



# *Taking action on community safety*

Fall 2010 Newsletter



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*Youth Safety Night 2010 (pictured above: Baby Boyz Dance Group, Sun, safety workshop, Kim Davis and Red Slam Collective)*

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

## 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 | Mary Auxi Guiao, Student-at-Law | Andrea Gunraj, Outreach Director | Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director | Jessica Mustachi, Safety Program Assistant | Jannette Saberon, Administrative Assistant | Jae Thuo, Legal Outreach Coordinator | Jordana Wright, Girl Guide Project Coordinator

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

**Summer and placement students:** Merona Abbas, Sugandha Nagpal, Vino Shanmuganathan

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

# Message from the Executive Director

**Wendy Komiotis (Executive Director)**

*“Together we can heal the world, one woman at a time.”  
(Ruth Messinger)*

I welcome all supporters as you read METRAC’s year-end newsletter on the theme of safety. The safety of women, youth and children is a pressing human rights issue and a key focus of our organizational mission. METRAC is modest in resources yet powerfully rich in vision, commitment and action to affirm the rights of all people to a safe planet. Over the years, METRAC’s Community Safety Program has taken creative risks to pursue the vision of safety for diverse women vulnerable to violence because of their gender, race, age, sexual identity, faith, class and ability.

*Our work has enabled us to understand that change to build a safer society can’t be done alone*

Our work has enabled us to understand that long-term change to build a safer society cannot be done alone. We have worked with municipalities and local community groups in their neighbourhoods, in workplaces, in healthcare facilities and in schools and universities to challenge violence, oppression, fear and

the lower quality of life they breed. The vibrancy and reach of our safety work is owed to amazing partnerships built between METRAC and community members, City of Toronto staff, housing providers, community workers, artists, entertainers, academics, administrators, civil servants, union members and leaders, faith leaders, teachers, students, health care providers and many more.

Networks we have worked hard to establish have brought diverse people together to elevate and affirm social justice and the value of life, inclusion and interconnection between human beings. By coordinating our efforts to foster a safer society, we have helped to open access to shared power and removed boundaries between those affected by violence and human rights violations and those who work to eradicate them. Together, we can create a safer world for women and for everyone.

As the 2010 comes to a close, I want to express my sincere thanks and appreciations to our supporters, including funders, donors, METRAC members, community partners, students, volunteers and our staff and Board of Directors for sustaining this work to create a safer society for everyone. I wish you peace in the year 2011.

## Bowling 4 Change 2010



On Saturday, November 27 between 3:00 and 6:00 PM, join us for our annual Bowling 4 Change fundraiser to

support the Respect in Action (ReAct) youth violence prevention program. It will be held at Playtime Bowl (23 Samor Road, Toronto). Help us reach our \$20,000 goal and come for prizes, food, music and fun! Each bowler raises \$100 to \$150 and you can also get involved as a Captain to organize family and friends into an unstoppable bowling team. Even if you don’t attend, you can use our online fundraising tool to donate and get pledges from your networks - there are many ways to show support. To get involved, donate or use our online fundraising tool, visit [www.metrac.org/upcoming/upcoming.htm#events](http://www.metrac.org/upcoming/upcoming.htm#events) and click “donate, join a team or sponsor a bowler online”.

# Message from the Board President

**Andrea Wobick (Board Co-President)**

Summer break is over and METRAC's Board of Directors is back in full swing. Following the election of board members at the annual general meeting in June, a new executive committee has been elected. It will bring new energy and direction to our board. Incoming Co-Presidents Andrea Wobick and Nadine Sookermany will replace outgoing President Kellie Scanlan. Shabnum Durrani will replace Vice-President Jennifer Fehr. Keisha Williams is now serving as Secretary and last but not least, Carol Dahan will remain as the Treasurer. We thank Jennifer Fehr and Kellie Scanlan for their work over the past year.

