



♀ ST. JOHN'S WOMEN'S CENTRE
♀ MARGUERITE'S PLACE
♀ SAFE HARBOUR OUTREACH PROJECT

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Violence Prevention Proclamation
Office of Women and Gender Equality
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

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Thank you to the Office of Women and Gender Equality for having us. I acknowledge with respect for the diverse Indigenous groups and people of this province that the spaces we live, work and organize on exist on the traditional territories of the Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Innu and Inuit. It's vital to acknowledge this in the context of what we're talking about: government relations, feminist organizing, and gender-based violence. We know that Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people live with heightened risks of experiencing violence, as they are most neglected and harmed by our social systems and institutions.

So much of our work at the St. John's Status of Women Council is in response to gender-based violence, because that is by far the most prevalent experience women and non-binary people in our community share with us. We are celebrating our 50th anniversary this year, with the St. John's Women's Centre being the first Women's Centre to open in Canada on Military Road. Our organization has seen and done a lot since 1972. In recent years we've directed our focus to imagine what coordinated, community-based, province-wide preventative work could look like. In doing so, our team has produced the first of its kind online educational tool responding to gender-based violence in Newfoundland and Labrador.

[Empowering Them](#) is our free, publicly accessible e-course on gender-based violence (GBV). This e-course was designed for everyone 14+ to learn about signs to recognize violence, and how to enact tangible tools to respond to real-life situations. The course leads users through scenarios and events that we might have experienced ourselves, or seen among friends or loved ones. The course uses facts and expertise from survivors to debunk myths and engage in skill-building to increase community capacity to respond to gender-based violence. Empowering Them is about shifting the responsibility, and the weight of GBV, from the people experiencing it to a collective, community responsibility. It is all of our weight to bear. We all have the capacity, and now the skills, to shoulder this crisis and engage in prevention. This e-course was not created to ostracize, or to point fingers, but rather to shore up what we already know we can do; to create an understanding that community care and healing is not only possible but powerful, and well within our reach. Since its launch in November of last year, nearly 400 people have completed

Empowering Them. This is significant - but there is plenty of work yet to be done. We cannot in good faith talk about the change-making work happening in this province around violence-prevention without talking about the critical state of the organizations and programs who, for so long, have been taking on the bulk of this work alone.

Status of Women Councils across the province operate on stagnant, annual funding agreements which directly hinder our ability to respond to the growing needs of our communities. This is work that we are well-positioned to do. Particularly in rural areas and in Labrador, where Status of Women Councils are often the primary resource in their community, and who are incredibly capable of providing services that are culturally relevant and responsive to their local and unique experiences. Operating on year-to-year budgets precludes our capacity to do dynamic, wide-reaching work. This funding model is precarious, insufficient and is a disservice to all women and survivors in this province. National experts deem multi-year, sustainable funding for women-serving organizations a vital part of reaching gender-equitable outcomes. We have and will continue to make requests for increased and multi-year funding agreements because we know that gender-based violence is preventable, and because services for survivors must be prioritized in our province. Violence is a matter of life and death for too many women and people of marginalized genders in Newfoundland and Labrador. Precarity is not an acceptable response.

February is Violence Prevention month in Newfoundland and Labrador. Each year we collectively participate in and uphold this proclamation. It begs the question: What does it mean to engage in a proclamation, if not in tandem with commitments around action and resources? Commitment to action against GBV is required of all of us, and with that comes accountability. We know we can, and desperately need to do things differently. Please consider this our invitation to do things differently: to complete and be a community champion of our new E-course Empowering Them, and also in your roles as community leaders and decision makers around the dissemination of critical resources for violence prevention and survivor-centred work in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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