

# *Campus Safety for Women*

Spring/Summer 2013 Newsletter



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*METRAC* is a community-based organization founded in 1984 and dedicated to preventing violence and advancing safety, justice and equity for all women and youth.

*Image: Campus Safety Audit (Ontario)*



## METRAC's Team

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- Tricia Bennett, Coordinator of Sustainable Development
- Karen Darricades, SchoolED Project Co-Coordinator\*
- Michelle Davis, Safety Director
- Najla Edwards, ReAct Co-Coordinator
- Andrea Gunraj, Communications Specialist
- Joanna Hayes, Legal Information Coordinator
- Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director

- Lynn Mackay, Justice Projects Coordinator
- Navneet Marwaha, Safety Audit Coordinator
- Jessica Mustachi, Safety Coordinator
- Jannette Saberon, Administrative Assistant
- Talayah Shomali, Coordinator of Sustainable Development\* (on leave)
- Shequita Thompson, SchoolED Project Co-Coordinator
- Tamar Witelson, Legal Director

### ReAct Youth Peer Facilitators

- Kavita Bee
- Linda Frempong
- Ray B. Garcia
- Angela Musceo

### Placement students:

- Meaghan Parry
- Jen Saeckl

*\*Departed from role since last newsletter*

# Message from the Executive Director

Wendy Komiotis, Executive Director



*Image: Campus Safety Audit (New Brunswick)*

Thank you for opening our spring/summer newsletter. As you can see, we've switched to a mobile-friendly online format to better share our work and save on paper. But if you'd like to receive a paper/large print copy, just let us know and we will gladly slip one in the mail.

*METRAC has demonstrated  
innovation and leadership  
on campus safety  
for almost 25 years*

This edition focuses on campus safety for women and groups at high risk of assault and harassment. In recent years there have been many news stories about violence on campuses across the country, but METRAC has demonstrated innovation and leadership on campus safety for almost 25 years. In 1989 we introduced the first Women's Campus Safety Audit Guide to enhance public safety for women, the disproportionate targets of sexual violence on campus. Since then, we've worked with thousands of students, staff, faculty members and administrators to generate extensive improvements to safety across Canadian campuses. Our Campus Safety Audit recommendations have resulted in enhancements to building design and layout, lighting, sightlines, signage, security programs and policies. In an ever-changing environment, our audit has evolved to respond to violence motivated by discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. Consequently,

our audit recommendations integrate human rights elements that lead to more accessible and inclusive safe spaces for students, staff and faculty of diverse abilities, sexual and gender identities, races and faiths.

There was a time of silence about campus safety for women. Policies and services on sexual assault and harassment were rare. While we still have a lot of ground to cover in raising awareness and willingness to build safer learning environments, we've noticed positive changes in the way campus communities deal with violence against women and marginalized groups. There is a greater sense that proactive solutions to violence are possible.

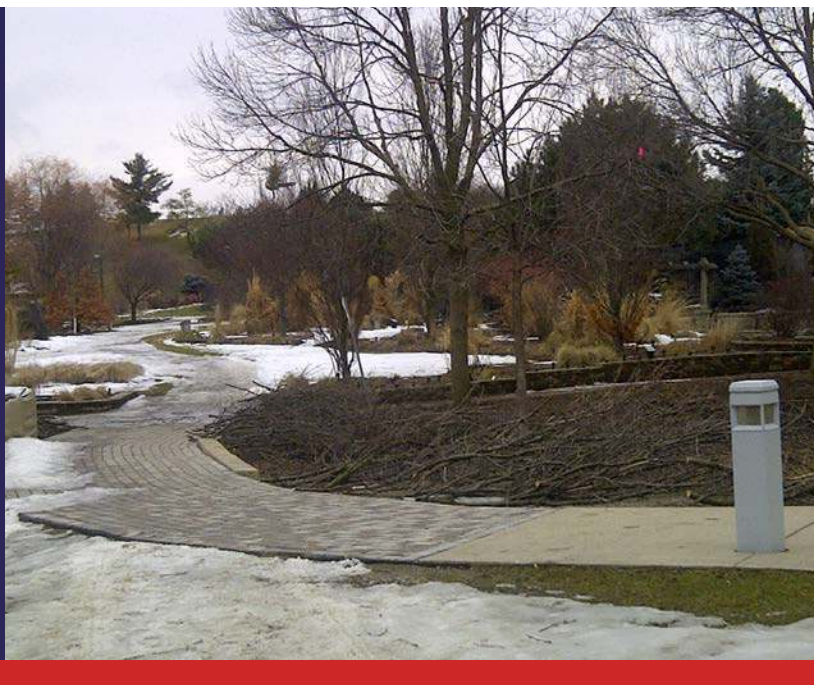
Browse the rest of this newsletter for interviews of representatives from campuses with whom we've done audits, as well insights from an organization doing campus violence prevention work in the United States (US). The *Jeanne Clery Act* helps push safety matters to the forefront of US campuses. Comparable legalization hasn't been instituted in Canada but it has gotten us thinking about safety policy in the grand scheme of change. How can Canada's post-secondary environments be made safer for women and other at-risk campus members through forward-focused policies?