Irene Darra, elected to the board in 2009, is leaving this fall. We wish her the best of luck in her future endeavours and thank her for her involvement.

In September, the board and staff participated in a retreat to contribute to the agency's strategic planning process, which will shape METRAC's direction for the

next three years. Everyone contributed with ideas and insights into various challenges and opportunities in reaching our goal to prevent violence against women, youth and children. We're looking forward to the next retreat at the end of November.

The Board of Directors also participated in an anti-oppression/anti-racism workshop. This training has been essential to strengthen board capacity and ensure that all levels of the organization share a common commitment to working from an anti-oppression framework. Finally, our upcoming Bowling 4 Change fundraiser has board members competing to organize teams and raise funds for ReAct. Don't be surprised by our fabulous teams, including the Bombastic Brunettes and the Bodacious Bowlers! Remember, you don't need to know how to bowl at this event - but you must be prepared to have fun. We invite everyone who wants to make a difference and end violence against women, youth and children. Can't wait to meet you there!



*Youth Safety Night 2010 (pictured above: Jessica Yee, Red Slam Collective, Shi Wisdom, Musical Guerrilla Offensive (\*MgO\*))*

*Our Safety Audit Process is rooted*  
in the experiences of those who live in, work in and frequent spaces, communities and neighbourhoods. They are the true experts on safety in those places.

*- Community Safety Program report at the 2009 Annual General Meeting*

# Safety Audit: gendered analysis of violence

Shanon Kalra-Ramjoo (METRAC volunteer)

When we discuss violence in the City of Toronto, particularly within marginalized neighbourhoods, we tend to associate it with “guns and gangs”. What is so often left out of the equation is a gendered understanding of how violence affects diverse women, young women and girls in our neighbourhoods, schools, places of worship, streets, apartment buildings and, just as importantly, our homes. The reality is that, according to Statistics Canada, 50% of women in Canada experience at least one incident of physical or sexual violence before the age of 16. Additionally, women often report feeling unsafe in public places. For example about two-thirds of women (64%) feel worried while waiting for public transit alone at night, a concern that only 29% of men share.

In 1989, METRAC pioneered the Women’s Safety Audit. While its content has been modified and updated throughout the years, the audit has always been used to evaluate key physical and social elements of safety for a neighbourhood space, workplace, organization or institution. In contrast to the array of other audit tools out there, METRAC’s audit does not rely on the distant voices of experts to define safety for those who access a space. Instead, it relies upon the everyday expertise of diverse community members themselves.

It ensures that communities who are marginalized and most at risk of violence and oppression - such as women, youth, racialized communities and members of LGBTTIQ2S (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, question and two-spirited) communities - have the opportunity to discuss their unique safety concerns and ideas for change. Space is created for community members to address past incidents of violence, discrimination and hate crimes, which often impact their sense of safety in a space. Instead of viewing these concerns as “fringe”, they are brought to the centre and taken as seriously as any other safety needs and solutions.

*METRAC has trained thousands of individuals to conduct safety audits*

Over the past decades, METRAC has trained thousands of individuals to conduct audits of their apartment buildings, schools, campuses, playgrounds parks and workplaces and identify what makes them feel safe and unsafe. These diverse community auditors have also been supported as they seek safety improvements, engaging relevant decision-makers to help them.

## Community, campus & work audits

**Community Safety Audits:** here are the steps to leading an audit in your neighbourhood. **1.** Attend a METRAC Safety Audit Training Session. Check our website to find out when the next training will be or book a special session for members of your community. Everyone who attends a training will get a Community Safety Audit Kit. **2.** Organize an audit group in your neighbourhood. **3.** Choose a date, place and time for the audit. **4.** Conduct the audit in your neighbourhood. Make sure it’s done after dark to identify lighting problems. **5.** Collect and send Safety Audit results to METRAC. We will create a

Neighbourhood Safety Report Card based on the findings, which includes information on follow-up and action. **6.** Discuss the Neighbourhood Safety Report Card results with your group and implement a plan of action based on it.

