



Spring 2010 Bi-annual Newsletter



**Metropolitan Action Committee on
Violence Against Women and Children**

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About METRAC

Since 1984, the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC) has pursued its mandate to build the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to prevent and respond effectively to the issue of violence towards diverse women and children. Our mission has been undertaken through public education and training, safety initiatives, partnerships, research, and policy in three program areas: Community Outreach and Education, Community Safety, and Community Justice.

METRAC staff & board

Staff: Keli Bellaire, Youth Engagement Coordinator | Karen Darricades, YAP Coordinator | Michelle Davis, Safety Director | Zahra Dhanani, Legal Director | Mergitu Ebba, Justice Program Coordinator | Andrea Gunraj, Outreach Director | Paola Jani, Girl Guide Project Coordinator | Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director | Jessica Mustachi, Safety Program Assistant | Katharine Neufeld, Legal Information Coordinator | Jannette Saberon, Administrative Assistant | Jae Thuo, Legal Outreach Coordinator | Onyii Udegbe, OHRC Coordinator

ReAct Facilitators: Najla Edwards, Feilpe Mendes, Angela Musceo, Helen Yohannes, Harold Phillips

Placement students: Ann De Shalit, Shaista Durani, Navneet Marawaha

Board of Directors: Melanie J. Adams | Carole Dahan, Treasurer | Irene Darra | Shabnum Durrani | Jennifer Fehr, Vice-President | Sabine Hikel | Min Kaur | Sudabeh Mashkuri (on leave) | Kellie Scanlan, President | Keisha Williams | Andrea Wobick, Secretary | Nadine Sookermany

Message from the Executive Director

Wendy Komiotis (Executive Director)

All the legislation and policy that recognizes women's rights to be free of male violence has been put in place because of the political strength and persistence of the women's movement in our country.

(Elizabeth A. Sheehy, *Legal Responses to Violence Against Women in Canada*, 1999)

METRAC's vision of the world is one where justice and safety prevail for women and girls regardless of race, gender, class, ability, sexualities, faith, immigration status, and age. In our society, women are disproportionately affected by violence and flawed policies. Though well-intended, these policies can fail to protect everyone's quality of life and they can fail to foster safety for women and girls. Our "Do Justice" theme was chosen in recognition of the important role public policy plays in the lives of women and girls and the need for authentic engagement of communities most impacted by violence.

Approximately 10% of METRAC's work focuses on public policy, systems, and institutions that affect

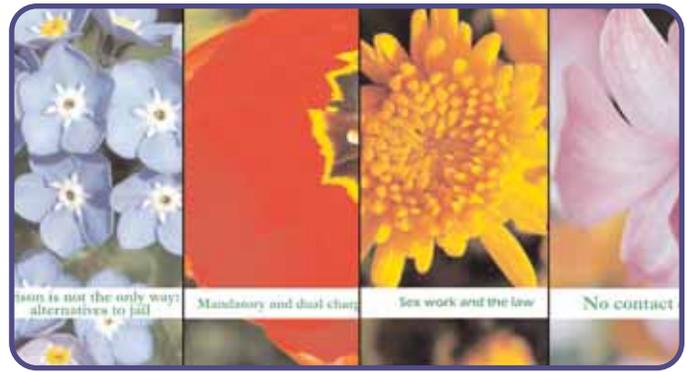
women's safety. Policy makers, like most people, are exposed to myths, stereotypes, and misinformation about violence in the lives of women and girls of diverse backgrounds. Policy work forms a part of our educational efforts. It's targeted to public service providers who make policies that are supposed to be inclusive and benefit everyone, including women and girls experiencing violence or at risk of violence.

Over the years, METRAC has made a significant difference in policy, in partnership with numerous women's groups and organizations. Milestones include passing of the criminal harassment/anti-stalking law (1993); changes to the self-induced intoxication defense (Bill C72, 1995) and production of personal records (Bill C46, 1997) in sexual assault cases; contribution to the Coroner's Inquest into the homicide/suicide of Arlene May and Randy Iles (1998); the ban on use of religious arbitration in family law disputes for women experiencing violence and leaving abusive relationships (Bill 27, 2005); METRAC's intervenor status at the Court of Appeal

for Ontario to highlight a need for remedies in situations where domestic violence leads to sponsorship breakdown and federal and provincial government discretion in collecting sponsorship debt from victims of violence (2009); and passing of the *Education Amendment Act (Keeping Our Kids Safe At School)*, 2009 (Bill 157) and the *Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act (Violence and Harassment in the Workplace)*, 2009 (Bill 168).

