

Occupational Competencies within Women-Serving Organizations

Specific to *Women's Centres*

Prepared for the Multi-Lateral Task Force on Training, Career Pathing and Labour Mobility Issues in the Community Social Services Sector

**Diana Ellis
Consultant**

February 2002

Introduction

The Multi-Lateral Task Force on Training, Career Pathing and Labour Mobility Issues in the Community Social Services Sector, formed in the early 1990's, grew out of the Korbin Commission. The Task Force has a mandate to identify occupational competencies within the sub-sectors of community social services, with the aim of developing a planning framework to guide development of an approach to training, career pathing and labour mobility within the six participating sub-sectors. From 1995 to 1998, the Multi-Lateral Task Force oversaw an Occupational Competencies Project, involving these social service sub-sectors: Community Justice, Persons with Disabilities, Family and Children's Services, Child Care, Immigrant and Multicultural Services, and Women's Services.

Women's Services sub-sector representatives sitting on the Multi-Lateral Task Force formed a Women's Services Steering Committee to oversee the involvement of the Women's Services sub-sector in the Occupational Competencies Project. The Steering Committee engaged a Consultant, and canvassed all women-serving organizations in the province to seek participants for a series of focus groups and constituent assemblies at which the values, functions, activities, performance indicators and knowledge specifications of women's service work would be clarified. 74 women responded to that call, and 42 women were eventually able to participate. Their experience represented 283 accumulated years of work in this field.

The product of the work from 1995 to 1998 was a generic set of occupational competencies for all parts of women's services, including Women's Centres, Children Who Witness Abuse programs, Stopping The Violence Counsellors, Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs, Sexual Assault Centres, and Transition Houses. This report, dated June 1998, has been available on the web-site of the Centre for Curriculum and Transfer Technology.

In 2001, at the request of the Women's Services sub-sector representatives still sitting on the Multi-Lateral Task Force, the Task Force agreed to fund a project to make the original 1998 generic set of women's services occupational competencies specific to the sub sub-sectors contained within it. (Women's Centres, Stopping The Violence Counsellors, Transition Houses and Children Who Witness Programs. Also in 2001, a similar project operating under other auspices, worked to develop other occupational competencies specific to Specialized Victim Assistance Programs and Sexual Assault/Woman Assault Programs.)

The 2001 project was funded by the (then) Ministry of Women's Equality and the Multi-Lateral Task Force. The funds were administered through the Centre for Curriculum Transfer and Technology. The Consultant who worked on the original project - Diana Ellis - was re-engaged, and the work was overseen by the two Women's Services representatives to the Multi-Lateral Task Force - Tracy Porteous of the BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling programs and Sheryl Jackson of the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.

Making the original generic occupational competency document specific to each women's services sub sub-sector involved the following:

- identifying and separating out the work and competencies that are specific to particular areas of women's service work;
- identifying and re-inserting the work and competencies that overlap with other women's services;
- checking all material against the now-existing program standards as a way to confirm accurate content. The four draft documents were then reviewed by experts in each area. Twelve such people, representative of Women's Centres, Stopping The Violence Counsellors, Children Who Witness Abuse Programs, and Transition Houses, provided valuable input to the four separate draft documents. The end products are four sets of occupational competencies, one each for Transition Houses, Children Who Witness Abuse Programs, Women's Centres and Stopping the Violence counselling. Each of these can now be found on the web-site of the Centre for Curriculum and Transfer Technology.

Preamble

Understanding and developing occupational competencies is complex, requiring care to ensure that the true sense of what people's work entails is not lost in abstract terminology. In the projects mentioned above, a commitment was made to ensure the words chosen to describe women's services work were words actually used in the field. The intent was to ensure that women's services staff could read these documents and see their work reflected there.

It is also important to make the point that although everyone doing this work strives to meet the highest personal level of competency possible, this work requires more support and resourcing than it presently receives. Additional financial resources in the women-serving sector will be required for this model of work to be fully realized.

Educators also need to know that the women's services sub-sector as a whole considers life experience to be a valued credential and that staff of women-serving organizations presently seek education and training opportunities

from a wide range of sources. For example, an informal survey of people involved in this project at one point found that the seven respondents, as well as being self-taught, peer-taught, and finding their work informed by their own life experience, had accessed training, in the form of long and short term courses and workshops, at 31 different venues. Five of the venues were universities or colleges. The Justice Institute of BC (counted as one venue) was mentioned nine times. The majority of training was delivered out of local organizations including Neighbourhood Houses, Sexual Assault Centres, Crisis Centres, Volunteer Centres etc.

This is mentioned because it reflects a concern of many in this field - that accessibility to, and the costs of training, are issues for many workers and their organizations. Those planning training and educational opportunities for the community social service sector need to take these concerns into account.

Workers in women-serving organizations are already extremely competent in their field, and have, over time, carefully developed their own training curriculum and delivery models. Any new or enhanced training must be based on, and include, the service-specific training that now exists for women-serving organizations. To do otherwise would mean losing the vast body of experience, analysis and knowledge this sector has developed to meet its training and service needs. Readers are referred to [A Framework for Understanding the Work of Women's Organizations](#), in the appendix of this document, for a brief review of the context of history and training in the women's sector.

Occupational Competencies for Women's Services - Specific to Women's Centres February 2002

Overall purpose for Women's Services: To address the abusive and unfair power imbalances that exist individually and collectively for women and their children; to advocate with and for women and their children; to

provide services for women and children to maximize the availability and quality of service support for women and their children.

Specific purpose for Women's Centres: To raise awareness of women's issues in the community, to advance the social, legal, economic and political status of women in the community through provision of a centre providing support, advocacy, information, programs, and education from a feminist perspective, and to support women to know themselves within the context of oppression and sexism.

Values: We are accountable to the women and children our organization/service is intended to serve and those with whom we work. In all aspects of our work we strive to:

- *conduct ourselves with integrity, honesty and fairness;
- *work without prejudice
- *maintain confidentiality; and
- *respect individual choices and values.