**Campus Safety Audits:** METRAC has conducted Safety Audits on many campuses across Canada, including Centennial College; Queen’s University; St. Thomas University; University of Guelph; University of New Brunswick; University of Toronto; and York University. Campus audits integrate the feedback,

needs, concerns and ideas of diverse campus space users and stakeholders, such as students, staff, educators and administrators.

**Organizational and workplace Safety Audits:** METRAC has conducted audits with many workplaces and organizations, including Mount Sinai Hospital (Toronto); New York Transit; Prisoners HIV/AIDS

Support Action Network; Royal Bank of Canada; Talisker Corporation; Toronto General Hospital; Toronto Transit Commission; Women's College Hospital (Toronto); and WoodGreen Community Centre.

For more information, contact Michelle Davis, Safety Director (416-392-3137 or [safety@metrac.org](mailto:safety@metrac.org)).

## Safety Audits around the world

**Sabine Hikel (METRAC Board member)**

METRAC's pioneering Safety Audit has been used in cities around the world since its development in the 1980s. Recently, METRAC was acknowledged as a global leader in women's safety audits by UN-HABITAT. This United Nations agency for human settlements is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the ultimate goal of building adequate shelter for all. To that end, UN-HABITAT has shined a spotlight on METRAC, highlighting the organization as the originator of women's safety audits, which are designed to assess the unique safety concerns women and girls experience in public spaces and the workplace. In a broader sense, UN-HABITAT has deemed safety audits a "best practice" as part of its Safer

Cities Programme, which builds capacity at the city level to reduce urban insecurity and cultivate a culture of crime prevention. Safety audits are one of four assessment tools that UN-HABITAT uses to determine the extent of a city's crime and to develop solutions.

The third International Conference on Women's Safety, "Building Inclusive Cities", will be held next month in New Delhi, India. For more information about the global use of safety audits, check out UN-HABITAT's Women's Safety Audit: What Works Where? publication at [www.unhs.org](http://www.unhs.org). For more about METRAC's Community Safety Audit process in particular, please visit [www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org).

*A person is*

truly safe when they are free from the threat, fear and experience of all kinds of violence, oppression and discrimination.

- METRAC's Community Safety Audit Kit

*Right: Wendy Komiotis and Michelle Davis, safety presentation for the Canadian Federation of Students*





# Youth are

often blamed for violence ... but youth are at huge risk of violence, especially young women and marginalized youth.

- METRAC's Youth Safety Zine

*Left: image from Sparrow Ways Safety Audit, led by youth as part of the Mayor's Tower Renewal Project*

## Girls to the rescue

**Jordana Wright (Girls for Safer Communities Project Coordinator)**



*Girls for Safer Communities Toolkit*

The Girls for Safer Communities Challenge has been officially launched! This challenge, funded by Status of Women Canada and initiated by Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada (GGC) in partnership with METRAC and Me to We, increases awareness about safety concerns of girls and women across the country. At the same time, it mobilizes girls to become leaders in their own communities. It's the result of a three-year project that empowers diverse girls aged 5 to 17 involved in GGC programming through the implementation of youth-led, community-based safety initiatives, including the facilitation of a special girl-friendly METRAC Community Safety Audit. A little background information is in order. Phase one of the project focused on assessing the level and breadth of GGC girls' understandings of safety. Data was

collected through focus groups, site tours across the country, adult GGC member interviews, a literature review and an online survey. These research activities engaged GGC members and included nearly 1800 participants in total. In phase two, we developed a tailored Girls for Safer Communities Challenge Toolkit, based on research findings of phase one. The toolkit includes an interactive training curriculum for GGC leaders and girls aged 12 to 17; a comprehensive training curriculum for adult mentors who will train and support audit leaders; educational safety activities designed for younger girl members aged 5 to 11; and a youth-friendly Safety Audit Handbook. An evaluation framework was also developed and an opportunity to engage girls on safety issues was held at GGC's 100th Year Anniversary Camp Mosaic celebrations in July in Guelph, Ontario.

