

Report on the CAEFS - CASAC Conference
Women's Resistance: From Victimization to Criminalization

Submitted to:
Status of Women Canada
Women's Program

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. Overview

1. Background
2. Conference Participants
 - a) Privileging Grassroots Participation
 - b) Promoting Intersectionality
3. Plans that Required Amendment

B. Impact of the Conference

1. Opportunities for Collaboration
2. Conference Evaluations
 - a) Participants
 - b) Sponsoring Organizations

C. Agenda for Action and Conclusions

1. Future Work for CAEFS and CASAC
2. Public and Legal Information
3. Advances in the Academy
4. Further Coalition Building and Grassroots Development

Appendices

Appendix I - Conference Expenditures

Appendix II - Registration Packages
* not available online at this time

Appendix III - Media Kit
* not available online at this time

A. Overview

1. Background

The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS) and the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres (CASAC) have worked in alliance on a number of important women's equality issues for approximately ten years. CAEFS and CASAC, along with women with the lived experiences of victimization and criminalization, other equality-seeking groups representing women with disabilities, Aboriginal and other racialized groups, academics and theoreticians, professional and practitioners, have worked collaboratively on policy and law reform initiatives.

Most notably, this alliance has resulted in such important developments as the current rape shield and protection of women's counseling records provisions in the Criminal Code of Canada, numerous interventions into court cases designed to protect women's constitutionally protected rights pursuant to section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, initiation and follow-up to the Self Defence Review of the cases of abused women who used lethal force against abusive men, submission of position papers and briefs to bureaucratic and political staff, as well as Parliamentary and Senate standing committees regarding numerous service, policy and legal issues with respect to women's equality.

It was a natural progression of the growing alliance between CAEFS and CASAC that we initiate a forum in which we might promote greater contact and knowledge between our organizational memberships, clientele and coalition partners. Both organizations were planning to host conferences within several months of each other, so we decided to join our efforts and thereby model the growth and development of our respective initiatives into a more multi-faceted and cross-sectoral agenda for action.

Despite relatively meager financial resources, CAEFS and CASAC utilized same in a manner that would ensure grassroots leadership at the conference and organized the conference and follow-up activities in a manner designed to model and therefore provide a springboard for longer term community-based alliance-building, service delivery, policy and law reform. The impact of the conference is already revealing significant development of such alliances, adaptation and/or development of services and programs for women and girls, particularly those who are victimized and criminalized, as well as longer term public education and collaborative actions by equality-seeking groups aimed at advancing women's equality via social policy and law reform.

B. Conference Participants

Despite initially deciding to cap conference registration at 500, when, by the end of August, that number had been reached, CAEFS and CASAC decided to allow a limited number of additional registrants. In addition, during the conference, a number of women and a handful of men in the local community who heard about the conference, approached us and requested permission to attend parts of or the remainder of the conference. Most of this latter group did not choose to formally register. Based upon the number of registration kits disseminated, conference attendees, including the 550 who registered, as well as the volunteers who also participated, and the non-registered full and part-time participants, we estimate that the conference was attended by approximately 650 people.

a) Privileging Grassroots Participation

In keeping with the participatory nature of the conference, many of the participants were also involved in the presentation of information to other conference attendees, via plenary or workshop presentations, poetry readings, musical and dramatic performances, geographic, constituency and issue-specific caucus meetings, display areas, sale of materials, and more. The conference participants included:

- (i) victimized and criminalized women and girls, including women who had been sexually victimized and women and girls who had been controlled by violent men in their families, women who had been forced to defend themselves violently and young women labelled as violent themselves,
- (ii) women who are disproportionately disadvantaged economically, socially, politically and legally;
- (iii) women and girls who are subject to systemic violence;
- (iv) women from equality-seeking groups, particularly those self-organized poor women, Aboriginal and other racialized women, women from many immigrant communities, including women from Asian and South Asian community groups, women from African communities, Caribbean and South and Central American communities, women with differential physical, mental and cognitive abilities;
- (v) front-line workers from the anti-violence and prisoner advocate groups especially our members and their associates;
- (vi) legal practitioners, academics, bureaucrats, politicians and other policy makers, service providers and activists who work with or otherwise address the issues of criminalized and victimized women;
- (vii) international and domestic colleagues from women's and justice groups.