Bill 157 strengthens processes for reporting serious incidents to parents and guardians and includes sexual assault and bullying. It also addresses harassment based on race, gender, and sexual orientation. Given the fact that educational facilities are the second most likely place for hate crimes, this is important. The bill sets out an expectation that adults should intervene when they witness serious incidents at school. It can help protect the rights of young women aged 16 to 18 who might not want to inform parents and guardians of a sexual assault because of fear, shame, stigma, and isolation. However, Bill 157 is broad and its interpretation is dependent upon discretion of school decision-makers. As has been the case with many laws, discretion can work to the disadvantage of marginalized individuals and communities. Another aspect of the bill is its expectation that community organizations will provide support for teachers, parents, victims, and offenders. It does not account for growing demands upon already stretched services and the need for more community resources and programs. Bill 157 does not apply to university or college students, but research shows that four out of five female undergraduates reported experiencing violence in a dating relationship. Twenty-nine percent of those women experienced sexual assault (DeKeseredy and Kelly, 1993).

Bill 168, the *Occupational Health and Safety Amendment Act*, requires that every employer take specific steps to prevent and manage workplace harassment and violence. In this bill, violence is defined as physical force that could cause physical injury. At a recent CLEONet webinar led by METRAC's Legal Director, Zahra Dhanani, participants were reminded that the bill is 14 years in the making. Michelle Schryer of the Chatham-Kent Sexual Assault Support Centre traced it back to 1996, when Theresa Vince was murdered at work by her supervisor who then killed himself. Prior to her death, he had sexually harassed Theresa for years. Evidence suggests that her employer knew what



Some METRAC legal materials for criminalized women

was happening for one and a half years. Nine years later in November 2005, nurse Lori Dupont was murdered in her Windsor hospital workplace. She was stabbed by a male colleague and intimate partner who then committed suicide. Evidence reveals that he had a history of violence against other nurses and had stalked and harassed Lori before killing her. Like Theresa, Lori's employers knew what was happening.

In the memory of Theresa, Lori, and all women who have experienced violence in the workplace, METRAC applauds the passing of Bill 168. It is an overdue step in the right direction. It recognizes how relationship violence can spill into the workplace and cause fear, terror, and even death. However, it is unclear whether Bill 168 will have the same reach in workplaces of less than five employees. It is unclear how it applies to domestic workers, nannies, and caregivers. Mainly immigrant women, domestic workers and caregivers tend to work in isolation and are vulnerable many kinds of workplace violence, including sexual harassment and assault. Bill 168 is also unclear when it comes to volunteers, students, and individuals with "non-worker" designations.

In short, there are many ways we must continue to support increased justice in our communities. I would like to thank METRAC's members, students, volunteers, community friends, and funders for their support and encouragement to keep our mission alive. I am also grateful to the amazing staff team at METRAC for its excellence in engaging individuals, communities, and institutions to prevent and end gender-based violence. Together, we are stronger in working to "Do Justice" for women and girls of every age, ability, class, ethnicity, faith, race, sexuality, immigration status, and geographic location.

Message from the Board President

Kellie Scanlan (Board President)

I'd like to start by thanking the staff of METRAC for their tremendous work over the past year to fight for a better and safer world for women and girls. METRAC, like many organizations, has felt societal and institutional pressures that can make promoting women's equality difficult. It is an understatement to say that our country's laws and policies, not to mention our recent economic realities, do not always work to support women and girls and the organizations that serve them. It is all the more difficult for women and girls experiencing violence. To their credit, METRAC staff members have worked tirelessly to strengthen our programs and amplify the dynamic voices of women and girls, despite the challenges.

I am pleased to introduce incoming board members. They have brought tremendous skill and enthusiasm to help build the organization. I would like to thank our departing Board President, Percy Lezard, for her important contributions. We wish her all the best in her

Annual General Meeting

METRAC's Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday June 24 from 6:30 to 8:30 PM at Lilian H. Smith Library (239 College Street). Come out and contribute to the organization.

future endeavors. The board, in conjunction with staff and volunteers, have started a strategic planning process. We look forward to examining our programs, mission, and mandate and building a plan for the future that will ultimately build safer and more equitable communities. We are also planning our fall *Bowling 4 Change* fundraiser. Dust off your bowling shoes and consider the team you'll lead in this fun event. Finally, my thanks extend to volunteers, partners, funders, and supporters of METRAC. Our work to prevent violence against diverse women, youth, and children would be impossible without you.