All of this foundational work leads us to the current phase of the project, which focuses on training GGC mentors, launching the challenge itself and meeting with the project's Advisory Committee to reaffirm goals and to discuss outcomes of phases one and two. Looking forward, the Girls for Safer Communities Project team will work to ensure the sustainability of the project and expand its reach to children and youth organizations and schools across Canada and internationally.

# Here's to the struggles and victories

of the last twenty-five years and to a world that is safer for women, youth, and children, safer for everyone.

- the Executive Director' of METRACs 25th anniversary message



*THRIVE Coalition's art workshop at the Jamaican-Canadian Association, October 2010 (Photo credit: www.meerasethi.com)*

## Volunteer profile: Andrea Wobick

**Sabine Hikel (METRAC Board member)**

Andrea Wobick is one of the longest-serving members on METRAC's Board of Directors. She first came into contract with METRAC through work she had done on victim issues. A lawyer by training, Andrea began serving on the board in 2006. "I was really drawn to METRAC's focus on promoting and improving women's safety in the community. When I moved to Toronto [from Ottawa], I really wanted to get involved with a feminist organization that focused on preventing

and eliminating violence against women, and one that worked from an anti-oppression framework."

This year, Andrea is excited to serve as Co-President of the Board of Directors for the first time. One of the most gratifying aspects of being on the METRAC Board, Andrea reports, is working with "fabulous, dedicated women." Staff members at METRAC are "so committed to the organization and to their work,

and their tireless efforts to improve our communities are an inspiration to me.”

As a woman who works in the legal system, Andrea finds that the legal initiatives METRAC undertakes, the ones that “assist women in learning about their legal rights and avenues of recourse”, are most meaningful to her. “The Ontario Women’s Justice Network is such

an important resource for women,” she says.

METRAC’s Community Safety Audits, Andrea adds, is also a critical tool for women. “Our Safety Audits led by staff, volunteers and community partners can make such a difference for vulnerable groups and are so important for our neighbourhoods.”

## Community Safety Program Update

**Michelle Davis (Safety Director)**

Back-to-school in September has translated to a flurry of activity in the Safety Program. So far this year, we have held 12 community safety trainings with 156 participants, supported 10 Safety Audits with 175 participants and led seven safety-related presentations. We have also distributed almost 200 METRAC Community Safety Audit Kits. Whew - and the year is not even finished!

I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Jordana Wright, who is coordinating the Girls for Safer Communities Project. Sadly, in August, we said goodbye to Paola Jani, the previous coordinator for this project. Paola’s expertise in working with girls and developing age-appropriate materials helped assure early success of the Girls for Safer Communities Project. We are also glad to have had Merona Abbas join the Safety Program in September. She is a social work student from York University.

The Safety Program has been very busy supporting community groups across Toronto as they seek to make their neighbourhoods safer. We trained residents in Dorset Park, Mornelle Court and Malvern neighbourhoods, in addition to people living in the Neptune neighbourhood and Moss Park neighbourhoods. We trained diverse youth in south Etobicoke and North York and we continue to form strategic partnerships with the City of Toronto’s Mayor’s Tower Renewal Project and Crisis Response Program, as well as with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. These partnerships are very positive because each organization is committed to community mobilization and engagement.