Throughout the development, delivery and follow-up to the conference, we have benefitted tremendously from the significant representation of women with the lived and front-line experience of victimization and criminalization, poor women, Aboriginal women, other racialized and immigrant women's groups. Those groups have included women with cognitive physical and mental disabilities. In addition, we were privileged with the input of women working at the local, provincial, national and international levels developing personal supports, services, policies, legislative reform, as well as community-based, regional, national and international actions and strategies.

Many conference participants commented very favourably about the nature of the conference organizers' commitments to ensuring that those with the lived experience of victimization and criminalization, Aboriginal and racialized women, lesbian, Francophone, rural and poor women in particular were well represented at the conference. Many attendees also expressed appreciation for the decision to ensure that these women, especially prisoners and women in and from shelters and front-line anti violence workers were privileged and provided with important new opportunities to work with key academics and policy-makers.

Once it became clear that resources for the conference would be quite limited and therefore all of the organizers' plans could not be accommodated, CAEFS and CASAC decided to prioritize the provision of subsidies to those with the lived experience of victimization and criminalization, especially prisoners and women in and from anti-violence centers and those working directly with the victimized and criminalized women. Accordingly, subsidies and sponsorships were provided for conference registration, transportation, meals and accommodation (including billets), child care and other personal support services and per diem during the conference.

This plan not only ensured the participation of women who would not otherwise have been able to attend the conference, but it also guaranteed those women that the organizations' assurance of influence and involvement throughout the planning and delivery of the conference was realized. We incorporated the wisdom and advice of women who participated in a number and variety of meetings that had considered the conference over five years of planning. These fora included meetings of the membership and Board of Directors of CAEFS, the Gatineau Gathering, the Winnipeg CASAC consultation, the CASAC Links meetings of CASAC researchers and the meetings of regional representatives of CASAC.

From the outset, CAEFS and CASAC advised all prospective participants that we would be privileging the disadvantaged equality-seeking groups and individual women and would therefore not be in a position to privilege those who are generally used to such treatment at other conferences.

Academics and more highly paid professionals, including government workers, were expected to utilize their relative privilege in terms of resources and communities of sponsorship and influence to facilitate their participation in the conference. Indeed, it was at the suggestion of some of these women that CAEFS and CASAC set the registration fee at \$350, with a late fee of \$450. Although we subsidized the registrations and expenses of 80% of the participants, the 20% who were in a position to pay registration fees contributed significantly to the ability of the conference to subsidize other conference participants.

In order to ensure that women were comfortable and accommodated at the conference, key support women were identified to provide 24-hour support, economic and social consideration and caucus space was reserved in advance for women in and from prisons and shelters, aboriginal and other racialized women, women from other countries, women with language barriers, lesbians and women with disabilities. Women were notified and prepared in advance of the conference in order to ensure that this support was provided as naturally and unobtrusively as possible throughout the conference. The overwhelming response of women who utilized these supports was that all assistance was provided with extreme care and women felt that they were treated with humanity, respect and dignity throughout the conference.

Fees for display space were similarly subsidized. Those with the means to pay for their space did, while a number of individuals and groups were invited to display their information and materials gratis, in order to ensure that the premium was placed upon the dissemination of important and relevant information for all conference participants.

In addition, in terms of the actual conference agenda, significant time and energy was devoted to recruiting and assisting women to develop and prepare their plenary and workshop presentations. This work ensured that the voices of women in and from prisons and anti-violence centres, as well as front-line workers from both fields, were represented on all plenary panels and in the majority of workshops.

In order to ensure that the interpretation would be as fluid and accurate as possible, significant time and energy was also devoted to ensuring that preparation materials were provided for translators. These included background documents and position papers, as well as a list of common language, terms, colloquialisms, jargon, street terms and acronyms. The development of these materials also facilitated the ongoing and very necessary pre-education work that was required by the two organizations with respect to developing common terminology and contextualizing differential interpretations.