Interview with Dr. Emily Carasco

Shanon Kalra-Ramjoo (METRAC volunteer)

Gender, race, and equity have only come under the radar in the last few decades, and Dr. Emily Carasco has been in the forefront. A professor at the University of Windsor, Dr. Carasco teaches family, immigration, and public international law. She describes herself as an "activist with particular interest in human rights, particularly the rights of minority women and children". Former Human Rights Commissioner and President of the Faculty Association of the University of Windsor, Dr. Carasco helped shape university policies and practices. She developed employment and educational equity policies that served as a model for other universities. She worked with various organizations to develop equity and human rights workplace policies. Dr. Carasco has also served as a Commissioner for the Hearings on Apartheid for Lawyers Against Apartheid; a member of the Gender Issues Committee of the Canadian Bar Association for Ontario; and a member of the Human Rights Code

Review Advisory Committee for Ontario. For her efforts to promote access to justice, Dr. Carasco was awarded a Doctorate of Law (honoris causa) by the Law Society of Upper Canada in 2006. In 2009, she was also honoured by the Feminist Legal Analysis Section of the Ontario Bar Association and received the prestigious Commitment to Equity Award.

"Gender-based violence prevents free and full participation in society"

Q: What do you believe are the most pressing legal concerns faced by diverse women, youth, and children in Canada today?

A: It is only in the last three decades or so that the legal system has recognized the fact that race, gender, sexual

orientation, class, and disability result in a differential impact of the law on individuals, families, and communities. The law has traditionally catered to the experiences and objectives of middle class white men. There have been positive changes in the last few years but there is still much that must be done to allow members of various groups to have the opportunity of full participation in Canadian life. We have to amend laws that ignore realities in the lives of these persons and we have to provide access to justice for all. We could start by making entry into Canada more accessible to women from all over the world. Our current immigration criteria ignore realities of life for the majority of women in the world. There is an undue focus on formal education, something not available to women in many parts of the world. Within Canada, we have to work to eliminate barriers to the enjoyment of services, employment, and other benefits of residence ...

Q: How does gender-based violence intersect with legal issues you've mentioned?

A: Gender-based violence prevents free and full participation in society. It denies the entitlement of a

woman to be treated with dignity and respect. It is never acceptable in any circumstance. No person or community aware of this form of violence can justify not acting to prevent it. If all of us, men and women alike who are aware of situations of gender-based violence, were active and interventionist in stopping it, it would cease to be an issue ... Education about rights and responsibilities combined with accountability would help eradicate this horrendous behaviour. For the sake of our children, we should commit to making gender-based violence a thing of the past.

Q: What do you believe groups seeking to make the legal system better for women, youth, and children need to do in our current social context?

A: They must continue to be vigilant about areas of law that disregard or diminish the experiences and goals of vulnerable segments of our society. Focus on specific changes and then become a royal nuisance to the powers that be until changes are made. We have to be active and interventionist and we have to demand accountability from those in charge of our legal system. Good laws are only as good as the people put in charge of enforcement.

Basics of Bill 157

Under Bill 157, the *Education Amendment Act (Keeping Our Kids Safe At School)*, 2009, certain acts of violence committed on school property must be reported to the school principal. With some exceptions, the principal must then report harm done to a student to that student's parent or guardian. Reportable activities include those that can lead to suspension or expulsion. Incidents that can lead to suspension include uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm on another person; possessing or being under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs; swearing at a teacher or at another person in a position of authority; vandalism; bullying; and any other activities identified in school board policies. Incidents that can lead to expulsion include possessing a weapon or using one to cause or to threaten bodily harm to another person; physical and sexual assault; trafficking in weapons or in illegal drugs; robbery; giving alcohol to a minor; and any other activities identified in school board policies.

If a school board employee - including vice principals, teachers and educational assistants, child and youth workers, psychologists, administrative and custodial staff, and bus drivers - learns of an activity listed above, they must report it to the principal as soon as reasonably possible. The principal must then report the incident to the student's parent or guardian, unless the student is 18 years of age or older; the student is between 16 and 18 years of age and has withdrawn from parental control; or the principal believes that reporting to the parent or guardian would place the student at risk of harm from their parent or guardian.

If the principal does inform the student's parent or guardian, she or he may provide information about the incident in question, the harm suffered, any steps that have been taken to protect the student's safety, and any imposed disciplinary measures. However, the name of the aggressor cannot be revealed.