On October 2, we hosted our 2010 Youth Safety Night: *Breaking the silence . . . youth speaking out against violence*. The event brought together youth who participated in Safety Audits through our partnership with the Mayor’s Tower Renewal Project. It provided youth an opportunity to discuss safety concerns and learn about an anti-oppression approach to safety through consciousness-raising performances and workshops. Sugandha Nagpal worked arduously throughout the summer to coordinate Youth Safety Night - her wonderful work is much appreciated. Even though it rained all day, the event was a great success. Youth from Malvern, St. Jamestown and Rexdale neighbourhoods attended and participated. They enjoyed fabulous presentations and performances by local activists and artists, including Toronto’s own Kim Davis, Red Slam Collective, \*MgO\*, Shi Wisdom, Sun, Baby Boyz Dance Group and Controversy Entertainment. A special thanks to everyone who attended and supported the event. Thank you also to Jessica Yee, founder and Executive Director of the Native Youth Sexual Health Network, who gave an excellent keynote address that perfectly set the tone for the day.

In addition to the Girls for Safer Communities Project, we are also starting to train youth and support them to audit their neighbourhoods and schools. We will begin working with middle school-aged youth in the Jane and Finch area and we also hope to work with young women at a secondary school in the Lawrence Heights neighbourhood. Engaging youth to address their safety concerns is an important way to build communities and enhance community safety. Thank you for your continued support of and interest in our work.

# Community Justice Program Update

Zahra Dhanani (Legal Director)



*METRAC's legal information webinars on CLEONet  
(www.cleonet.ca)*

METRAC's Community Justice Program is involved in exciting initiatives to increase access to justice for diverse women, youth and children. A few examples of this work are listed below.

- \* Thirty-five pro bono law students have been recruited from five universities across the Province. After training, they will deliver legal information workshops for women and their service providers.
- \* In November, a special consultation with feminist lawyers was held, hosted in partnership with Susan Vella (Rochon Genova) and Elizabeth K. Grace (Lerners LLP).
- \* A "What's New in the Law" forum will be held on November 24, co-hosted with the Institute for Feminist Legal Studies at Osgoode Hall Law School and the Sex Professionals of Canada. The keynote speaker is Alan Young, who will address the recent appeal victory in *Bedford v. Canada*. Here, the court held that provisions of the *Criminal Code of Canada* that criminalize sex trade work are unconstitutional, contrary to guaranteed rights in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.
- \* Legal information trainings for individuals and service providers have been conducted throughout the fall season. In addition, webinars on the law have been taking place over the fall on sexual assault and harrassment, child custody and protection and criminalization of the sex trade.
- \* Various communications and technological solutions to legal information are being explored, such as legal information DVDs, viral videos and a public anti-rape campaign. These initiatives are being planned this year end and into next year.
- \* In addition to other policy work supported by the Justice Program, we are working with a gender justice coalition to stop detention of non-status women who experience violence and access shelter services. In negotiations with the Canadian Border Services Agency, the coalition successfully worked towards the passing of a directive to prevent detention of non-status women in shelters.
- \* The Justice Program has also been involved in intervening in the Mavi Case. Here, the main issue is whether or not governments must exercise discretion on a case-by-case basis and comply with a duty of procedural fairness when enforcing undertakings given by citizens or permanent residents to sponsor a relative's immigration to Canada. This case impacts women who escape violent situations and are affected by sponsorship debt as a result.
- \* Data analysis for the Sexual Assault Court Watch Project is underway. Here, volunteer observers examined several sexual assault proceedings in Greater Toronto Area courts, noting dynamics in the cases and any issues of bias, discrimination and "rape myths" which may have impacted case outcomes. On an international level and with respect to our work with Women in Law and Development in Africa-Ghana (WiLDAF-Ghana), the idea of establishing an international "court watch" project is being discussed.

Be sure to follow the Ontario Women's Justice Network (OWJN), METRAC's legal information website for women, young women and their service providers, on Twitter ([www.twitter.com/owjn](http://www.twitter.com/owjn)) and Facebook ([www.facebook.com/owjn.org](http://www.facebook.com/owjn.org)).

Finally, many sincere thanks to the hardworking Justice Program team, which includes Mergitu Ebba, Mary Auxi Guiao, Katharine Neufield, Vino Shanmuganathan, Jae Thuo and our volunteers, students, advisory committee members and community partners.

