

Accessible Communications for a Non-Profit

Includes:

Final Report
Welcome to Crossroads Video

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TCCBE Group Project: YWCA Crossroads Shelter

Accessible Communications for a Not for Profit:

A communications project for the YWCA Crossroads Shelter centered on creating an instructional film that outlines the policies and procedures of the shelter. The film also functions as a welcome to the community, and an introduction to shelter life.

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YWCA - Kerri Boyd Joëlle Favreau

Literature review-----

Suffering and Support: Poverty, Gendered Violence and the YWCA

This is an exploration of some of the academic sources that have discussed the issues necessitating the existence of the YWCA. We have agreed that a literature review is of crucial importance for a foundational understanding in the history of the YWCA and to identify key aspects and themes relating to poverty, violence against women, and ultimately the existence of the YWCA. Therefore, we believe that we can better meet the needs of the YWCA's clients within the orientation film by familiarizing ourselves with this discourse, and educating ourselves on the issues that have impacted their lives. We have discovered that there is a theme running through all the sources we have analyzed, being that women are willing to sacrifice and suffer to survive and keep their children well and fed. Our objective in this project is to analyze the foundational elements and issues these articles have to teach us, and to relate them back to the existence, purpose and essence of the YWCA, ultimately leaving us better informed and therefore able to create a better final product.

To begin, in the book *Changing Lives and Changing Times*, Shaw-Cullen and Lee (1991) explain that the YWCA began as a Christian organization whose main objective was to encourage the education and social involvement of young women, through studying the bible, introducing them to new skills, encouraging economic self-sufficiency and involving them in society eventually through the vehicle of charitable work. The charitable work the YWCA was responsible for began with the goal to help "reform

fallen women” (Shaw-Cullen and Lee, 1991, pp. 6-9). Initially these two programs were kept separate, but as the organization developed, they became intertwined.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the YWCA made waves by encouraging women into the burgeoning work force, especially in Peterborough, as it was a strongly industrialized city with factories that hired women, such as General Electric (Shaw-Cullen and Lee, 1991). In these years, the YWCA was known for providing housing to young working women and encouraged their economic independence. This began with a room registry service to ensure young women had safe places to stay, which also surrounded them with Christian family values. In this way, the YWCA’s charitable identity was strongly intertwined with Christian morality, however as the author suggests, this was partially to encourage funding from donors (Shaw-Cullen and Lee, 1991).

Around the 1960s, this climate began to change when it was realized that the atmosphere of the organization was rather unwelcoming to the more troubled young women who did not necessarily relate to Christian ideals and the sterile, highly surveilled atmosphere (Shaw-Cullen and Lee, 1991). This changed in the 1970s, when women who were experiencing mental illness, unwanted pregnancy, rape, and abuse (among many other issues) were welcomed into the shelter, and given support, counseling, and advocacy. This soon developed into supporting abused women more strongly, after new research was developed in the late 1970’s (Shaw-Cullen and Lee, 1991).

Based off of a housing study completed in 1978, it was found that abused women and their children were disproportionately in need of temporary housing and support (Shaw-Cullen and Lee, 1991). In response to this, a year later, the YWCA offered a section of their building specifically to these women, which began what is now known as

the Crossroads program. This program offered services, housing, protection and advocacy to women in these situations (Shaw-Cullen and Lee, 1991). Studies were developed based off the experiences of these women, and from these, specific patterns within abusive relationships were able to be analyzed, and policies and procedures to better serve the needs of women and children in these situations were able to be developed (Shaw-Cullen and Lee, 1991). Unfortunately, many of these policies were formulated after tragic and unfortunate circumstances, such as the murder of Crossroads resident Joyce, who was shot and killed by her husband upon returning home to collect her belongings and start a new life. Because of this, policies were developed to ensure that women in Joyce's position were given police protection, and moving services upon returning home so a tragedy of this nature would never happen again (Shaw-Cullen and Lee, 1991).