We also strive to:

- *treat all women and children using our organization/service with unconditional positive regard
- *listen with care, empathy and without judgement, and believe that each woman is the expert on her own life
- *give and receive information and assistance in a manner which is empowering, and
- *work from a feminist perspective

Functions:

1. Provide a safe, welcoming environment for a wide diversity of women and their children.
2. Support women in making choices for their lives.
3. Work for individual and collective social justice for women and their children.
4. Initiate and facilitate public education about women's issues and related children's issues.
5. Liaise and network with others in the community.
6. Strive to ensure and enhance a quality organization and service.
7. Contribute to effective and fair operation of the organization.
8. Engage in ongoing personal and professional development.

Summary of Functions and Activities

Function 1

Provide a safe, welcoming environment for all women who come to the organization.

Activities

- 1 a Create a hospitable environment for all women who come to the organization.
- 1 b Work without prejudice.
- 1 c Contribute to providing a physically and emotionally safe climate for women and children.

Function 2

Support women in making choices for their lives.

Activities

- 2 a Assist women in identifying and assessing their needs.
- 2 b Provide information and referrals to women.

Function 3

Work for individual and collective social justice for women and their children

Activities

3 a Workers continually expand their knowledge and analysis of women's history and experience, current policies, practices and structures relevant to women's social justice issues.

3 b Initiate and participate in advocacy activities.

3 c Encourage and support interested women to become involved in working for social justice.

Function 4

Initiate and facilitate public education about women's issues and related children's issues.

Activities

4 a Pro-actively develop, deliver, promote and evaluate workshop/speaking presentations and resources, specific public education programs and respond to requests for public education.

4 b Prepare and deliver all public education work from a feminist perspective.

Function 5

Liase and network with others in the community.

Activities

5 a Maintain regular working contact with relevant associate systems, service providers and community organizations.

5 b Develop and speak to a feminist analysis/critique of relevant community issues or services for women and their children when necessary and appropriate.

Function 6

Strive to ensure and enhance a quality organization and service.

Activities

6 a Participate in organizational and program planning and evaluation.

6 b Monitor and evaluate the needs of women/children using the organization and the services provided.

6 c Monitor the performance of board, staff and volunteers.

6 d Ensure confidentiality and security of documents and information at all times.

Function 7

Contribute to effective and fair operation of the organization.

Activities

7 a Negotiate for and maintain financial security.

7 b Develop, implement and maintain and follow the agreed upon organizational policies, procedures and protocols.

7 c Maintain and nurture a positive working environment.

Function 8

Engage in ongoing personal and professional development.

Activities

8 a Identify personal and professional development needs and set priorities.

8 b Participate in activities to enhance current skills and knowledge to respond to changes in work circumstances and to expand opportunities.

8 c Support and encourage colleagues/co-workers and volunteers to learn from each other's experience.

8 d Strive for personal balance.

Functions, Activities and Performance Indicators

Function 1. Provide a safe, welcoming environment for a wide diversity of women and their children.

Activity 1 a Create a hospitable environment for all women who come to the organization

Performance Indicators

- 1.a.1 Women are welcomed in a friendly manner and are treated with respect at all times*
- 1.a.2 Physical surroundings are comfortable and reflect a diversity of women's lifestyles, circumstances and needs including age, language, culture, class, race, with or without children, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability.*
- 1.a.3 The facility is accessible (or, works towards being accessible) to women with a wide range of disabilities.*
- 1.a.4 Staff will work to facilitate that the organization reaches out to the diversity of women the organization is intended to serve.*

Activity 1 b Work without prejudice

Performance Indicators

- 1.b.1 Each women's dignity and individuality is acknowledged and respected in the context of her age, class, race, culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, spiritual beliefs and ability through active listening skills and knowledge of these issues.*
- 1.b.2 Women and children using the service are not discriminated against.*
- 1.b.3 Incidents of felt and perceived prejudice and discrimination by women/children using the organization's services are acknowledged and addressed.*

Activity 1 c Contribute to providing a physically and emotionally safe climate for women and children

Performance Indicators

- 1.c.1 Appropriate security and safety policies and procedures are developed and consistently implemented according to organizational guidelines and contractual requirements.*
- 1.c.2 Emergency procedures and protocols for natural disasters and critical incident reports are developed and implemented consistently.*
- 1.c.3 Each women's way of processing her emotions is respected.*
- 1.c.4 Each woman is supported to express her emotions in ways that are safe for herself and others.*
- 1.c.5 Each woman's confidentiality, and that of her child, is strictly respected according to organizational policy and within legal requirements.*
- 1.c.6 The dignity and self esteem of each child using a women's centre is respected*
- 1.c.7 Age-appropriate, non-sexist and non-violent activities and materials are provided for children using a women's centre.*
- 1.c.8 Children's play and activity equipment used in a women's centre meets C.S.A. standards.*
- 1.c.9 Non-violence discipline and coping skills are used and promoted with children using a women's centre.*

Function 2. Support women in making choices for their lives

Activity 2 a Assist women in identifying and assessing their needs

Performance Indicators

- 2.a.1 Each woman is asked about her personal information and experience in a respectful, supportive manner and is supported to recognize she is not alone in her experience.
- 2.a.2 Each woman's experience of her situation as she describes it, is acknowledged as her truth.
- 2.a.3 Each woman is listened to with sensitivity, caring and empathy.
- 2.a.4 Clarification is sought as needed from women and they are encouraged to ask their own questions of staff.
- 2.a.5 Each woman's needs are explored and assessed.
- 2.a.6 A woman's right to make her own choices and decisions is respected consistently, unconditionally, and without prejudice within legal limits.

