



Connect Women's Centres

Annual Report 2024-2025

The Provincial Association of Women's Centres

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Introduction

For the past 35 years, Connect Women's Centres (Connect) has united nine distinctive Women's Centres throughout Nova Scotia into a vibrant and supportive association. Women's Centres are front-line, community-based organizations that bring together staff and volunteers to meet the needs of women, girls and gender diverse individuals throughout rural Nova Scotia.

As a social safety net, focused on "book-ending" services, Women's Centres are critical to the continuum of care women, girls and gender diverse individuals receive when dealing with poverty, housing or food insecurity a

Through a feminist and intersectional approach, they work collectively to advocate for public policy changes and strive to advance equity and equality. Each centre tailors its services to the specific needs of its community, offering programs and services in the following areas:

- Direct Services (e.g., Support Counseling and Crisis Intervention)
- Community Education and Development Initiatives
- Advocacy Activities
- Outreach Programs

Connect facilitates coordination among the Women Centres by articulating shared activities, concerns, and needs. Its specific roles include:

- Providing a platform for information exchange and organizational development among Women's Centres
- Expressing a unified voice on the activities, concerns, and needs of Women's Centres in Nova Scotia
- Enhancing the visibility and credibility of Women's Centres in the province
- Serving as a collective feminist voice for women's concerns in Nova Scotia
- Collaborating with other organizations to advance the status of women
- Advocating for equitable funding for all Women's Centres, working with government funders to develop service agreements and reporting frameworks

- Bringing policy and program concerns affecting women to decision-making tables

This report aims to highlight Connect’s significant achievements from March 2024 to February 2025.

It has been a very busy year at Connect, with several landmark milestones and research opportunities. Some internal work was also done, which involved resetting Connect’s foundation with new by-laws and policies, as well as the launch of a customised Information Management System.

Connect’s Major Milestones 2024-2025

- ✓ Held the AGM virtually on June 25th, 2024.
- ✓ Sponsored publication of a book in honour of Paula Gallant, *For the Love of My Sister*, to which Lynn Gallant Blackburn was extremely grateful.
- ✓ Proposed changes to the Labour Standards Code and Regulations, with special focus on paid Domestic Violence Leave.
- ✓ Endorsed CCFWE’s call to have the provincial and territorial governments make survivors’ economic security and safety a key element of focus under the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (“the NAP”).
- ✓ Connect operations policy reviewed
- ✓ Connect by-laws redrafted anew
- ✓ Purchased a new corporate seal
- ✓ Created and launched a new Connect Information System and Dashboard.

Connect Research & Project Updates for 2024/25

Connect has led, or been involved in, several research projects this year, as reported here below.

Offshore Wind Research

This is a research project that aimed to assess the impact of Offshore Wind Development in Nova Scotia on women in rural areas.

Connect Policy Procedure Manual Refresh

Connect enlisted the services of Pink Larkin law firm to redraft the association’s policy and procedure manual. More generic templates were provided to the Centres to adopt at will. The hope is that this work will support the requirements of the new service level agreement presented to the Centres.

Socio-demographic Dashboard Project

To address the frustration of not being able to have socio demographic information for the Centre specific catchment areas, Connect partnered with Saint Mary’s University to retrieve and organize publicly available data into an easy to interpret and use data dashboard. Dr. Yasushi Akiyama of the SMU Computer Science department led the project, with assistance from four Masters students who worked under Connect’s Coordinator supervision.

With seed funding from the March 8th funds from the Status of Women, this project and partnership received matched funding from CLARI and MITACS, expanded the project scope to include the building of Connect’s customised Information System.

Connect Information Management System

Women Centres were allowed to stop using HIFIS, and assured by the Status of Women (SWO) that their funding would no longer depend on the software use, as long as they could collect and provide the needed data in the SWO report.

The SMU students used requirements outlined by the Centre’s reporting needs, and what is needed by SWO reports to create a minimal viable product.

6 out of 9 Centres managed to furnish the SMU students with HIFIS data, which was crucial in helping set up the minimum data set for the new Connect Information System.

Centres were given an opportunity to indicate any data or information they wanted removed from HIFIS, as they changed to their new information systems.

Shared 3 Gender-Based Violence Knowledge Synthesis Reports
Three critical knowledge synthesis reports were shared at the 2025 GBV Summit, through our newsletter and social media posts. More importantly Women Centres crafted their own GBV work-plans as a result.

Collaboration & Partnerships

One of Connect's primary activities is collaborating and partnering with organizations and agencies both within our communities and across the province. This involves working as a provincial association, supporting our Centre members, fostering Centre collaboration, and creating learning opportunities.

Over the past year, Connect and the Centres held 24 virtual meetings, supplemented by an in-person, two-day priority-setting meeting and the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Some additional collaboration and partnership opportunities include:

Path Program

The Department of Community Services sought to collaborate with Women Centres, to reach youths who qualify for the path program. Under the program, youth formerly in care or Youth Services Agreements aged 19-25 qualify to receive bi-weekly payments and other support services.

International Women's Day

Connect was represented at the International Women's Day breakfast held at Halifax Marriott Harbourfront Hotel on March 7th, 2025.

Affordable Energy Coalition (AEC)

AEC's new website is affordableenergycoalition.ca

Members of Connect were able to participate in a webinar, where Roger Colton and EPTF members presented findings and recommendations from the report, *A Way Forward: A Made-In-Nova Scotia Home Energy Affordability Program* by Roger Colton.

Be the Peace Initiative

Connect participated in IWD Summit follow-up work but did not join the administrative or planning team.