Basics of Bill 168



Respect in Action (ReAct) school assembly, in action (May)

As of June 1, 2010, Bill 168 will require employers to take greater responsibility for violence and harassment that occurs in the workplace. The bill recognizes that domestic violence has consequences for women in their workplaces and responds to the workplace deaths of many women in Ontario, including the murders of Theresa Vince and Lori Dupont. Like domestic violence, workplace violence and harassment can begin with emotional abuse and culminate into other acts of violence. Action is usually not taken unless or until an incident of physical abuse occurs. However, early intervention is crucial to preventing an escalation of violence in the future. Amongst other things, Bill 168 requires employers to take precautions if they become aware or ought reasonably to be aware of situations of domestic violence that would likely expose a worker to injury in the workplace. Employers are required to “take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of the worker”. Obligations under Bill 168 include the preparation and posting of a written policy on workplace violence. They also include an annual assessment of violence risks associated with the nature of the workplace - employees who work with the public, for example, have a higher risk of experiencing violence. A health and safety representative or the workers themselves must be advised about these annual risk assessments. Moreover, Bill 168 requires that a policy program be developed and implemented. It should outline risk-management procedures, reporting procedures, and procedures for getting immediate help when workplace violence occurs or is about to occur. The program must describe how the employer will investigate and deal with complaints and incidents of workplace violence.

Under the bill, inspectors with the Ministry of Labour have broad powers to perform inspections. They have the power to obtain a warrant without notice to enter the premises and order an inspection. Ministry of Labour Inspectors can issue orders requiring the employer to make changes to the workplace in light of safety considerations.

Here we are, 25 years into feminist legal policy reform for women. This is a milestone being recognized by many women’s agencies across Ontario. At METRAC, we celebrate this social change work in solidarity with sister agencies that are also at the same juncture in their journeys. Women have been “doing justice” for a long time, but the 1980s signified a shift - women started graduating from law schools in larger numbers. Feminist legal collectives were born and a wide breadth of feminist social justice organizations were birthed.

We congratulate agencies serving women across the province, including the Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO), and Barbra Schlifer Clinic. Promises in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, promises of equality and protection, have moved us slowly but surely towards gender justice. These last decades have seen the introduction of “rape shield” laws, equalization principles in family law, “domestic violence” as a ground for protection in refugee law, police obligations to inform women of potential harm, a bill of rights for victims, legalization of same sex marriage, and reproductive health rights. “Doing justice” has come from unfortunate realities that so many women have experienced. While there have been successes, there is much more work to do. In our current environment of regressive immigration laws, increased criminalization of women, and astronomical poverty rates coupled with racialization, it is clear that we need to continue to push forward.

“Doing justice” in 2010 will mean even more collaboration across sectors and identities. We look forward to doing that with you.

- Zahra Dhanani, Legal Director, METRAC

Community Safety Program

Michelle Davis (Safety Director) and Jessica Mustachi (Safety Program Assistant)

Michelle Davis: This past winter was a hectic time for us in the Community Safety Program. I can hardly believe that summer is just around the corner! First, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Jessica Mustachi, who began work as Safety Program Assistant in March. Jessica has been busy refining community safety trainings and audits and reaching out to community groups in Toronto. I also would like to say goodbye to Navneet Marawaha, a social work student who completed her placement with the program. Thank you for your wonderful work and support - we wish you continued success!

We've continued our safety initiatives, such as the partnership with Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada on the Girls for Safer Communities Project. We are working with girls across the country to create a new safety challenge and badge. As a result, girls will audit their neighbourhoods and identify ways to improve and/or celebrate safety in their communities. This is an exciting project - stay tuned for our fall launch. We also partnered on the Mayor's Tower Renewal Project, which seeks to retrofit high-rise buildings across the City of Toronto to make them more energy efficient and community-oriented. Over 100 adult and youth residents in four neighbourhoods have conducted audits of their buildings and identified a range of physical safety and social issues. Based on their work, we will issue Safety Report Cards with recommendations to help residents create action plans to make their neighbourhoods safer. We have also held a number of safety trainings around Toronto, including sessions with Action for Neighbourhood Change in Malvern and Dorset Park. More than 20 residents attended each training and received information and tools to conduct audits. We look forward to supporting these groups to do audits in their neighbourhoods.