All of the foregoing contributed to the overall success in making the conference highly accessible. A number of young women in particular commended CAEFS and CASAC for seeking out and providing outreach support to youth. The result was a very key and important core group of young women whose interests included issues of child welfare, the development of human rights and youth justice, the humanization of globalization, curtailing the pornography industry, ending prostitution, racism and poverty. Indeed, such groups as Justice for Girls, Save the Children, and the National Youth in Care Network (NYICN) were provided with opportunities for discussion amongst themselves and other women-serving organizations and policy-makers. Indeed, these organizations have continued discussions and Justice for Girls and the NYICN are involved in several key research project initiatives aimed at identifying and addressing the needs and interests of young women who have been victimized and criminalized.

b) Promoting Intersectionality

The entire conference promoted the intersection of expertise and experiences. This was encouraged and occurred in a number of ways. In terms of the lessons learned and growth experienced by professionals and academics who attended the conference, many reported that they received very significant and substantive feedback about their work. Some acknowledged that the women who attended had challenged and in some

cases corrected their assumptions or conclusions. Others indicated that participants and presenters had reinforced their pre-existing understandings and analysis. The academics in particular expressed appreciation for the opportunity that the conference provided to offer their intellectual work in support of front line work and grassroots experiences of women who have experienced sexist violence and criminalization, even imprisonment.

Given the number of comments received about the restorative justice plenary, it also bears noting that a number of conference participants felt that the perspectives of the anti-violence and Aboriginal women require much more discussion. For some, the conference plenary apparently represented the first opportunity that they had experienced whereby some of the fundamental challenges and equality-making opportunities offered by restorative approaches were considered and explored. Many felt that the subject needs significant additional time and resources devoted to ensuring that the woman-based dialogue and agenda for action may be developed.

Similarly, the plenaries regarding the need to counter regressive "law and order" approaches, as well as the call for a coalition to end the imprisonment of women generated significant feedback from conference participants and the public at large (viewing the plenary on TV). The overwhelming response has been one of concern that the work on these issues must not only continue, but that significant energy and resources need to be injected into both in order to ensure that women and girls achieve equal access to justice in Canada.

A number of women who described themselves as having had no prior involvement or interest in the issues of criminalized women, described themselves as having been startled into reality as a result of having watched the conference proceedings on CPAC. Many were ignorant of the approaches to justice which have been developed in the Canadian women's movement, as illustrated by CAEFS and CASAC member groups. Women then made donations to CAEFS and CASAC and some indicated that they would be seeking out local grassroots groups to which they would contribute time, energy and financial resources.

3. Plans that Required Amendment

Unfortunately, only as a result of very limited resourcing of the conference, our original plans with respect to the development of pre-conference materials and the provision of satellite sites that would be linked up to the conference via technology had to be abandoned. As a result, the original plan for the conference was adapted so as to ensure that sufficient resources were maintained in order to allow all participants to get to the conference. For instance, our original plan to distribute discussion papers in the form of a compact disc prior to the conference was abandoned as a result of limited resources. Instead, hard copies of discussion papers were provided to conference participants on site.

In addition, participants were encouraged to link up with each other to further share information and discuss issues. Key information about web sites and linkages to other sources of information were also disseminated. Connections that were initiated at or by the conference are being maintained electronically, particularly via email communication and list serve and web site postings. In addition, alliances were built internationally. As a result, two women's groups in Eastern Europe, three in Mexico, one in Cameroon and one in Nepal are being sistered by groups who attended the conference. The sistering groups in Canada are providing internet linkages, as well as economic and political partnering.

As part of the rethinking of the expenditures with respect to compact discs and official proceedings from the conference, the organizers decided to produce more post conference material rather than invest in pre-conference material alone. At present, all plenary sessions from the Conference have been developed into compact disc recordings and are also available in both compact disc and MP3 format. Indeed, a copy of the plenary sessions is enclosed with this report. In addition, we are in the process of editing and developing additional recordings of those workshops for which we have audible audio taped recordings. These post conference materials will be advertised on the CAEFS and CASAC web sites. In addition to being

promoted amongst Universities, Governmental bodies and women's equality and other social justice organizations.

