

# Dream Soup...

A collection of learning materials for women on the street

## and Life Stew



*Written by:*

Capilano College  
Lucy Alderson  
Diana Twiss

*In collaboration with:*

WISH Drop-In Centre Society  
Catherine Minchin

WISH Learning Centre  
D. J. -  
Donna Jesso -  
Adrienne Macallum  
Charlene Ottenbros -  
Gina Robertson -  
Josie Wiehe -

*October, 2006*

*National Literacy Secretariat*

*The British Columbia Adult Literacy  
Cost-Shared Program*



# Dream Soup... -

A collection of learning materials for women on the street

# and Life Stew



*Written by:*

Capilano College  
Lucy Alderson  
DianaTwiss

*In collaboration with:*

WISH Drop-In Centre Society  
Catherine Minchin

WISH Learning Centre  
D. J. -  
Donna Jesso -  
Adrienne Macallum  
Charlene Ottenbros -  
Gina Robertson -  
Josie Wiehe -

*October, 2006*

*National Literacy Secretariat*

*The British Columbia Adult Literacy  
Cost-Shared Program*

*Dream Soup... and Life Stew:*

*A collection of learning materials for women on the street -*

Copyright Capilano College, Community Development & Outreach Department, 2006

Permission is given to reproduce the activities and handouts included in this curriculum for educational purposes only. Please acknowledge Capilano College and the WISH Drop In Centre Society as the source.

Written by Lucy Alderson and Diana Twiss (Capilano College), in collaboration with Catherine Minchin (WISH Drop In Centre Society), D.J., Donna Jesso, Adrienne Macallum, Charlene Ottenbros, Gina Robertson and Josie Wiehe (WISH Learning Centre).

Copies may also be downloaded at <http://library.nald.ca/learning>.

Desktop design by Clarisa Niks

Cover designed by Clarisa Niks, fabric art created by Diane Wood

Web preparation by Clarisa Niks

Printed in Canada

*Dream Soup... and Life Stew :*

*A collection of learning materials for women on the street -*

ISBN-10: ISBN 0-9782541-1-2

ISBN-13: ISBN 978-0-9782541-1-7

Capilano College

Community Development & Outreach Department

2055 Purcell Way,

North Vancouver, BC V7J 3H5

Tel: (604) 984-1759 / Fax: (604) 984-1718

e-mail: [cdo@capcollege.bc.ca](mailto:cdo@capcollege.bc.ca)

WISH Drop In Centre Society

515-119 W. Pender Street

Vancouver, BC, Canada V6B 1S5

Tel: 604-669-WISH (9474) / Fax: 604-669-9479

e-mail: [wishdropincentre@telus.net](mailto:wishdropincentre@telus.net)

The National Literacy Secretariat, Human Resources Development Canada, funded the project in partnership with the British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education.

*Dream Soup... and Life Stew* is the second publication written by Capilano College and the WISH Drop In Centre Society. In November, 2003, we wrote *Literacy for Women on the Streets* during a two-year participatory research project ( <http://library.nald.ca/research/item/4676> ).

---

# Acknowledgements -

We would like to thank the following people, organizations and institutions for their help in this project:

The National Literacy Secretariat through the Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program, for providing the funding for the learning materials development part of the project.

We would like to thank the Community Development and Outreach Department at Capilano College, North Vancouver, BC for their ongoing support of literacy programming at the WISH Drop In Centre.

In addition to the difficult task of operating a crisis centre for female sex-trade workers, the WISH Drop In Centre Society Board, Staff and Volunteers provided regular support to the literacy program. Without the daily work of the drop in, no other programs would be possible at WISH. We thank you all for your ideas, information and encouragement.

We want to honour all the women at WISH who participated in the WISH Learning Centre and the development of the learning materials document. We want to thank each of you for your curiosity, your courage, your risk-taking, your willingness to create a positive learning environment and your generosity in sharing these concepts with women across the country.

Finally, we want to acknowledge Catherine Minchin from the WISH Drop-In Centre Society and six women who formed the Learning Materials Advisory Group:

- DJ
- Donna Jesso
- Adrienne Macallum
- Charlene Ottenbros
- Gina Robertson
- Josie Wiehe

Together we wrote, revised, field tested, laughed, learned, cried and in the process, built a wonderful bracelet and a book that we hope will be enjoyed by many.

*Lucy Alderson and Diana Twiss*

Published by Capilano College - 2006



---

# Dedication -

## *For Gina Robertson*

She was a good friend. Gina was kind-hearted and she would always help you out when you needed it.

Gina had many ideas to for this book. No matter how hard her life was going, she supported our efforts to promote learning at WISH. Gina emphasized how important it is to see beyond the stereotype of the addicted sex-trade worker and support the living, loving, thinking woman beneath.

We miss her.



---

# Contents -

Acknowledgements	I -
Dedication	II -
Introduction	1 -
Hello	3 -
Dream Soup... and Life Stew	4 -
The Bracelet Symbol	4 -
New to literacy?	5 -
New to literacy outreach?	5 -
Being	7 -
Introduction	9 -
Activities:	13 -
1. Mandalas	13 -
2. French Manicure	15 -
3. Painting Your Teapot and Cups	17 -
Healing	21 -
Introduction	23 -
Activities:	25 -
1. Journals	25 -
2. Aromatherapy	27 -
3. Harm Reduction and Learning	35 -
4. Dialogue about Relationships	39 -
5. Healing Dreams - Set Your Sights High	43 -



---

## Creating 49 -

Introduction	51 -
Activities:	55 -
1. Candle Holders	55 -
2. Painted Flower Pots	56 -
3. Still Life Drawing or Painting	59 -
4. Dream Web Doodle/Sketch/Collage	63 -
5. Ongoing Fibre Arts Activities	65 -

## Learning 69 -

Introduction	71 -
Activities:	73 -
1. Reading	73 -
2. Math Dice Game	78 -
3. Math Word Problems	80 -
4. Building General Knowledge	82 -
5. Writing	83 -

## Leading 87 -

Introduction	89 -
Examples:	91 -
1. Newsletter	91 -
2. The Women's Advisory Group	93 -
3. Women's memorial Quilt	96 -
4. Solidarity Project - Project Materials	98 -
5. Emerging Voices - Part II - Project Materials	100 -



# Introduction



Hello

Dream Soup... and Life Stew

The Bracelet Symbol

New to literacy?

New to literacy outreach?



---

# Introduction



## Hello!

Welcome to our resource book! It has been a labour of love and conviction to put these materials together and it's dedicated to all of you and the important literacy work you are doing in your communities.

We imagine you to be just like us - a group of street women, volunteers, community development workers and literacy instructors. We are women who care about each other and believe that every woman deserves a place where she can reflect, learn, heal and create.

Most women living and working the streets don't have that learning space. The street is a dangerous and dehumanizing place for women. Your identity becomes invisible and unimportant and your soul is eroded.

When we began our literacy project at a drop in for female sex-trade workers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, many people thought it would not work.

"Women are not ready to learn."

"Women need to clean up (be alcohol and drug free and not working in the sex-trade") before they can begin their upgrading."

"How can you deliver a literacy program in a chaotic drop-in centre?"

Instead, we found the opposite. Women are eager and interested in learning. Women on the street long for a place to be creative, write poetry and reflect on their lives. Women at WISH have a lot to say about themselves, their organization and the way society treats its most vulnerable population. We also found that literacy programming needed a re-definition if learning was to be appropriate and accessible to women who are fighting a daily struggle of survival. When we started the WISH Learning Centre, we could not find any learning materials that were directly applicable.

---

In November 2003, we published our collaborative research findings as *Literacy for Women on the Streets* (<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/litforwm/cover.htm>). This book outlines our two year journey to find out how and why learning was empowering to women using the WISH Drop In Centre. The book also describes the efforts and struggles of the literacy workers as they experimented with teaching and learning in these complex circumstances.

## Dream Soup... and Life Stew

The following year, we initiated our curriculum project. In *Dream Soup... and Life Stew*, we want to share some of the hands-on literacy materials that emerged from our work as well as a description of the approach and philosophy that we have created together. Five women from the WISH Learning Centre applied to work on the Advisory Committee and received a small honoraria for their excellent guidance and contribution to this resource. We met six times to create, design and finalize the book. In the funded year, we were able to map out the book and test many resources. As usual, the project was bigger than our grant! It has taken us an extra two years to complete the project after our initial funds ran out. During that time, we lost one of our members, Gina Robertson, and we are dedicating this book to her.

## The Bracelet Symbol

We knew when we started this book that it would be hard for everyone to commit to the project for a year. Dream Soup demanded that women read pages of draft material, discuss emotional issues, write pieces, draw and sketch, and give lots of feedback. Our advisory group's lives continued to be difficult, challenging and full of stress. Our instructors' work lives were expanding to help the community deal with fewer resources. As a group, we gained support and inspiration from each other and we learned to negotiate difficult issues for the group and the book.

Early on, we decided to make charm bracelets to keep track of our progress and symbolize the work we were doing. You will see the charm bracelet come into focus as the chapters go by. We started by giving everyone their own crystal to symbolize the shining potential in all of us. The teapot, used in Chapter One: Being, represented the warmth and nurturing environment we try to create in the Learning Centre. The key with the heart is a symbol of self-love, the core of the healing topic in Chapter Two. The moon and stars charm takes us through healing dreams into the power of creativity and self-expression in Chapter Three. The feather is used to represent the general knowledge and upgrading learning we emphasized in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five: Leading, we come back to the crystal that embraces the

---

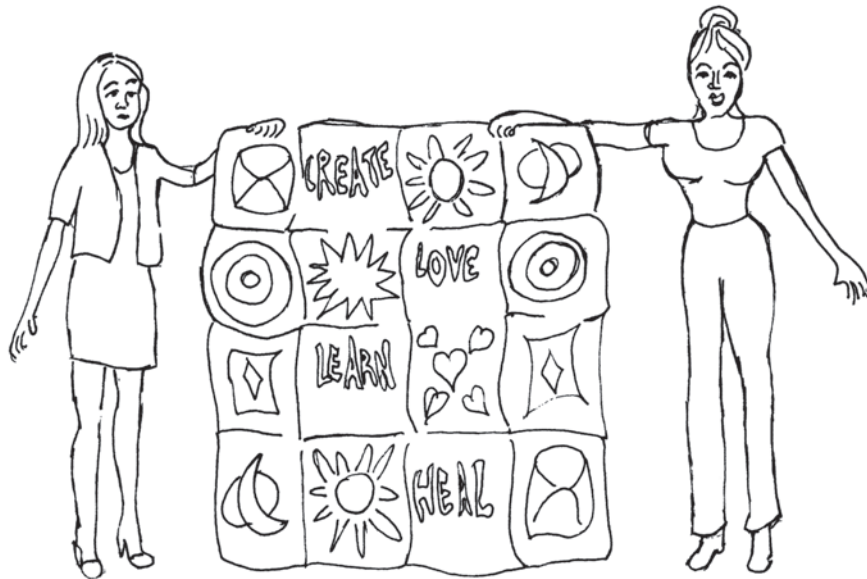
power of individual women at WISH as well as their collective voice.

## New to literacy?

We think that some of you may be very familiar with the street scene or working in a community organization, but are new to literacy work. We hope this book will get you started. We know that your own creativity will carry you forward once you see all the ways that learning can be approached. Your familiarity and experience with street women's struggles makes you an expert already.

## New to literacy outreach?

We think some others of you might be literacy or ABE instructors who want to reach further into the community with your programming. Having a partner community organization will help you with that goal. Also, this book will explain the approach taken by Capilano College and WISH together. We hope this book will help you to develop a new repertoire of literacy strategies so that you can be as effective in a women's outreach program as you are in your current work.



*We know you can do this, so keep reading! -*



# Being -



## Introduction

### Activities:

1. Mandala
2. French Manicure
3. Painting Your Teapot and Cups





---

# Being -



We decided to start this book with a chapter on the most important aspect of bringing women back to learning: an exploration of what it takes to just “be” – to exist free from worries, conflicts, and other burdens. In the following section you will find a discussion of the day-to-day realities women working on this project and at the WISH Learning Centre face. We follow that with our view of what creates a welcoming space for women coming into a learning centre from the street.

Women working on this project struggled to represent the views, attitudes and experiences of other street involved women. It was important to explain what the daily reality was, so you the reader could better understand the challenges the group faced in creating a safe, nurturing and accepting learning environment.

## Women tell us about life on the street

We wanted to describe what it is like for women living and working in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver (DTES), so we asked women on the Committee and in the Learning Centre to tell us about what it is like:

- Physically
- Emotionally/Mentally
- Spiritually

## Realities of living in the DTES:

The living arrangements of women on the Committee ranged from single room occupancy (SROs), to a room in a house, to a separate living space equipped with private bathroom, kitchen facilities and living areas. However, the majority of women do not have that luxury or any kind of privacy. We learned that there was little space to keep and store learning materials. Oftentimes women had books and other supplies stolen by people who quickly sold them.

*“It is physically hard on addicted women who live in hotel rooms. Bugs. No privacy. Bathroom down the hall. Cruelty from everywhere.”*

*“I can see how hard life can be for women down here – they look so old for their ages.”*

---

"Physically being down here has ripped my body to shreds. My so-called boyfriend seems to expect me to be out there 18-24/7, nonstop just to get the money, to get the drugs and food to just give to him. It's all about him."

Your health is at risk for STD's. Syphilis - a lot of people don't even know they have contracted it. Look at the movie stars who have died from it. Symptoms vary from lesions, like cold sores, to rashes on inside of mouth and hands. Herpes sores on private parts. There's also Chlamydia, Herpes, Gonorrhea and AIDS."

"Most women have no homes of their own. The bars are the only social life possible. For most women, their addiction comes first. Most come from loveless homes, lots of sexual abuse. Many have lost their kids, lost their hope for the future. They have lost their self-esteem - comes from men. Selling their bodies makes them hard. They hate men and the violence put upon them."

Women work and men benefit.

"Emotionally I am like a roller-coaster. Some days are great and I'm very happy go lucky while on other days I'm just tired and bitchy or sad or mad and bitchy."

"I feel a lot of women in the DTES are on an emotional rollercoaster, a lot of ups and downs that have to do with addictions. Up - quick high. Long low (downer). For me, living in the Downtown Eastside is very stressful."

Street involved women experience a great deal of violence. There is a high risk for STDs as well as getting beaten up or sexually assaulted. Street workers are the most vulnerable and East Hastings has been identified as the most dangerous place for street involved women.

"Emerging Voices" a recent study funded by the Status of Women, documented women's experience of violence in this area. In the study 51% of the women surveyed had experienced a violent incident in the past 24 hours, 62% had witnessed one, and 66% had heard about a violent incident in the last 24 hours. This is the reality street involved women face.

In our group conversation with women about life in the Downtown Eastside we talked about the fact that there is no privacy for women, that there is a great deal of cruelty, women have to have strong survival instincts, bars are their living rooms and self-esteem is dangerously low. Women are isolated and there is not a strong sense of community. There is strong competition, lots of mistrust, fear, and anger. A lot of the time, women felt that they were alone in the world. That they had little or no community to support them in making positive changes in their lives.

## Emotions

Women involved in this project commented on how much the group had come to mean to them. The opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas with other women had been an enriching and affirming experience. Being part of a group, a group that was working collaboratively to create something meaningful to be shared with other women, was a positive factor for all of us.

Women talked of life in the DTES as stressful with little opportunity to recover from the effects of stress and ill-health.

---

## Spirituality -



"Spiritually, I believe that there is a Higher Power whom I choose to call the "Creator" instead of God. Our Creator has a plan for each and every one of us."