There are exciting updates to mention. Our organizational rebranding process is well underway – thank you to everyone who took time to fill out our survey and participate in research activities. Your input will help shape a new brand to demonstrate METRAC's relevance and resiliency after almost 30 years of fulfilling our critical mission to build a safer world for women and youth. Another new initiative on the horizon is our search for accessible office and programming space. Stay tuned for details about both in our next newsletter.

You'll also read updates about our programs and the May Be Me Campaign to prevent violence against women and youth. My thanks extend to our supporters, donors and funders, as well as our volunteer and staff team, for making it all possible. I would like to thank to departing board member Tracy Ford (Co-President) and placement students Silmi Abdullah, Shadika

*“I believe  
METRAC is a true agent of  
change that every post-  
secondary institution  
should have on their  
campus.” (Livy Visano, York  
University Safety Audit  
Committee Chair)*

*Image: Campus Safety Audit (Ontario)*



Grimes-Jackman, Manivillie Kanagasabapathy, Arooba Khan and Crystal Sukhdeo. Your contributions have added value to the important work of METRAC.

With the Annual General Meeting coming up on Wednesday October 2, 2013, we're searching for candidates to join our Board of Directors, specifically

those with a background in fundraising, finances, building design, research, communications and human resources. If you would like to contribute your talents to an ever-growing and dynamic organization, visit [www.metrac.org/about/get.involved/get.involved.htm#board](http://www.metrac.org/about/get.involved/get.involved.htm#board) and apply today.

## Apply to our board

Do you have leadership skills and talent to help us make the vision of a violence-free world a reality? We are searching for new members to volunteer on METRAC's Board of Directors who:

- are committed, reliable, great communicators and team-players;
- have strong supportive leadership skills;
- will commit for a minimum of two years with eight to 10 hours of board activities each month (e.g. meetings, correspondence, events);
- have talent and experience in financial management/accounting; fund development/capital campaigns/social enterprise; communications and marketing; human resources; community/university-based research; real-estate/facilities development; risk management; impact data specialization;

social justice, anti-oppression framework and policy;

- will support development of METRAC's vision, strategic plan and policies; and
- will use their ingenuity, connections and resources to support the organization's violence prevention efforts

Previous board experience is an asset. Note: food, transportation and subsidized childcare expenses are provided, if necessary.

Please submit your resume (fax 416-392-3136 or email [executivedirector@metrac.org](mailto:executivedirector@metrac.org)) and fill out the online form ([www.metrac.org/about/get.involved/get.involved.htm#board](http://www.metrac.org/about/get.involved/get.involved.htm#board)).

More information: email [info@metrac.org](mailto:info@metrac.org) | call 416-392-3135

**Applications due: Wednesday, July 31**

# Key Campus Safety Concerns

Andrea Gunraj, Communications Specialist

METRAC has identified several factors of unsafety for women and other groups at high risk of violence and harassment on campuses.

## Isolation, lighting, sightlines

Fear of attack can intensify in deserted, poorly-lit areas. Furniture, architecture and landscaping can affect feelings of safety and create pockets of fear. (Image: Juan Pablo Bravo, from The Noun Project)

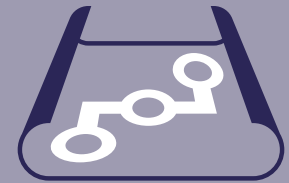


## Accessibility

Physically inaccessible spaces and inadequate accessibility mechanisms can interfere with free movement. They increase everyone's vulnerability to entrapment and creates barriers to an open learning environment. (Image: candice gras, from The Noun Project)