As already mentioned, the Ontario Government has passed Bill 168 to amend the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. It requires employers to carry out risk assessments and prevent and respond to workplace violence, including domestic violence. For the past 20 years, METRAC's institutional Safety Audits have helped employers and staff evaluate safety in their workplaces by examining the physical and social



Community Safety Audit training

environment, policies and practices, and incidents of discrimination and harassment. Employers will require information and training to best comply with the legislative changes, and METRAC's expertise can help provide that support. We look forward to a busy and fruitful spring and summer. Thank you for your continued support of and interest in our work.

Jessica Mustachi: Working to end violence against women is an important aspect of my personal activism. Joining METRAC is a great honour. Having completed a Master's degree in health, community, and development from the London School of Economics and a Bachelor's degree in international development and women's studies, I've focused on many issues women face, particularly personal and systemic violence on local and global levels. I also have experience working with a variety of non-profits that address issues such as access to healthcare, non-formal education, and historical archives of feminist activism. As Michelle mentioned, we conducted Community Safety Audit trainings throughout the city and are planning trainings at Mornell Court and the Allan Road-Lawrence Avenue area. We've been working with METRAC's Respect in Action (ReAct) youth violence prevention program to pilot a new Youth Safety Audit Zine and conduct two youth safety trainings. We have also reformatted our audit training materials and are reformatting our Safety Audit Report Cards to better assist community members to advocate for change in their neighbourhoods. The spring has been busy with safety trainings and we are looking forward to hearing back from community members about audits they are leading in their communities.

Community Justice Program

Zahra Dhanani (Legal Director)



Some METRAC legal materials on violence and harassment in the workplace

We are again very pleased to present you with highlights of the last three months of work in the Community Justice Program. We have had an eventful and incredibly productive few months.

- ★ We coordinated and led a two-day consultation with over 48 reference committee members from across the province. The reference committee is a group of diverse women who support and guide the program's work.
- ★ We completed an annotated bibliography of METRAC's justice-related materials that have been created over the past 25 years. It will be made available in print and online.
- ★ We continued to present legal information trainings, workshops, and keynote addresses across the province and developed high-level legal information for women and their service providers. Trainings were recently held in Barrie and Six Nations in partnership with the Elizabeth Fry Society of Simcoe County (Barrie) and Ganohkwasra Family Assault Support Services (Ohsweken, Six Nations). Over 50 service agencies participated in these trainings.
- ★ In partnership with CLEONet, the Justice Program hosted a wildly popular webinar on sexual harassment and violence in the workplace with specific focus on Bill 168. We led speaking engagements on the bill, as well as a workshop on immigrant women living with violence at a conference in the Niagara Region. We also led presentations and workshops on Bill 157, the new legislation affecting schools, and Bill 133 (*Family*

Statute Law Amendment Act).

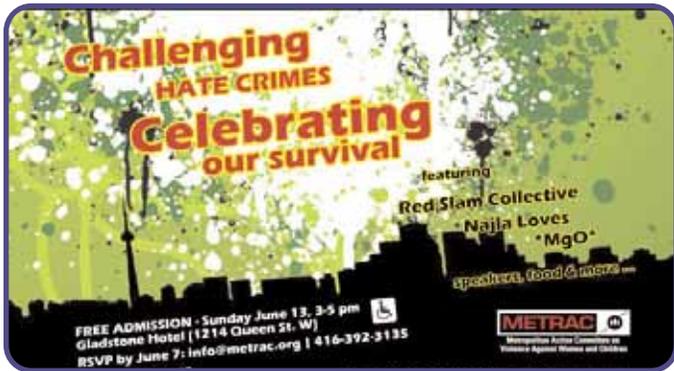
- ★ In partnership with pro bono law students from the University of Toronto, we delivered 23 workshops from October 2009 to March 2010. Workshops focused on child protection, sexual assault and harassment, and immigrant and refugee women's rights. They were delivered to women fleeing violence and service providers in shelters and community centers.
- ★ Fifty new legal articles were posted on the Ontario Women's Justice Network (OWJN) website, www.owjn.org. These articles provide up-to-date information on new legislation, family law, criminal law, international law, labour law, and human rights. Follow OWJN on Twitter by searching for "@OWJN", clicking on the "Follow me on Twitter" link on OWJN's home page, or by going directly to <https://twitter.com/OWJN>.
- ★ Since November 2009, we have distributed well over 9000 legal information materials on workplace violence and criminalized women.