" I don't know too much about spirituality. Many women believe in a higher power. Myself, I believe in a higher and lower power. Yin/Yang. What goes around, comes around. Treat others the way you'd like to be treated."

## What creates a welcoming space for women coming in from the street?

All participants at WISH are welcome to participate in the activities in the Learning Centre. The Learning Centre is a room off the main Drop in area where women eat, get ready for the evening, and obtain clothes and other services. The WISH Drop In Centre is open from 7 pm. to 11 pm. It is a busy and chaotic place. The Learning Centre is a place of refuge. It is a comforting and inviting space where women are given quiet support with no demands placed upon them. Our challenge of creating a safe learning space for women is an on-going activity, not just something we think about when we start a program. It is something we all think about and take into consideration each night we set up the learning centre. We strive to create a space where first and foremost, women can feel accepted as who they are and where they are at in their lives.

The Learning Centre is a place where women can "exhale". We got this idea from Kate Nonesuch and the Reading and Writing Centre in Duncan, BC. In their centre they have an "inhale" room where students learn new things and take on new challenges. They also have an "exhale" room where the students go to further process their learning in a more relaxing environment. The terms originally come from work<sup>1</sup> by Sylvia Ashton-Warner, who used them to describe different kinds of learning activities she planned for her classes. Building on that concept of a space to "exhale" we have created

"The Learning Centre is the only place we can go to get intelligent conversation, to talk to someone with brains."

"Sex trade workers aren't expected to have brains, in fact, being a "dumb broad" is a persona that many women are encouraged to take on."

---

<sup>1</sup> Ashton-Warner, S. (1963). *Teacher*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

---

"Recovery works when people took the time to listen, when I could say things, lay them on the table and have a look at them."

a space where women can take a deep, relaxing breath in and a long one out. A cup of tea is at the ready and a state of "being" starts to take over. For some, just being there is enough. Participation takes all forms, some eat their dinner, relax and let down their guard, some join in on some of the activities, others watch from the sidelines. There is always a pot of tea in the Learning Centre. It is a comforting drink for many. We maintain the classroom space as a peaceful and calm area. Disagreements are quickly solved, or moved to another space. We provide as much free materials as we can manage, journals, drawing books, pens, pencils, stickers, and paperbacks. We also offer each other a lot of support. For some women, just entering the room takes courage. Staying there takes more. We make sure that women know their participation is voluntary and we make few demands on women. After a while, the feeling of acceptance and the calm atmosphere takes over.

## When you plan activities that help women to "ex-hale" consider the following:

- Hands on activities such as beading, drawing, colouring, cutting/pasting, knitting, or sewing -- anything women can do with their hands is calming.
- Activities that have colourful features in them. These draw women to the Learning Centre.
- Activities that can be done fairly quickly (10 minutes), so newcomers experience success. -
- A relaxing activity that allows you to care for yourself or someone else.
- In the following pages we have provided some examples of the kinds of things we do in the WISH Learning Centre.

## Mandalas

What is a mandala? It is a kind of geometric design contained in a circular pattern that represents wholeness. Mandala symbols can be found throughout the world from Navajo to Tibetan culture. The word "mandala" is from the old Indian language of Sanskrit, meaning circle and it is symbolic of the universe (*Mandalas for Power & Energy*). The circle pattern is also found throughout nature in flowers, tree trunks and shells.



We discovered that colouring mandalas is a soothing and peaceful way to spend time in the WISH Learning Centre. We offer it as one of several options on the table. Colouring a mandala is an individual activity that lets a woman focus on one thing. It gives her a chance to find her own centredness in the circle. The mandala designs are fixed but the use of colours is totally up to each individual, depending on their mood and preference. Mandalas bring a sense of balance, and it is known that they promote the cross-communication of the right and left brains.

We found that the most popular mandalas were ones that had Indigenous people's symbols on them. These are not easy to find. We had one book that outlined mandalas from all over Turtle Island, but unfortunately it is out of print. Other mandalas, Buddhist, Celtic or original designs also work. Our local artist, Diane Wood, designed a beautiful mandala for us to use as a handout in this chapter.

When we started working with mandalas, we had no idea how much was known about their therapeutic effect. We discovered that since ancient times, people have used mandalas as a meditation and a healing reference. Buddhist monks and Hopi shamans have used mandalas created in sand to achieve inner reflection and to assist in healing ceremonies. Colouring mandalas also provides a nice backdrop for conversation and check-ins.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

→ mandala design on white paper

→ coloured markers or pencil crayons

It is possible to create more challenging exercises with Mandalas, such as making your own, or creating a visual picture of your goals and assets, but these ideas change the mandala from a relaxing, soothing, pastime to a challenging activity.

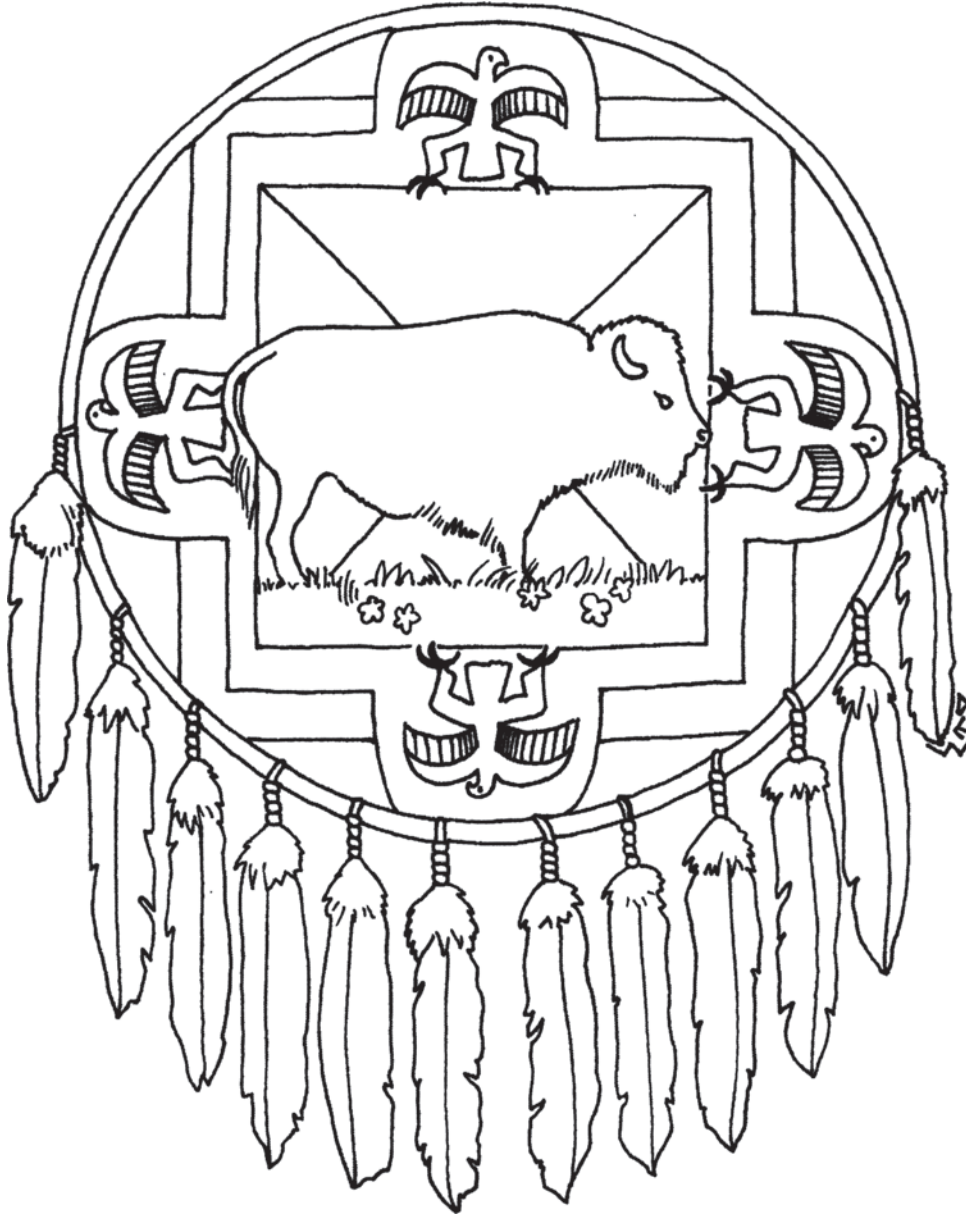
### Mandala Websites and Resources:

*Mandalas for Power & Energy*, Marion and Werner Kustenmacher, Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., New York, New York, 2003.

*Tibetan Mandalas*, Tatjana Blau, Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., New York, New York, 1998.

<http://www.coloringtherapy.com>

<http://www.artnetwork.com/Mandala/>



## French Manicure

A relaxing activity that allows you to care for yourself or someone else:



### The Original French Manicure:

This is the original French manicure, not the new fangled one that uses white polish to make the nail brighter. This one uses real lemons. Lemon juice is acidic. When your nails are soaked in the lemon juice two things happen; the protein is strengthened and the nail is whitened. This activity is good to do, even if your nails are bitten to the quick and your cuticles are chewed raw. The juice will help to toughen the cuticles, promote healing and get you on your way to strong healthy nails and good looking hands.

#### MATERIALS NEEDED

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| → Nail polish remover      | → Lemons                               |
| → Cotton balls             | → Nail files, clippers, cuticle sticks |
| → Bowl of warm soapy water | → Clear nail polish                    |
| → Towels                   | → Hand cream                           |

1. Remove all traces of old nail polish from your nails.
2. Wash hands and nails in warm soapy water to remove residue from polish remover.
3. Cut lemons in half.
4. Stick fingers into the lemons covering the entire fingernail. If you have bitten fingers or cuticles, this step will sting a bit, but the stinging won't last for long.
5. Keep fingers in lemons for five minutes, working the juice into and under your nails.
6. Wash nails in warm soapy water.
7. Dry hands and begin the shaping part of the manicure: clean nails, shape with emery boards, push back cuticles.
8. Cover nails with one single coat of clear polish.
9. Rub hand cream onto hands and down along cuticles.
10. Stand back and admire your lovely result.

### Manicure conversations:

- Women's hands do 2/3 of the world's work.<sup>2</sup> What have your hands done today?
- What can you do to stop biting your nails?
- What is your favourite colour of nail polish?
- Some people have beautiful hands. What is about their hands that make you think of them as beautiful?



<sup>2</sup> ActionAid International homepage, 2006 -



## Painting Your Teapot and Cups

Finding a way to take ownership of the physical space of your Learning Centre can be a fun and warming activity. At WISH, we only have a temporary space loaned to us that we dismantle every night. So we decided to decorate what we could!

A pot of tea has always been a sign of welcome to women. After we broke our previous teapot, we decided to get a big, plain pot and cups and paint them ourselves. Everyone had a good time doing this. Some women took their cups home and others left them at WISH to be used by everyone.

The teapot continues to be a source of discussion - it says WISH and is painted in red and yellow flowers.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| → Plain teapot                                | → Stencils (optional) |
| → Plain cups                                  | → Plastic tablecloth  |
| → Porcelain paints or porcelain paint markers | → Household oven      |
| → Paint brushes, sponges                      |                       |

Everyone will have their own ideas and designs for the teapot and mugs. Markers would be quite easy to use although more expensive than the paints. We used paints and learned to use a **dry brush** (everyone is tempted to put their brush in water first) and **not to use too much paint**. Some of our designs "sagged" because of this.

Also, don't paint the inside of the cups or teapot. The manufacturer warned against the paint coming in contact with food.

When the painting is completed, you need to fire the teapot and cups in a household oven for 30 minutes. This may vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, so be sure to get someone to read the instructions.

On the manufacturer's website, they also recommended that many ceramic materials cannot withstand sudden changes in temperature, so place your piece in a room temperature oven and allow it to warm up with the oven. After 30 minutes, turn the oven off and allow it to cool back to room temperature gradually.

**Suggested design starters:** flowers, names, stripes, sponging effect, sayings

Women continue to comment on the colours and designs of these pieces. They are a sharp contrast to the institutional and second hand look of the regular mugs that are used in the Drop In.

The activity is fun and easy. You can paint one colour over the whole cup or sponge paint on for a great look. Some women spent a long time layering their colours or working on a complex design.

If women feel like talking, we have included a few Tea Conversation topics and a Tea Wordfind. If anyone is curious and likes the Internet, get them to check out the suggested tea website!

### Teapot Conversations

- When did you start drinking tea?
- Do you like it better than coffee?
- Does anyone drink herbal tea? What kind?
- Who made tea in your family?
- Who in the world would you like to have tea with today?





## Tea Wordfind

q	w	s	u	g	a	r	c	h	l	n	a
p	e	r	t	y	u	i	a	o	p	a	s
o	h	b	l	a	c	k	m	n	g	f	d
r	j	k	s	l	z	x	o	e	c	v	b
c	r	e	e	n	e	w	m	e	q	m	n
e	a	r	v	t	y	u	i	r	i	k	o
l	r	p	a	e	a	r	l	g	r	e	y
a	o	p	e	a	s	d	e	f	g	t	h
i	m	b	l	v	c	x	z	l	k	t	j
n	a	n	a	m	t	r	a	y	q	l	a
y	h	t	e	g	r	f	e	d	w	e	m
j	u	s	t	e	e	p	i	n	g	k	i
l	o	p	p	z	a	x	a	i	d	n	n
w	c	l	o	u	d	b	e	r	r	y	t

tea leaves  
camomile  
India  
teaspoon

sugar  
earl grey  
China  
steeping

black  
kettle  
aroma  
tray

mint  
green  
cloudberry  
porcelain

### Tea Website

Have you ever had cloudberry, juniper or crowberry tea?? Try googling "crowberry tea" to see what the Avataq Cultural Institute is doing with traditional Inuit teas.





# Healing -



## Introduction

### Activities:

1. Journals
2. Aromatherapy
3. Harm Reduction and Learning
4. Dialogue about Relationships
5. Healing Dreams - Set Your Sights High



# Healing -



The chaos and danger of street life make it very difficult for women to attend to their healing needs. As instructors and participants, it took us a while to figure out that women came to the Learning Centre to create a healing space for themselves. We started to see that no matter how destructive some elements of women's lives were, the urge to heal was also a powerful force alive in every woman.

We all know at some level that self-esteem is the key that unlocks our potential. But self-worth is very hard to hold on to when society has turned its back on sex-trade workers and street women.

Women described how the pattern of abuse was set in childhood for many of them by residential schoolteachers, priest, parents, family and community members. They learned to shut down and go numb, and this leads to alcohol and drug abuse. Eventually, lots of women start to work the street and this routine becomes a way of life.

Many women have lost children to care or given up a child to the care of a relative. These mothers have immense feelings of grief and loss and yearn for the company of their children.

None of us are trained counselors but we all understand that reflection can be a healing activity. At the same time, it is difficult to know how to support women through the trauma of their lives. In response to women's feedback and using our own instincts, we have tried to make the WISH Learning Centre a non-judgmental place where women can be encouraged and validated in their personal healing journeys. We came up with four ways to think about healing and learning: areas of literacy activity that create healing opportunities.

- Caring for Yourself: Journals, Aromatherapy
- Harm Reduction: Harm Reduction in the Learning Process

*"If I don't like myself, how can I expect anyone else to?"*

*"I didn't grow up thinking I was going to be a hooker."*

*"You have to have self-esteem before you can lose it."*



- Dialogue about Relationships: Healing Relationships, Violence and Relationships
- Healing Dreams: Set Your Sights High, Ruth's story

We have included several literacy activities that create healing opportunities. As usual, women are totally in control of their participation. Some women may take the handouts with them and do them later; others will want the support of the group.