Activity 2 b Provide information and referrals to women

Performance Indicators

- 2.b.1 Each woman receives accurate information about what the service can offer.
- 2.b.2 Each woman's understanding and expectation of the services offered is clarified by asking questions.
- 2.b.3 Each woman is assured she has a choice to use or not use the service, within its limits.
- 2.b.4 Each woman is assured she can return as often as needed without judgement, within the mandate of the service.
- 2.b.5 Each woman is offered a range of analyses of the issues she is experiencing in a manner that is appropriate and understandable to her.
- 2.b.6 Information about and referrals to other services are accurate, complete, current and appropriate to the woman's needs and circumstances.
- 2.b.7 Information and referrals are presented clearly, through a variety of accessible and appropriate methods, where resources are available.
- 2.b.8 Women are able to access information, resource and referral services, where possible, at times and locations which meet their needs and circumstances.
- 2.b.9 Women are able to access information, resources and referral services in their first language when feasible

3. Work for individual and collective social justice for women and their children.

Activity 3 a Workers continually expand their knowledge and analysis of women's history and experience, current policies, practices and structures relevant to women's social justice issues

Performance Indicators

- 3.a.1 Issues and current information that have an impact on women and their children are identified, discussed and analyzed consistently by workers in terms of advocacy opportunities.
- 3.a.2 Analysis of social justice and women's issues is grounded in the actual experience of women.
- 3.a.3 Time during work hours is set aside by individual staff to get and stay informed on relevant issues related to advocacy for women and children through training, group discussion, conferences and reading.

Activity 3 b Initiate and participate in advocacy activities

Performance Indicators

- 3.b.1 Issues requiring specific advocacy are identified and prioritized according to needs of the women served, and the mandate of the organization.
- 3.b.2 The needs of the women the organization is mandated to serve are given first priority when undertaking advocacy.
- 3.b.3 Other stakeholders involved in issues of common concern are identified and brought together to discuss possible ways of working together in advocacy.
- 3.b.4 Differences between other stakeholders and the worker/organization are acknowledged and respected.
- 3.b.5 Workers are knowledgeable of, and know when to use, a range of advocacy strategies.
- 3.b.6 Communication with and from related provincial and federal associations about social justice issues and coordination of related advocacy needs and activities is initiated and responded to on a regular basis.

Activity 3 c Encourage and support interested women to become involved in working for social justice

Performance Indicators

- 3.c.1 The individual and collective experience of injustice felt by community women is validated by the worker(s).*
- 3.c.2 Women are informed of opportunities to become involved in working for social justice so they can choose to participate if and when they are interested or ready to contribute.*
- 3.c.3 Organizational resources such as reference material, fax machines and copiers, computers, paper, meeting places, etc, are shared with community women, as feasible, to assist them in their work for social justice.*

Function 4. Initiate and facilitate public education about women's issues and related children's issues

Activity 4 a Pro-actively develop, deliver, promote and evaluate workshop/speaking presentations and resources, specific public education programs and respond to requests for public education

Performance Indicators

- 4.a.1 Public education programs are offered as appropriate, needed, as resources permit and as possible in individual communities.*
- 4.a.2 Public education presentations are delivered in a clear, focused and informative manner.*
- 4.a.3 Public education programs, specifically those related to violence and abuse, take into account the potential emotional safety needs of participants by acknowledging verbally the potential impact and providing some on-site materials, support, and referral to those needing it.*
- 4.a.4 The content and presentation of public education activities and materials takes into account inclusivity, literacy, diversity of presenters and participants, and plain language.*
- 4.a.5 All public education presentations and materials are evaluated by participants/readers verbally and/or in writing.*
- 4.a.6 Public education presentations and resources are changed and adapted as directed by evaluation findings and the experience of the presenter.*
- 4.a.7 Public education presentations and resources take into consideration published statistics and research on violence against women.*

Activity 4 b Prepare and deliver all public education work from a feminist perspective

Performance Indicators

- 4.b.1 The experience and expertise of the audience at public education sessions is publicly acknowledged.*
- 4.b.2 Questions, debate and dialogue in public education sessions are encouraged.*
- 4.b.3 The written and spoken material delivered in public education sessions is grounded in women's experience of the issue(s) being presented.*
- 4.b.4 The specific written and spoken material presented in public education sessions is described within the larger context of social justice and women's issues*

Function 5. Liaise and network with others in the community

Activity 5 a Maintain regular working contact with relevant associate systems, service providers and community organizations.

Performance Indicators

- 5.a.1 A current list of relevant appropriate community organizations and service providers is maintained, updated regularly, and is accessible to staff and volunteers.*

5.a.2 A working relationship with other colleagues in related community organizations and service providers is established and maintained through telephone and personal contacts.

5.a.3 Staff work pro-actively with related systems, service providers and organizations in ways that contribute to and maximize the effectiveness of the service.

5.a.4 Liaison with others in the community is undertaken with respect for differences.

5.a.5 Working protocols are established and followed between agencies when required.

5.a.6 Events are co-planned and co-sponsored with relevant community organizations and service providers where and when appropriate.

Activity 5 b Develop and speak to a feminist analysis/critique of relevant community issues or services for women and their children when necessary and appropriate

Performance Indicators

5.b.1 Women's experience within the community and with community services is monitored and analyzed.

5.b.2 Information learned from women about their experiences with other community services and interventions is provided to those other community agencies when appropriate, and within the boundaries of confidentiality.

5.b.3 Knowledge of women's experience within the community and with other community services is used as a base for community liaison and networking.

5.b.4 Local community issues related to women are analyzed and described in a regional, provincial, national or global context as appropriate

Function 6. Strive to ensure and enhance a quality organization and service.

Activity 6 a Participate in organizational and program planning and evaluation

Performance Indicators

6.a.1 Staff, volunteers, board members, and when appropriate, representatives of women using the service, are involved in a regular planning and evaluation process for the organization.

6.a.2 Board, staff and volunteers participate in maintenance of an organizational structure that facilitates working in whatever way the organization has chosen, for example, shared or modified management model, collective, hierarchy, consensus etc., by including, when needed, a structure discussion on the agenda of the annual planning session.

6.a.3 The overall ethical premise of the work done by the organization is discussed by staff, volunteers and board members as part of the annual planning session.

6.a.4 The work experiences and needs of staff, volunteers and board are documented and taken into account when evaluating and planning services.

6.a.5 An achievable and realistic annual organizational plan is developed and ratified by staff, volunteers and board.

6.a.6 Staff, volunteers, board and women using the service are encouraged and supported to suggest ways to make internal and external organizational change to improve and enhance programs and services according to agreed upon evaluation findings.

6.a.7 The development and planning of specific programs for women and children is managed in a timely way, according to organizational procedures.

6.a.8 The method(s) of service delivery within the organization are respectful of women's experiences and reflective of the organization's philosophy and values.