## Signage, layout, maintenance

Unclear signs, complicated buildings and obscuring layouts (indoor and outdoor) promote confusion and disorientation, factors that can increase fear. Poorly maintained spaces also create feelings of isolation and vulnerability. (Image: Dmitry Sokolov, from The Noun Project)



## Attitudes and behaviours

Discriminatory actions and slurs on campus elicit feelings of exclusion, not belonging and unfairness. Past incidents of violence, harassment and discrimination, especially those not properly followed up on, create an aura of fear. (Image: Stephen Thomas, from The Noun Project)



## Policies and practices

Safety is impacted by an area's rules or patterns of activity, such as when a place opens or closes and when lights are turned on and off. Practices and policies on how a campus is administered, even those that appear neutral, may unintentionally create additional safety risks for certain groups.



# Interview with Michelle Davis

Shanon Kalra-Ramjoo, Communications Committee volunteer



Image: Michelle Davis, METRAC

We interviewed Michelle Davis, Safety Director at METRAC since November 2009. Amongst other things, she oversees Safety Audits of neighbourhoods, campuses, organizations and institutions.

## **Q: Tell us about your background.**

A: I've worked both locally and internationally to advance gender and social justice. Prior to joining METRAC, I coordinated Legal Aid Ontario's Domestic Violence Response Project to address needs of women survivors of violence. I spent five years in the Caribbean assisting a number of projects to address women's equality including the Commonwealth Secretariat's Gender Management System pilot project in St. Kitts; UNIFEM Caribbean's Transformational Leadership Program; the World Bank's review of gender issues in Jamaica; and a project to examine root causes of gender-based violence in Jamaica. I've also taught women and gender studies courses at University of Toronto and University of the West Indies.

## **Q: How can a campus be unsafe for women and other groups?**

A: Physical safety might need improvements such as more lighting, better security services, better maintenance and decreased isolation. Schools may also be unsafe in terms of social safety environments. Unsafety might arise in experiences of discrimination and harassment, poor policies and procedures,

inadequate responses to sexual violence and inadequate support services.

## **Q: What campus safety problems do you typically notice?**

A: Poor lighting, isolation, under-resourced security services and discrimination and harassment do come up. And a need for more concerted, focused commitment from campus leadership is often necessary to address violence, including sexual assault.

*Concerted, focused commitment from campus leadership is often necessary to address violence, including sexual assault*

## **Q: How does campus safety vary by season?**

A: Safety feels differently depending on time of year. Most campuses are busiest between September and March when it usually gets dark by 5:00 in the evening. Lighting is an important safety feature. Maintenance issues are also different based on the season. In winter, quick snow removal to ensure persons can move freely is an issue, whereas in spring and summer, keeping trees and bushes trimmed to prevent covering lights and creating hiding spots become an issue.

## **Q: What can be done to make campuses safer?**

A: Consultation with the campus community is necessary: "What features need to be added, which ones can be improved and which ones are no longer working?" Campuses must also demonstrate that safety is a top priority by regularly investing in safety improvements, communicating well with the community and ensuring sound safety-related policies and procedures. Schools must respond quickly when violence does occur and give those harmed the support they need, whether medical, legal, emotional, housing or academic. A safe campus works collaboratively across disciplines and demonstrates care for all members of the community.

# Preventing Sexual Violence on Campuses

Ontario Women's Directorate

Young students head off to college and university in eager anticipation of new learning, new relationships and new experiences. Unfortunately, research shows that 15 to 25% of college and university-aged women will experience some form of sexual assault during their academic careers.

Taking action against sexual violence contributes to an environment where students can pursue fulfilling academic studies and social lives, and where gender equality and diversity are valued. "Our goal is an Ontario where everyone on and off campus knows that sexual violence is unacceptable, where victims receive the support they need and where perpetrators are held accountable," said Laurel Broten, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues.

To this end, the Ontario Women's Directorate created *Developing a Response to Sexual Violence: A Resource Guide for Ontario's Colleges and Universities* as part of Ontario's Sexual Violence Action Plan. In developing the guide, the directorate sought advice from individuals and organizations in the post-secondary and violence against women sectors.

Preventing sexual violence on post-secondary campuses requires a comprehensive approach that engages all members of the campus community. The

guide provides information and tools that can be used to increase understanding of sexual violence and develop inclusive policies and protocols.