The YWCA advocates strongly for women taking control over their own lives and feeling empowered through change. In her article, Casey Ready discusses how the McGuinty government pressured the YWCA to have statistics of the number of women they 'rescued' from dangerous situations or relationships. During this time, neoliberal thinking and discourse was still strong even though the Harris government had ended. The YWCA focuses around a feminist attitude that encourages the women to "... define their own options and plans," (Ready, 2012) and move on from violent relationships with the help of the YWCA's resources. Although there were small changes with the McGuinty government in terms of funding, the language and misconceptions stayed the same – keeping the YWCA in a position that did not allow them to show that they value quality of empowerment over quantity.

The YWCA's relationship to the interconnections between poverty and violence are well documented. Because of the Crossroads program, and the resulting studies that developed from it, we now know that a main reason for women to stay in abusive relationships is because of economic dependence and monetary insecurity.

The article *Walking on Eggshells: Abused Women's Experiences of Ontario's Welfare System* portrays the parallels between abusive intimate relationships and the welfare system. Because the welfare system has fallen short in offering services for women to escape abuse, they are often forced to stay in abusive relationships. More specifically, abusive partners are often able to maintain control over their partners through the welfare system (ex. snitch lines) (Mosher et al., 2004). Women in the study emphasized the following as top priorities for change of the welfare system to help women out of abusive relationships:

The inadequacy of benefits for women on welfare; the lack of sufficient benefits inhibits women from being able to seek safe housing, childcare, and steady employment; women being encouraged to use Ontario Works and take advantage of jobs that do not necessarily lead to a career, or to a career of their interest; women being encouraged to seek child support from abusive partners while being on welfare (women understood this as counterproductive because this gave power back into the hands of their abusive partners); women being constantly under surveillance and suspicion from Ontario Works; the difficulty in accessing information in the welfare system that would enable them to be successful in escaping abusive relationships and moving on from the welfare system. (Mosher et al., 2004). Overall, the welfare system effectively keeps women in abusive relationships by not offering sufficient resources and services for women to support

themselves. It is obvious that there is a demand for a shift from viewing poverty as the failing of individuals to viewing poverty as an outcome of societal problems and social systems.

Bringing women and their children out of abusive relationships is what the YWCA shelters focus on. The stated values of the YWCA show how women taking part in their own community development is very important and that through community involvement women from abusive relationships will feel empowered (YWCA Peterborough, Victoria & Haliburton, 2013). The YWCA offers many supports to help women who are trying to escape abusive relationships not end up in poverty. The YWCA's shelter services are structured based on their desire to “deliver women to safety and help them build better futures,” (YWCA Peterborough, Victoria & Haliburton, 2013).

In Dara Culhane’s article, *Their Spirits Live Within Us: Aboriginal Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver Emerging into Visibility* (2003), she explains that the Downtown Eastside area of Vancouver has historically been a very poor neighbourhood with drug use and commercial sex as overwhelming issues. This article attempts to show the neighbourhood in a different light than it has previously been understood. For example, many people of the Downtown Eastside hold an annual Valentine's Day Women's Memorial March in honour of the women from that area who have been murdered or disappeared. This march brings the aboriginal women of the Downtown Eastside to the forefront, in an attempt to change the way they are portrayed. Moreover, this article focuses on three key themes that perpetuate the cycle of poverty in the Downtown Eastside. First, “a preference for exotic and spectacular representation of

drugs, sex, violence, and crime rather than the ordinary and mundane brutality of everyday poverty,” (Culhane, 2004, pp. 595). As drug use and commercial sex continue to be 'normalized', this area will continue to see violence (against women) and crime, and supports will not be put into place to address the causes behind the poverty. The second theme is the medicalization of poverty. Finally, the third theme is a lack of interest for change and resistance.