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- ★ We are engaging partner organizations' activities and have participated on the Migrant Women's Coordinating Body, the Parkdale Newcomer Service Provider Network, and No One Is Illegal. We are also supporting a coalition to oppose Bill 94, the proposed Quebec-based niqab legislation.
- ★ In November 2009, we also started the Sexual Assault Court Watch Project to gather data about sexual assault case outcomes and develop recommendations and strategies to improve the system's response to sexual assault. Eleven volunteers were recruited to attend sexual assault trials in the seven courts across the Greater Toronto Area. We have also engaged four academic advisors to oversee data collection and writing of a report on findings. We have met with the Attorney General's Office, which is eagerly awaiting findings.

Community Outreach & Education Program

Andrea Gunraj (Outreach Director)



*Challenging Hate Crimes ... Celebrating our Survival
event on June 13, 3 to 5 PM at The Gladstone Hotel*

METRAC's Outreach and Education Program has been heavily active over the winter, spring, and summer. Our Respect in Action (ReAct) youth violence prevention program team has continued to do excellent work with youth and educators across the city and beyond. Between January to March 2010 alone, 945 young people and adults who work with them have participated in workshops, speaking engagements, and trainings on violence against women and youth. ReAct Peer Youth Facilitators have done an incredible job making a difference in our communities through the program. In addition, ReAct has launched a new youth workshop and training on Safety Audits, in partnership with the Safety Program.

Phase II of the Youth Alliance Project (YAP II) was launched at the start of the year with funding from the Laidlaw Foundation. Five young women members of the former Youth Alliance (Phase I) have been reconvened to address policing, sexual assault, and gender-based violence against Toronto youth. By making systemic recommendations to the Toronto Police Service, the Youth Alliance will help build more supportive police-youth relationships and contribute their perspectives to improve police training, policies, and processes. The group is currently looking at policies and practices on paper and will launch a community needs assessment to better understand realities amongst youth, adults, and local police officers in the city. This is an exciting project that will build accountability to our city's youth - they are most at risk of experiencing gender-based violence and their voices need to be heard in the systems that impact their lives.

Another exciting development has unfolded. With support from TELUS, we are launching our V-Game Project to create a Canadian-wide mobile game on sexual assault. We were thrilled with the response our *RePlay: Finding Zoe/ReJouer: Où est Zoé?* online game on healthy relationships. The opportunity seemed ripe for the V-Game Project. Mobile applications are increasingly popular and mobile technology is pervasive - it is a powerful medium to break the silence on sexual violence. Statistics demonstrate that youth do not often go to adults or authorities for support when they experience sexual violence. They go to each other and, as such, must have tools to best support each other. The game to be developed through V-Game will provide these tools to youth directly. Stay tuned for the mobile game's big launch in the fall.

*We continue to survive and thrive,
despite the odds*

We are also hosting an event on Sunday June 13 from 3 to 5 PM at The Gladstone Hotel (1214 Queen Street West), entitled *Challenging Hate Crimes ... Celebrating our Survival*. Funded by the Ontario Victim Services Secretariat (Ministry of the Attorney General), this event will feature energizing performances and speakers, including Barbara Hall, Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Over the past few years, METRAC has incorporated an understanding of hate crimes against diverse women and communities in our analysis of gender-based violence and made links between these different forms of violence. All violence is interconnected and tends to intersect in the lives of women and girls, particularly those on the margins of society. *Challenging Hate Crimes* will draw attention to the complexities and celebrate what women and communities are already doing to support victims. We continue to survive and thrive, despite the odds.

Finally, take a moment to read our blog, *Megaphone Diaries* (metrac.wordpress.com). Join the ReAct and METRAC Facebook pages to keep up with interesting developments in our work.

Thank you to METRAC's supporters

Our Funders and Donors:



Staff, Board, Volunteers, Students, Donors, & Partners:

We extend our thanks to METRAC's team of dedicated staff, board, volunteers, and placement students. Your hard work is appreciated and makes a difference.

Thank you to departing staff: Raksha Jeyaratnam, Event Assistant; Kirsti McHenry, OWJN Coordinator; and Helen Yohannes, YAP/ReAct Coordinator. We also thank departing placement students.

METRAC would like to thank our community partners, including organizations and individuals dedicated to ending violence against women, youth, and children.

Finally, we extend sincere thanks to individual and anonymous donors who have contributed to METRAC since fall 2009 - we could not survive without your support.

Yes! I would like to support METRAC's work to end violence against women, youth, and children. Enclosed is my gift of:

- \$25 \$50 \$100 Other \$ _____
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- Do not publicly acknowledge my gift.
- Donations include membership for 2010-2011. I want to become a member of METRAC at this time.

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