A campus culture that rejects sexual violence requires leadership from the most senior level of the institution. Such leadership moves policy to practice and encourages new attitudes and standards of behaviour. Presidents and Executive Heads can serve as catalysts for change by issuing a statement that sexual violence will not be tolerated at their institutions and that formal protocols and policies will be used to prevent sexual violence, support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. Commitment from administrators, student leaders, staff and faculty, and the participation of the entire campus community is also essential.

Individuals can become educated about sexual violence; they can participate in sexual violence prevention activities on their campuses and in their communities. They can take bystander training on how to step in when they witness behaviour that could lead to sexual violence. Engaging in community action events such as "Take Back the Night" can help raise the profile of the issue and the need for systemic change. Visit [www.ontario.ca/women](http://www.ontario.ca/women) to learn more about the resource guide and other actions the Ontario government is taking to end sexual violence.



Developing a Response to Sexual Violence:  
**A Resource Guide For  
Ontario's Colleges and Universities**

*"Women represent over 93% of all sexual assault victims, and female college and university students are particularly vulnerable."*

*Image: cover of Developing a Response to Sexual Violence: A Resource Guide for Ontario's Colleges and Universities*

# MakingNoise @Humber



*Image: Jason Merai, Urban Alliance on Race Relations*

Jason Merai is Gender-based Violence Project Coordinator for Urban Alliance on Race Relations (UARR). He manages Making Noise @Humber, a project funded by a Status of Women Canada to raise awareness about gender-based violence at Humber College. It engages key stakeholders the Humber Students' Federation and Humber College administration. Other key stakeholders include external community members and a student committee.

The first year of Making Noise @Humber is dedicated to capturing attitudes and awareness through surveys, focus groups and safety assessments and analyzing

policies and practices to address gaps in services. Year two is dedicated to implementing violence prevention recommendations and delivering a community plan for Humber's North and Lakeshore campuses. The plan will include workshops to address gender-based violence.

“An important component to addressing violence is understanding the social and physical environment of a campus,” Jason says. “We were very happy to work with METRAC, who is a leading organization in addressing violence against women and youth, to help deliver safety assessments of Humber's North and Lakeshore campus.” METRAC trained student committee members to conduct these assessments and identified key areas for improvement. In March, the student committee and public safety staff did a physical survey of respective campuses. The collaboration allowed public safety staff to get direct feedback and allowed students to learn more about services public safety staff provide.

“Key improvements suggest a better awareness of resources on campus,” notes Jason. “But there are more issues we're looking forward to addressing collectively with the Humber Students' Federation and Humber College.”

*“It was encouraging to see so many people wanting to help others. It made me feel good about doing my part to stop violence against women.”*  
**(Attendee)**

*Image: We All Have a Role Forum to Challenge Sexual Violence (April)*





# Mount Allison University



*Image: Rachael Coon, Mount Allison University*

Rachael Coon is Safety and Security Project Manager for Mount Allison University Students' Union. She coordinated last year's Campus Safety Audit by METRAC and oversees a project funded by Status of Women Canada to engage young people to prevent violence against women on campuses. At the same time, she is a fourth year biology and drama student.

During the recent Campus Safety Audit Process at Mount Allison, Rachael coordinated meetings between METRAC's Safety Program representatives and students and staff. She helped organize the audits themselves, recruiting students and employees to

participate.

"The response has been extremely positive," says Rachael. "Students are excited to see a focus on safety both by the Students' Union and the university itself. Improvements have already begun, such as a new University Safety Services website and the reinstatement of a Security Matters Committee."

Rachael believes recommendations that arise from the audit process will give validity to safety concerns students have raised and encourage more positive change. "I suspect there will be recommendations that are fresh and new," she says. "I'm looking forward to broadening the scope of our efforts to improve safety at Mount Allison."

She also notes that changing the social climate towards violence is the first step to a safer community and points out that the university has recently become part of the Green Dot Campaign. It teaches people how to safely and effectively intervene and stop power-based personal violence. "This is a program I would highly recommend as a tool for changing social constructs and denouncing violence," says Rachael.

## We All Have a Role forum

Held on April 26, 2013 at North York Civic Centre, this forum provided information and tools for 85 people who have experienced sexual violence and those who support them. We All Have a Role was funded by Department of Justice Canada in honour of National Victims of Crime Awareness Week with presenter support from partners: Maggie's Toronto Sex Workers Action Project, Springtide Resources, Toronto District School Board, Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/ Multicultural Women Against Rape, Victim Services Toronto, Victim-Witness Assistance Program Peel, White Ribbon Campaign and WomenatthecentrE.

