



The Brief

Vol. 11 No. 7 | A publication of the NB Media Co-op | April 2020 | nbmediacoop.org

CUPE's Sharon Teare: value our elders by respecting the people who care for them

By SUSAN O'DONNELL



Sharon Teare, President of the NB Council for Nursing Home Unions in Fredericton. Photo by Susan O'Donnell.

Sharon Teare entered the long-term care setting 23 years ago "because I care, genuinely care about the seniors. We have all we have today because of all the hard work that seniors had done."

Teare is president of the New Brunswick Council of Nursing Home Unions (NBCNHU), representing about 4,000 workers in the 51 nursing homes unionized by CUPE, New Brunswick and Canada's largest union. "The 51 local presidents give me direction," she explained. Teare uses this direction as a member of the CUPE New Brunswick executive.

The nursing home sector in New Brunswick has a history of strong women fighting for their rights as workers. Teare's first experience on a picket was in 2001, before she became a union activist. The 2001 nursing home strike was settled in part because the government agreed with the workers' demand to commission a study on the quality of care in nursing homes.

That report, released in February 2002, was prepared by the DMR Consulting for the NB Department of Family and Community Services. For their study, DMR consulted more than 250 individuals through focus groups, interviews and surveys.

The 2002 DMR report, "Nursing Home Services Resident Care Needs Project," found that home care residents required an increasing level of attention from professional staff compared to the previous 10 years. Some of the findings: 80% of residents presented with cognitive impairments / dementia or psychiatric disorders requiring behaviour management approaches; incontinence management was required for 66% of the residents; 42% of residents required major or total feeding assistance; about 17% of residents had formal rehabilitation plans that were not being fully implemented, and, since 1997, there had been a 48% increase in special treatments and procedures required for patients.

The report also identified the major weaknesses in the nursing home system, including: staff burnout and dissatisfaction, high absenteeism related to injury and burnout, staff challenged to meet basic care needs, a large percentage of staff not full-time, growing waiting lists, and crisis management prevailed over best practices.

The DMR consultants described "the stressed state of the service providers." Their report states: "Nursing home service

providers are beyond accepting cosmetic changes or 'window dressing' initiatives and are at record low levels of patience and tolerance." Workers are "just trying to keep their heads above water."

The report labelled this situation a vicious reinforcing circle. "Over the years, I feel that governments have failed to address the crisis even with all the information provided to them, and as a result we're here now with our current working conditions that have led to this situation: we're not monetarily being compensated for the work being done because it's taking such a physical, emotional and mental drain on us," Teare explained.

She is very concerned about the mental health of nursing home workers. Statistics show that nursing home workers have an increased use of anti-anxiety medication. The sector is predominantly female: "We get up in the morning and get our children ready, you're caring all day, making sure the kids are taken care of, the residents are taken care of. So who is taking care of those who are taking care of our seniors?"

Teare believes that Premier Higgs and other senior decision makers are "only seeing CUPE, and that's unfortunate." She says that if they could see past CUPE they would see workers who provide a good quality public service: "when you provide service within the community you live in, you're going to be more apt to take pride in your work." For example, for a municipal outside worker who had built up the cement on the curb, "when you're taking a walk, you can say to your daughter: 'hey mommy or daddy did that.'"

She believes it's unfortunate that the media reports about the struggle of nursing home workers are always about wages. "Wages are very important," she says, but it's also about "recognition and respect."

"As women working in a predominantly female sector, we don't complain, we're care providers. As workers as a whole, we have to stand up and value our worth, and say: It's OK to value yourself enough to say that I'm worth more, and until that recognition happens within the sector, we're not going to have the resources to be able to give the care."

Susan O'Donnell is a member of the NB Media Co-op editorial board.

Wearing a hijab in Fredericton

By SARAH TAHA

Saturday, Feb. 1 was world hijab day. It was also the first official display of my handmade headscarves at the northside market. Today is another first, the opportunity to share my hijab story and the experience of being a hijabi in Fredericton with a wider audience.