In terms of measurable outcomes from the conference, our original plan was to focus on a number of joint resolutions by the end of the conference. As a result of the widespread interest in the conference and the quality of participants who are showing interest in engaging in a much broader dialogue at the conference, we decided to transform this plan. We began to see that it would be a waste of incredible talent, and practical and intellectual resources, to try to overly focus the conference on one plan. As a result, we diminished our focus on the need to develop joint resolutions emerging out of the conference; and, instead decided to enhance all our plans to encourage participants to develop a multiplicity of action plans that will be initiated into their communities of interest, organizations, et cetera, both during and following the conference. There are many examples. The foregoing provided just a few of these action plans and ongoing liaisons between conference participants.

B. Impact of the Conference

1. Opportunities for Collaboration

Overall, one of the most common responses to the conference, was an indication that women had developed increased awareness and appreciation of others working on women's equality and social justice issues. The conference itself, provided the first opportunity for many anti-violence and prison workers to meet and discuss shared concerns, experiences and strategies for developing improved services, policy and law reform for their respective clientele. In addition, for some of the women in and from shelters and prisons, the conference provided the first opportunity to actually meet with Parliamentarians, Academics and other activists.

A number of individuals commented on the unique opportunity posed by this conference to encourage dialogue between Parliamentarians, American and Canadian Academics, activists, front line workers and women in and from prisons and anti-violence centres. The discussions promoted a great deal of interest and cross talk, in addition to a very rich exchange of ideas and interesting considerations with respect to potentially new theories of change. The conference also provided an opportunity for front line workers and Aboriginal Leadership to further develop the voice and important political leadership by women in anti-violence and prison contexts.

The display space also provided an excellent exemplification of the ability of women from diverse backgrounds, experiences and expertise to collaborate in planning effective and informative displays. The very act of developing the display space was one of consultation and collaboration. The end result, was a seamless overview of a variety of issues pertaining to women and girls who are victimized and criminalized, including historical materials, materials that were for sale, and initiatives that urged participants to think creatively about their own work and the future of the movement towards women's equality.

Since the conference, the collaboration has continued in a variety of ways that will be discussed later. One example of this is the fact that a woman who is on contract with the Swedish Government is now working in partnership with a rape crisis center in Vancouver and a women's center in Quebec against prostitution and trafficking of women in Canada. Another example, is the work that one woman who had experienced historical racism, when she was jailed in the Mercer Reformatory as a result of her sexual relationship with a Chinese Canadian man, with women and prison and shelter work. This woman, who is now in her seventies, linked up during the Conference with young women, immigrant women and front line anti-violence and anti-prison workers, as well as academics who were interested in developing the linkages between her life experience and ongoing struggle and the experiences that are currently ongoing for women and girls throughout Canada.

Other examples include but are not limited to: the involvement of artists who are also activists and public educators and technicians throughout the conference, the coordination of several Provincially-based groups who are working to address the burgeoning development of child apprehension and detention legislation, parading under the guise of child protection in Canada. This provided a cross-geographic, cross-Canada discussion that involved lawyers, academics, transition house and women center staff and women in and from prison, as well as their advocates.

There was also considerable International collaboration regarding the connections between globalization and the increase in the use of prison, women's issues, human security and human rights concerns, international discussions of trafficking and local prostitution issues, connections between international security and human rights issues of violence against women and the criminalization of women.

Unfortunately, the combination of the late notice of receipt of funds from CIDA and the tragic events of September 11, 2002, meant that a number of the women who we anticipated would be able to attend the conference were unable to obtain travel documents in time to do so. Furthermore, one woman from Cameroon who planned to attend and for whom we had already purchased an airline ticket notified us on Friday, September 28, 2001, that she had just been refused a travel visa by Canada. In addition to continuing to maintain our contact with her, CASAC has developed a sistering alliance with her group and they have contributed resources to them as well.

One of the most common responses the organizers received both during and following the conference was appreciation expressed for the provision for a women's conference at all. A number of the women who attended the conference have never experienced a women's conference and most found it quite an intensely positive experience.