Activity 6 b Monitor and evaluate the needs of women/children using the organization and the services provided

Performance Indicators

6.b.1 The needs of women in the community are assessed and considered first when planning new programs or changing program direction.

6.b.2 Annual program evaluation is done by the staff responsible for specific programs and includes input from participants and other community service providers.

6.b.3 Individual workshops, sessions and events are evaluated by staff and participants after completion of each event and results are fed into the organizational evaluation.

6.b.4 Statistics on service and program use are kept according to organizational policy.

Activity 6 c Monitor the performance of board, staff and volunteers

Performance Indicators

6.c.1 Annual work and goal reviews of each staff member and volunteer are carried out in accordance with organizational policy.

6.c.2 The administration and evaluation of programs and services supports and respects the needs of staff, volunteers and board.

6.c.3 Annual work and goal review of the board as a whole is carried out in accordance with organizational policy.

6.c.4 Staff, volunteers and board are encouraged and supported to change, enhance or adapt their work according to agreed upon performance evaluation findings and agreements.

Activity 6 d Ensure confidentiality and security of documents and information at all times

Performance Indicators

6.d.1 Records are kept according to agreed upon organizational procedure.

6.d.2 File cabinets are kept locked.

6.d.3 The files of staff are not permitted out of the office.

6.d.4 Computer discs and files containing personnel material are only accessible according to agreed upon policies and procedures concerning confidentiality.

6.d.5 Information is not discussed or released without the specific written consent of the woman involved except in circumstances described in the Agency's policies on records management.

6.d.6 Staff and volunteers in the organization keep up to date with their legal responsibility in relation to files of women and children.

6.d.7 If a file is ordered for release by the court, the worker will follow organizational policy and procedure to protect the privacy interests of the women and children.

Function 7. Contribute to effective and fair operation of the organization

Activity 7 a Negotiate for and maintain financial security

Performance Indicators

7.a.1 The annual budget is developed to meet needs of clients and support all aspects of the work done by staff and volunteers to meet organizational goals and objectives.

7.a.2 Funding proposals are developed to meet deadlines, and in accordance with organizational procedures.

7.a.3 The budget is reviewed and revised as necessary after actual funding is received.

7.a.4 Fundraising activities are planned and undertaken according to need.

7.a.5 Financial records are kept according to standard accounting procedures and, when required, funder specifications.

7.a.6 Actual and potential funders are met with and lobbied as required and needed.

7.a.7 A year-end financial report is prepared for the agency, funder(s) and the Registrar of Societies.

Activity 7 b Develop, implement, maintain and follow the agreed upon organizational policies, procedures and protocols

Performance Indicators

7.b.1 Policies, procedures and protocols are developed in accordance with labour and employment standards and organizational needs.

7.b.2 The recruitment, hiring, support and maintenance of appropriately qualified staff, volunteers, and when applicable, board members, is undertaken according to specifications of the organization and contractual requirements.

7.b.3 Incoming staff, volunteers and board are oriented promptly to roles and responsibilities, organizational structure, philosophy, decision-making and dispute resolution processes, and accountability guidelines of the organization.

7.b.4 Orientation, training and ongoing professional development of staff, volunteers and board is undertaken according to given specifications of the organization.

7.b.5 The work experience and needs of staff and volunteers are documented and taken into account in developing and maintaining the organization structure, policies and procedures, collective and work agreements, working environment and safety.

7.b.6 Staff/management and, when unionized, union/management protocols regarding negotiation of the working or collective agreement are followed.

7.b.7 Staff, volunteers and board members are dismissed in an empathetic, clear and timely manner in accordance with collective agreement/working agreements, employment standards, Societies Act and organizational policies.

7.b.8 The methods of operation used within the organization are congruent with its service philosophy and values.

Activity 7 c Maintain and nurture a positive working environment

Performance Indicators

7.c.1 Staff, volunteers and board are encouraged and supported to attend their respective meetings regularly.

7.c.2 An agreed method of decision-making is developed and followed by staff, volunteers and board.

7.c.3 An agreed upon conflict resolution method is developed and followed by staff, volunteers and board.

7.c.4 Volunteers, staff, management and board are encouraged and supported to recognize the contribution they each make.

7.c.5 Staff, volunteers and board are encouraged and supported to question, analyze and discuss a range of traditional, non-traditional and innovative service policies, procedures for potential use to ensure organization is current, effective and fair.

Function 8. Engage in ongoing personal and professional development

Activity 8 a Identify personal and professional development needs and set priorities

Performance Indicators

8.a.1 Personal and professional needs are assessed by each staff person and used in discussion at their annual work review.

8.a.2 Priorities for overall staff personal and professional development are set according to discussed needs of all staff, program availability and budget.

Activity 8 b Participate in activities to enhance current skills and knowledge, to respond to changes in work circumstances and to expand opportunities

Performance Indicators

8.b.1 Staff, volunteers and board are encouraged and supported to engage in a range of relevant developmental activities such as reading, discussion, attending workshops, seminars and courses.

8.b.2 Staff are encouraged and supported to attend personal or professional development sessions annually.

8.b.3 Staff, volunteers and board are encouraged and supported to evaluate, individually and collective on an annual basis, their own oppressions and place of privilege and the impact of those on their work.

8.b.4 Staff, volunteers and board are encouraged and supported to expand their own personal feminist analysis of working with women and children.

Activity 8 c Support and encourage colleagues/co-workers and volunteers to learn from each other's experience

Performance Indicators

8.c.1 Professional development learnings and materials are shared with colleagues, as appropriate.

8.c.2 The giving and receiving of feedback by and from co-workers about work is encouraged and supported formally (i.e. staff meeting) and informally (i.e. as needed during the work day).

8.c.3 The sharing of relevant work experiences is encouraged as a way to learn from others and offer peer support.

8.c.4 The questioning and exploration of a range of work processes is encouraged within the organization through staff and peer support meetings.

Activity 8 d Strive for personal balance

Performance Indicators

8.d.1 Staff, board and volunteers are encouraged and supported to set and act within personal boundaries regarding their work and personal life, within stipulated agency standards.

