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| |  | | --- | |  | | **INTRODUCING SCARBOROUGH WOMEN’S CENTRE**  **Our mission**  Scarborough Women’s Centre facilitates the empowerment of women and girls to make long term, positive changes with confidence. They are encouraged to become economically and emotionally independent, free of violence.  **Who we are**  A non-profit, charitable organization (#10795-9660-RR0001), with a volunteer Board. Seven staff deliver services; ten facilitators offer courses and workshops; and seventy volunteers provide direct service or work on committees and events. Our work with women and their children has been recognized through the Mayor’s Community Safety Award. Our Executive Director received the 2013 City of Toronto Constance E. Hamilton Award on the status of women, and was named a Paul Harris Fellow by Rotary International Foundation. **Who We Serve:** Women using the Centre are from all walks of life, economic situations, ethno-racial backgrounds and ages. Many are dealing with issues related to poverty, isolation, abuse, emotional health and newcomer integration. The majority are residents of Scarborough. We have touched the lives of 170,000 women and their children since our inception. | |  | |  | |  | | --- | | **Our Programs and Services:****The Centre provides information, education and support services to assist women in the transition to economic and emotional independence. We also have the Building Strong Futures: Young Women’s Outreach and Expanding the Reach: Outreach to Women with Disabilities. All these programs support women to develop life skills, support networks, and self-confidence to achieve their goals for economic and emotional independence, free of violence.** **The Impact Of Our Programs And Services:**  **Women benefit from the experience of learning with others. They realize that they are not alone, that they have options in their lives, and that they deserve to live free of fear. In 2014-15, the Centre served more than 3000 women and girls.** | |  | | **Typically, women will report the following outcomes after using our services**   * Leave an abusive situation, develop a safety plan * Register for further training (community college, GED, etc.) * Obtain employment, build marketable skills, improve work performance job retention | |

**Ways you can get involved:**

* Participate in your workplace Jeans Day to raise funds to provide supportive services to women
* Tell women you think could benefit from services at the Centre
* Consider volunteering as a mentor, tutor or workshop host

Thank you for your interest! With your support, women can make a brighter future for themselves and their children!

**HERE ARE SOME STORIES FROM WOMEN WHO HAVE USED THE SERVICES AT SCARBOROUGH WOMEN’S CENTRE. THEIR NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT PRIVACY.**

**LETTER FROM MELINA**

I was so happy when I got married. Someone was going to take care of me forever, and always be there for me. My childhood had been painful, because I went back and forth between my grandparents when my parents were ill. I always felt like I was inconvenient and in the way. Later when I met my husband, he made me feel important. He told me I was beautiful, and that he wanted me for himself. I didn’t know that meant that he wouldn’t let me see my friends or go to work.

When we started our family, Eric was so critical of my mothering. He said I was stupid, and would make our kids stupid too. Eventually he got so fed up with me that he would leave for days at a time. He never explained where he’d been, and several times he didn’t leave me any money for milk or baby food. I was frantic with worry and fear.

One day, Eric just didn’t come back at all. I couldn’t believe that he would abandon me and our two beautiful kids, Amelia and Sammy. I didn’t know what to do.

My neighbour Jill saw me crying in the laundry room of our apartment building, and asked what was wrong. I told her. She said that I should talk to Scarborough Women’s Centre. They would know how to help.

I got up the courage to call the Centre, and was so happy to find a friendly voice at the other end of the phone. She told me how to get social assistance and helped me find the closest food bank. Then she told me about the Counselling service at the Centre. I met with the Counsellor on a weekly basis for several months. She helped me sort out my feelings, get used to the idea that I was responsible for myself and our kids.

Once I started to heal emotionally, I realized how much of myself I had hidden for such a long time. I started to think about what I’m good at doing, and began to imagine that it would be possible to get a job one day. I started slowly by doing the Building Self Esteem course at the Centre, and attending some of the other workshops on problem-solving, communication, and goal-setting. I met some really nice women who were going through similar things. It helped me feel like I wasn’t alone.

When I felt stronger, I went back to school, and got my nursing qualifications. It’s so exciting to be working at a job I’m good at, where people appreciate me. I can support my family, and we’re even taking our first vacation this summer.

If it hadn’t been for Scarborough Women’s Centre, I would never have gotten up the courage to find my way. They helped me save my own life, and give my kids a happy home. Thank you so much!

**LETTER FROM SAMANTHA**

I never thought I would be one of "those women" who I saw being abused, and staying for years and years. Little did I know how easy it was to fall into the sticky spider's web of abuse. I stayed for eleven years. I had five children. My body is scarred, and my self - it took a long time to make even the smallest decisions, I was so afraid, all the time. My tale is not unique - women accept abuse for so many reasons, in all cultures, everywhere.

During a time of crisis, I came to Scarborough Women's Centre. I was surprised to get an appointment with someone quickly - and the comfort and acceptance with which I was greeted is wonderful. My counsellor helped me by letting me know that anything I said was ok. She is always there for me to bring me back down to Earth, and helped me realize that my struggles are not impossible to overcome. She has helped me not by giving me answers, but by giving me the tools to be able to figure out what to do on my own, and in a positive and growth-oriented manner.

I will always be grateful to the Scarborough Women's Center for being there to help - and I wish everyone to know that even in the darkest of hours, we as women need to extend our hands to each other because together we can help, heal and grow to get past our struggles for a better life for ourselves and our children.

**LETTER FROM SILMA**

My name is Silma. I am a woman living with a disability. I was diagnosed with lupus in 1995. Before the diagnosis, I was actively involved in my community, and had a job teaching young kids. It was distressing not to be able to run after them and to feel so tired. At one point, I was completely unable to work, and had to go on Long term disability.

It was very isolating to find myself stuck at home, unable to socialize, and feeling useless. I had a caregiver who would come to help me with basic needs, and she would often treat me roughly, call me names, and sometimes steal my money. That little chocolate bar my sister brought me would always disappear. I felt trapped and helpless. I started believing that I had nothing to offer, and my life didn’t matter. I started believing that I was lucky that the caregiver showed up at all.

One day a friend phoned and told me about the workshops she was attending at Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre. Scarborough Women’s Centre was coming in to do workshops about Building Self Esteem and things to help women feel stronger. She encouraged me to attend with her, and said that we could get help with Wheel-trans, and there would be an attendant there to help too. She said that there would be about 10 women, so I wouldn’t have to feel too overwhelmed. I decided to try it out.

When we got there, Alma introduced me to women of all types. They were all colours, sizes and ages. Some were in wheelchairs or used a walker, a couple were blind, and a few I couldn’t tell why they were there. Like me, they have good days and bad days depending on their health.

Well, my life didn’t change overnight, but as I met these women and felt accepted by them, and listened to the facilitators and what they had to say about how I could contribute, and that I deserve to be treated with respect, I found myself thinking differently about my life. I got interested in seeing how I could make a difference, and I developed real connections with women like me. I talked with the PSW agency and got a new caregiver. She’s fun and respectful, and brightens my week. I’m very excited about the future, and I feel renewed.

I look forward to doing the leadership development training very soon. I feel able to make a difference, and I know this program has made a difference. Thank you for making this possible!

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