In a sample of 41 forum participants, an average ranking of 4.65 out of 5 was given in response to the question, "How relevant was this forum in addressing sexual violence?" An average ranking of 4.44 out of 5 was given in response to the question, "How effective were the presenter(s)?" and an average ranking of 4.35 out of 5 was given in response to the question, "How would you rate the forum overall?" Eighty-eight percent of respondents said they would participate in follow-up events to the forum. Participant comments about the forum include: "Nice to see different perspectives", "Wonderful presenters and group discussion", and "Engaging and relatable".

For video clips of the opening panel, visit [www.metrac.org/about/press.room/press.room](http://www.metrac.org/about/press.room/press.room).

# Clery Center for Security On Campus



*Image: Abigail Boyer, Clery Center for Security On Campus*

The Clery Center for Security On Campus is a US non-profit organization dedicated to prevention of criminal violence at colleges and universities. Co-founded by Howard and Connie Clery following the murder of their daughter Jeanne, the Clery Center was the driving force behind the *Jeanne Clery Act*. It requires US colleges and universities that receive federal financial aid to keep and disclose information about crime on and near their campuses. The Clery Center fosters collaborative relationships among law enforcement, school officials, students and families and provides crucial education. It is committed to advocacy for those who have been victimized and supports policy initiatives to build safe campus communities.

*“The most important thing an institution can do is get the entire campus engaged in prevention”*

Abigail Boyer is Director of Communications and Outreach. “The most important thing an institution can do, in my opinion, is get the entire campus community engaged in prevention,” she says. “A top-down, bottom-up approach is critical.” She notes that institutions should communicate and set expectations for behavior and have a consistent response to violence. But there should also be prevention education to help students recognize the role they play. Everyone should be able to recognize sexual violence and harassment and know how to safely intervene. They should also be equipped to “speak out against attitudes and behaviors that often lead to sexual violence and harassment, like

derogatory remarks.”

Abigail is excited by the more recent focus on primary prevention on campus – that is, strategies to stop violence before it occurs. “They’re having conversations about what consent means and what healthy relationships look like,” she says. “They’re engaging bystanders to carefully consider messages they receive from the media and peers and challenge norms that make it seem like sexual harassment or violence is okay.” She also notes that when violence does occur, more colleges and universities are developing coordinated responses through sexual assault response and resource teams.

Of course, institutions face challenges in figuring out where to start. Abigail encourages institutions to start by communicating with students, faculty, staff and wider communities beyond the campus. “Making connections and exploring new and innovative partnerships can help tackle some of these challenges.”

Abigail further points to the power of partnerships. “We can learn so much from other committed individuals. And certainly look within your own community. Evaluate your campus culture and your approach to these issues. Consider what’s working and where there could be change. And if you identify a problem, start a dialogue.”

## Coming in fall ...

**METRAC’s Annual General Meeting:** October 2013 (date and location to be announced). Interested in becoming a Member of METRAC? Visit [www.metrac.org/about/get.involved/get.involved.htm#member](http://www.metrac.org/about/get.involved/get.involved.htm#member).

**May Be Me Dialogues and Awareness Webinars:** examining issues in prevention such as the role of safe schools and tips for parents (details to come).



*“I love purple,  
but purple is so much  
more than just a colour.”  
(Rachael-Lea Rickards, May  
Be Me Spokesperson)*

*Image: Rachael-Lea hosts Preventing More Histories of  
Violence May Be Me Celebration at the City of Toronto  
Archives (May)*

## May Be Me Campaign Update

So far this year, hundreds have joined our ongoing May Be Me Campaign events and activities. We thank all you Purple People for building the movement to prevent violence against women and youth!

**Awareness Webinars:** between February and June, we held nine free webinars on topics such as preventing street and workplace harassment, sexualization and sexual violence, and men and boys preventing violence. Presenters included METRAC’s team of educators and guest partners including Holly Kearn of Stop Street Harassment and Jeff Perera of White Ribbon Campaign. For recordings and slides, visit [www.maybemecampaign.ca/about/media.html](http://www.maybemecampaign.ca/about/media.html).