# Journals

Whenever we have new journals at WISH, every woman wants one. Many women came in and asked for journals and they would always say "I *need* a journal". When we asked women to describe this *need*, they said it came from having no one who listens to them, and no private thought space. One woman said she came in to the Learning Centre to write because every time she turned on the light in her hotel room, people barged in assuming she had drugs. Women also said they *needed* a journal because they wanted to have real conversations about life, not just talking about drugs or pretending to Johns that they were brainless.



"Paper is usually my best friend."

Many women learned to use journal-writing in treatment facilities. Other women used to write poetry when they were younger. Access to a new journal is always met with appreciation.

We tend to buy our journals at dollar stores and we select many different styles so that women have a choice of colour and format. We always buy some blank books for women who draw or put pictures into their journals. It is also possible to use plain notebooks that each woman can decorate with fancy paper, collages, etc. This activity can be the beginning of a journal writing segment.

Although giving away journals is easy, it is an impossible task to get everyone in the WISH Learning Centre writing in their journals at the same time. So instead, we came up with a "Journal Starter" that we put on the board at the beginning of each evening. Some women wrote in their journals, and other women discussed the topic over beading or other craftwork. Because women come in and out of the Learning Centre, the topics generated many different conversations. We encouraged women who wanted to share their thoughts to read aloud or submit their work to the newsletter (for more information on the newsletter see chapter on Leading).

We have included a list of journal starters. Some are open-ended sentences, some are quotes that we ask women to respond to, and some are strong statements that encourage strong agree/disagree reactions. Many of the statements on the list were made by women on the Curriculum Committee.

There are also many other ways to encourage reflection. We have a set of rubber stamps with Adinkra symbols from West Africa on them. The symbols are shapes that represent concepts such as hope, ...

To use these stamps as a journal activity, we placed the rubber stamps on a tray and gave each woman a handout of what each symbol meant. We suggested that women let themselves be drawn to a symbol, then look up its meaning. Then they decorated a page in their journal with this symbol and wrote about the meaning. Other women went from the definition and looked up the symbol. This activity always works as a discussion/writing starter. It also gets us thinking about the geography of Africa and the culture of Ghana. (Have an atlas handy!)

Arranging the words from Healing Magnetic Poetry has also worked, although everybody wants to take their magnets home. Healing Cards can also be very helpful. We did a workshop at the women's jail and the Healing Cards were very popular. Women chose cards about issues that were important to them and then wrote down the words of wisdom associated with that card.

A blank journal page is intimidating to some women. Using a symbolic system, or choosing a healing card gives women a chance to check in with how she is feeling before having to write about it.

### Journal Starters

*The part of my body I love most today is...*

*If I didn't spend my money on drugs, I would buy...*

*The best thing I did today was...*

*If I were to leave one thing behind today, it would be...*

*If I had a dream, it would...*

*I like me. I just don't like what I am doing.*

*You have about 50,000 thoughts a day. What are yours saying?*

*You have got to try to find things to replace the bad habits.*

*Guys know how to get girls to work for them. They are subtle.*

*I didn't grow up thinking I was going to be a hooker.*

*Drugs are a phase for most people.*

*If you don't risk anything, you risk even more.*

*"A true friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out."*

*"The best thing to be without...jealousy. . . The worst thing to be without...hope."*

*"When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist." (Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, Brazil)*

# Aromatherapy

Women in our community are facing many health issues as a result of the stress of sex work, addictions and poverty. Hep C, HIV/AIDS, STD's, heart and respiratory illnesses take hold in women's lives and most women do not have the resources to take their health in hand. We started exploring aromatherapy to see if we could address some of the stress that women experience. Little did we realize how healing these sessions would be.

Over the last two years, we have mixed aromatherapy oils for insomnia, depression, grief and confidence. We have made facial cleansers and blends for beauty treatments. We have also set up eucalyptus steams for colds, bronchitis and to help prevent pneumonia.

Women love both the process of mixing their own recipes and having someone make a special blend just for them. Deciding which blend to choose encourages women to connect with how they are really feeling and it has started many significant conversations.

None of us are aromatherapists, so we are exploring this area together. We have a couple of books on the topic and women have also used the internet to research particular problems. Because women are drawn to aromatherapy, they are eager to read about it.

Our sense of smell is one of the oldest parts of the brain and so it can be very effective. We have included three aromatherapy activities to try. The recipe for facial cleansers also involves using measuring cups and can include some basic multiplication when you are making the cleanser for more than one person. This is good math practice for everyone.

The essential oils are expensive, ranging from \$7.00 to \$14.00 each. We slowly built up our stock of oils. When we first started doing aromatherapy, we bought little bottles for everyone to take home a blend. Because each one cost a dollar, we could only do one or two blends each, which lead to arguments and disappointment - the opposite effect that we were trying to create! Then we had the brainwave to go to photo shops and ask for their empty film containers. This helped us all relax, and women could make as many blends as they wanted.



### MATERIALS NEEDED

- aromatherapy essential oils
- carrier oil, such as grapeseed or sweet almond oil, to carry and diffuse the drops of essential oil
- bottles or empty film containers
- handouts or reference books

### Resources:

- The Complete Book of Essential Oils & Aromatherapy, Valerie Ann Worwood, New World Library, California, 1991.
- Brochures given out by aromatherapy stores often provide helpful charts and blends for common ailments.
- There is a lot of information on aromatherapy available on the Internet.



## Aromatherapy and Insomnia

### Taking Care of Insomnia (not able to sleep well)

Last week, several women mentioned that they have insomnia. They don't sleep well and it affects their lives in a negative way. We decided to share our solutions to insomnia. One suggestion was to bring the aromatherapy remedy that we used last year. We also want to find out from everyone what causes insomnia and what helps to get rid of it. Please share your experience and then we will write up the suggestions.

### Aromatherapy and Insomnia

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils of natural plants and trees to create positive health - both physical and mental/emotional. A recommended blend for curing insomnia is:

- Lavender                      2 drops
- Clary-sage                    3 drops
- Vetiver                        2 drops

(Valerian is also recommended but we weren't able to find it)

Put 2 drops of this blended mixture in one teaspoon of a carrier oil such as grapeseed or sweet almond oil. If you have a bathtub, put three drops of the blended mixture into your bath.

Remember to never put the essential oils directly onto your skin. Put them into a carrier oil first.

### Causes of Insomnia

Insomnia can be caused by many reasons. Anxiety, stress, drugs, poor digestion, and stimulants can all cause you to lose sleep.

### What else causes insomnia?

Women reported that fear (nightmares) was a cause of insomnia. Loneliness, missing someone, also made nights hard and resulted in poor sleeping. Other women found that eating lots of sugar contributed to insomnia.



### Do you have any suggestions for dealing with insomnia?

There were lots of good suggestions from around the table:

- Drink chamomile tea.
- Take valerian, a natural root.
- Take a shower or a bubble bath before going to bed, or if you don't have a safe bathroom, put a hot cloth with your aromatherapy mixture on your face for a few minutes
- Drink a warm cup of milk.
- Don't exercise right before sleeping.
- Fresh air helps you sleep.
- Alcohol may help you sleep but you will also get a hangover.

*What else works for you?*



## Aromatherapy and Love

Essential oils are perfect for creating a romantic feeling. You can scent a card, put some in a bath or wear a blend on your skin. Fragrance and the sense of smell cause a quicker reaction in the brain than any other sense. The following essential oils are perfect for making your love potion:

- Rose
- Ylang-Ylang
- Geranium
- Palmarosa
- Patchouli
- Jasmine

Three good blends are:

#### Blend #1

- 3 drops Rose
- 4 drops Palma rosa

#### Blend #2

- 4 drops Rose Geranium
- 3 drops Jasmine

#### Blend #3

- 3 drops Ylang-ylang
- 4 drops Patchouli

## Self-Love and Aromatherapy

Self-love is also an important issue to remember in February. All of the above blends remind us of our lovability. If you want a relaxing, calming blend try:

#### Relaxing Calming Blend

- 3 drops Lavender
- 3 drops Geranium

#### Rejuvenating Refreshing Blend

- 3 drops Bergamot
- 3 drops Grapefruit

#### Warning:

Do not put essential oils directly on your skin. Only a few can be used directly. Most are too strong and should only be combined with other ingredients.



## Aromatherapy and Grief

### Blends to Help Cope with Grief

These blends can help during times of grief. Rose is noted to be especially helpful during times of grief, so you will notice that it is an ingredient in all of the below blends. When selecting and using oils, be sure to follow all *safety precautions* and remember that aromatherapy should not be used as a substitute for proper medical treatment.

#### Blend #1

- 2 drops Rose
- 3 drops Sandalwood

#### Blend #2

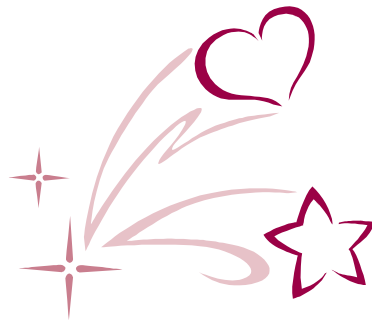
- 2 drops Rose
- 3 drops Cypress

#### Blend #3

- 1 drops Neroli
- 1 drop Rose
- 3 drops Sandalwood

#### Warning:

Do not put essential oils directly on your skin. Only a few can be used directly. Most are too strong and should only be combined with other ingredients.







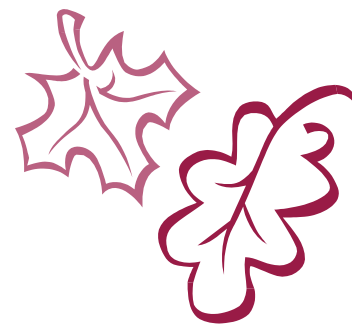
## Aromatherapy and Skin Care

### Making Our Own Facial Cleansers

For centuries, women of all cultures made their own skin care and medicinal products. It is only in the last 100 years that most women have lost this useful knowledge.

This is a recipe for making a facial cleanser that will work with most skin types. It is taken from *The Complete Book of Essential Oils and Aromatherapy* by Valerie Ann Worwood. She says that all vegetable and nut oils can be used for cleansing as well as for nourishing the skin. The basic recipe is:

- 3 ounces Almond oil
- 4 ounces Ground almonds
- 2 ounces Spring water
- 6 drops Essential oil of your choice
- 2 ounces Cider vinegar  
(we are going to try making it with less, some people just put a few drops in)



Place all ingredients in a blender and mix for a good two minutes until a smooth paste is obtained. You could probably use a spoon or whisk and get the same results (with a lot of elbow grease!)

Use a spoonful of the paste and gently rub it into your face. Rinse with luke warm water. At first, it feels like the paste isn't rinsing off. But don't worry. After drying, your face feels soft and refreshed.

We have 5 essential oils to choose from and each one does a different job.

- **Lavender:**  
This is a very versatile and healing oil for the skin. You can use it for minor skin irritations as well as eczema. Lavender is also calming and relaxing.
- **Geranium:**  
This oil helps regenerate skin cells. It is also good for eczema and scars. The fragrance assists with nervous tension and depression.



- **Grapefruit:**  
Grapefruit assists with acne, congested and oily skin. Its fragrance is a stimulant and helps to reduce depression.
- **Rosewood:**  
Rosewood is an antiseptic and cellular stimulant. It is good for dry or mature skin, wrinkles and scars. Its aroma is calming and good for anxiety and sadness.
- **Tea Tree:**  
Tea Tree oil has been used by indigenous people in Australia for hundreds of years. It has strong antiseptic and antifungal qualities while still being safe for your skin. It also helps to stimulate your immune system.

Use an essential oil that suits your skin cleansing needs and has a fragrance that appeals to you.

#### Warning:

Do not put essential oils directly on your skin. Only a few can be used directly. Most are too strong and should only be combined with other ingredients.



## Harm Reduction and Learning

One of the unique aspects of the WISH Learning Centre is that women can be active in their addictions and active in their learning. Most treatment or educational opportunities require women to be detoxed and sober before they can enter the program. Many women are not sure they are ready for life without drugs or alcohol.

*"Drugs help with the numbness. You have to have it to survive."*

Women devise their own harm reduction strategies that allow them to experiment with their own capabilities. They may cut down on drugs and alcohol for several days out of every week and during that time they try to eat more and build up their bodies. Using fewer drugs also means that women can do less sex work, and so have more time on their hands. They are desperate to keep busy during these times and they have turned to the Learning Centre for support and distraction. In addition, women begin to contemplate what else they might do with their lives. This can be exciting and devastating. Not being in a numb state also means looking at all the issues that brought them to the street and the feelings that go with those issues. On the other hand, women can begin to look at new possibilities for themselves. Sometimes they want to get on with their education and we set up individual learning plans. Some women want to share their knowledge and begin instructing or helping with the activities of the learning centre.

We recognize that this is a time of growth for women. Our role is support them on this new path and assist them to process their experiences with their personal harm reduction strategy. As instructors, we affirmed women's courage to risk change. As a group we always tried to create an atmosphere of non-judgment so that women who had been boasting the week before about being drug-free would not be ashamed to come in if they were back using drugs. We also tried to have what we call Helpful Conversations.

### What is a Helpful Conversation?

We have talked about providing a non-judgmental space for women at the WISH Learning Centre, but a helpful conversation goes one step further.

Most of us are used to putting emphasis on what failed rather than what went right. We worry about failure, we analyze it, and basically, it gets more head time than success. A helpful conversation focuses on what went right, even if only one out of 20 things went right. This approach helps women to reframe their experiences and celebrate the smallest step toward their goals.

So for instance, Melissa comes in to the Learning Centre and says she managed to stay clean for four days, but then binged on the weekend and feels like she can never break this cycle. Instead of focusing on what triggered her back into using, we ask questions about her clean days.

## Healing- Activity 3

- How did it feel to not use on the first day? How did her body feel? How did her mind feel?
- How did she find the resolve to try going clean in the first place?
- What did she do with her time?
- How did she get the courage together to stay clean on the second day?
- How many dates did she not have to go on?
- How many meals did she have?
- How will she know when she can do this again?

All of this emphasis on the positive impacts of her week usually reframes the experience. Melissa usually ends up feeling proud and knowledgeable about her clean time. Women around the table usually add in their own experiences and compliments and it is a positive experience for everyone to share. The trick is to ask genuine questions that allow an individual to explore her own success. We know tons about our failures, but very little about our successes.

We have included an explanation of harm reduction taken from the Harm Reduction Coalition ([www.harmreduction.org/aboutHRC/aboutindex.htm](http://www.harmreduction.org/aboutHRC/aboutindex.htm)).



The Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) is committed to reducing drug-related harm among individuals and communities by initiating and promoting local, regional, and national harm reduction education, interventions, and community organizing. HRC fosters alternative models to conventional health and human services and drug treatment; challenges traditional client/provider relationships; and provides resources, educational materials, and support to health professionals and drug users in their communities to address drug-related harm.

The Harm Reduction Coalition believes in every individual's right to health and well-being as well as in their competency to protect and help themselves, their loved ones, and their communities.

## PRINCIPLES OF HARM REDUCTION

Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies that reduce negative consequences of drug use, incorporating a spectrum of strategies from safer use, to managed use to abstinence. Harm reduction strategies meet drug users "where they're at," addressing conditions of use along with the use itself.

Because harm reduction demands that interventions and policies designed to serve drug users reflect specific individual and community needs, there is no universal definition of or formula for implementing harm reduction. However, HRC considers the following principles central to harm reduction practice.