# Community Outreach Program Update

Andrea Gunraj (Outreach Director)



*What It Is.: a digital game challenging sexual violence*

METRAC's Community Outreach and Education Program has entered the fall season with a number of initiatives. To start, we have been working with diverse youth to develop **What It Is.**, a bilingual Canada-wide video game on sexual violence for youth aged 12 to 25. **What It Is.** is supported by TELUS and the Department of Justice Canada. It will be playable online and available for download onto Java-based mobile phones. The game raises awareness about sexual assault, abuse and harassment with the understanding that young women are most at risk. It provides vital information about where youth can go for help and how they can support their peers. Players who get a high score will get to download an original new track, "Zalaura", created by Toronto-based artists Shi Wisdom and Myk Miranda (produced by ENJ, engineered by Ron Dias, spoken word recorded by Definitive Sound). **What It Is.** will be released at a media launch on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

In addition to ongoing violence prevention work with youth, Respect in Action (ReAct) has launched into *It's On: Challenging Violence through Digital Video*. The Liaison of Independent Filmmakers of Toronto received funding from Canada Council for the Arts and partnered with ReAct to mentor media students at Bloor Collegiate Institute and build their video production skills. ReAct's Youth Facilitators are supporting artists and students by increasing their understanding of violence and developing a "lens" from which the youth will create their own digital videos.

The Youth Alliance Group, our team of young women seeking to improve police policy and practice with respect to sexual assault and gender-based violence against Toronto youth, is also hard at work. They were trained on the police system and began an initial review of key police policies. In addition, they have initiated community-based research to learn how youth, police officers and adults working with youth experience policing when it comes to violence young women face. We hope this work will set precedence on how young people can improve police practices and accountability.

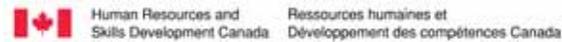
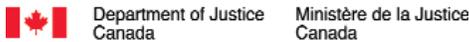
THRIVE, the multicultural women's coalition that METRAC facilitates, is kicking off amazing initiatives for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence. Two Toronto-based artists, Meera Sethi and METRAC's own Karen Darricades, led creative community-based art workshops with diverse women. The upcoming exhibit, "Fabricating Change", will feature art pieces that were created by women. It will be held on November 25 from 7:00 to 9:00 PM at the Raging Spoon (761 Queen Street West, Toronto). THRIVE is also organizing a forum entitled "Women's Voices Rising!" on December 11 from 9:30 AM to 3 PM at Metro Hall (55 John Street, Toronto). It's open to participants who identify as women or trans and will include dynamic speakers, workshops and food. The RSVP deadline is December 3 (November 26 for participants who require ASL or childminding). Visit [www.surveymonkey.com/s/3YRM95V](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/3YRM95V) to register.

Finally, we released an online sexual harassment survey. Findings will inform the creation of an iPhone application to raise awareness about and challenge sexual harassment, planned for development in 2011. This project is in partnership with *Holla Back!*, a movement dedicated to ending street harassment using mobile technology ([hollabacknyc.blogspot.com](http://hollabacknyc.blogspot.com)). Go to [www.metrac.org](http://www.metrac.org) to participate in the survey today.

We thank you for your support. And please remember, none of the Outreach Program's work would be possible without ReAct Facilitators, Youth Alliance members, Keli Bellaire, Karen Darricades, Jessica Mustachi and our volunteers and community partners.

# 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, Paola Jani, Katharine Neufield and Onyii Udegbe, as well as departing board member Irene Darra. We also thank our departing placement students and ReAct Youth Peer Facilitators. 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 spring 2010 - 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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- I would like to give monthly support of \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Do not publicly acknowledge my gift.
- Donations include membership for 2010-2011. I want to become a member of METRAC at this time.

I have enclosed a cheque made payable to METRAC

I prefer to pay by VISA (please include details below):

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**Thank you for your support**  
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