**May Be Me Dialogues:** as part of the campaign’s awareness-raising efforts, we launched this speaker series to connect the public with great ideas and efforts to prevent violence. We featured Mark V. Campbell, Executive Director at Nia Center for the Arts, addressing art for human development and resilience to violence; Fran Odette, Faculty Member at George Brown College, addressing the law, violence and women with disabilities; and Andrea Gunraj, Communications Specialist at METRAC, addressing technology for violence prevention. For video clips and images of these presentations, visit [www.maybemecampaign.ca/events.html](http://www.maybemecampaign.ca/events.html).

**Pledges for May Be Me Day:** supporters signed up online and gathered pledges from friends and family toward their personal goal to express themselves in purple on May 31. From the bottom of our Purple Hearts, we thank everyone who raised funds for METRAC’s violence prevention efforts! It’s never too late or early to help – do so by visiting [www.maybemecampaign.ca/participate.html](http://www.maybemecampaign.ca/participate.html).

**Preventing More Histories of Violence:** on May 31, we held this event to showcase the cause and celebrate the campaign. Attendees enjoyed “Purple Pizzazz” cocktails, great food and entertainment and a performance from “I Am Not a Dinner Mint”. Many thanks to host and performer Rachael-Lea Rickards (actor, writer, producer) and DJ Denise Benson (The Grid). We also extend our deepest thanks to Gold Sponsor Fasken Martineau, Print Sponsor High Print, Local Friend Bazaar Marketing and Communications Inc. and our silent auction and prize donors.

**Awareness-raising and Ambassador teams:** we added to our incredible teams of May Be Me volunteers who champion the campaign and special plan projects to promote violence. Stay tuned for information about their exciting endeavours in the fall. (Want to volunteer? Contact us by emailing [sus@metrac.org](mailto:sus@metrac.org) or calling 416-392-3135.)

# Community Justice Program Update

**Tamar Witelson, Legal Director**

The Justice Program completed several projects through the winter months, with a significant focus on immigration and refugee issues, to help explain recent immigration changes and their effect on women and children.

Just before the winter break, we held three training days for service providers working with vulnerable women. Two of them dealt with immigration issues: the new Conditional Permanent Residence program; changes to the refugee system; poignant descriptions of women held in immigration detention; and uplifting end-of-day presentations about immigrant women now living with secure status in Canada. Our third training responded to the epidemic of sexual assaults against women and covered ideas about how individuals and communities can fight to protect women's safety.

We completed a total of 10 webinars since last October for the Family Law Education for Women (FLEW) campaign ([www.onefamilylaw.ca](http://www.onefamilylaw.ca)). Some dealt with immigration, including how to start a refugee claim

with the new "Basis of Claim" form. We also covered the Children's Aid Society system; the Victim/Witness Assistance Program; and ways to resolve family law disputes without going to court. FLEW webinars have attracted participants from 250 organizations around the province and thousands of online viewers.

This year's Pro Bono Students Canada project ended in March and led to many new articles on immigration and other issues for the Ontario Women's Justice Network website ([www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org)). Four volunteer law students gave legal information presentations in women's shelters about child support, spousal support, domestic assault charges and concerns for immigrant women in abusive relationships.

We are looking ahead to planning new programming, with some staff changes. Our articling student, Silmi Abdullah, has passed her Bar exams and has moved on to new challenges, and Lynn McKay has joined us as Justice Projects Coordinator.

# Respect in Action (ReAct) Update

**Asam Ahmad and Najla Edwards, Program Co-Coordinators**

Over the past few months, ReAct has been busy working on a number of initiatives and planning activities for spring and summer. We have been updating our workshops, doing skill-shares and coming up with brand new interactive workshops we're excited to present in our communities!

We facilitated a conference in the town of Red Lake in Northern Ontario. It was a learning experience that allowed for team development and a sharing of skills and experiences. ReAct is focusing on workshop development, project proposals and new workshops for the OUTshine conference in June. We are implementing important enhancements to our curriculum such as making workshops more trans inclusive and further addressing victim-blaming and shaming. In May, the ReAct team facilitated two sessions at the Gay-Straight Alliance Summit in Toronto, exploring and highlighting

the resilience of queer people of color and looking at different ways to be queer beyond the stereotyping ones we see in the media every single day.

Through our after school Schooled Project, we've been focusing on participatory action research with youth participants and development of a toolkit to help students take up and use our peer-to-peer model in their own schools. We participated in an innovative day of sharing of activities and feedback for the toolkit, which is being developed by Schooled Co-Coordinators Shequita and Karen. So far, it's looking great and the team is really excited to see the finished product!

