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LOCAL PROGRAM RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION AT YWCA CANADA AMM

Can we challenge stereotypes? Can we create new images of disabilities and physical differences? Can we imagine new possibilities?

These were the questions that Joëlle Favreau, Compass Training Manager and Lorna Renooy Project Manager for YWCA of Peterborough, Victoria and Haliburton and their colleagues Fran Odette from Springtide Resources and Dr. Carla Rice from Trent University, were hoping to explore when they began their work in the Spring of 2007. What developed over the course of the next three years is an engaging and eye-opening project, entitled “Envisioning New Meanings of Disability and Difference” that has toured the province to illustrate how art has the power to change and shift perceptions.

On June 4th, the Envisioning New Meanings of Disability and Difference program received the YWCA Special Program Award in recognition of its innovation, impact and transferability at the 2010 YWCA Canada Awards Ceremony held in Niagara Falls.

Over the past three years, the Envisioning New Meanings of Disability and Difference project provided training in photography and digital story-telling to women living with disabilities and differences. This project gave the participants the opportunity to present themselves, through their own stories and images, as opposed to how they are represented by others.

The photographs and digital stories produced were exhibited in Peterborough, Toronto, Sudbury, Simcoe, Hamilton and Scarborough, in public and private Art Galleries as well as in universities and colleges, and are now available for exhibition across Canada. The images and stories are also now available for viewing at www.envisioningnewmeanings.com.

According to Joëlle Favreau, Compass Training Manager for the YWCA of Peterborough, Victoria and Haliburton and collaborating leader of the project, “The art created by the participants is powerful, eloquent and moving. So often, women with disabilities and differences are seen by others as either tragic victims to be pitied, or as spirited survivors to be put on pedestals as sources of inspiration. Our hope, through this project is that by sharing women’s photos and stories, we are able to shift thinking away from stereotypes toward an appreciation of what we – as people, living with disability and difference or not – share. We seek to foster connection among people, and to enhance public education regarding disability and difference.”

The project was funded through the province-wide stream of the Ontario Trillium Foundation as well as the Canadian Women’s Foundation and the Ontario Women’s Directorate.

This amazing program is a collaborative effort involving two YWCAs, university academics, anti-violence advocates, trainers and educators and disability advocates, health institutions and, most importantly, women across Ontario living with differences and disabilities.

For over a hundred years, YWCAs and YMCA-YWCAs have been offering programs and services that meet the changing needs of women and girls in their communities. As the needs of women and girls change, so too do associations’ response in creating new and innovative programs and services. The YWCA’s Special Program Awards, first presented in 1992 at YWCA Canada’s Annual Membership Meeting, recognize programs which demonstrate innovation in partnerships, delivery and continuous impact.

The YWCA of Peterborough, Victoria and Haliburton began a creative learning process to promote anti-racism, anti-oppression and inclusion in 1993. Today Joelle Favreau, who has been at the creative heart of all of this inclusion work, is focused on ways to expand the Envisioning New Meanings of Disability and Difference Program to the rest of Canada. As the manager of the YWCA’s Compass Training Centre, she is always seeking and finding ways to take what she has learned about positive change and share it with other organizations and workplaces.

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