I decided to wear a hijab when I was 15 years old, in 2001. I was living in Egypt with my parents. Back then, even though more than 90 percent of Egyptians are Muslims and Egypt is a somewhat Islamic country, being a hijabi was not easy. There were many challenges for anyone choosing to wear a hijab.

For example, hijabs were associated with being ignorant, poor and uneducated, and this prejudice often influenced how people dealt with you. Also, there was no such thing as fashionable hijab. You couldn't easily find stores selling modest hijab-type clothes.

The situation in Fredericton today for women wearing a hijab is not very different. When I arrived in Freddy last summer, I learned that many locals think any woman wearing a hijab is a Syrian refugee, doesn't speak English, and is living on government assistance, and they don't like them for the latter.

I quickly learned to clarify that I am from Egypt when I introduce myself to people around the city to avoid any friction. I had a random guy come near me at Walmart and yell "ignorant mountain girl." Sarcastically speaking, if I am an ignorant mountain girl (which I'm not), what is he? An astronaut?

My hijab story started when my mom used to listen to Islamic lessons in the car. Whenever I was with her, we listened together and, from there, I started feeling a growing urge to be more religious. I am a Muslim and I wanted to be the best Muslim I can, so I considered wearing a hijab.

On the other hand, my family, with more experience in life, understood the challenges I would face if I chose to wear it. They like the hijab but believed I was too young to wear it and go through all the challenges that might come towards me as a result. Nevertheless, after a while, my mom allowed me to wear it. Many of my friends believed I would not go through with it, or I would just wear it for a while and then take it off. Here I am, 19 years down the road, still wearing it.

Overall, my experience wearing a hijab in Fredericton has been OK. I have met plenty of nice people around the city, I wouldn't let some small situations here and there shape my opinion of everyone. That said, I believe wearing a hijab in New Brunswick is not the same as wearing it in other provinces and cities in Canada. I've heard mixed opinions about being a hijabi (hijab-wearer) in Quebec. I've heard more positive stories from Toronto, London, and Mississauga.

What does wearing a hijab mean? First and foremost, there's nothing to be afraid of! Wearing a hijab is about not only fulfilling a religious requirement but also expressing your identity and who you are. A woman wearing a hijab is not judgmental - or jealous - of women choosing to wear differently. A truly religious person at heart is very judgmental of their own self but not of others, or else they are not truly religious. Women don't wear hijabs at home while with their families and female friends.



Wearing a hijab in Fredericton. Photo by Sarah Taha.

Letters from New Brunswick's Future

Write a letter from New Brunswick's future. The letters can be a speculative and fictional look back from the future to imagine what New Brunswick could be like if we could meet our climate change obligations. It is fiction, but it need not stay fiction. Read published letters from New Brunswick's future at nbmediacoop.org. To submit a letter or for more information, contact: info@nbmediacoop.org.

Viola DanDijk, advocate for off-reserve Indigenous people and Indigenous women, remembered

By Tracy Glynn



Viola VanDijk (left, back row) with other participants at the Human Resources Development-NB Disability Awareness Workshop in 1999 in Fredericton. Back row, right: James Denny Jr., executive director of the Eel Ground Community Development Centre Inc. Front row: Tracy Arthurs, First Nations Human Resources Development Corporation, and Dave Keenan of Maugerville. Photo by the Government of New Brunswick.

Viola VanDijk, known to her loved ones as Vi, died in Saint John on Feb. 16 at the age of 73 from heart disease. Her friends remember her as a strong champion for Indigenous people who live off-reserve and for Indigenous women.

Gail Paul, former president of the Indigenous Women's Association of the Wabanaki Territories, was a friend of Viola's. She met Viola two decades ago when they both worked at the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council.

"Vi said, 'let's make it workable.' I will always remember that when there is conflict in my life. That is only one teaching of many from her. Her family will sadly miss her but I know that her spirit lives on," said Paul.