Note: ReAct recently released a zine for young survivors of sexual assault, *Choosing Your Own Path to Survivorship*. Find it on METRAC's website.

## SchoolED project impact

Our SchoolED after school peer violence prevention project, funded by Status of Women Canada, is quickly coming to a close. But our initial evaluation of the weekly interactive, peer-led sessions demonstrates real and lasting impacts on the lives of high school student participants.

- 50% report that SchoolED sessions helped them improve their leadership and advocacy skills; 22% say sessions helped them improve these skills “very much”.
- 83% report increased knowledge of gender-based violence and 89% report receiving relevant information to take action and prevent violence against women and youth in their own lives.

- 100% report enjoying the sessions; 61% said they enjoy them “very much”.

Here are comments from three of the SchoolED youth participants.

*“The topics in the sessions are very interesting. I learn a lot from these sessions, I feel comfortable with everyone.”*

*“I know more about what’s going on in the world. It makes me view things differently.”*

*“I gained a lot of knowledge from these sessions that I can use in the future.”*

These results illustrate the real potential of longer term peer-to-peer youth violence prevention programming.

## Community Safety Program Update

**Michelle Davis, Safety Director**

I would like to thank our three placements students, Shadika Grimes-Jackman, Crystal Sukhdeo and Arooba Khan. We were very fortunate to have three committed and passionate students complete their placements with us over the fall and winter terms. Shadika worked with the Respect in Action (ReAct) team and Crystal and Arooba in the Safety Program. We wish them continued success in all their future endeavours.

We have been very busy working on Campus Safety Audit projects with Mount Allison University, Humber College, Seneca College, McMaster University, the University of Lethbridge and Royal Roads University. Status of Women Canada is funding 22 projects across the country that help students lead initiatives to prevent gender-based violence on campuses. Engaging and supporting students to prevent violence is so very important to fulfilling our mandate and vision.

We continue to work at the municipal level to ensure cities are safer for women and youth. In December, representatives from the City of London in Ontario contacted us to learn more about our Community Safety Audits. Jessica Mustachi, Safety Coordinator,

and I trained London city staff on our audit process in February. London will incorporate the audit as part of a neighbourhood renewal strategy and we look forward to learning how they’ve adapted and adopted it.

On April 8, we met with City of Toronto Councillors and their staff to discuss audits and to highlight how Councillors have used it to achieve safety improvements in their wards. Councillor Mike Layton discussed an audit in the Christie Pitts neighbourhood and how residents have taken action to respond to sexual violence in public spaces. A staff member from Councillor Vincent Crisanti’s office spoke of how recommendations from a safety report we wrote to Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) helped with enhancements of a local housing complex. Scott McKean from the City’s Community Crisis Response Program shared how they worked with us to carry out audits of communities that then had Toronto Hydro, TCHC and youth volunteers repair and replace exterior lights with CFL bulbs and encourage residents to leave on porch lights that “Light Up the Night”, improve safety and deter crime. Thank you very much for your continued support of and interest in our work.

# Placement student profile

Shequita Thompson, SchoolED Project Co-Coordinator

Given our focus on Campus Safety, it's only fitting that we interview someone who volunteered with METRAC's Safety Program.

In this interview we highlight the contributions of Crystal Sukhdeo, Centennial College student who did a placement with us between September 2012 and June 2013. Her volunteer work has helped us tremendously. In my recent interview, Crystal reflected on her placement.

## **Q: How did you get involved with Safety Audits?**

A: Michelle Davis (Safety Director at METRAC) first introduced me. It was my first day and I had the opportunity to delve right into the work. The Christie Pits community audit happened that day. I talked with lots of participants and got their opinions on what it means to have a safer community. That helped me to get a greater understanding of Safety Audits and the work METRAC does. It really crystallized the impact of Safety Audits.

*“I learned a lot about community engagement and contributing to communities in positive ways”*

## **Q: What is something you will take with you after your placement ends?**

A: I learned a lot about community engagement and contributing to communities in positive ways. This experience has helped to build on my skill sets and aid my knowledge as I enter university in September. Learning about community development and co-facilitating workshops helped me gain confidence.