One of the most overwhelming recommendations was that the conference organizers continue the momentum and plan to develop additional conferences in the future. While there is some interest in this possibility, in the immediate future, the plans are to continue to work with the groups who participated in the conference and to assist other equality seeking organizations to incorporate some of the strategies and learning from the Women's Resistance Conference into their conferences, event planning and plans for action.

2. Conference Evaluations

a) Participants

CAEFS and CASAC have received many accolades for having provided 10 outstanding plenary sessions and a very impressive and rich array of 130 workshops. Indeed, our first success and one of the issues about which we have received considerable feedback is the success in terms of the number and quality of workshop proposals, which we offered. Initially, we intended to refocus a number of the workshops in order to decrease the number of presentations. When we examined the workshop proposals, we decided to reconsider this strategy and instead decided to reorganize the conference in order to accommodate the quantity, quality and expertise of the workshops that were being proposed.

The feedback from women who attended the conference, particularly those not members of either CAEFS or CASAC, is that there was an impressive involvement of women in and from prisons and shelters and front line workers. It was only due to our lack of resources and the timing of the allocation of the resources we did receive, which prevented us from knowing whether in fact we could have developed the audio and video conferencing aspect of the plenaries and display area. Had time and resources permitted, we had intended to involve ten shelters and ten prison sites at the conference. Both organizations plan to ensure that women in and from shelters and prisons will have access to the video and audio records of the

conference proceedings. As it happens, there is no doubt that the record of the conference will be having an impact for some time across many disciplines and areas of work for and about women.

Rather than conduct evaluations at the time of the Conference, the organizers decided to ensure that more thoughtful and considered feedback was received from Conference participants. The result was that approximately six weeks after the Conference, all Conference participants were contacted via electronic mail and requested to complete an online evaluation form. A copy of that evaluation form is attached as an appendix. In addition, people gave oral evaluations throughout the Conference and delivered elaborate evaluations during the closing plenary. We encouraged all participants to complete an evaluation online. Many also chose also to write personal letters of congratulations and thanks to both of the Conference organizing groups.

Although most everyone described their very positive impressions at meeting women in and from shelters, anti-violence centers and prisons, and the fact that women with the lived experience were well represented at the Conference, both organizations always consider that they can improve in this area. Accordingly, the organizers have agreed that while prisoners and rape and abuse victims were well represented, we would still have preferred to have seen more of them evident and comfortable being identified as such, at the Conference.

There was a minority opinion that it was outside their experience to have so much going on such a caliber of workshops at a conference. Indeed, one of the few critiques that the Conference has received, is that the Conference needed to be offered in three to four different conferences as opposed to the one that did occur. As conference organizers, we planned for conference participants to take breaks and use all of the time of the Conference according to meet their respective needs.

For a number of women, however, they were so caught up in the energy of the Conference and the desire to glean as much information as possible from the experience, that they reported feeling extremely energized, but physically exhausted by the end of the Conference. A number of these women described the Conference as offering far too much mental, intellectual and physical stimulation. Indeed, in order to accommodate as much of the material we hoped to include in the Conference, there were very few breaks and expressed desire that Conference participants decide for themselves how to monitor and address their own needs. A number of the women felt overwhelmed by the number of workshops and by the end of the Conference were exhausted. As a result, the organizers have determined that any future conferences would need to include instructions for participants around self-care and regulation.

In terms of interpretation and translation services, some women were so unfamiliar with having translation that there were some language-based misunderstandings that were caused. For instance, in some contexts where translation was provided, women did not don the headsets that were provided, so some Francophone women were properly insulted by the apparent insensitivity of presenters and some facilitators to language requirements. In addition, some of the women who were volunteering at the registration desk were mistakenly informed by contractors that they should tell conference participants that the plenaries would be offered in English in a number of time slots and that therefore, they did not require translation devices. The headsets were of course necessary in order to demonstrate a commitment to complete language understanding between Francophones and Anglophones, and in any case we felt that the headsets would assist all women in hearing the discussions of plenary participants in the main hall which has difficult acoustics. We issued an apology on behalf of CAEFS and CASAC from the podium, an action which participants described as having clarified the mistake and consequently avoided continued resentment and paranoia.