YWCA emphasizes women escaping violent situations and relationships, and coming to a safe place to build change in their lives. The YWCA exists to help women like women of the Downtown Eastside to overcome poverty and create a safer life for themselves and their children. The Valentine's Day Women's Memorial March shows that the issue of violence against women will not be tolerated and will be visible for the public to better understand and work to change. The YWCA supports the same change that the women of the Downtown Eastside are working towards.

In the article *No Cherries Grow on Our Trees*, Komiotis, Currie, and Mosher thoughtfully discuss interconnections of violence against women and women's poverty. In particular, they argue that situations of poverty often force and trap women into unhealthy and violent relationships founded on dependency (Komiotis, Currie, & Mosher, 2008). Women who are living in poverty often use relationships as a tool of survival because they offer economic stability, housing security, and basic living needs to them and their children. Moreover, the authors argue that violence against women is rooted in the social inequality that is found between women and men and has become characteristic of women's poverty (Komiotis, Currie, & Mosher, 2008). Not only is violence against women an issue that concerns women's physical health, but it also

affects and restricts women's opportunities, weakens and limits women's capabilities, threatens their emotional, psychological and economic security, and denigrates their power (Komiotis, Currie, & Mosher, 2008). Because violence against women has such a negative impact on women's lives, it only generates a cycle of helplessness and confinement with no escape route. Such situations of abuse greatly disempower and disable women, leaving them to live a life of precarious conformity.

Additionally, these issues are echoed in OAITH's article, *Choose to Change This*. This document explains that the issue of violence against women is directly related to a lack of social assistance and affordable housing. Because affordable housing is essentially inaccessible and because of the unsympathetic nature of social welfare, women are left with no choice but to find other sources of survival. Due to the lack of social assistance provided to women, they are forced to either remain with or return to their abusive partners. Additionally, not only do women have difficulty in receiving social assistance, but shelter services also have difficulty in gaining support. OAITH argues that women's shelters in Ontario have never been appropriately supported and have had to fight to make ends meet (OAITH, 2004). Because shelter services experience financial restrictions, this creates a limit on the number of women they are able to support. Therefore, since little social support is given to women themselves and to shelter services, many women are left with nowhere to go and become reliant on their partners.

In October 2012, the YWCA released a document entitled *Family Court: Gateway to a Violence-Free Life?* This research report takes a look at the obstacles that women in domestic abuse situations confront as they go through the family court system in Peterborough. Through research conducted by the YWCA, women who had

experienced domestic violence expressed a number of concerns regarding Peterborough family court. They said that they were often misinformed or under-informed about where to go for help, services were often inaccessible due to barriers regarding child care, transportation, parking, language, and disability, the services that they were able to access were often delayed in relaying information to them, court-related services were often very lengthy in time which compromised their safety, and women often expressed fear of the potential negative repercussions of getting involved in the system (Rogers, 2012). From this report we can see that women's problems in dealing with domestic abuse go beyond the issues in the home and extend into legal services. These issues are crucial because they are hindering women from escaping their dangerous situations and from seeking effective help.

In response to the information gathered in this study, the YWCA aims to enhance their services by providing women with free and accessible frontline court support, additional life skills programming to prepare women for during the post-separation period, and to remain connected with interested stakeholders to plan and implement a domestic abuse service-delivery initiative (Rogers, 2012). From reviewing this report, it is clear that the issues women face as a result of domestic violence is complex and multidimensional. These recommendations act as good starting point for achieving a more accessible and effective system of response to domestic violence against women. Although our project with the YWCA does not deal with the legal aspect of domestic violence, we hope that our orientation video will be effective in providing women with accessible information about the Crossroads shelter and help them better transition out of their abusive and dehumanizing circumstances.

In closing, we feel that our own discussion and review of these articles has given us a deeper understanding of the intersecting issues of gender, violence, and poverty. Also, we feel better equipped to tackle this project with the YWCA because we have a better understanding of their history, their values, and their goals in assisting and empowering women who have suffered from poverty and domestic abuse. It is clear that issues we have discussed surrounding poverty and violence against women are directly related to the purpose and objectives of the YWCA. We hope that this foundational research on such relevant issues will benefit us as we work with the women of the YWCA and create an orientation video for the Crossroads Shelter.