## **Q: What are some memorable moments?**

A: My first day at METRAC stands out. The Christie Pits Safety Audit resonates with me because everyone was so eager to make a difference. I had an opportunity to learn so much about community as well as different

perspectives held in that shared space. Also another moment would be the Youth Safety Audits I assisted with, because of participants' varying opinions and how different their perspectives and priorities were from adult counterparts. Priorities can shift between the two groups.

## **Q: What are your thoughts on METRAC's Safety Audit?**

A: It changes community in a beneficial way. It allows for dialogue that sometimes doesn't happen prior to an audit. Before my placement, I didn't know people could have the opportunity to voice their concerns about how to make their communities safer. It was educational, inspiring and serves as a great way to engage. It allows people to not just share their experiences of physical violence but also other forms of violence and how that integrates with experiences of oppression and discrimination.

## **Q: What about Campus Safety Audits?**

A: It's a great tool for college and university students to learn about different types of violence on campuses. Many people are not aware of contributing factors that could create an unsafe environment, such as insufficient lighting and the trees blocking sightlines. Sometimes signage also proves to be confusing. Students don't always know who to go to for support or help. With campus audits, it isn't just big things. Little things that oftentimes go unnoticed can contribute to one's feelings of being unsafe.

We thank Crystal for her contribution to Safety Audit work at METRAC. Safety concerns often get trivialized and go unaddressed. Audits are integral to framing the work we do and open space for participants to have conversations about diverse safety needs and solutions. It allows for multiple safety "truths" to exist and, with the right partners at the table, helps people build tangible solutions to systemic and societal unsafety.

# Profile of a Justice Program volunteer



*Image: Sarah Rustomji, law student and volunteer*

Sarah Rustomji is a third year law student at the University of Windsor and the University of Detroit Mercy School of Law. She started as a volunteer with METRAC's Community Justice Program. She updated articles on the Ontario Women's Justice Network (OWJN) website ([www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org)) to help women experiencing violence and their service providers. In 2013, she took a leadership role to coordinate other Justice Program volunteers at law schools across Ontario.

Working with METRAC allowed Sarah to take on an active role in a cause she's passionate about. It helped her "gain a practical understanding of legal and social

issues affecting women" and "develop skills that are essential for a legal practitioner." She notes this experience is "simply unattainable in the classroom setting" – for example, she learned to communicate the law in simple and plain language so anyone can understand it. Sarah says she's grateful to have had such a "rich learning experience" in her volunteer role.

One project particularly had an impact. She volunteered to search the internet for other legal resources for women and came to the "staggering conclusion" that there simply aren't many out there. "It made me realize the importance of a resource like OWJN which compiles and presents information to women so they can easily access legal information when they need to."

Going forward, Sarah will take with her "the wonderful relationships she has built at METRAC" as well as "knowledge of the issues and practical skills" she learned. She says, "METRAC is a great organization and its work is invaluable to the worthy cause of minimizing violence against women in society." She believes in its mandate to provide women with important legal information and says it's essential to prevent further victimization of women who have faced abuse. "I am extremely proud that I was able to be a part of the organization and contribute to its worthy projects."

## Transit shelters and safety

In March, Toronto's General Manager of Transportation Services submitted a report to City Council's Public Works and Infrastructure Committee that recommends amending the "Street Furniture Agreement" with Astral Media. If approved, "creative advertising" will be allowed on the city's bus and streetcar shelters, including wrap-around advertisements. We believe this will have an adverse impact on safety, placing transit users at risk of theft, sexual and physical assaults and harassment. Transit users, operators, pedestrians and drivers will not always have a clear view in and out of shelters wrapped with this type of advertising.

Reports that assess the design of public transit, fear of violence and safety emphasize the importance of fully transparent shelters. METRAC's seminal "Moving Forward: Making Transit Safer for Women" report (1989) on its audit of Toronto's subway and bus system states the importance of clear sightlines and lighting. It outlines recommendations to the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) to ensure shelters are easy to see in and out of and users feel safe waiting in them.

Read our backgrounder and let your Councillor know about the risks opaque advertising will create: [www.metrac.org/email/transit.shelters.and.personal.safety.backgrounder.6jun13.pdf](http://www.metrac.org/email/transit.shelters.and.personal.safety.backgrounder.6jun13.pdf)

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We extend our thanks to METRAC's team of staff, volunteers, supporters and placement students working across the organization. You are appreciated and you make a difference in our organization and communities. Deep thanks to departing staff members and volunteers for how they supported the cause. We would also like to thank 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 fall 2012 - we simply could not survive without your support.



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