8.d.2 Staff, board and volunteers are encouraged and supported to take personal responsibility to seek balance between their work and personal life, within stipulated agency standards.

8.d.3 Staff, board and volunteers are encouraged and supported to involve themselves in pro-active self care.

Knowledge Specifications

In order to perform all the functions and activities reflected in the occupational competencies, Women's Centre Workers need to have a strong foundation in a wide range of knowledge and skills. What follows are the knowledge and skill expectations associated with the work of Women's Centre Workers. These are divided into three categories:

- * Theories, Concepts, Principles that the worker needs to understand
- * Skills and Attitudes that the worker needs to have ability in
- * Facts, Data and Information the worker needs to know or be able to find out

The knowledge specifications begin here with a listing of Theories (etc), Skills (etc) and Facts (etc) that fit across all functions.

Across all functions, Women's Centre practitioners need to understand *theories, concepts and principles* about:

The Historic and Systemic Oppression of Women

Understanding women's rights and issues within a historical and systemic framework is at the heart of work within women's services and is critical to the ability to work effectively with and for all women, and for social change. Particularly key issues for women's services are:

- *economic oppression
- *sexism in all its forms
- *violence against women and children
- *the use, abuse and imbalance of power and inequities within our social structures including families, organizations, governments, legal and service systems.

Feminist Practice and Analysis

Understanding feminist analysis and practice is an essential part of being able to plan, carry out, and evaluate work with women, work in women's organizations and in the community. Critical concepts to apply in all aspects of working within women's organizations are:

- *put women first
- *start from and believe in women's experience as it is described

- *go beyond what has been defined by society at large by asking questions and looking at issues with a critical mind
- *actively work to overcome oppression in all its forms
- *honour diversity through promoting inclusion in all levels of work
- *recognize and address internalized oppression

Woman-Centred Service

Providing a woman-centred service is, along with feminist practice and knowledge of the historic and systemic oppressing of women, a foundation for women's empowerment. Core concepts are:

- *safety for women includes emotional and physical security
- *that women know what information about them is being gathered and maintained, and know that information about her will not be shared with others without her written consent, unless legally required
- *respect for women's right to make their own choices and decisions consistently, unconditionally, and without prejudice within legal limits
- *inclusive work and administrative methods such as: shared decision-making, mutual respect, responsive leadership, empowerment through knowledge and information sharing
- *the right of women to be given all of the available information to her situation as well as information about the potential consequences arising from choices she may make

Accountability and Ethics

Practitioners need to understand the high level of accountability and ethical behaviour that is required in the sector. The critical concepts are:

- *relevant legal and/or contractual obligations must be met
- *appropriate personal and professional boundaries
- *personal values congruent with philosophy of practice and work
- *codes of ethics of work-related associations one is affiliated with
- *accountability to women and the community

Across all functions, Women's Centres practitioners need to have the *skills and abilities* to enable them to:

Communicate Effectively

Effective communication is an essential part of good practice. It is critical that practitioners are able to:

- *use verbal, non-verbal and written communication methods appropriately and effectively
- *recognize and respond to a wide range of individual communication styles
- *appropriately and non-judgementally attend, engage, listen actively, reflect back, challenge, validate and self-disclose
- *give and receive constructive criticism
- *participate collaboratively in groups to make decisions, solve problems and resolve conflicts

Honour Diversity

The ability to honour and affirm diversity is an essential part of good work. It is critical that practitioners are able to:

- *recognize, clarify and challenge personal and organizational power and privilege biases
- *recognize and address internalized oppression
- *implement personal and organizational anti-bias strategies
- *promote inclusion at all levels of work
- *demonstrate awareness, understanding and respect for the diverse communities of women
- *treat every woman with unconditional positive regard

Assess, Plan, Implement and Evaluate

The ability to consistently engage in the process of assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation is an essential part of being able to work well. It is critical that practitioners are able to:

- *assess needs and situations in clear, unbiased and non-judgmental ways
- *set goals and objectives for appropriate responses and strategies
- *organize and facilitate implementation of plans
- *evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of the work and make necessary adaptations

Reflect on Personal Work and Practice

The ability to reflect on one's self and work is an essential part of best practice. Practitioners need to understand the impact of their values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviour and skills on women, children, colleagues, communities and themselves. It is critical that practitioners are able to:

- *clarify and articulate their personal values and philosophy of work
- *assess their own strengths and weaknesses
- *recognize and accept their personal limits
- *care for themselves
- *be open to feedback, growth and change

Across all functions, Women's Centre practitioners need to know, or be able to find out about these *facts, data, information*:

The Community They Work In

It is critical that practitioners have current information about the community they work in. They need to know:

- *the sociol-economic and cultural characteristics of the community
- *the other community services, resources and supports available in the community, their power dynamics and values, and key resource people in them
- *the needs of women in the community
- *significant changes and plans for the community

The Organization Within Which They Work:

It is critical that practitioners know the following information about the organization and/or service where they are employed:

- *the women and children served by the organization
- *the organizational history and structure
- *the mandate, vision, philosophy and goals
- *the decision-making protocols and procedures
- *standards of work (contractual and otherwise) within the organization
- *their job descriptions and responsibilities
- *roles and responsibilities of board, management, staff, volunteers, collective

Knowledge Specifications related to specific Functions

(Note: Cross-function knowledge specifications related to Theories (etc), Skills (etc) and Facts (etc) appear in bold face type)

Function and related Activities	Theories, Concepts, Principles Practitioner needs to understand:	Skills and Attitudes Practitioner needs to have the ability to:	Facts, Data, Information Practitioner needs to know, or be able to find out:
<p>Function One: Provide a safe welcoming environment for a wide diversity of women and their children</p> <p>Activities:</p> <p>1 a Create a hospitable environment for all women who come to the organization</p> <p>1 b Work without prejudice</p> <p>1 c Contribute to providing a physically and emotionally safe climate for women and children</p>	<p>- the historic and systemic oppression of women</p> <p>- feminist practice and analysis</p> <p>-principles of woman centred service</p> <p>-the dynamics of crisis</p>	<p>- communicate effectively</p> <p>- assess, plan, implement, evaluate</p> <p>- honour diversity</p> <p>- manage records</p> <p>- assess the safety of the environment</p>	<p>- the community they work in</p> <p>- the organization they work in</p> <p>- applicable laws and legislation</p> <p>- child development stages and parenting issues</p> <p>- what the barriers are to women accessing the facility</p> <p>- appropriate resource and handout material (cultural, literacy etc)</p>

