



Women and Aging

Stories about the Widening Gender Gap

Event Program

Backgrounder

The Older Women's Dialogue Project

Why this Project?

In recent years there has been much focus on the reality that our population is aging, but little attention to the experiences of older women. This is true even though we know women live longer and the poverty rates among older women are high.

There is a need to understand better the experiences of older women from diverse communities, so we can develop law reform and policy solutions that address the pressing barriers to their well-being. Women are experts in their own experience, so the starting place for this Project was to talk to older women.

What did we do?

In July 2012, the United Way Lower Mainland provided the CCEL with funding for a one-year project focused on older women. The Older Women's Dialogue Project is a community-engaged research project that aims to support further work to enhance the quality of life of older women by asking older women what they need to improve their lives.

In collaboration with the West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, we organized consultation events in various geographic and cultural communities throughout the lower mainland. Between September and February we met with over 350 older women. Local community organizations provide meeting space and registered participants. The events each involved 5-27 women. Working with facilitators and interpreters, we held events in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Punjabi, Spanish, Russian, Polish, Farsi and Dari. At each event we asked women about the barriers to their well-being in the areas of: poor treatment and discrimination; income security and poverty; legal systems, family dynamics; personal safety and freedom from abuse; housing; and immigration.

What did we Learn?

Older women make tremendous contributions to our communities – as mothers, spouses, grandmothers, caregivers and volunteers – and yet they face significant challenges to quality of life. Although there were similarities, different pressing social and legal problems emerged at each event. A one size fits all solution is not appropriate here.

Why this Event?

The goal of this project, and this event, is to start with stories and move on to positive solutions for systemic change. *Women and Aging: Stories about the Widening Gender Gap* brings together older women's stories and people with expertise in the underlying policy issues. The stories are composites that reflect the experience of many women we spoke with during this project. The stories highlight some, but not all, of the challenges older women face. We will offer you the opportunity to participate in the discussion by offering your own ideas for solutions. Today, we're celebrating older women and the crucial roles they play in our lives, families, and society.

How you can learn more about this Project?

In fall 2013 the CCEL will publish a full report summarizing what the women told us, identifying which social and legal issues are most pressing in the eyes of older women. You will be able to download this report for free at: <http://www.bcli.org/ccel/projects/older-women's-dialogue-project>.

Featured Speakers:

Yvonne Adalian was trained in England and Canada. Mother and grandmother, she has enjoyed a career that enabled her to play in radio, TV and film and most of the major theatre centres across Canada.

Janine Benedet is Associate Professor at the UBC Faculty of Law, and Director of the Centre for Feminist Legal Studies. Her areas of teaching expertise include criminal law, labour law, administrative law, professional responsibility and anti-discrimination law.

Jas Cheema is Manager of Diversity Services at Surrey Memorial Hospital, organizer of the Dementia Forum (for the south Asian community), and an ongoing hospice volunteer in Surrey. She wrote the second monologue, based on her experiences as a volunteer.

Rosie Frier-Dryden is a film, television and theatre actor. She will be reading the third monologue.

Judy Graves, Advocate for the Homeless, City of Vancouver, has worked with the homeless and marginally housed since 1974. Recipient of an honorary doctorate from UBC, Judy's goal is to end homelessness and malnutrition in Vancouver.

Gloria Gutman is Professor Emerita in the SFU Gerontology Department, a Director of the International Institute of Ageing - United Nations, and a member of the World Health Organization's Expert Advisory Panel on Ageing and Health. She has written extensively on issues impacting older people.

Jill Hightower retired as Executive Director of the BC Institute Against Family Violence in 1998. She maintains an ongoing research practice focused on public policy, health and social issues affecting older women.

Karen Kobayashi is Associate Professor and Graduate Chair, Department of Sociology and Centre on Aging, University of Victoria. Her research interests include aging, immigration and intergenerational issues.

Ellen Woodsworth is Co-Chair of Women Transforming Cities and a former Vancouver City Councillor. She is a speaker, writer, activist and community organizer, who have engaged around women's equality and senior's rights for decades. She is MC for the event.

Program:

9:00-9:30 Registration and Coffee

9:30 Welcome by Krista James, CCEL National Director

9:33 Opening address by Gloria Gutman, Professor Emerita in the SFU Gerontology Department

9:40–10:15 First story

Monologue performed by Yvonne Adalian

Analysis by Judy Graves, City of Vancouver – Coordinator of the Tenant Assistance Program

Questions

10:15–10:50 Second story

Monologue performed by Jas Cheema

Analysis by Karen Kobayashi, Associate Professor, University of Victoria, Department of Sociology

Questions

10:50–11:10 Health break

11:10–11:45 Third story

Monologue performed by Rosie Frier Dryden

Analysis by Jill Hightower, retired Executive Director of the B.C. Institute Against Family Violence

Questions

11:45 Closing remarks by Bev Pitman, United Way Lower Mainland

11:50 Closing remarks by Janine Benedet, Director of the Centre for Feminist Legal Studies

11:55 Final thank you by Krista James

Advisory Committee:

The Project is guided by an advisory committee comprised of older women with a diverse array of expertise on gender and aging issues. The Advisory Committee members are:

Andrea Rolls
Anne Beveridge
Carol Ross
Elsie Dean
Hon. Justice Lynn Smith
Hon. Justice Marion Allan

Jill Hightower
Linda Light
Penny Bain
Shashi Assanand
Susan Henry
Jill Hightower

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