- Accepts, for better and for worse, that licit and illicit drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them.
- Understands drug use as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses a continuum of behaviors from severe abuse to total abstinence, and acknowledges that some ways of using drugs are clearly safer than others.
- Establishes quality of individual and community life and well-being--not necessarily cessation of all drug use--as the criteria for successful interventions and policies.
- Calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to people who use drugs and the communities in which they live in order to assist them in reducing attendant harm.
- Ensures that drug users and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them.
- Affirms drugs users themselves as the primary agents of reducing the harms of their drug use, and seeks to empower users to share information and support each other in strategies which meet their actual conditions of use.



- Recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination and other social inequalities affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with drug-related harm.
- Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm and danger associated with licit and illicit drug use.

# Dialogue about Relationships

## Healing Important Relationships

Healing important relationships is a big concern for many women living on the street. Each holiday or significant occasion that goes by brings up feelings and memories. We try to have a variety of supplies for making cards available at these times as well as some "getting started" phrases. We always make cards and small gifts before holidays so women have a chance to create something special for their children in foster care or for family members or important people in their lives. Some women also use this as a chance to thank workers in the Downtown Eastside for supporting them through difficult times or "just being there" with a smile or hug.

We have made every kind of card: simple cards, rubber stamp embossed cards, collage cards, stenciled cards, embroidered cards, calligraphy cards. Some women really appreciate having a fast and easy format to follow. Other women love having lots of ingredients around for being creative. It is important that your activity allow everyone to make something beautiful and special within 10 minutes. Often, this success encourages women to try other methods and stay longer.

We didn't create a set of handouts for this because making cards is quite straightforward. The more supplies you have, the more women enjoy this process. So visit your local craft or dollar store. It also helps to have a few cards already made up to stoke everyone's imagination. We have also brainstormed a list of sentiments to put inside the cards. Sometimes people get really stuck on what to say and others are so good at this part.

## Violence and Relationships

When we were preparing this curriculum, our group talked a lot about self-esteem and violent personal relationships. Not everyone felt they were in an abusive relationship but everyone had a past relationship that fit the bill. The group talked about how they often felt at the bottom of everybody's priority list, but they knew they didn't deserve to be at the bottom.

*"One day I realized that I was punishing myself for something I didn't do."*

Our curriculum committee felt it was vital to include something in the book that helped women to figure out who was in charge of her life. They wrote a play for women to read or act out, which we have included in this chapter. They also produced an unfinished comic strip called the "Boyfriend Blues" to start discussion amongst women. These are painful issues and you would want to use these activities carefully and with full permission of your group.



## Charlene's Play

It's a dark, cold, rainy night. A north wind ripples down Hastings. A girl stands shivering in a doorway. Nothing moves. She hasn't seen another being for at least an hour. Still she hesitates to leave. She hasn't had much luck tonight and knows that there won't be a welcome mat at home. For a loss of another word, she still calls it "home". After another half hour, she turns into the wind and heads there.

Music is blasting. She hears people laughing. She hopes she can sneak in and up the stairs without "him" seeing her. No such luck!

HIM: "Hey, babe, come here and give your daddy a kiss!" (He's well dressed, silk shirt, dress pants, cost her close to \$200 for his outfit). "How much money did you make?"

HER: "Sweetie, there's no one around. I've been out there for over 4 hours and didn't turn one trick. There's nobody out there. I just wanted to come in and dry off. Okay, sweetie?"

HIM: (Glares at her) "Do you realize how much time and money I've invested in you? All those fuckin clothes! You ungrateful bitch. Now that it's a little cold out and rainy you get lazy and come home. I bet you've been sitting in the fuckin bar all night. Out of all the girls that I could have gotten and I choose the laziest, dumbest one of all."

HER: "I'm sorry, sweetie, I'll just run upstairs and get a dry coat. Okay, I'll go right back out. I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking. Okay? Forgive me."

(She runs up the stairs quickly)

Back on the doorstep, a car drives by, turns a corner, then comes around again. A trick window shopping. The car stops. She saunters over to the driver's side.

HER: "Hi, honey, like what you're looking at?"

HIM: "Um, how much?"

HER: "Depends on what you order."

HIM: "Get in."

HER: "I got a room right here."

HIM: "Never mind, I like to stay with the car."

HER: "Long as we don't go too far."







HIM: "I'm paying for you. I want to drive around. If you don't like it I'll get another girl."

HER: "No, No, it's okay. I'll go."

Two hours later; bloody, wet and tired; a police car found her. Her eyes were vacant, looking straight ahead, putting one foot in front of the other. They picked her up and asked what had happened. They got no reply. The officers gave up trying to communicate with her and radioed in. The dispatcher advised a hospital visit. They took her to emergency and admitted her.

She was there for a week. One long safe week. She ate three meals a day. Social Services brought cigarettes and magazines. As she was recuperating, she realized that if it wasn't for her "boy" friend, she wouldn't have been out that night. Ever since she had moved in with him, she never had money; was almost always out on the streets working late. She could never have a decent meal; could never go out with the girls; he always needed this and that. He was supposed to pay half the rent but he only did it for the first while. There was always an excuse. He needed a phone to keep in touch with her. Never mind that she didn't have one. He needed a leather coat one month, gym fees the next. She just gave up asking for anything.

The more she thought about how things were with him and her, the more she realized it was mostly her work and his play. When she left the hospital she went to a women's shelter until she could figure out what she wanted.

He found her and came to "get her". He gave her supreme shit for taking an extended holiday. He never asked her how she was. He demanded money and told her she had to go to work double-time; the rent was due and the telephone was cut off. He didn't have any groceries. She looked at him wondering what she had ever seen in him.

Smiling, she went back into the shelter.

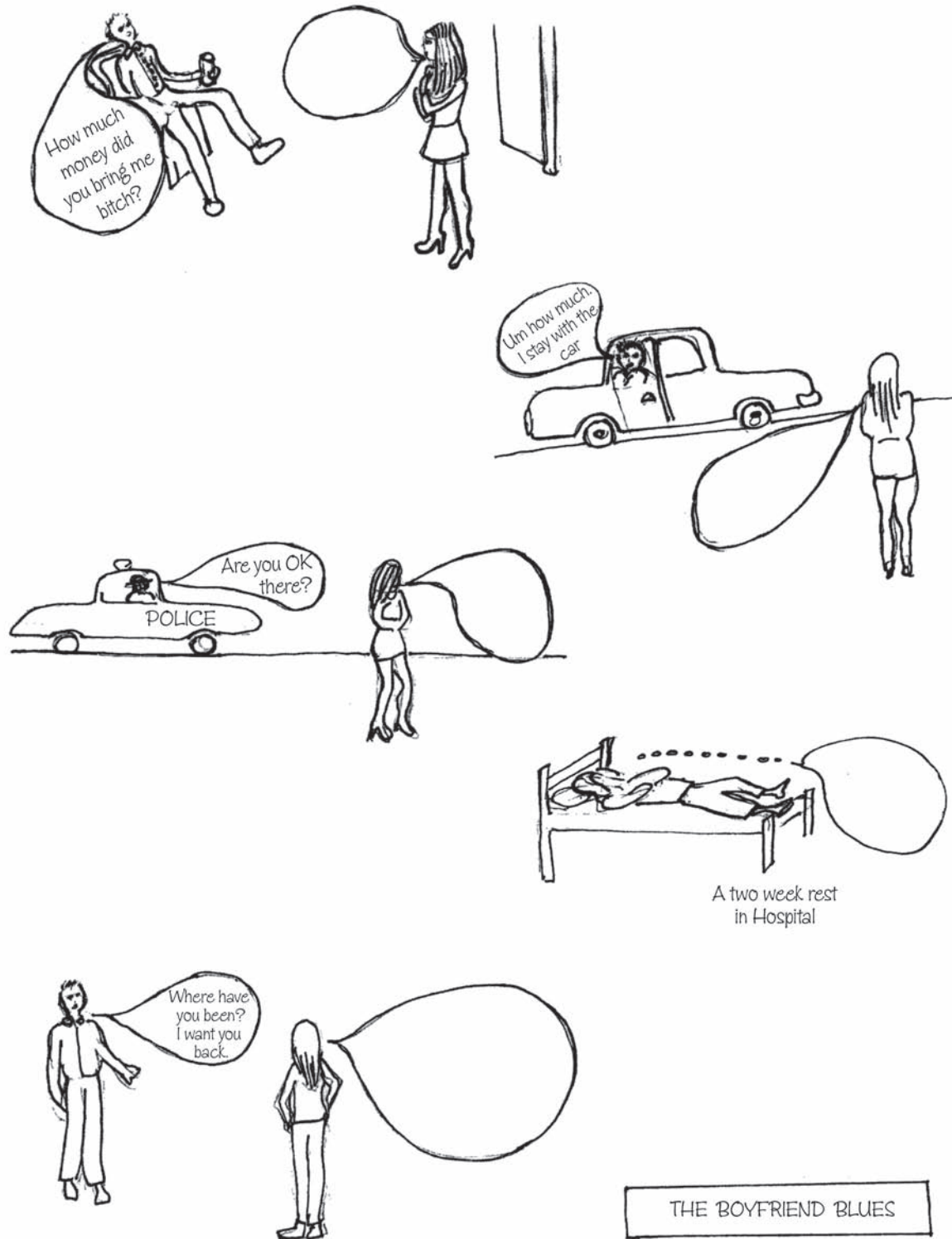
HIM: "Hey, where the fuck are you going. I told you I'm here to take you back. I'll forgive everything."

HER: "Oh, yeah, asshole, you forgive me. Well, I won't forgive you! As for your stupid bills, get a job and grow up. I'm going to!"

THE END

### Suggestions:

- The play can be read alone or done out loud with three readers.
- Read through the play and have anyone in the group stop the action and jump in to change the play.
- Write your own play based on violence in relationships.



Graphic by Adrienne Macallum

## Healing Dreams - Set Your Sights High

We created this exercise at the beginning of the year as a creative brainstorm for the WISH Learning Centre. It was very effective. The symbol of the kite was freeing for us all. The mixture of personal and group hit a safe note and brought lots of ideas for activities and participation into the learning group. Many women enjoyed doing it and our ideas decorated the walls for the entire year.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- photocopy of the kite
- markers (thin)
- decorative paper (scrapbook stores have tons of small sheets of pretty paper)
- glue sticks
- scissors
- nylon string in several bright colours for the tail
- create cutout stencils on cardboard for the four sections of the kite (this makes it easier to cut out the right shape of decorative paper)

Be sure to make a sample so that everyone knows where they are headed. You can make one with your ideas. Some women like to write on the worksheet first, then transfer to the image. Others just made it in to a collage.

### Taking Time to Review the Ideas

It worked for us to take the time to examine each woman's finished kite and acknowledge what she wanted and what she was offering the learning centre. A few women really wanted to take their image home, but most participants wanted to tape them to our wall.





## Set Your Sights High

This activity is designed to tap in to our creative centres and make some fun and interesting plans for us this year.

Take the picture of the kite and fill in each section with your answers to the four questions below. Feel free to use any of the decorative paper to design a beautiful kite to carry your ideas for this year. (You can also write your ideas beside the kite, if you don't want to write on your design.)

### 1. A Strong Feeling

what do you want this learning centre to feel like this year? Hopeful, challenging, friendly, restful...

### 2. A WILD IDEA

what wild and crazy suggestion do you have for yourself or this group for this year? No limits!

### 3. My Contribution

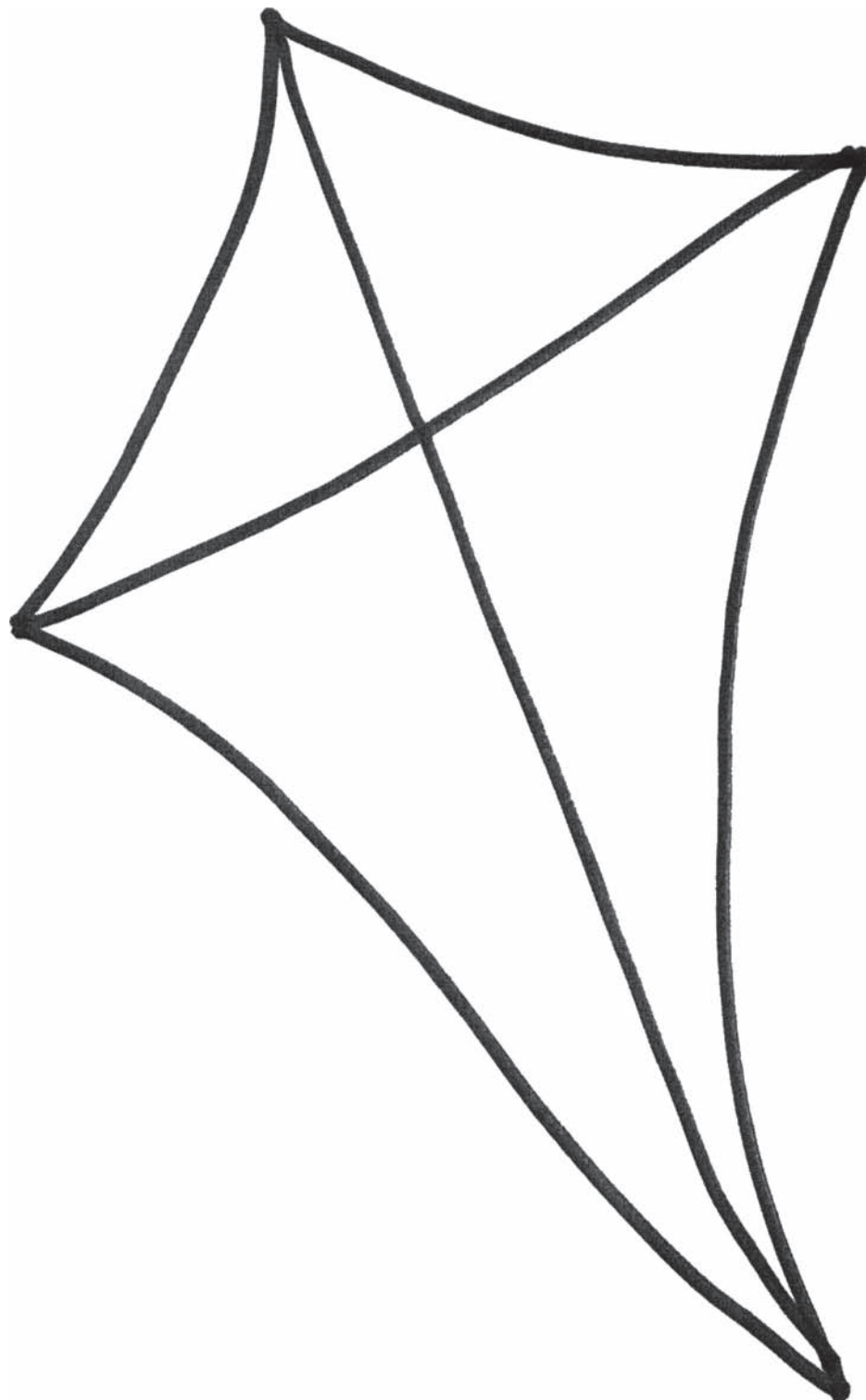
what could you contribute to the learning group this year? Friendship, ideas, leadership, teaching an activity, finding stuff, helping clean up, etc

### 4. A New Activity for the Learning Centre

what would you like to see us try this year?



## Set Your Sights High





## Healing Dreams - Ruth's Story

I am already going to Native Court Workers' Recovery classes, Monday to Wednesday, and I am going to Peers, Thursday and Friday from 10am to 3pm. And I work on the weekends 11-2 at the Women's Centre.