Function and related Activities	Theories, Concepts, Principles Practitioner needs to understand:	Skills and Attitudes Practitioner needs to have the ability to:	Facts, Data, Information Practitioner needs to know or be able to find out:

<p>Function Two: Support women in making choices for their lives</p> <p>Activities:</p> <p>2 a Assist women in identifying and assessing needs</p> <p>2 b Provide information and referrals to women</p>	<p>- the historic and systemic oppression of women</p> <p>- feminist practice and analysis</p> <p>-principles of woman centred service</p> <p>-women's decision-making processes</p> <p>-the process of empowerment</p>	<p>- communicate effectively</p> <p>- assess, plan, implement, evaluate</p> <p>- honour diversity</p> <p>-provide support to women in crisis</p> <p>-use appropriate peer and lay counselling skills and methods</p> <p>-gather and share useful information</p> <p>-interview effectively</p> <p>-make appropriate referrals</p> <p>-facilitate women's process of decision making</p> <p>-provide support and options</p>	<p>- the community they work in</p> <p>-updated pertinent resource and referral information</p> <p>-decision-making tools to use and share</p>
--	--	--	---

<p>Function and related Activities</p>	<p>Theories, Concepts, Principles Practitioner needs to understand:</p>	<p>Skills and Attitudes Practitioner needs to have the ability to:</p>	<p>Facts, Data, Information Practitioner needs to know or be able to find out:</p>
--	---	--	--

<p>Function Three: Work for individual and collective social justice for women and their children</p> <p>Activities</p> <p>3 a Continuously expand one's knowledge of women's history and experience, current policies, practices and structures relevant to women's social justice issues</p> <p>3 b Initiate and participate in advocacy activities</p> <p>3 c Encourage and support interested women to become involved in working for social justice</p>	<p>- the historic and systemic oppression of women</p> <p>- feminist practice and analysis</p> <p>- accountability and ethics</p> <p>- principles of advocacy</p> <p>- the purpose and value of the work of women-serving organizations</p> <p>- process of social policy development and decision-making</p> <p>- theories of social change</p> <p>- the impact of legislation and changing social policy on women and children</p> <p>- community organizing</p> <p>- ways that women and children can best be heard</p>	<p>- assess, plan, implement, evaluate</p> <p>- honour diversity</p> <p>- communicate effectively</p> <p>- use a range of advocacy skills including public speaking, networking, lobbying, letter/brief writing, direct action, public forums</p> <p>- use the Internet and other technologies</p> <p>- be assertive and persistent</p> <p>- teach and mentor</p> <p>- research, synthesize and analyze</p>	<p>- the community they work in</p> <p>- other advocacy organizations</p> <p>- the "who, what, when, here, why" of allies and opposition</p> <p>- all necessary data on the issues</p> <p>- law as it relates to women and children: GAIN, BC Benefits, Criminal Injuries Compensation Act, Victims of Crime Act, Family, Civil and Criminal law, Legal Aid, and other relevant legislation</p> <p>- relevant local, regional, provincial, federal and international resources related to the advocacy issues</p> <p>- freedom of information and privacy regulations</p> <p>- key present and proposed social policy changes, initiatives and legislation affecting women and children</p> <p>- local, provincial and federal decision-making processes and structures</p>
--	---	--	--

<p>Function and related Activity</p>	<p>Theories, Concepts, Principles Practitioner needs to understand:</p>	<p>Skills and Attitudes Practitioner needs to have the ability to:</p>	<p>Facts, Data, Information Practitioner needs to know or be able to find out:</p>
--------------------------------------	---	--	--

<p>Function Four: Initiate and facilitate public education about issues affecting women and their children.</p> <p>Activities</p> <p>4 a Pro-actively develop, deliver, promote and evaluate workshop/speaking presentations and resources, specific public education programs and respond to requests for public education.</p> <p>4 b Prepare and deliver all public education work from a feminist perspective</p>	<p>- the historic and systemic oppression of women</p> <p>- feminist practice and analysis</p> <p>- principles of woman-centred service</p> <p>-concepts of effective adult education and popular education</p> <p>- principle that the personal is political</p> <p>- the use of public education to effect social change</p>	<p>- assess, plan, implement, evaluate</p> <p>- honour diversity</p> <p>- communicate effectively</p> <p>- speak from and normalize women's experience</p> <p>- do promotion and public relations</p> <p>- develop accessible, inclusive and culturally appropriate learning experiences and materials</p> <p>- be assertive</p> <p>- find commonality between different points of view</p> <p>- support and refer participants at public education events (e.g. those who disclose after a presentation on sexual abuse)</p> <p>- facilitate learning</p> <p>- do public speaking</p>	<p>- the community they work in</p> <p>- information about women's experience</p> <p>- appropriate learning aids (films videos, written resources etc) and where to find them</p> <p>- current and necessary information about the issue(s), that the public education is about</p> <p>- other public education offered in the community</p>
---	---	---	---

<p>Function and related Activities</p>	<p>Theories, Concepts, Principles Practitioner needs to understand:</p>	<p>Skills and Abilities Practitioner needs to have the ability to:</p>	<p>Facts, Data, Information Practitioner needs to know or be able to find out:</p>
--	---	--	--

<p>Function Five: Liaise and network with others in the community</p> <p>Activities</p> <p>5 a Maintain regular working contact with relevant associated systems, service providers and community organizations</p> <p>5 b Develop and speak to a feminist analysis/critique of relevant community issues or services for women and their children when necessary and appropriate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the historic and systemic oppression of women - feminist practice and analysis - principles of woman-centred service - accountability and ethics <p>-social change theory</p> <p>- principles of advocacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assess, plan, implement, evaluate - honour diversity - communicate effectively <p>-be assertive</p> <p>- research, analyze, synthesize</p> <p>- represent the organization in the community</p> <p>- articulate and maintain values</p> <p>- work collaboratively with others (network, case conference, service co-ordination, resource-sharing, awareness-raising, committee participation)</p> <p>- teach and mentor</p> <p>- establish and maintain professional networks</p> <p>- resolve conflicts between diverse organizations and perspectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the community they work in - the organization they work in <p>-distribution of power in the community</p> <p>- language/terms of other systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - information about funders - current local issues for women and children <p>- where and how to access resources for women across the province</p> <p>- freedom of information and privacy regulations</p> <p>- confidentiality policies</p>
---	--	--	---