Personal Reflections and Evaluations-----

Lisa McKaskell

Being involved in this project was one of the best experiences of my University career. Being involved with the women at the YWCA taught me the intricacies of “real-life” planning, organizing and scheduling. Working with such a range of women who all have busy, conflicting schedules, children and other responsibilities showed me how planning in advance and being flexible is not just useful, its *essential* to making a project work. The fast-paced lives these women live are inspiring; they talk about how something’s always going wrong, something always needs to be fixed, and you always have to keep going. These women are powerhouses, and it was an incredible opportunity to watch and learn how they lived their lives. I wasn’t expecting this aspect of the project to be as influential as it has been, and I am grateful for it.

Another important element was the experience of working in a tightly knit group. The three of us all have very different talents, and discovering these was a practice of trial and error. This was interesting. I found myself essentially “directing” the film, because I have extensive training and prior experience in visual arts, meaning that I am comfortable analyzing and organizing composition and working with the elements of design. This came naturally to me, in the same way that working with the camera or being the “cameraman” came naturally to Andrea. I feel that

my performance as the acting director was generally helpful and of good quality. There was a constant flow of communication between the three of us, as we were all concerned with our roles, how we were performing them and whether or not we were overstepping our bounds in the group.

It became very obvious as the project continued that my strengths were largely creative, and not as much organizational or technical. This became a running joke within the group, which lessened the tension. I was comfortable completing anything in the project that had artistic elements to it, such as the poster-board we created for the Community Innovation Forum, the design aspects of this binder, the cover for the dvd, and the music for the film with the help of my friend, and band-mate, Luis Pavon. I also focused my energies on editing much of the final drafts and coming up with wording, as my group mates appreciated my writing style and felt it would be contributive towards the quality of the project. Having said this, I was not as good at ensuring constant communication or organizational elements between the women at the YWCA and Marg, and I was also not as good as Andrea and Naomi at editing the actual film.

For that part of the project, we divided forces. I spent my time designing the dvd cover and putting together this binder, while Andrea and Naomi were in the editing studio. This served a few purposes. As we began the editing process, it quickly became evident that three people

trying to edit the same film at the same time was unrealistic. There was not enough physical room around the computer or tasks to justify the attentions of three people simultaneously. In other words, there were too many cooks in the kitchen. At this moment, it turned out to be advantageous that I naturally work well alone, so I was able to take care of other things that needed to be done.

The flipped side of this situation was that my instincts towards independent thought and action occasionally got in the way of the project. There were a few moments when my independence meant that I was not as reliable as Andrea or Naomi, and this caused some tension within the group. Because I was making independent contributions to the project in my own way, and not always physically present, this left a feeling of discord, because my involvement was not always as obvious. I was conscious of this, and made every effort to contribute in any way that I could, while balancing the realities of the situation. This was an issue that was communicated and resolved productively within the time frame of the project.

Overall, I felt good about my contributions to the project and the finished product we all created together. It was an incredibly positive experience and the hands-on aspect of the project was intensely appreciated. Being given the opportunity to transform intellectual

knowledge into a practical, hands-on product that benefits the lives of other women was amazing.

Naomi Holtkamp

I was first interested in this project when I saw that it was a hands-on type of assignment, and that it was a project that involved the YWCA. I have had experiences of domestic abuse in my own family, and therefore felt close to this project in that way. In high school I was greatly involved in social justice groups and co-founded a group called the "Non-Violent Action Committee". We brainstormed ways in which we could encourage a more inclusive and less oppressive school atmosphere and mind-set. With the pressure of a busier schedule at Trent, I noticed I was not as involved in the things I was passionate about. Even though this project came up at the end of my Trent career, I was still very motivated to be a part of it. I was excited about the fact that this would produce a useful tool for women to use on a daily basis; rather than a research paper. It seemed to be a great way to end my time at Trent and leave behind something memorable.