I used to sit in the bar day to day, smoke up rock every chance I got money. Now when I go out drinking, I get really sick because my tolerance for drinking is down. I decided to change my life around when I met my spouse. He's not a heavy drinker and he loves me so much he tries to straighten me out. He wants me to move away from this downtown area. That's our next goal, to find safer housing outside this area.

My dream is to get a job and work on my resume and to get married, settle down, have a house for my grandchildren to come visit me. I'd also like to have one more baby - if it's not too late. I want to have a car, get my driver's license and go on a cruise. Save up our money. I'll be a Bahama Mama. And someday be recognized by my family for doing all these things and be known as a good mother.



## Healing Dreams - Ruth's Story

1. Ruth's dream is guiding her actions every day. What steps is she taking to stay on track?
2. Ruth is getting support from her spouse. Do you think he is the main reason she is getting her life straightened out?
3. Ruth wants to be recognized by her family and be known as a good mother. Do you think this is a good goal?
4. What are your dreams?





# Creating -



## Introduction

### Activities:

1. Candle Holders
2. Painted Flower Pots
3. Still Life Drawing or Painting
4. Dream Web Doodle/Sketch/Collage
5. Ongoing Fibre Arts Activities



---

# Creating



Working with objects and tools to create something is a critical thing for us. Creating allows us to keep our hands busy and our minds focused on the task at hand. Creating gives our brains a break from the other things in our lives that tend to dominate our thinking. It quiets the voices in our heads, however temporarily while we bead a bracelet, draw a picture, colour our drawings, sew, knit, paint or just plain doodle.

We strive to have a hands-on activity planned every night the Learning Centre is opened. The opportunity to make something pretty or useful is a major motive – it gets women in the room and generates excitement about being there for something fun. While we often have an activity planned with all the necessary supplies at hand, we also have drawing materials and other craft supplies on the table available for whatever activity may come to mind at the time.

## Abundancy: When More is Better

Coming into the room and seeing pencil crayons, markers, coloured paper and other materials galore is an exciting thing. In a world of limited resources, or none at all, the concept of abundance is an important piece of the creative process. Materials a-plenty create a sense of optimism, playfulness and potential. It makes the room all the more inviting and inspiring.

Participation in the evening activities is not mandatory. Sometimes women come into the Learning Centre and watch other women do art while they eat their dinner. Observation is a great way that many learn and a way that many become familiar with a process and obtain ideas. The art activity draws women in the room and once there working on something fun, it's easy to get involved in the other things being offered or talked about in the Learning Centre. Before long, women are working on a project and delaying their re-entry to the street because they want to finish the item.

Working with their hands on a creative project reminds women of what they were once able to do. We've heard many comments on how great it is to knit again, remembering the person who taught them the skill. It reminds

---

*"Being in the Learning Centre gives me a time out, it gets me out of my room and gives me something fun to do."*

women about other interests and a more "normal" lifestyle. Many women avoid holidays and other festivities such as birthdays because they don't have any extra money to buy gifts or give cards. The art projects we create help to satisfy an important need in women – the need to give something beautiful and meaningful to a loved one.

The art and craft activities not only draw women into the room, but it calms them. It often changes the energy quite dramatically. Focusing on making something is an important part of the healing process. It makes women happy to be able to make a gift for a friend or a child. It feels good to work on something, to finish it and then to give it away. There is a strong sense of completion that comes with working on a project, staying with it through the various stages and then giving it away to a loved one.

We have organized art activities and we also offer on-going activities. These are activities that are available for women to do any evening they come to the centre. One of the favourite on-going activities is colouring using pencil crayons and brightly coloured markers. We have some interesting colouring books that have complex designs and interesting mandalas. It is a focusing and calming activity. When women colour, it is easy to pay attention to the task at hand, and also participate, at whatever level they choose, in the other activities going on in the Learning Centre. Another favourite on-going activity at the Learning Centre is beading. Using glass beads and elastic thread, women can easily make a few bracelets, necklaces and even rings for themselves and loved ones.

While it is tempting to simply organize "craft" activities, we add layers to the activities. Along with the materials to do the project, we include reading materials, and other handouts so women read, think, analyze, make decisions, discuss and exercise as many thought processes as they prefer. From the craft activities, we build capacity for learning. Working with their hands and working on a project that creates an item that women want to own, gives women enormous control over a process. It invites beauty into their lives and offers them a sense of completion.

*"I don't have any materials at home, but I can find them here."*

On several occasions, women have taken the lead in teaching us to make Dream Catchers and other activities learned elsewhere. This is why it is critical to have a well-stocked storage cupboard. If you have a variety of materials on hand you can make quick modifications to activities or do an entirely new one if wanted. It is therefore important to be able to "go with the flow" and to not be rigid about the activity planned. Women often bring their creative experiences from other places and programs want to try out something new.

The more involved activities we have done are making lovely candleholders, flowerpots, and still life drawings. Instructions for these activities follow.

---

## Craft Cupboard List:

### Drawing tools:

- Pencils
- Pens
- Markers (fine and wide tipped)
- Pencil crayons
- Oil pastel crayons
- Wax crayons

### Painting supplies:

- Tempera paints
- Watercolour kits
- Assortment of paint brushes

### Paper:

- 8 1/2 x 11, 11 x 17, and assorted colours
- Construction paper (variety pack)
- Bristol board
- Tissue paper (assorted colours)
- Lined paper
- Graph paper

### Sewing supplies:

- Scissors that will cut fabric
- Needles (variety pack)
- Straight pins
- Tape measure
- Sewing thread
- Embroidery thread
- Thimbles
- Fabric
- Buttons
- Ribbon and other embellishments
- Sewing machine

### Knitting supplies:

- Knitting needles (3.5 mm – 5.5 mm)
- Assortment of yarn
- Crochet hooks
- Patterns
- Knitting books
- Zip lock bags for storage

---

### Beading supplies:

- Assortment of beads, large pony beads, glass beads, and seed beads
- Elastic thread, .5mm
- Hemp cord
- Leather
- Wire
- Wire cutters

### Miscellaneous items:

- Scissors
- Safety pins
- Glue stick, white glue, podgy
- Sparkles, stickers
- Glue gun\* (please use a low temperature glue gun)

\*Please note: the glue in a glue gun can reach temperatures high enough to cause serious second degree burns. Use with caution.

## Candle Holders

This is a popular activity in the WISH Learning Centre. It takes little set-up, the materials are inexpensive and the results are stunning. The completed candle holders make wonderful presents and are beautiful additions to women's rooms. Furthermore, because the candle is located deep inside a jar, they are extremely safe. The activity can take as much time as women have for it can be done in several stages.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

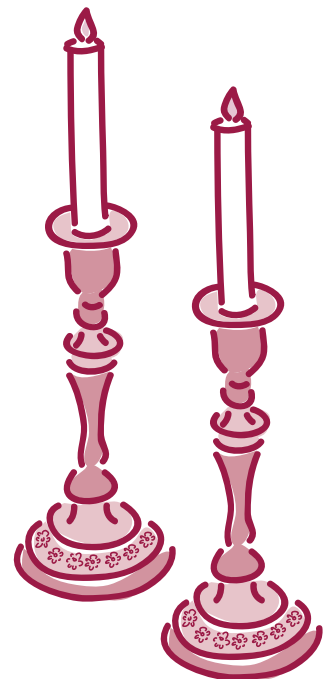
- Wide mouth jar
- Tissue paper in assorted colours
- Paint brush
- Podgy: available at many Dollar Stores
- Tea light candles

### Instructions:

Tear the tissue paper into small pieces. The size and shape of the pieces will depend upon the effect you want. Dip your brush into the podgy and cover a small section of the jar. Put the tissue paper on the podgied part of the jar and paint over the tissue paper with a layer of podgy. When the tissue paper is covered with podgy it becomes transparent. Because it's transparent, you can layer the colours of the tissue to get a lovely effect. The podgy dries clear so don't worry that it looks a bit of a mess right now.

Put it in a place where it can completely dry. When dry put a candle into the jar and light it. It produces a warm, rich effect.

This activity takes a bit longer do to than other painting activities, but it is an easy activity. The time it takes to it, gives women a chance to relax and talk during the process. If there is a topic or something you need to talk about with women, this is a good activity to accompany the discussion.



## Painted Flower Pots:

Many women at WISH have little interaction with nature. Having flowers and herbs available to grow in their living spaces motivates many to join in on the activity. This is a multi stage activity. We paint the pots over several evenings making sure that everyone who wants a flowerpot has one ready for the planting evening. On the planting evening we bring in an assortment of potted flowers and herbs, potting soil and reading material on the care of the individual plants. We have included some sample reading materials.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- > Plastic or terra cotta pots,
- > Potting soil,
- > Potting plants  
(assortment of flowers and herbs, especially mint, basil, rosemary and oregano),
- > Acrylic paints,
- > Brushes.

### Instructions:

Using the acrylic paints, paint designs on the pots. Have some design examples on hand to encourage the flow of ideas. We used simple design shapes such as circles, squares and triangles.

After the pots dry, fill with potting soil and put in the potting plants. Hand out reading materials on the specifics about your plant.





## Pansies

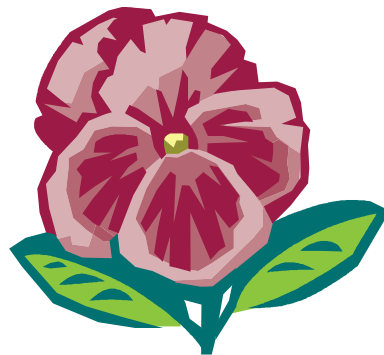
### How to grow:

Pansies are meant to be outside. Pansies are surprisingly cold-hardy and their bright faces can bloom all winter long -- at the very least, they wait out the cold to bloom again with the first warm spell.

Pansies need at least six hours of sun; plants growing in shade will produce fewer blossoms. They also need good drainage. If the soil stays wet and soggy through winter, the plants may rot.

### Hint:

Removing the faded blossoms will stimulate flower production.





## Chives

Chives (*A. schoenoprasum*) grow in grassy clumps from very small bulbs. The leaves have a mild onion flavour. Chinese or garlic chives (*A. tuberosum*) have bigger leaves that have a strong garlic taste. Both types grow well in small containers. To harvest, clip leaves close to the ground any time.

### How to grow:

A pot of nursery-bought chives can be planted at any time, although it's best to avoid the worst of summer and winter where those seasons are severe. Grow in average, well-drained soil or in pots. Keep the soil moist, especially if growing chives in pots. If clumps become overcrowded in pots or in the garden, lift them in autumn or spring, break them into smaller clumps and replant them.

### Where to grow:

These plants grow best in full sun but tolerate partial shade. In very hot, dry climates they may require a little shade.

### Source:

Gardening: A Commonsense Guide (Murdoch Books)



## Still Life Drawing or Painting

Still life drawing and painting has always been popular amongst artists, especially women artists for they traditionally did not have access to nude models and the outdoors!

Mary Pratt, a famous Canadian artist, popularized the Canadian still life with her paintings. As a housewife and mother of four she painted what she had available to her. A famous piece she did was *Trout in a Bowl* (<http://www.nfld.com/nfld/clients/newfound/pratt.htm>). It was simply fish waiting to be prepared for dinner, but Pratt found the beauty in it, and loved the way the light reflected from the scales. She painted it and it has become one of her masterpieces.

Drawing a still life can be a very relaxing thing to do. The best part of the drawing experience is that the subject matter doesn't move! You can keep the still life set up for several days if you want and take your time working on a drawing or painting.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Large white sheets
- Manila or
- Construction paper
- Oil pastels
- Crayola twistables
- Pencil crayons
- Regular pencils
- Markers
- Objects for a still life, any combination of organic and manmade objects work well

### Instructions:

#### ■ Step One:

Select your paper. You have several to choose from:

- Large white sheets,
- Manilla or
- Construction paper

### ■ Step Two:

Select your drawing material. Like the paper, you have several to choose from:

- Oil pastels
- Pencil crayons
- Regular pencils
- Markers

### ■ Step Three

Organize the still life to suit you. When you have it set up, do a small sketch on newsprint paper, just so you have a sense of the shapes and the organization of the still life.

### ■ Step Four

Start drawing. You can sketch it first and then add colour, or you can jump right in and use colour right from the beginning. You can try "realism" making everything look as real as possible. You can be "impressionistic", and go with shapes, colours, and images that inspire your feelings and sense of the still life.



## Mary Pratt

Mary Pratt was born in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in 1935. She graduated with a bachelor of fine arts from Mount Allison University in 1961. She moved to the province in 1963 with her Newfoundland-born husband Christopher.

At the beginning of her career, the Pratts' four young children became an important focus in her life. Her first solo exhibition was organized by Memorial University Art Gallery in 1967, after her children had reached school age. Her participation in the 1975 show *Some Canadian Women Artists* at the National Gallery of Canada, was a crucial point in her career. The London Regional Art Gallery organized her first nationally toured solo exhibition in 1981.

Pratt is one of Canada's most respected realist painters. She is known for her perceptive depiction of light and the themes of domestic life, which recur in her work.

*It is difficult for people to escape being indoctrinated by ideas beyond their own comprehension. It is easy to be tricked into thinking that a popular ideology is a satisfactory substitution for a personal philosophy. It is hard not to "join the parade". My paintings investigate my observations of my own life. It has become increasingly exciting to discover that even within the confines of a small and uneventful life - truths - however humble in the origins can have universal importance. I am personally opposed to a world awash with easy information and facts. I prefer to discover things for myself and celebrate those discoveries in my painting.*

—Mary Pratt, August 16, 2000

### Discussion Questions:

1. Mary Pratt states:

*It is easy to be tricked into thinking that a popular ideology is a satisfactory substitution for a personal philosophy. It is hard not to "join the parade".*

Why is it hard not to "join the parade"?

2. How can you avoid joining in?



3. Mary Pratt states:

*I am personally opposed to a world awash with easy information and facts.*

Why would Pratt feel this way?

4. How do you feel about the availability of information and facts?

5. Mary Pratt states:

*I prefer to discover things for myself and celebrate those discoveries in my painting.*

What does it mean; "to celebrate discoveries"?

6. In what ways you ever done that?

7. Why are there so few "great" women artists?

## Dream Web Doodle/Sketch/Collage

This activity is a tool to use in the process of finding out who we are and what motivates us. The Be-Do-Have concept comes from one of the Power Processes found in *Becoming a Master Student*, by David Ellis, published by Houghton Mifflin.

We are all human beings, however many of us are not focused on the "be-ing" part of it: we are focused on "having". Getting the stuff we need to make us feel good; could be food, clothes, shelter, drugs, cars, status, or a holiday. Sometimes we are so focused on **having** things that we end up "doing" things just to reach that objective, like taking a job we hate. And what we end up "do-ing" starts to determine who we are, and that affects how we are "be-ing". So the energy flow goes like this

HAVE → DO → BE

To get back on track we need to focus on who we are, and what our core values are. That determines the BE part; what our be-ing consists of. From that step we can more comfortably determine what we will DO that will be in keeping with our core values, who we are and what makes sense to us. Then, from that step we know what we want and what we will HAVE. The energy flows so much easier in the **BE → DO → HAVE** model, than it does from the **HAVE → DO → BE** one. That one is like paddling upstream as we move from what we want to who we are.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Large sheets of paper
- Assortment of drawing materials such as markers, crayons, pencil crayons
- Pencils and pens
- Old magazines and photographs
- Scissors

### Why mind mapping is such a helpful tool.

Mind mapping is useful because it uses both sides of your brain. When people think about something, they mostly use the left side of their brain, the analytical, reasonable, logical side. Mind mapping invites the right side of the brain to also participate in the activity. The right side is the creative, melodic, artistic, non-verbal side of your brain. When you mind-map, you use words, signals, and pictures to represent your idea.