Viola is survived by her husband, Tony, three children, nine grandchildren and one great-grandson.

In 1996, Viola received a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work then worked with the New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council to support Indigenous people living off-reserve to find employment and financial support for higher education.

Viola was also active with Skigin Elnoog Housing Corporation, an organization devoted to meeting the housing needs of off-reserve Indigenous people.

In 2012, she was awarded the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal for her efforts supporting Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve.

Viola was also a champion for women's rights, particularly Indigenous women's rights. Viola worked with the Native Women's Association of New Brunswick and the New Brunswick Women's Council. In the 1980s, she participated in the successful effort to amend the Indian Act to ensure equal status rights for Indigenous women in Canada.

The 1992 book, *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out*, as told to Janet Silman, documents how women from Tobique First Nation led an effort to end legislated gender-based discrimination against Indigenous women in Canada. The women occupied the Tobique band office, they marched a hundred miles to Ottawa, and made testimonies to the United Nations.

As Viola's mourners note, sadly, many of these strong women have passed away but the memory of their efforts on behalf of their communities lives on, inspiring the next generations.

Part of Viola's obituary reads: "Viola will be remembered for her feisty spirit and sense of humour which remained a part of her earthly being even in her final days."

Tracy Glynn teaches courses on social movements at St. Thomas University and is a writer with the NB Media Co-op.

Dear municipal candidates: #MeToo made survivors a powerful political constituency. Why should we vote for you?

By KYLIE BERGFALK

In October 2017, I was introduced to Harvey Weinstein through a story in *The New York Times* containing multiple allegations of sexual assault and harassment and, almost four years to the day since the Ghomeshi scandal broke, I expected very little would come of it. I watched with consternation as #MeToo appeared on my social media feeds, and then blew up online and in real life and in international news. I'd seen so many survivor's stories shared, their pain briefly sensational, only to fade from view with the news cycle or pushed into the background of daily living. I worried that all of this would also add up to what felt like nothing.

But I was wrong. Ex-Mossad agents couldn't prevent Weinstein from having to face consequences for some of his behavior in court. #MeToo has been less like a tidal wave and more like the tide – a cyclic rise and fall of survivors, everywhere, from all walks of life, adding their voices to the chorus and returning public attention to the problem of sexual violence, again and again. Already we can see how this tide is shifting the sands of what's permissible, and what's possible.

On February 24, a jury in New York found Harvey Weinstein guilty on two counts: criminal sexual assault in the first degree and rape in the third degree. On March 11, Weinstein was sentenced to 23 years in prison.

Tarana Burke, who coined the hashtag a decade before it went viral, describes #MeToo as a survivors' movement that is about healing and action. In an election year, she says, that action shows up in politics, at debates and in the ballot box.

2020 is a municipal election year in New Brunswick. Cities are where we live, work, play and, sometimes, are subject to unwanted sexual behavior and assault. The #MeToo tide touches here too.

In Fredericton, the number of calls received by volunteers

on the crisis line operated by Sexual Violence New Brunswick (SVNB, formerly Fredericton Sexual Assault Centre) has tripled in the last two years. The volunteers who answer calls on the line and the survivors and their supporters who call are among your constituents in Fredericton. We want to know your stance on sexual violence and what you plan to do about it. Why should we vote for you?

I want to vote for a city councillor who:

Names the problem. Statistics Canada reports in its initial findings from the Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (SSPPS) that approximately 4.7 million women in Canada – or almost 30% of all women 15 years of age and older – reported that they had been a victim of sexual assault at least once since the age of 15. The prevalence of sexual assault among men is smaller but still significant: 1.2 million (8%) men reported the same. We know that trans and gender-diverse folks experience sexual violence at similar or even higher rates (analysis of the data for these populations in Canada is planned for release in a report forthcoming from the SSPPS this year). All of this adds up to a substantial population of survivors in our cities. As a city councillor you have a locally influential platform. Use it. We are all responsible for shaping an environment where sexual violence is named and unacceptable.