Function and related Activities	Theories, Concepts, Principles Practitioner needs to understand:	Skills and Attitudes Practitioner needs to have the ability to:	Facts, Data, Information Practitioner needs to know or be able to find out:
---------------------------------	--	---	---

<p>Function Six: Strive to ensure a quality organization and service</p> <p>Activities</p> <p>6 a Participate in organizational and program planning and evaluation</p> <p>6 b Monitor and evaluate the needs of women and children using the organization and services provided</p> <p>6 c Monitor the performance of board, staff and volunteers</p> <p>6 d Ensure confidentiality and security of documents and information at all times</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feminist practice and analysis - principles of woman-centred service - accountability and ethics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - theories of organizational behaviour - key characteristics of a range of organizational structures - principles of responsive leadership - role and function of organizational strategic planning and goal setting - role and function of evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assess, plan, implement, evaluate - honour diversity - communicate effectively - reflect on work and self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - manage a non-profit organization - coordinate volunteers - provide empowering, interactive support to co-workers, volunteers and board - maintain accurate records - prepare and deliver accurate reports - develop and implement performance appraisals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the organization they work in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - labour code, employment standards - working and/or collective agreements - Societies Act - signs and prevention of the negative impact of work-related stress - who owns the organization's records - freedom of information and privacy information - organizational liability - annual financial statements of the organization - requirements arising from contractual agreements and/or obligations
---	--	--	--

Function and related Activity	Theories, Concepts, Principles Practitioner needs to understand:	Skills and Attitudes Practitioner needs to have the ability to:	Facts, Data, Information Practitioner needs to know or be able to find out:
-------------------------------	--	---	---

<p>Function Seven : Contribute to effective and fair operation of the organization</p> <p>Activities</p> <p>7 a Negotiate for and maintain financial security</p> <p>7 b Develop, implement, maintain and follow agreed upon organizational policies, procedures and protocols</p> <p>7 c Maintain and nurture a positive working environment</p>	<p>- feminist practice and analysis - principles of woman-centred service - accountability and ethics</p> <p>- theories of organizational change - concept that prior leaning and life experience are valuable job qualifications - principles of fiscal accountability and financial management</p>	<p>- assess, plan, implement, evaluate - honour diversity - communicate effectively - reflect on work and self</p> <p>- fundraise - develop and monitor budgets - hire and let go of staff effectively - manage change - develop board and volunteer development and training - use resources effectively and efficiently - apply effective conflict resolution techniques</p>	<p>- the community they work in - the organization they work in</p> <p>- terms of employment, wages and benefits, health and safety policies, job descriptions, stress, sick and maternity leave, training and professional development policies, job assessment procedures, protocols for working with other agencies, client and staff safety and security - policies on harassment and discrimination - information about actual and potential funders - organization's financial plan - organizational constitution and by-laws - signs and prevention of the negative impact of work-related stress - policies and protocols of similar organizations in the field</p>
<p>Function and related Activities</p>	<p>Theories, Concepts, Principles Practitioner needs to understand:</p>	<p>Skills and Attitudes Practitioner needs to have the ability to:</p>	<p>Facts, Data, Information Practitioner needs to know or be able to find out:</p>

<p>Function Eight: Engage in ongoing personal and professional development</p> <p>Activities</p> <p>8 a Identify personal and professional development needs and set priorities</p> <p>8 b Participate in activities to enhance current skills and knowledge, to respond to changes in work circumstances and to expand opportunities</p> <p>8 c Support and encourage colleagues, co-workers and volunteers to learn from each other's experiences</p> <p>8 d Strive for personal balance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - feminist practice and analysis - principles of woman-centred service - accountability and ethics - the historic and systemic oppression of women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concepts of self care - principles of adult education and lifelong learning - concepts of vicarious traumatization and critical incident stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assess, plan, implement, evaluate - honour diversity - communicate effectively - reflect on work and self <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintain personal wellness and balance - manage time and stress - share expertise with others - set priorities - self-advocate - give and receive feedback - de-brief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the organization they work in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - relevant professional and provincial associations and community organizations - self care resources - information about work-related stress - current laws, cases, policies, regulations and acts - professional development and training opportunities in the community and region - current research, newsletters, resources etc
--	---	--	--

Appendix

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING THE WORK OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Women's organizations, individually, or as a group of organizations delivering a similar service, such as Transition Houses, have incorporated their history and practice of organizing work when developing training and professional development opportunities. This background should also inform any development of a provincial framework for training within community social service organizations.

The examples described below reflect the 30 year struggle of a diverse women's movement to develop actions and services defined by community women, for women, in the context of governmental policy and funding responses that have ranged, over the same time period, from nil to barely adequate.

History

In B.C., community women's organizations and issue areas (such as violence against women) have, over time, developed parallel to but often differently from one another. The pattern, however, has tended to be the same. Women began by talking to one another about what was happening to themselves and others they knew, and from there they started to organize - perhaps a status of women action group, or maybe a community needs assessment on violence against women. From this grassroots base has grown nearly all of the "women-serving" organizations that exist in British Columbia today.

Over time, as women's organizations identified service needs, (often becoming directly involved in service delivery themselves), or as specific issues such as battering or sexual assault emerged, they lobbied all levels of government for funding to deliver these services. Slowly, through project funding and more recently through contracts, dollars for service delivery were made available by government.

In the last decades, issue-based province-wide organizations such as the BC and Yukon Society of Transition Houses, and the BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs, formed to connect members, impact policy makers, and begin discussion of ethics, best practices, records management, standards and training. They have done this, and continue to do so (sometimes with the resources and support of, for example, the Ministry of Women's Equality and the Justice Institute of BC) because their needs were not being met through other mainstream educational institutions or professional associations.