### Explain how it is done:

Put your name in the middle of a large sheet of paper. Draw a circle around your name. Choose about three or four things that are really important to you and write them around your name. Think about the parts that make up that thing that is important to you and write those things around them. You may start to see some connections between things and if you do, draw a line or some kind of connector to the similar points. There are many ways to do this activity, and the more you do it, the more you understand the way it opens up possibilities. Some people aren't comfortable drawing so you can help them along by providing magazines and other visuals. You can cut and paste ideas and use a "collage" approach.



## Ongoing Fibre Arts Activities

Along with the many organized activities, we have a series of ongoing arts activities in the WISH Learning Centre. The most popular ones are beading, knitting, crocheting and sewing. These are things women can start in the Learning Centre, but if desired, they can bring home with them and continue to work on them long after the centre is closed for the evening. For some women a repetitive task such as crocheting keeps their hands busy in a constructive way, rather than picking or scratching at their skin.

In the WISH Drop In Centre, women are able to obtain free clothing. The sewing machine helps us to modify clothes to suit the size needed and the fashion desired. It also gives us the chance to teach (and learn) some excellent tailoring skills. It is surprising what skills women bring to the centre.

The beading activity also provides gifts for friends and family; gifts that are otherwise difficult to come by. Many times women have come to the Learning Centre upset and unable to focus on the planned activity. After working with the beads and making a bracelet or other object, they become focused and calm and able to carry forward.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- > Knitting needles, crochet hooks, and other such supplies
- > Assortment of yarn
- > Knitting and crochet books and magazines, pattern books
- > Assortment of beads, plastic, glass, alphabet,
- > Elastic thread
- > Interesting fabric scraps
- > Sewing supplies
- > Sewing machine

In the Learning Centre we will have the planned activity and all related materials on the table. Many women know that we also have the materials for the on-going activities as well. Each evening we list the scheduled activities on the white board that is prominently displayed at one end of the room. Oftentimes we will also list the on-going art and craft options.

## Round Crochet Rag Rug

We want to acknowledge Monica Resinger who provided us with this fantastic crochet idea.

This is a good activity to do after women in the program have developed some skills with crocheting. It doesn't take a lot of skill and after learning or re-learning how to crochet, many women want to make something useful and beautiful. The information on the skills needed to do this project can all be found in any basic crochet instruction book. There are several available through public libraries. This project solves the problem of having the right resources. There seems to always be t-shirts in the "give away" pile.

We have found a great way to recycle t-shirts; we make crocheted rag rugs with them! The finished rugs are beautiful and durable and are great to use or give away as gifts.

When looking for the right material, weed through clothes and set aside t-shirts. When cut into strips, they are great because they don't fray.

Cut the t-shirt into one long, approximately 1/2 inch wide strip. The way to do this with t-shirts is to begin at the bottom, cut into the shirt about 1/2 inch then cut around and around the shirt stopping around the arm and discarding the rest. The strip doesn't have to be a perfect 1/2 inch; if it is a little off here and there, it won't harm the finished rug. After you cut the strips, wind them into a ball (like a ball of yarn). It is important to keep the material in one long strip rather than making a lot of short strips to prevent as much joining of strips as possible. Joining strips will make the rug a little thicker in those spots, so you don't want to join too much. You will need a few t-shirts for one fairly large crochet rug. Cutting the strips is actually the most work of the project; once this is done, the crochet works up quickly because you are working with big stitches.

When you are ready to begin crocheting, select a large crochet hook. A 10 mm size hook is best, but smaller ones will also work; just be sure to crochet loosely. Here are the instructions for crocheting a round crochet rug:



## Crochet Rug

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Crochet hook: size 10 mm approximately
- Balls of "yarn" made from 1/2 inch strips cut from several t-shirts

#### To Start:

Ch 3. Join with slip stitch (Sl st) into a ring. Chain (Ch) 1, work 9 single crochet (sc) into ring. Sl st into top of ch 1. Do not turn.

#### Increase Row:

Ch 1, work two sc in each stitch around. Join with sl st in top of ch 1. Do not turn.

#### Pattern Row:

Ch 1, work a sc in each st around. Join with sl st in top of ch 1. Do not turn.

Continue working pattern stitch unless the piece starts to "cup", then work an increase row. Continue working in pattern stitch with increase rows as needed until the rug measures desired size. End and fasten off.

To join new strips onto the rug, sl st the new strip into the next st and leave a 5-6 inch tail; crochet over this tail in your next few stitches to secure it.

#### Abbreviations:

- Ch: chain
- Ch1: chain one
- Sl st: Slip stitch
- Sc: single crochet

Happy Crocheting!



# Learning -



Introduction

Activities:

1. Reading
2. Math Dice Game
3. Math Word Problems
4. Building General Knowledge
5. Writing



---

# Learning -



We are well aware that everything that we undertake in the WISH Learning Centre is full of learning, so it seems funny to isolate learning in this chapter. We are talking about upgrading - presenting opportunities for women to work on improving their literacy, numeracy and general knowledge skills.

Upgrading while living the street life is a tough challenge for women and a tough challenge for literacy workers. Many women want to get their GED, for example. We know this because we always put the GED preparation book on the table with whatever craft or hands on activity we have planned. Women see that book and start talking about their learning dreams. Presenting upgrading exercises amongst other activities is very important for women who want to get more education but are living the chaotic lifestyle of the street. We found that upgrading activities had the highest non-participation rate. In other words, about 50% of the time, women will say they are not interested in doing “brain work”.

Although many women are tired and overwhelmed when they come in to WISH, their natural curiosity and their interest in expanding their skills is still present. In fact, many women feel their brains are underutilized and want to find ways to challenge themselves. Even if it’s for 15 minutes.

We learned to keep all of our upgrading material optional, fun and interesting. Some women come in and collect material that they will look at later. Some women want to do it in a group. Many women want to do crafts, but listen in to the “brain work” activities. Sometimes they jump in when they check it out and know they won’t fail. We always encourage women to do things in pairs or to help each other. Some women have a big distrust of instructors, but will ask their friends for help.

One aspect that literacy instructors need to get used to is that many of the terrific activities you plan won’t work. For some reason, no one wants to do the fun, inventive activity you have slaved over for several hours. Don’t despair! That same activity might work 3 weeks later so don’t throw it away. On the other hand, some activities will go very well and then you will want to create a series of exercises in the same manner. Be sure not to label any-

---

thing a failure until you have tried it a few times.

There are so many factors that pressure women who live on the street. Being flexible about the time and head space that women have for learning is critical. Every new piece of information or new skill adds to a woman's power and builds her self-esteem. Women living close to the street are like hummingbirds - they are busy with their thoughts, their business, their emotions and their attention. If you are outside that life, you may think that women are not processing or absorbing what's going on in the literacy room. This is far from the truth.

We have included five activities that we have used in the WISH Learning Centre with some success. The first two activities were reviewed by our committee and we have included their comments so that you can understand the many ways that women might respond to upgrading exercises.



## Reading

We always try and have something on the Learning Centre table that requires reading. This piece we have included as a handout "How Grandmother Spider Stole the Sun" is from a First Nations science text that features the mythical legend and the scientific explanation for a phenomena. It was very appealing and we have read other excerpts from this book.

Sometimes we read stuff together, a couple of people at a time. Other times, everyone reads it to themselves and we discuss it. The picture is great for pre-reading discussion. Clearly, it is the main reason that women read on!

### Reading a Short Novel "Book Club" Style

We took a unique approach to reading a novel. We copied the novel and handed it out chapter by chapter. As we read the novel, we built the book. We decided to leave the growing novel in the Learning Centre to make sure that it would be there when we arrived to do the activity. Even though we wanted to take it home and read it again, leaving it in the Learning Centre was better than having to remember to carry it with us.

This anticipation worked to keep the small group interested over a number of weeks. Reading a chapter at a time also ensured lots of room for discussion. This approach worked well with women who were not reading books on their own.

### Free Books

Lots of women love to read and use reading as an escape. We work with the librarian at the Carnegie Library to get donated books every week that we can give away free in the Learning Centre at WISH. The librarian has also come to WISH and talked directly with women about their favourite fiction writers, issues that are important to them, etc. She then makes a special effort to sort books that she knows will be popular at WISH. We give away close to a thousand books and magazines a year.

Although some women bring back the books for continued circulation, it's important that we have no strings attached to these materials. Living in shelters, hotels and on the street make it almost impossible for women to hang on to their belongings.

We are much more interested in women maintaining their literacy levels and enjoying reading, than getting these books back. However, some women have started using the local library because of their connection with the librarian.

### Local Writing

It has been important to feature local writing from the Downtown Eastside. We have used the WISH and Carnegie Newsletters as well as *UpWords* a magazine published out of the Lifeskills Centre in the DTES, to get people talking about an issue. There are books of poetry and collected short pieces, both fiction and non-fiction written by accomplished and emerging writers in the Downtown Eastside. One woman in the Downtown Eastside started a book club with Maggie DeVries' novel *Missing Sarah*, the story of her sister who was one of the missing women.

### Reference:

*Keepers of the Earth: Native Stories and Environmental Activities for Children*, Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac, Fifth House Ltd, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 1999.



## How Grandmother Spider Stole The Sun

(Muskogee {Creek}- Oklahoma)

When the Earth was first made, there was no light. It was very hard for the animals and the people in the darkness. Finally the animals decided to do something about it.

"I have heard there is something called the Sun," said the Bear. "It is kept on the other side of the world, but the people there will not share it. Perhaps we can steal a piece of it."

All the animals agreed that it was a good idea. But who would be the one to steal the Sun?

The Fox was the first to try. He sneaked to the place where the Sun was kept. He waited until no one was looking. Then he grabbed a piece of it in his mouth and ran. But the Sun was so hot it burned his mouth and he dropped it. To this day all foxes have black mouths because that first fox burned his carrying the Sun.

The Possum tried next. In those days Possum had a very bushy tail. She crept up to the place where the Sun was kept, broke off a piece and hid it in her tail. Then she began to run, bringing the Sun back to the animals and the people. But the Sun was so hot it burned off all the hair on her tail and she lost hold of it. To this day all possums have bare tails because the Sun burned away the hair on that first possum.

Then Grandmother Spider tried. Instead of trying to hold the Sun herself, she wove a bag out of her webbing. She put the piece of the Sun into her bag and carried it back with her. Now the question was where to put the Sun.

Grandmother Spider told them, "The Sun should be up high in the sky. Then everyone will be able to see it and benefit from its light."

All the animals agreed, but none of them could reach up high enough. Even if they carried it to the top of the tallest tree, that would not be high enough for everyone on the Earth to see the Sun. Then they decided to have one of the birds carry the Sun up to the top of the sky. Everyone knew the Buzzard could fly the highest, so he was chosen.





Buzzard placed the Sun on top of his head, where his feathers were the thickest, for the Sun was still very hot, even inside Grandmother Spider's bag. He began to fly, up and up toward the top of the sky. As he flew the Sun grew hotter. Up and up he went, higher and higher, and the Sun grew hotter and hotter still. Now the Sun was burning through Grandmother Spider's bag, but the Buzzard still kept flying up toward the top of the sky. Up and up he went and the Sun grew hotter. Now it was burning away the feathers on top of his head, but he continued on. Now all of his feathers were gone, but he flew higher. Now it was turning the bare skin of his head all red, but he continued to fly. He flew until he reached the top of the sky, and there he placed the Sun where it would give light to everyone.

Because he carried the Sun up to the top of the sky, Buzzard was honored by all the birds and animals. Though his head is naked and ugly because he was burned carrying the Sun, he is still the highest flyer of all, and he can be seen circling the Sun to this day. And because Grandmother Spider brought the Sun in her bag of webbing, at times the Sun makes rays across the sky which are shaped like the rays in Grandmother Spider's web. It reminds everyone that we are all connected, like the strands of Grandmother Spider's web, and it reminds everyone of what Grandmother Spider did for all the animals and the people.

## WISH Participants' Response

*"I find this intriguing. Yes, I'd like this Exercise because I like visual learning."*

*"Reading legends about other tribes is interesting. I would love to listen and tell legends. If we don't they will die out and we don't want that."*

*"I like the spider one a lot."*

*"They had to learn to share the sunlight with others. This is what Grandmother Spider would have wanted."*

*"Visually stimulating. Then, it's a legend and sounds for very interesting for reading."*

*"Not especially interesting for me as an activity. I like the picture. I don't like science that much."*

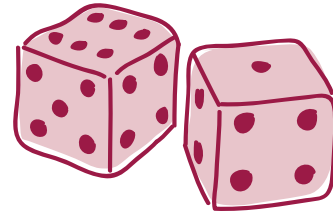


### Additional discussion

- Over all, lots of women were interested in knowing more about native legends.
- Without the picture, it would be considerably less appealing.
- One person said they would like to take it home to read because it would be hard to concentrate in the group.
- Reading it aloud would be helpful.

## Math Dice Game

We were always looking for ways to encourage women to practice their math. Lots of women are not familiar with the times tables and feel very rusty on decimals, fractions, etc. One day, I was in a Dollar Store and saw these big, colourful dice. They were so big and chunky that you just wanted to pick them up. So I bought them and took them to WISH. I spent about two minutes thinking up the rules and it worked! It was a game that used math but also relied on chance. So if you were a whiz at math, it didn't necessarily mean you would win. And the same was true if you were just learning math skills.



### MATERIALS NEEDED

- > 3 large dice in different colours (for instance blue, black and yellow)
- > paper and pencils for everybody
- > a scorekeeper

### How to play:

1. Everyone rolls once dice to see who starts - the highest wins
2. Each woman (or pair, some women like to work as a team) throw(s) the three dice. In order to figure out the score, the player must add the black dice and the blue dice. Then she must multiply that number by the yellow dice. Using a pencil and paper or fingers is fine.
3. If the player gets it right (every other player is doing the calculation, too) then she writes down her total number as her score.
4. Go round until someone reaches a certain number such as 100 or everyone has had four turns.
5. Feel free to change any of these rules to make it easier or harder, a shorter game or a longer game.

### Reaction from WISH Participants

*"Yes, because it looks fun. I love math."*

*"The dice game is new, very inventive. It would sharpen our minds especially if we had to go fast. I would really enjoy it."*

*"I think I would like it to be like Yatzee."*

*"Math dice game helped me with my math skills and adding skills."*

*"Colorful, interesting. Help me with my math skills, practice my times tables."*

*"Seems like a fun game. Good for getting people involved and thinking fast and using their brains."*

*"OK. I don't like much to do with dice. But I'm curious. But it has something to do with numbers. Yuk."*

### Additional Comments:

It's a good idea not to say "we are going to practice math now." This strikes terror into many women's hearts and minds. Math anxiety is alive and well in many of us. But everyone can relate to a game.

## Math Word Problems

Many people have a tough time when math is embedded in a word problem. To keep up everyone's ability to read a math problem, we make quizzes that feature instructors or regular participants. Adding humour makes the quiz more inviting to most people, particularly if it's at the expense of an instructor! Here is an example, but you will want to make up your own.

Be sure to have an answer sheet that demonstrates how to do the problem. Some women do not want to do math in front of others, but they will take it home.

### Spontaneous Math

Helping women to solve a specific problem that involves math is great. Motivation is high and it's a chance to talk the problem out loud so that more than one person will hear how to sort a math issue. Often, a math problem comes wrapped in other issues - drugs, sex work, boyfriend/pimp issues - and it's important not to get distracted. Be sure to deal with the question that is asked of you first "How do I figure out...", or you may never get asked again!