Understands the costs of sexual violence and looks for places where city policies meet them. Survivors may feel empowered by sharing their stories, but you don't need to know the gory details to understand the economic, emotional, physical, social, and temporal costs of sexual violence. We've lost work time and friends; we grieve our sense of safety and belonging. It takes time to come to terms with harm, to heal, and to take a different route that doesn't make you pass the place where – to borrow a phrase from President Trump – he grabbed you by the pussy.

City councillors have more power than most people when it comes to shaping public safety. One in three women and one in eight men in Canada experienced unwanted sexual behavior in public in the last 12 months (SSPPS). Can infrastructure planning help prevent unwanted sexual behavior in public spaces like parks, sidewalks, and public transportation? Both women and men most commonly cited a commercial or institutional establishment as the location of their self-reported most serious sexual assault in the past 12 months (SSPPS). How can the Council encourage bystander training for staff and promote a culture that doesn't tolerate sexual harassment at the events, restaurants, and venues that shape our city's lively cultural life?

Considers the city's role in making criminal justice response to sexual assault a key part of public safety. Not all survivors choose to report to law enforcement but, for those who do, we can enhance the criminal justice response to sexual assault and minimize secondary wounding for survivors locally by providing ongoing evidence-based, victim-centered, and trauma-informed training for the men and women of our police force. City Council can commit our city to accountability by requiring periodic sexual violence case reviews, done in collaboration with community experts in the gender-based violence sector. These are best practices recommended by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police in the Canadian Framework for Collaborative Police Response on Sexual Violence, released in December.

Allocates funds to support survivors' healing and restoration. I live in Fredericton where we are fortunate to

have a sexual assault centre which runs a crisis line and provides counselling at no cost to the local survivors who use these services, but, like most things, these services are not cost free. Late last year, SVNB was forced to stop accepting new clients for counselling services because it doesn't have funding to expand the centre's counselling capacity to meet the demand. The only direct funding the centre receives for its counselling program, from United Way, is enough to cover the cost of one counsellor for one day per week. How can the Council support this vital program to make it sustainable?

Shows up. As Tarana Burke says, people engage survivors from a place of pity all the time. Can you engage us from a place of empathy, understanding our strengths? I would be heartened to see members of Council at the Take Back the Night March every September. I would love to hear through the grapevine that my city councillor is actively involved in the White Ribbon Campaign or visiting local classrooms to assist in delivering prevention programs about healthy identities, relationships, and consent. There's no point fighting the tide, Councillors, and much to be gained from moving with it.

And, to survivors and the people that love us: there's a lot of us out here. We have more power than we know. The next stage of #MeToo is a call to action. What if we made it impossible for an elected official to not have a position on sexual violence? What if we asked questions about sexual violence at electoral debates and when politicians knock on our doors? What if we demanded that our candidates address survivors' concerns with empathy? What things are possible now that didn't seem possible before?

Kylie Bergfalk is an advocate for women in Fredericton. She has been volunteering with Sexual Violence NB since 2017 and is presently employed by Sexual Violence NB as a project coordinator. She is a recent addition to the editorial board of the NB Media Co-op.

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Wearing a hijab

Usually being a hijabi means that you don't drink and don't smoke, you pray and fast and practice your religion to the best of your ability. More religious hijabis don't shake hands with men, which sometimes means unintentionally awkward situations. Personally, this has been one of the social challenges that I have had trouble handling without embarrassing anyone.

Going to the gym in Fredericton is not an option because all classes and gyms currently available are mixed (men and women exercising at the same time). I tried to book an all-women closed group class to exercise for my friends and I, but it was too expensive for us.

How can you support women wearing a hijab? The most important thing you can do is understand what a hijab is and why women choose to wear it. You don't have to agree with it. Understanding that, and listening to and reading the stories of women wearing a hijab is, in my opinion, the best thing you can do.

Sarah Taha is a Muslim Egyptian who moved to Fredericton in 2019. This story is from Sarah's blog, I Just Got New Brunswicked!

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