Access to Justice & Law Reform Institute Schulich School of Law

Connect and Women Centres participated in "No Longer on My Own". They also shared a resource website, www.nolongeronmyown.ca, which they developed primarily for lawyers, researchers and survivors of domestic violence.

Public & Professional Education

Connect and its Centres participated in several significant education opportunities.

Changes to Labour Code

In April 2024, Centre Executive Directors attended a focus group meeting hosted by Rachel Labonte of Nova Scotia to review and make recommendations to Nova Scotia's labour code.

Metro Interagency Restorative Conversations Committee on Family Violence (MIRCCFV)

Connect regularly participated in the efforts by the "Metro Interagency" including letter writing against the use of NDAs.

Canadian Research Institute for The Advancement of Women

Connect was represented at a function of regional discussion groups, hosted at Halifax by the Canadian research institute. The topic of discussion was how, if at all, the growth of regressive and anti-feminist movements impacted the work of individual groups.

Gender-Based Violence Project

Connect benefitted from a presentation by Fédération des Femmes Acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse ([FFANE](#)), which was based on the organisation's Gender-Based Violence project.

Connect and some Women Centres attended a knowledge sharing event dubbed, *The Power of Collaboration: A Gender-Based Violence and Women's Homelessness*, which was hosted by THANS.

MORPH Programs by Shelley

Members of Connect, Centre Executive Directors and staff received MORPH training from Shelley.

The Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) Forum

Connect was represented at the conference in Ottawa, where Basic Income Guarantee was discussed.

Rural and Remote Pregnant Mom's study: Atlantic Canada Research Unite

Connect participated in the research conducted by Dr. Salter and other researchers at Dalhousie, where the focus was ways to mitigate adverse maternal and infant outcomes. There will several follow on research opportunities with this work.

Danger Assessment Training opportunity

Connect shared 15 seats for representatives of transition houses and Women Centres, for the Danger Assessment Training with Dr. Jaquelyn Campbell. This training is normally intended for nurses and other healthcare providers.

THANS:

- 16 Days of Activism Guest at Lightning Round

Connect joined THANS to speak to schools about healthy relationships. The 16 days of activism was a period to focus on Nova Scotia’s initiatives, meant to end violence within intimate partner relationships.

- Offered a Complementary Model of Board Governance Session at NSGEU on May 29th, 2024.

New Funding from Public Safety Canada

Centres were given access to newly established funding from the government, through The Canada Community Security Program (CCSP). Centres that serve victims of gender-based violence qualify for the program.

Funding for Communication /Outreach Worker

A proposal for funding was submitted to the Status of Women Office to increase funding to Connect to hire a communication/outreach employee. This new position is expected to be the first shared service opportunity among Connect and the Centres. The communication/outreach person would standardize messaging, and knowledge brokering across the centres, and track and expand the outreach efforts of the Centres. This position would provide SWO with a centralized, and single sourced insights into rural outreach efforts and knowledge hub.

Migrant Worker Rights NS

The Executive Director, Centre for Migrant Worker Rights, NS, Stacey Gomez, presented to Connect how Centres can contribute to actions that safeguards the rights of migrant workers.

Policy Engagement and Advocacy

Over the past year, Connect and each of the nine Women's Centres engaged in numerous policy and advocacy initiatives. Acting on consensus, Connect provided a powerful voice on issues related to the social determinants of health, equality, and equity.

We maintain our advocacy efforts by collaborating with various organizations that share our mission. Here are some examples of Connect's advocacy work from the past year.

Impact Organisations of Nova Scotia (IONS)

Connect benefitted from IONS' research brief that culminated in a proposal for a 4-day workweek within the community.

Human Trafficking

Concerns were raised regarding the ineffectiveness of Status of Women's actions, as far as provision of support to victims of human trafficking is concerned. For example, safe movement of the victims is not facilitated, and instead they are left to use public transport.

New Housing Support

There was a policy change to allow Women Centres submit applications for housing support for those in need, and also to make referrals. The program director, Kathy Cox-Brown, was supportive. By the time of the program launch, 10 referral agencies had been identified, and LEA was one of them.

Also, there were already 27 clients.

Features of the housing support program:

- ✓ The government has committed itself to participate in the funding for 4yrs
- ✓ Different government departments are also set to contribute to the funding
- ✓ Potential clients must apply through acknowledged referral agencies
- ✓ An applicant must have experienced gender-based violence and declared it
- ✓ The application must be in a bid to flee from the violence
- ✓ Clients can only be hosted for a maximum of 2yrs

✓ For the clients with reasonable income, only the first year is fully sponsored. They should be ready to pay 30% of the rent during their second year of stay.

SVTT Hybrid Model

Avalon and Centers continue to collaborate, to identify a new way of working together that would bring sexual violence trauma therapist into Centres.

AEC

Connect continues to be included in the Affordable Energy Coalition, and is now listed on their website as a member.

Ban Parental Alienation: By National Association of Women and the Law

Connect continues to work with the National Association of Women and Law, and participated in the parental alienation campaign. Ultimately, the House of Commons passed Bill C-332 into law, hence coercive control has now been criminalized.

Pursuit of Charitable Status

Connect decided not to pursue charitable status, and that position has been communicated to Pink Larkin.

Connect Priorities for 2025-2026

Aside from regularly scheduled work and other opportunities that arise, the following will be the top activities that Connect will focus on in the year, 2024-2025.

- Source additional funding so that:
 - Centres can reach an additional \$150,000 each.
 - Connect can fill the Communication/Outreach position, a new position.
- Celebrate Connect’s 35th year as an association by hosting a women serving conference and training day.
- Launch the Connect Information System
- Compile and analyze a series of case studies pertaining to Centres’ HIFIS replacements.