Organization of Work

Women's organizations are involved in functions and activities that are both specific and overlapping. For example:

- Women's Centres have historically worked as community change agents and advocates. They do not provide shelter for abused women, although they may contract to provide a "Stopping the Violence" counsellor, or a Specialized Victim Assistance program. All women's centres help women in crisis to assess their needs, and all provide them with referrals. Many women's centres apply for and receive project funds from a range of sources to do work relevant to women in the community, including employment training, health research, child care referral etc.
- Some transition houses have traditionally considered their work of supporting and encouraging women to be counselling per se, other transition houses emphatically state that they do not consider this work to be counselling.
- In recent years, the provincial government's Stopping The Violence Initiative has funded "mid-range counselling" for abused women - those workers do call themselves counsellors. Some STV counsellors are now located in transition houses, sexual assault centres, or related off-site offices; others are based in completely separate organizations such as umbrella community service societies or mental health offices.
- Specialized victim assistance workers have a mandate to help women wishing to pursue legal remedies after an assault to do so. Their contract states they are to provide emotional support and assistance - not counselling in a formal sense.
- Children's support workers in transition houses work with children and their mothers on a day to day activity level. However, staff of the separately funded Children Who Witness Abuse Programs develop and run specific support/counselling groups. Children in the CWWA groups may be referred through a transition house, or directly from the community. Some children's counsellors working in organizations dealing with child sexual abuse are funded through the specialized victim assistance program dollars.
- Most sexual assault/woman assault centres are stand-alone operations, but some are part of umbrella women's organizations which can include a women's centre, or transition house or a specialized victim assistance program.

Although there are differences in the way women's groups choose to organize their work and services (or must, because of contract stipulations) they all do so cognizant that to get at the root of women's inequality and oppression, they must also advocate, lobby, support, change policy and challenge mainstream thinking about women's roles.

Historically, women's groups have also structured their work to address concerns about how women's needs are handled in mainstream service delivery organizations. For example, in many women-serving organizations,

administration and co-ordination is often shared, structures range from collective to modified consensus to hierarchical, jobs are often rotated or shared, and decision-making is usually consensual.

Additionally, women's organizations consistently seek out and value women's life experience as a key credential - for paid staff, volunteers and board members. They do this because of their strong belief that women with a wide range of credentials can and should do this work.

Summary

- Women's organizations developed services because women were not, and are not, being effectively protected, supported, advocated for and helped elsewhere.
- Women's organizations see their work as serving individual women as well as addressing larger societal change. The work includes advocacy, counselling, court preparation, crisis intervention, consciousness-raising, organizing, lobbying supporting, etc. They do not see themselves only as service providers, nor do they see their services solely as "helping" ones. Service is one of the many things women's organizations do to respond to issues affecting women in their communities.
- To date, most in-house training developed by and for women's service work includes issue analysis and community development skills as well as service delivery skills. The same can be said for existing training curriculum for Transition House, STV, CWWA and Sexual Assault Centre staff. It is not just **what** is done within women's services that determines the kind of training developed; it is critical to understand **how** it is done.
- Any ongoing work on occupational competencies, training and standards must be informed by this analysis as a start, and further input should be sought from the field if and when this process continues.

Definition of terms used to describe the women's services work

Feminism, and working from a feminist perspective

Women's service workers consistently use the term "feminism", or "working from a feminist perspective", or "applying a feminist analysis." Because the meaning of feminism is so often misunderstood, because participants in the occupational competency project stated that feminism was a key value, and because they were emphatic about how working from a feminist perspective grounds their work, this clarification is offered as a guide to readers.

Feminism, in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, is defined as the "advocacy of women's rights on the ground of equality of the sexes." However, most feminists working in BC women's organizations look at feminist analysis from a more specific focus. The following definition, taken from a widely distributed paper written in 1986 by the Vancouver-based Working Group on Sexual Violence, provides a useful example:

"Feminism (being a feminist) means putting women first. It requires starting with women's experience - our own and other women's - as the basis for developing analysis and strategy to guide our work.

To be a feminist is to be critical, to ask questions about how society functions, about how women live in society. Feminism is a process of questioning rather than a dogma or a set of prescribed positions or answers.

By starting with women's experience, and analysing how women live in society, it is clear that women are oppressed socially and economically and that women's subordination is institutionalized in our society, whether the institution is small (the family), or large (the government, the economy). Feminism enables women to see how and why our everyday lives are affected and shaped by society's ideologies and institutions.

To be a feminist requires identification with other women and acknowledgement that all of us, as women, are affected by women's oppression. To work as feminists, therefore, is not to work for the benefit of some "poor downtrodden women" over there, but for ourselves. This does not mean we are all affected in the same way - or that all women are the same and have the same problems. In fact, it is essential to be clear about the differences. It does

mean suspending the distance between ourselves and other women and recognizing that our lives are on a continuum based in women's oppression; some are in a better, more privileged place than others, but we are all on the continuum.

Feminism, being a feminist, pre-supposes that women's oppression must end. It means a commitment to working in whatever ways we can for change."

For the purposes of this document, references to "feminist perspective" mean, in short:

- putting women first
- starting with women's experience, identifying with other women
- going beyond what has been defined by society at large, asking questions, being critical
- actively working to overcome women's oppression
- recognizing and addressing internalized oppression.

Other Terms

The following terms were often used by participants throughout the development of these occupational competencies. All definitions are from the Concise Oxford Dictionary, except for "counselling", which is adapted from "Counselling Skills for Social Service Workers", Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour, R. Shebib, 1995.

ADVISE: recommend, inform, notify, consult with, give advice to

ADVOCATE: one who pleads for another, speaks in favour of, defend, recommend, support policy

ASSIST: help person in doing this, take part in, be present at

COUNSEL: to offer support, challenge and understanding to help people identify and deal with problems, opportunities, their own values and new skills

ENCOURAGE: give courage to, urge, advise, help

LIAISE: connect and co-operate with and between

SUPPORT: give strength to, encourage, keep from failing, enable to last out.