Before preparing the literature review, I was unsure how much impact it would have on our time at the shelter and readying us for the project. I believe the documents we read and reflected on were able to help us situate ourselves in the project and understand the ways we could

contribute. I think the literature review also showed us that although creating a video orientation process was going to be very different from our normal academic perspective, we were still in need of some literature preparation. We concluded that the academic literature cannot really prepare anyone for the realities of how a shelter operates and what is dealt with on a daily basis; however it was a good place to start.

My expectations changed multiple times throughout the ever-changing process of filming, editing and finalizing the project. I expected to know more about technology than I ended up understanding. There was a great deal of trial and error when it came to figuring out the video camera and the editing process. I felt as though I already knew what to expect in the shelter because I've been in that type of setting many times before. From the beginning of the project I thought it would take less time than it actually did to complete the video. Once we began filming and editing and I realized the time and effort that was needed, the end seemed so far away. Especially with the editing process, there were many aspects that needed to be co-ordinated perfectly that continually pushed the end vision further away. My expectations definitely changed many times throughout the filming and editing process.

My experience of the shelter was very different than Andrea and Lisa's experience. After our initial tour of the shelter they felt that they noticed a vibe that all the women there had been through so much

trauma and that they seemed to retreat away from us. I did not notice that type of atmosphere. Because of what I have been involved with in the past, and because of my family experiences, I was not unfamiliar with shelters. Instead, I noticed a huge amount of courage and resilience. I felt that the women and children at the shelter were there because they were able to escape their situation and get help, and that takes a lot of courage to do. I had an overwhelming feeling of the fact that these women were very strong and the shelter felt very safe and welcoming in every way.

The experience at the shelter and the whole video process has greatly contributed to my learning. Being at the shelter has shown me the different directions my career can go in and has helped me get back involved in what I am passionate about. Of course, the filming and editing part has contributed to a learning I did not anticipate. I am now more familiar with the different aspects that go into making a video, and the technicalities of it. Most of my assignments at Trent have been individual essays or projects, and I have had limited group work. I enjoyed working in a group and being able to bounce ideas off each other. I believe that tackling this project as a group has made this final project more well-rounded. Each of us has different strengths that we were able to bring to and use to better the project.

As a group we learned that in order to complete this project well, we needed to use a different type of skills that we were not familiar with. Because we were all used to doing individual research projects, group work required compromise, schedule organization and understanding our unique abilities. Learning how to work as a group created some conflicts, however we all were able to bypass these and focus on the project. Working as a group was a huge learning curve for me. While working alone, compromise and communication is not needed. Because I am a quiet person, I normally keep my thoughts and ideas to myself and learn through reflection and writing, rather than through communication. I slowly realized how important my thoughts and opinions were as a contribution to the group. My ideas were often different than my group mates, and in the beginning this caused me to stay silent, but in the end it helped me come out of my shell and I believe it enhanced the group dynamics. Staying silent was definitely a weakness for me in the beginning, but I was able to grow from that and learn that my input is important.

I am proud that this is a concrete final project and that it will be useful for the YWCA Crossroads shelter. As my last assignment in my Trent career it is exciting that this video will live on at Crossroads. I am more than grateful that this project has thrown me back into what I am passionate about and I now feel more than ready to continue with it.

Although the women of the YWCA see this video as a gift to the women of Crossroads, I truly feel that participating in it has been an amazing opportunity and experience for me.

Andrea Knechtel

I was interested in this project with the YWCA because of my previous experience working with women in a shelter setting abroad. In my third year of university, I spent 8 months studying in Ecuador. For half of my time spent abroad, I worked in a safe house for adolescent women escaping familial abuse and sexual exploitation. Since that experience, I have wanted to learn more about the local initiatives and services available to vulnerable and victimized women here in Peterborough. This project through the Trent Centre for Community-Based Education seemed like the perfect opportunity to explore this interest.