### Math Workbooks and Handouts

We also keep a steady supply of basic math handouts to give to women who say they want to work on their math. Many women do not know their multiplication tables by heart and appreciate worksheets to practice with. Many women find doing basic math a comfort. It is a straightforward activity, with a right and wrong answer. Also, they are working on their education and that is important if they are to aim for a change in their lives.





## Quiz #1

### Should these staff keep their jobs??!?

1. Lucy took \$35 out of petty cash and went to the dollar store to buy new journals for everyone. Each journal cost \$1.45 including tax. She bought 8 blue ones, 7 red ones and 9 black ones. Did she bring enough money? Should she keep her job?!
  
2. Catherine is cooking roast beef for us tonight. She calculated that it would take 2 hours and 40 minutes to cook the roasts and 15 minutes to carve them. As everyone knows, supper at WISH is served at 6pm sharp! Catherine is planning to put the roasts in the oven at 3:30pm. Will she keep her job?!
  
3. Diana is writing a grant for the Learning Centre. She wants to make sure that our computer internet expenses are covered in the budget. The monthly charge is \$26.95. The budget is for the whole year. She is putting \$350 in the budget. Is it enough? Should she keep her job?!

## Building General Knowledge

We found that women at WISH are like many literacy learners; they had difficult and interrupted experiences at school and consequently have big gaps in general knowledge. General knowledge is the basic information that most high school graduates take for granted. Being confident about your general knowledge means being familiar with the geography of the world, having some basic benchmarks in Canadian history, some practical knowledge of how governments work, etc.

We make a strong effort at WISH to build women's general knowledge so that they feel more connected to the world. Working with general knowledge topics also makes it easier for women to contemplate preparing for their GED or other upgrading.

### Use Current Events

Building lesson plans around general knowledge areas is familiar territory to literacy and ABE instructors. The difficult part is knowing when a lesson like this might work. Dramatic or eventful reporting in the news can provide a meaningful moment for building general knowledge. When the tsunami took its deadly toll in the Indian Ocean, none of us knew where Banda Aceh was located. We got out the atlas and all became more familiar with that part of the world together. Everyone likes to discuss current events from a place of confidence.

Once when a federal election was called, we made a quiz that asked participants to match the national party names with their logos. We wanted to make sure that women would recognize the parties at the ballot box. This worked well and then we had a basis to discuss some of the policies held by each of the major parties.

During the investigation of the Picton Farm, we created a scrapbook of newspaper articles. This scrapbook was important to women. Every week, they could catch up on the investigation when they came to WISH, synthesizing what they heard on the street with what was being reported in the paper.

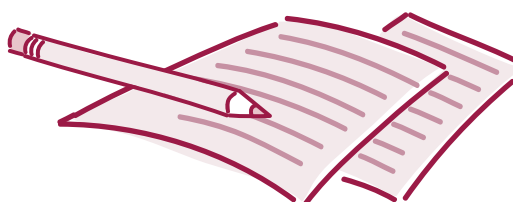
### Games and Collages

Of course, games provide the most fun. We have used Junior Canadian Trivial Pursuit and made crosswords and wordfinds. One time, we discovered that several women around the table grew up on the east coast of Canada. At the next session, we brought the Atlantic chapter from *A Beginning Look at Canada* (Anne-Marie Kaskens, 1998 Prentice Hall Canada Inc., Don Mills, Ontario) to give to everyone. It was a workbook style chapter covering some basic facts on the four Atlantic provinces and requiring reading and writing. At the same time, we asked the experts, the women who grew up in the east, to create a collage of their knowledge of the area using words and drawings and magazine photos. Participants seemed to enjoy both the workbook style assignment and the more creative work using their local expertise.

## Writing

Finding a reason to write in the WISH Learning Centre is one of our big challenges. On the one hand, women will write freely when they have a purpose or strong reason. Working on your writing as an activity is almost unheard of! So we are always looking for real life reasons to help women with their writing and we continue to create reasons to write.

Starting the WISH Newsletter or putting out books of writing helped a great deal. Women have written articles, interviews, advice columns, safety tips, poetry, stories, book reviews and opinion pieces for the newsletter. Sometimes, women hand in complete submissions and sometimes we work with women to "get down their thoughts" about an important issue.



In the last couple of years, more and more peer support or advisory committee jobs have come up at WISH and in the community. Women usually need to submit a letter outlining why they would be suitable for the position. Women have sought help in the WISH Learning Centre to brainstorm, write or type up these applications. We have also done sessions on putting your resume together.

Creating a writing challenge has also worked. One time, we decided to write a group ghost story on Halloween. Another time, we did Surprise Writing. This involved buying word stickers from a stationary shop. The words are similar to magnetic poetry (another good way to get people started!) and we cut up the sheets of words and put 5 word stickers in each envelope. Each participant received an envelope and then had to write a paragraph using all of her sticker words. This produced some very funny stories! Of course, you could do the same thing by typing the words on a sheet, then cutting them up. But the sticker part is interactive and fun. You can also put a combination of pictures and words in each envelope.

Sometimes women want to tell their stories, but they don't want to write them. So we simply sat with the learner and transcribed the story she was telling. Let the learner just tell the story, don't stop or clarify. Just keep writing. When the story has been told, go over the first draft of the story together, clarifying pieces, changing things around and fixing up grammar and spelling mistakes. After time, we found that women started to take over the writing themselves. In this way, women observed the entire writing process and get involved when they feel ready, but the story is always theirs.

Finding reasons for people on the street to write is important. There are so few places for homeless people to practice and maintain literacy skills. Expressing personal thoughts and receiving feedback also establishes visibility for people who are increasingly less visible to society.

We took several ideas from *Writing Out Loud* by Deborah Morgan (1997). *Writing Out Loud* is an approach to literacy development that uses freewriting as the core to get people back into writing, learning, healing and living fuller lives. The mission statement from their website states that:

*Our goal is to promote the use and value of writing in literacy programming. We believe that writing is a fun and effective way to increase literacy skills, feel part of the community and make healthy changes in our lives.*

Here is one of our favourite, best used writing activities. You can find more at [www.writenet.ca/ideas.htm](http://www.writenet.ca/ideas.htm).

### Alphabet Exercise

This is one of our favourite warm-up exercises and it is a great way to introduce the idea of freewriting to a group, especially a group who are reluctant to write.



#### How to do it:

Ask participants to write the alphabet down the left-hand margin of the paper. Then on the count of three and writing as quickly as they can, they write a word next to the letter. For example, "apple, bear, cucumber, dog..."

Encourage them to do this as quickly as they can and not to think about what they are writing.

After this is complete we talk about the process. What was going on for you? Was that fun? Was it difficult? Do you notice any themes? Like food, names of people, and so forth.

Then ask if anyone wants to read their list, or part of it. Folks are usually shy at the beginning, but once a couple of lists are read, the rest of group follows.

This is good "first" writing activity because it gets word on a page. It gets women thinking that this can be fun and they won't be judged on what they write. It also gets us talking about the issue of how we edit ourselves before we even put words down on the page.

It is important for facilitators to also be writers and to actively participate in the writing activities. When we write along side women, we are sharing ourselves and the process.





# Leading -



## Introduction

### Examples:

1. Newsletter
2. The Women's Advisory Group
3. Women's Memorial Quilt
4. Solidarity Project  
Project Materials
5. Emerging Voices Part II  
Project Materials





---

# Leading -



When we began our literacy work at WISH, we instinctively included the development of leadership as a part of our program. Empowerment is a key principle in community development and community-based literacy work. At the same time, WISH was just completing a five-year strategic plan that envisioned the participation of sex-trade workers in the planning and decision-making roles of the organization.

Although our goals were clear, there was no road map! So we began with what seemed obvious:

- We supported everything that women wanted to organize – parties, picnics, bingos. Our thought was that you use the same set of skills for organizing a karaoke party as you do for coordinating a health fair, so we started with what motivated women to initiate leadership.
- We reinvented our idea of “follow through”. This is a critical concept for working with homeless, addicted or very poor people whose lives are often swamped by larger forces. Instead of waiting and hoping that someone wouldn’t “drop the ball”, we tried to plan for success. We made it a collective responsibility to keep the ball rolling. For example, two women would take on one job knowing that between the two of them it would be completed. We split work up into small segments. We charted the planning progress of an event on flipchart paper so that it was in the collective memory, not just one woman’s. As facilitators, we tried to read the difference between jumping in and helping out when someone had done their absolute best.
- We acknowledged women’s potential. We never discouraged women from their dreams and we looked for steps, however small, that would send them forward.
- We tried to implement women’s suggestions from the WAG (Women’s Advisory Group) as soon as possible or report back the response from the Board or staff.

- 
- We publicly applauded successes – personal and collective achievements, big and small – to reinforce individual and group efficacy. Powerlessness is such a dominant experience felt by women at WISH and other people living on or close to the street. We knew it was important to support all efforts to create positive change if women were to begin to exercise their power.
  - We got out of the way! There are many women at WISH who do not need help with leadership. They are already leaders in other organizations in the community or their skills were developed at other times in their lives. It is important for other women to see and learn from these leaders without interference from staff or instructors.

Over the last five years, the support for women’s leadership at WISH has created an upswell of participation and innovation. Women have taken on leadership roles at the Women’s Advisory Group, facilitating, taking minutes and taking on tasks. For four years now, women have written, published and distributed the WISH Newsletter to all women in the organization. Women have collectively written grant proposals for learner events and have researched information for trips and other projects. In conjunction with a local fabric artist, women designed and sewed quilt panels to illustrate the grief and respect for all the missing and murdered women from the Downtown Eastside. At this time, women from WISH are participating in three programs as honorarium employees giving direction aboriginal health and safety work, HIV/AIDS education and committee work on within the organization.

Instead of designing curriculum for this chapter, we decided to provide some examples of leadership initiatives at WISH. We have included writing by women detailing their experiences as leaders. We have also attached some sample literacy materials that we created to support these activities.

### You are the Leaders

You are the best experts for your group. You will know the best way to proceed. We know that there is great work about to happen in all of your communities. We are sending our best wishes and our full confidence. Good luck!

Adrienne has been the editor of the WISH Newsletter since it started. Under her leadership and commitment, we have published dozens of newsletters for and about WISH participants. Here is her reflection on the process:

## The Newsletter

The WISH Newsletter got started at the Christmas Party in 2001. One of the women there brought up the idea and a lot of people seemed to get excited about the idea. Since I have had experience being a secretary I volunteered to get it going. Since then we have produced a newsletter regularly, usually once every two or three months.

**DREAMWEAVING**

WISH LEARNING CENTRE AND CAPILANO COLLEGE  
ARE PRESENTING A COURSE FOR WOMEN AT WISH  
WHO WANT TO CONSIDER CHANGE IN THEIR LIVES

COME OUT AND ENJOY:  
Reading & Writing together  
Interesting discussions  
Investigating learning and work opportunities  
Creativity, fun and laughter  
A supportive place to explore your dreams!

TIME & PLACE:  
Tuesdays and Thursdays  
1:30 – 3:30  
The WISH Office, Suite 515, 119 Pender Street

For more information talk to Lucy, Catherine or Betsy at WISH  
Phone 604-669-9474

**WORKSHOP SCHEDULE**

<b>APRIL:</b>		<b>MAY:</b>	
5 <sup>TH</sup>	Self esteem	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup>	Photo-stories
7 <sup>th</sup>	Aromatherapy	10 <sup>th</sup>	Learning Styles
12 <sup>th</sup> & 14 <sup>th</sup>	Presentation Skills	12 <sup>th</sup>	Pro Development – no class
19 <sup>th</sup>	Anger Management	17 <sup>th</sup>	Improving your memory
26 <sup>th</sup> and 28 <sup>th</sup>	Break – no classes	24 <sup>th</sup>	Drama queens: role plays, skits and plays
		31 <sup>ST</sup>	Field Trip ?????
<b>JUNE:</b>			
7 <sup>th</sup> & 9 <sup>th</sup>	Make zipper sculptures		
14 <sup>th</sup>	Job search (resumes, cover letters, resumes)		
21 <sup>st</sup>	Word Games and Board Games		
23 <sup>rd</sup>	Graduation celebration		

**WISH NEWSLETTER**

**WISH**

**SPRING 2005**

Our concept of the newsletter from the beginning has been a way to get the women at WISH involved as much as possible. It has been a challenge for me because I don't always get the follow-through from them and have to learn to be patient and basically just accept whatever I can get for submissions. We put original poems, announcements, stories, artwork, an advice column, and a calendar of events into the newsletter. Our newsletter is pretty informal and only gets circulated in our organization so this gives us a lot of freedom in what we can put into it.

The women at WISH appreciate it when the newsletter comes out and we keep trying to build up their involvement in it by encouraging everyone and anyone to submit to it. Doing this has really built up my leadership skills because I have to gently remind people and try to make it fun for them to get involved.

I have found doing this Newsletter to be very rewarding. It gets me out in the community, it gets me interacting with a lot of people and I have really enjoyed the process and producing the final product. The Layout and Design part is actually what I enjoy the most since I am an artist and love creating things.

I think doing the WISH newsletter has been a confidence builder for a lot of the women at WISH but particularly it has been for myself. Not only did I learn how to produce a newsletter through trial and error but I also greatly improved my leadership and management skills and had a lot of fun at the same time.

Adrienne  
May 19, 2004

## Working with the Women's Advisory Group (WAG)

The Women's Advisory Group was started so that women using the services of WISH could have a voice in the organization. WISH was looking for a way to tap in to the thoughts and experience of women who used the Drop In. The WAG was seen as a critical component of the organization's vision for self-governance and a place where women could develop leadership and decision-making skills. The Learning Centre seemed the obvious place to start these meetings.

Over the years, we experimented with different formats and locations for the WAG meetings because we wanted everyone at WISH to feel comfortable participating. Initially, the meetings were held in the WISH Learning Centre and facilitated by literacy staff. But because the WISH Learning Centre room can only hold about 20 women, we also tried holding the WAG meeting in the church gym for several months (The WISH Drop In is held in a section of the First United Church, six nights a week.) On WAG nights, dinner was served in the gym and the meeting started right away. This served to publicize both the existence and purpose of WAG and increased participation. The meetings were chaotic, but fruitful!

Some women complained about this arrangement because it meant that the main Drop-In room (the room with the couches, make-up and television) was not opened until the meeting ended. Some women needed to rest, or use the make-up and shower services in order to get ready for work. After several months of using the gym, the WAG decided to return to the Learning Centre and invited everyone to keep coming.

## Quality of Participation

Including everyone's voices is a challenge at WISH and participation in the WAG continues to be up and down. However, women who do attend have become more skilled at conducting meetings, taking minutes, initiating new ideas and advocating for themselves. We also developed literacy strategies to solve problems that kept recurring in the meetings such as: following an agenda when everyone wants to talk now and making sure that women's voices were being heard in the WISH organization.

Waiting for your turn to speak is difficult for some women and has resulted in women just walking out. We experimented with giving women a chance to talk right away, but this frustrated other women who had been patient already. In the end, we introduced a minutes sheet and encouraged everyone at the table to take minutes, not just the minute taker. On the sheet, there was a place for individuals to write their ideas or concerns down. If

the meeting didn't get to a specific item before a woman had to leave, then someone else would read the item and it would be recorded in the minutes. This process was mainly successful and it also was helpful to the minute taker because several perspectives on the conversation were recorded. We have included the outline we developed for taking minutes at our early WAG meeting. There is also another minutes format included later in this chapter that we began using for another project as people became more advanced at taking minutes. (See Emerging Voices Part II.)

