaking about issues through self-led initiatives.

Tricia Bennett is a student with METRAC and an advocate in supporting survivors of sexual assault. She believes art to be an important element of education, noting that it “allows people to develop areas of themselves that they might not be able to access through other avenues” and “provides a creative outlet to express energy and emotions – negative or positive – that could potentially be destructive.” In particular, Tricia notes that writing, both prose and poetry, provides an opportunity to process thoughts and explore options while expanding imaginations.

Employee Spotlight: Jannette & Joanna

Shabnum Durrani, Board Member

I interviewed Jannette Saberon, METRAC’s Administrative Assistant. When asked why she enjoys her work at METRAC, Jannette’s answer is very simple: “I like the feeling that I am helping people and that the work we do can change the world.” Jannette has been with METRAC since 2007. She came to the organization by accident. Jannette worked at a school and when summer break came, she found herself out of work. She faced the same problem many immigrants confront: she could not find another job without Canadian work experience. Luckily, her resume was passed onto METRAC where she was successfully interviewed and hired.

When asked to describe what she does, it becomes clear that Jannette applies her substantial organization and administrative skills to a broad range of responsibilities. She supports everyone from the bookkeeper to the Executive Director and supports every program in the organization. Jannette’s day ranges from ordering office supplies to working with the bank on METRAC’s finances.

She is not alone in working on a wide variety of tasks

in the organization. I also interviewed Joanna Hayes, METRAC’s Legal Information Coordinator and lawyer. There are a wide range of legal programs she keeps going. She updates information on two websites, the Ontario Women’s Justice Network (www.owjn.org) and Family Law Education for Women (www.onefamilylaw.ca). She is responsible for reviewing all legal information material METRAC puts out to make sure it is current and she supervises 10 law students from Pro Bono Students Canada who volunteer on various writing and research projects.

Joanna came on board in August 2011 as one of METRAC’s most recent hires and is a key member of the organization’s restructured Community Justice Program. She became keenly interested in women’s rights while working in South Africa after completing her articling with the Ministry of the Attorney General. When asked what she likes about her job, the answers come quick. Joanna likes the mix of all types of law she deals with and enjoys teaching and public education aspects of her position. Mostly, she loves the people she works with, asking, “Who wouldn’t want to work with a team of dynamic and intelligent women?”

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Our Team, Donors & Partners:

We extend our thanks to METRAC's team. Your hard work is appreciated and makes a difference. Deep thanks to departing board members, staff, volunteers and placement students. We would also like to acknowledge and thank departing ReAct Youth Peer Facilitator Najla Edwards, who has been a team member for several years.

Thank you to contract Bookkeeper Sony Matthew and contract Web Assistant Mitchelle D'Souza. We would also like to thank our community partners, including organizations and individuals dedicated to ending violence against women and youth. Finally, we extend sincere thanks to individual and anonymous donors who have contributed to METRAC since spring 2011 - we simply could not survive without your support.



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