To prepare for this project and for our involvement with the Crossroads shelter, we read a number of articles about the YWCA and issues concerning violence against women. From completing this literature review, I felt as though I had developed a deeper understanding of the intersecting issues of gender, violence, and poverty. I also felt better equipped to tackle this project with the YWCA because I had a better understanding of their history, their values, and their goals in assisting and empowering women who have suffered from poverty and domestic

abuse. However, when we had our first tour of the shelter, I realized that this literature review was only one piece to the puzzle. During the tour I was flooded with emotions as I saw and encountered the women living at Crossroads. Although we had read about the unfortunate experiences of women and their histories of domestic abuse, I wasn't expecting to see these horrible experiences to be so visibly displayed on the faces and in the body language of the women in the shelter. I had hoped to see women who looked empowered and free from abuse, however, the stories and struggles I had read about had become more real to me after this tour. This experience helped me recognize that a book or a written story can only provide so much information. Although I believe that our literature review was an essential exercise to help me understand the social and economic underpinnings of women's experiences, I learned that written information must be in combination with real experience and exposure to better understanding. Additionally, due to this experience, I found myself feeling a bit uncomfortable in the shelter because I was made aware of my own privilege as a white, educated woman who has never experienced domestic abuse. In the shelter, I felt like an outsider because of my privileges and my inability to relate to the residents. Thus, I learned that it is important to recognize our own privileges within our environments so that we are able to be respectful of diversity among individuals and past histories.

When we started to film at the shelter, it quickly became clear who was best suited for different roles. In my case, I was best at doing the actual filming while Lisa and Naomi directed and acted in the film. We found out that I had the steadiest hand to capture smooth and stable shots. This team organization worked well as we were able to efficiently collect a large amount of footage in a short amount of time (the battery life of the video camera was not long) without getting in each other's way. I think it helped that we were all well acquainted each other before the filming process through group meetings and sharing meals together. Because we were all comfortable with each other, we were each able to take over certain roles without having to be too concerned about stepping on each others toes and sharing our individual ideas. After the filming process, it was reassuring to hear that Katherine, the shelter director, was pleased with how we worked as a team and how we interacted with the women in the shelter.

The editing process of the video project was a very new and exciting experience for me. I really enjoyed trimming and altering clips in a way that was stimulating and visually appealing. I found out that the editing aspect of this project was something that I was also good at and had the patience to work through the long hours of sitting in the editing room. The editing process of this video project was longer than anticipated. I knew that editing would take up a large partition of our

time, but I didn't realize how much time was going to be required. Due to the lengthy nature of the project, after some time we grew impatient with the project, and therefore we at times grew impatient with each other. In this situation we had to make sure that each group member had a specific task to do so that we weren't getting in each other's way and so we each felt like we had a specific role to play.

In this project, I feel like I brought an important administrative role to the group. I was responsible for looking after e-mail communication and organizing group meetings and meetings with the TCCBE and the YWCA. I also booked all of the audio/visual equipment and made reservations for the editing room at Trent. It was clear that I possessed strength in organizational skills, which I was able to contribute to the group project. Also, I was also very punctual and made sure I attended all meetings and finished all of my assigned tasks on time. This was not a strength of all group members, which created tension that had to eventually be confronted. Through this project I had to learn how to effectively confront someone in a way that is not accusatory, but rather encouraging. I think that this skill is important for any group initiative. One of my weaknesses in the project was my tendency to become too much of a leader, which sometimes led to an overshadowing of my group members. I am prone to take control of certain situations which doesn't always leave room for others to share opinions and explore their ideas. In

this project I had to learn how to step back and let others take responsibility for different aspects of the project. I also learned that not everyone felt comfortable speaking up when they were displeased with an aspect of our project. Thus I learned that I had to check in with group members and ask how they felt during different stages of the project. Because I have a strong and talkative personality, it was difficult at times to give up the reigns. However, this realization was critical to the contentment of all group members and to the success of the project.

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