Although the establishment of the WAG was part of the WISH Board's strategic plan, implementing a process to collect, review and respond to women's input had its ups and downs. We found out that each of us had a role to play in improving the flow of information back and forth. At one point, women at the WAG refused to comment on an issue until they had heard back from the Board on their other suggestions. This action resulted in the minutes being emailed by literacy instructors to Board members, the WISH newsletter being handed out at all Board meetings and the Executive Director responding in person with the Board's response to WAG suggestions. Women had found their voice; they wanted to make sure it was being heard.

Women's Advisory Group Meeting Minutes -

Date:

Present: .....

.....

Agenda Items: .....

.....

News and notices: .....

.....

Newsletter: .....

.....

What's coming up in the Learning Centre and/or at WISH? .....

.....

My Issues/Suggestions: .....

.....

Next WAG MEETING: .....

.....

Working with Diane Wood, a local fabric artist and activist, women from WISH participated in creating the 65 panels (more being added) of the Women's Memorial Quilt. This quilt commemorates the sisters, daughters, cousins, girlfriends and friends who have disappeared or been murdered in the community. The quilt looks like a row of giant prayer flags when it is carried in the Missing Women's March on February 14th of each year. Here are some pictures of the quilt and an article written by Diane inviting community members to participate in the project.

## The Women's Memorial Quilt

Do you like to sew? Would you like to learn how? Women are invited to join Diane at the Carnegie on Tuesday evenings from 6-9pm and Thursday mornings from 9-11:30am to sew quilts, banners and fabric art. Some of us are working on a Memorial Quilt in remembrance of all women who have died through violence - physical violence, alcohol and drug addiction, HIV/AIDS, poverty and homelessness. Materials will be supplied, just bring yourself and your ideas. There's also a Monday night session for the street-workers at WISH from 6pm to 8:30pm where I sew alongside some very artistic women, one of who calls herself "Martha Stewart on crack".

The Women's Memorial Quilt Project has evolved into a fabric banner that we plan to carry on the Valentine's Day Memorial March, to display where everyone can read the names, and can be added to over time. It will be a banner like no other in that we all make it, and it represents our community as we see it, in a giant ribbon, something like the dragon in Chinatown parades. More loving than a stone monument that someone is paid to come in and design, in the way that our grandmother made quilts and baskets that we use, passed down from one generation to another, even after the grandmothers are no longer alive.

We know when we make something like this it will outlive us. By creating and teaching quilts, I am challenging the stereotype of "a woman's place", and a woman's silence. My involvement with the issues of addiction, abuse and recovery are the basis of my art. I call on a long herstory of craft and spirituality to challenge the oppression of women. Please remember, it's not me who is making the Banner/Quilt, it's the whole community. I'm not signing my name or making a video. I'm being a gardener or a midwife who facilitates the growth and birth of new life. I don't even mind if people forget my name and just call me the quilt lady, although I prefer the crazy quilt lady.

One of the most powerful, unifying sensations I have of the February 14 Memorial March is when hundreds of us join hands in a circle at Main and Hastings, and again at the end of the March around the totem pole in



---

## Leading - Example 3 - Women's Memorial Quilt -

---

Oppenheimer Park. Holding hands can mean different things, but the underlying theme is always friendship and love. We can't stop the drug-related deaths (only our own) so we join hands to honour the lives of the women who have died. We join to grieve and to organize. We join our voices to sing, to pass on information, and to argue for those so marginalized most people don't believe they have the same rights as everyone else, to justice, police protection, adequate housing and medical attention.



These women were not nameless, they were not faceless, they were not just a number on a list - they were human beings deserving of empathy, love, support, caring and most of all understanding. These women were mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, cousins, grandmothers, girlfriends and friends. It is important that public pressure remain on public officials to find out who was responsible for investigating the disappearances of these women, and why the lack of action so many years prior to Pickton's arrest.

Each panel of the Quilt/Banner is to be 18" x 24". Come out and sew a panel or write the name of a woman you know who we want to remember with this Memorial Quilt.

Diane Wood

In 2004, WISH undertook a project to work with women around issues of violence and safety. They formed the Solidarity Group and defined violence in many ways: street violence, economic violence, discrimination against sex-trade workers and violence between women. Initially, they surveyed women at WISH about balance in their lives. We have included some of the shocking results. Then this group went on to think about responses. One of their creative solutions was to try and create a stronger network amongst women. They wrote a statement of solidarity and started the Petroglyph Project. Charlene, a group member, describes the project.

## Survey Results

The Survey on Violence was conducted by women participating in Emerging Voices: Developing a Collaborative Strategy to Address Violence Against Women in the Downtown Eastside, August- September 2003. They were assisted by researcher, Leslie Robertson. They surveyed 43 women.

### Major Findings

- 51% of women responding at WISH had experienced a violent incident in the last 24 hours
- 63% had witnessed a violent incident in the past 24 hours
- 69% had noticed a change in violence on the street lately
- 20 women wrote that drugs were directly related to levels of street violence; 17 women wrote that poverty and government cuts were directly related to levels of street violence
- 28 women said that fear or fear of reprisal stops women from reporting violence they experience/witness i.e. ratting
- 19 women said they do not report because of the responses of authorities: police stigma/blame, disbelief, or being arrested for their activities or outstanding warrants, also other agencies and services stigmatize women
- 18 women (51%) noted that personal support/solidarity was the most important way for women to help other women on the street. They talked about the need to address the current lack of solidarity amongst women on the street. They suggested talking and listening to each other, working in buddy systems, speaking up about dangerous dates, sharing "on the spot" strategies and safety tips. These findings prompted the group to start the Solidarity Project.

## Statement of Solidarity

We, the Solidarity Group, have been meeting to discuss the unity of people in the Downtown Eastside. We are working on ways to get people together, to look out for each other and bring back the old days when people stood together, worked together and played together for the common good of all.

In the old days you had to work to live and if you ripped someone off, everybody knew about it. Down here it seems nothing's being done about it and we need to restructure this way of thinking and behaving. Getting back to being solid is the first and foremost rule of the street or any community. An unhappy area leads to negative feelings because for every action there is a reaction. We are trying to discourage violence, it doesn't do anything. It just brings bitterness and negativity.

Maybe you received a stone with a message from us. That is our Petroglyph Project (writing/drawing on stone) that we hope will get people thinking about changing towards the life they want to live and the place they want to live in. BE SOLID.

## Solidarity

The Solidarity Group was formed to try and reach the women of the Downtown Eastside (Hastings) in Vancouver. One of our projects was the "petroglyphs". We bought bags of tumbled rocks and then brainstormed about sayings that would get the women to think about solidarity on the street. Sayings like "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." "Don't judge a person unless you've been in their shoes." "Respect yourself...Respect others...Walk the talk – No violence is justified – Be Solid." etc. We typed up the lines then cut and wrapped them around with rocks with stickers.

The reactions varied, at first. It went from "Why are you giving me a stupid rock?" to "When are you passing out the next batch"? I think, although a small project, the petroglyph project helped a little.

Charlene Ottenbros

In 2005/2006, we launched a strategic project through the literacy program to incorporate women's voices into the governance structure of WISH. Funded by Status of Women Canada, *Emerging Voices Part II* was designed to bring the voices of women who use WISH into the organization's decision-making committees. The project has had a profound impact on the organization. Emerging Voices participants have helped re-write the volunteer manual and are now part of orienting new volunteers. They also helped design a new peer volunteer program at WISH and created a successful application to the Vancouver Foundation to support the coordination of this new program. The work of the EV2 participants also inspired WISH to change its by-laws to ensure three Board positions are occupied by women who use WISH.

**Emerging Voices Part II** used a co-operative learning curriculum that supported women in the development of committee skills. We created a chart which showed the progression of four skills: discussion skills, note taking, problem solving and hosting/chairing. We used this rubric as an individual assessment and goal-setting tool and a way to bring awareness to the literacy and thinking skills involved in committee work. Women were able to practice and use these skills within the group, at monthly Women's Advisory Group meetings and at WISH's committee meetings. We have included the committee skills chart and a note taking format that helped to structure the job of taking minutes (everyone's least favourite job!)

As part of the program, Emerging Voices participants were registered in a non-credit course at Capilano College and received Capilano College student cards. Women were also paid a small honorarium for their committee work. This project has been successful in many ways, including graduating 7 out of 8 participants and demonstrating the value of women's voices throughout the organization.

Women's experience and the perspective were highly valued in the project. The participants' compassion, wisdom and take action energy propelled us through difficult issues and challenging projects. Women also initiated and carried out their own projects such as the Mother's Day Care Package Project. The group applied for funds, usually earmarked for field trips, to create 90 care packages for women working the streets the night before Mother's Day. Individually, we all benefited from the weekly support offered by the group. It helped us through many traumatic experiences over the course of the project such as the death of loved ones, homelessness, violence, court appearances and serious health issues.

Women said over and over again how pleased they were to give back to the organization that had given them so much over the years. One participant explained why WISH is so important to her and other women. We used her moving description in the revised volunteer manual to help orient new volunteers to WISH.

*In a situation when I need to make a safety plan, the first thing that comes to my mind – run to WISH. In that moment I relax.*

*In hotel rooms you have no cooking utilities or fridge. I go to WISH to eat. In a small place like mine, I don't want to attract bugs.*

*I come to WISH to socialize when I'm lonely. You can't afford a coffee in the restaurant so I go to WISH.*

*How can I live on \$145 my groceries would never last. I go to WISH.*

*If I flee with the clothes on my back, I need panties, socks, toothbrush and a brush. I need WISH.*

*If I have no place to lie my head down, WISH is there for me.*

*If it wasn't for Emerging Voices I wouldn't have cash in my pocket to buy that ice-cream I wish to have after someone passes me.*

*If I didn't have a TV in my room, thank God I could come to WISH.*

*When I only want to talk to women and have a woman's point of view, we love every one of you ladies at WISH.*

*When I run away and don't have no bra or underwear underneath, thanks WISH.*

a) Job Posting

## WISH Drop In Society Job Opportunity Emerging Voices Part II

Ten Part-time Leadership Positions for Women at WISH

October 1, 2005 - June 30, 2006

\$10 Honorarium for Each 2 Hour Weekly Meeting

### Goal of the Project

Emerging Voices Part II is a project designed to bring the ideas, experience and leadership of women at WISH into the decision-making committees: policy committee, fundraising committee, volunteer committee, membership committee and communication committee.

Ten women will be hired to work for 2 hours per week. They will work closely with Lucy Alderson, Learning Centre Instructor, and the Project Support Coordinator, to:

1. Learn the skills of committee work
2. Act as a bridge between women in the Drop In, the WAG and members of the WISH Committees
3. Bring on the ground experience, advice and leadership to these monthly committee meetings.

### Background

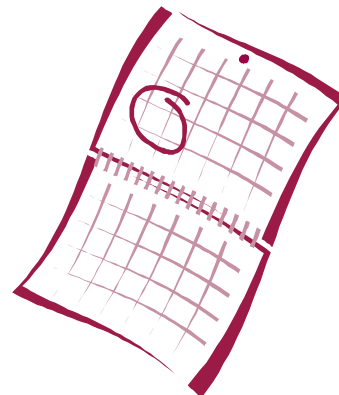
For many years, WISH has wanted the voices of the women who come to the Drop In to be active in the running of the organization. To date, there has not been enough support and attention focused on this issue.

Emerging Voices Part II is a project funded by Status of Women Canada for 10 months. Two part-time staff will work with women to bring important issues to WISH Committees and to provide a learning program for developing committee and consultation skills. The project will also advise the Board and Committees about additional ways that WISH can support women to be involved in the direction of their organization.

### Time Commitment

The project will take place for ten months between October 1, 2005 and June 30, 2006.

The positions will meet for approximately 2 hours per week (some extra sessions may be necessary to meet Committee tasks, but would not exceed 1 extra hour).



### a) Job Posting -

#### Honoraria

A \$10 honorarium is available for each 2 hour meeting for the duration of the 10 months. Refreshments will also be available at meetings.

#### Qualifications

- You have been coming to WISH for at least six months.
  
- You want to help WISH be a stronger organization for women working in the sex-trade.
  
- You are willing to learn about the processes and policies of the WISH Drop In Centre Society.
  
- You are able to talk to other women at WISH and represent their ideas to WISH Committees.
  
- You are willing to hear about the past and current work of the WISH Committees and to discuss these issues in a way that moves the organization forward.
  
- Educational Qualifications  
There is no educational level required for the position. However, the project is *a learning project*. It will be an opportunity for each woman to expand on her strengths and develop new communication skills such as speaking, note-taking, hosting meetings, researching issues and introduction to computer skills.

#### How to Apply

Please write a letter describing your interest in this project and the way you meet the qualifications listed above. Hand-written is fine. If you have a resume, please include it!

If you need help in preparing your letter, see Betsy, Jen or Lucy in the WISH Learning Centre.

Interested in the project? Never written an application letter? Don't worry! It's your voice that is important for this project. Be sure to get help in the WISH Learning Centre and get your application in!

#### Deadline

Friday, October 7, 2005

a) Job Posting

Please submit your letter to the WISH Learning Centre (Lucy, Betsy or Jen) or Deanna Decker and Kate Gibson (WISH Staff).

*Need more information? Have lots of questions?????*

Come to the Learning Centre on Monday, October 3rd between 6:30pm and 7:30pm for an information session about the project.

Thanks for applying!





b) EV2 Committee Skills Chart

## Emerging Voices Part II

### COMMITTEE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

<p><b>Discussion Skills</b> (Listening and Speaking)</p>	Cannot sit through a short discussion without interrupting or getting up to leave	Able to listen to discussions while doing other activity such as colouring or crafts	Listens and occasionally asks questions, can sometimes be defensive if others have a different opinion	Listens to others, takes turn in speaking, offers opinions and suggestions on agenda items	Initiates discussions on important issues, seeks group opinions, summarizes group discussion, looks for possible actions to take
<p><b>Note Taking</b></p>	Anxious or not interested in taking notes for self or group	Willing to try writing notes, unclear about what to write down about the discussion	Makes point form or sentence notes, tries to capture everything that is being said	Makes notes about the main part of the discussion, sometimes unclear about how much detail to include	Summarizes important points under each agenda item, records “actions to be taken” at the end of each agenda item
<p><b>Problem Solving</b></p>	States problem, believes solutions are impossible because “they” are in charge	Relies only on self knowledge about problem and possible solutions	Interested in what peers and others have to say about problem, who else faces problem?	Optimistic about group’s ability to find solutions or partial response to problem	Brings energy to problem solving, participates in group analysis of the problem, willing to seek outside allies when problem is greater than group’s capacity
<p><b>Hosting/ Chairing</b></p>	Resists the role of chair for self, may also resist anyone else taking that role	Supportive of those leading a discussion Open to hearing about the role of chair	Willing to assist with some parts of chair/host role ie. timekeeping, welcoming, writing down agenda items, reading previous minutes, helping group deal with intensity	Willing to try co-chairing with more experienced facilitator, encourages others to participate, shows interest in group	Practices chairing in groups, is aware of balance between group process and group productivity and does best to facilitate both goals

c) EV2 Note-taking format -

## Minutes/Notes

Meeting Title:

.....

Date:

.....

Chair or Co-chairs

.....

Meeting Participants:

.....

.....

Agenda Items:

- |         |          |
|---------|----------|
| 1. .... | 6. ....  |
| 2. .... | 7. ....  |
| 3. .... | 8. ....  |
| 4. .... | 9. ....  |
| 5. .... | 10. .... |

c) EV2 Note-taking format for Emerging Voices Part II - Page 1 -

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action	Who