In spite of active urging on the part of the conference organizers to encourage presenters to use inventive and creative formats, most of the workshop presentations consisted of a thirty-forty minute presentation followed by a discussion period of between 15 and 45 minutes. In addition, most of the presentations were relatively low in terms of use of technological equipment. In some cases, however, presenters utilized

video, PowerPoint, dramatic and other visual and auditory approaches to presenting their conference materials.

Some of the conference workshops were attended by as few as five to eight women, however, most workshops, even those with small numbers, resulted in the construction by the workshop participants of ongoing networks and numerous local, provincial and inter-provincial activities, as well as national and international initiatives related to the issues discussed (eg. please refer to the letter from Dr. Karlene Faith attached in the appendices). Indeed, conference evaluations revealed that none of the participants considered the workshops a waste of time for either the participant or the presenter and many of the workshops were literally bulging at the seams, with all seating and floor space consumed by conference participants. In addition, CAEFS and CASAC, as well as other organizations and individuals continue to receive correspondence via the post, electronic mail and telephone calls and facsimiles regarding the information that was first raised at the conference.

Much of what was discussed at the conference has generated further discussion and actions. Although there were many kinds of workshops that left lasting effects, impressions or connections, the most emotionally charged workshops were those presented by prisoners and abused women and their advocates. Not surprisingly, conference participants found these presentations the most likely to have pushed them to consider alternative viewpoints and realities. Many participants in these workshops in particular commented that the issues which were discussed were new to them and that Women's Resistance Conference informed them of many issues, materials, groups and individuals of which they had previously been ignorant and/or unenlightened.

All of the plenaries were considered extremely worthwhile and have generated important and lasting discussions amongst conference participants and others in their geographic communities, as well as their communities of interest. The manner in which the plenaries were organized involved designs, which were clearly established in order to ensure that the plenaries were quite different from usual conference plenary sessions. The conference organizers employed the plenaries in order to assist them to create thematic unity for the conference and to ensure that the voices and views of those that needed to be heard were presented and in a manner that kept the conference focused thematically on the issues which both CAEFS and CASAC felt were important and necessary for all participants. Each of the ten plenaries included the voices of women in and from prison and shelters, front line workers, policy makers and academics. CASAC and CAEFS developed the plenary themes and questions.

The feedback from conference participants indicates that they, like we, believe that we asked the right questions. In hindsight, however, we believe that it would have been useful to have somehow incorporated another plenary into the conference which could have considered when and how to assess reforms proposed by government, such as restorative justice, might be in the interest of women's equality and particularly how they might contribute to an end to violence and an end to women's imprisonment.

Overall, there was so much content and it was provided in such a compact and dense manner that, for some women, particularly because much of it was new material, it gave the conference the character of an intense intellectual as well as a consciousness-raising experience. While some of this was planned, it is clear from the evaluations and other feedback received from conference participants that this occurred far more than we had expected and that it enhanced the overall effectiveness of each plenary, as well as the conference as a whole.

In addition to arranging with CPAC to cover all of the plenary sessions for the Conference, CAEFS and CASAC hired a media coordinator to assist with communications involving media work during the conference. A copy of the media packages produced, as well as the joint statement of both CAEFS and CASAC is attached as an appendix to this report.

Most of the media focused on the response of Minister Fry to the speech delivered by Dr. Sunera Thobani, and then to the speech and the support expressed for it from the conference participants. There were many

important linkages made to both organizations and the work done by the national body as well our member organizations. In addition to the headlines that covered the country, the Prime Minister responded to a question in Question Period in the House of Commons with a very positive and supportive affirmation of the importance of our organizations being able to utilize public space and public resources in order to deliver the conference and work to advance the interests of our constituencies. Indeed, immediately following the conference, we wrote to the Prime Minister to thank him for his leadership in this respect.

We anticipated that our work and the conference would be minimized in the press, but in fact the interest has been quite widespread. Dr. Thobani's speech was reproduced in its entirety by the Vancouver Sun and there have been links made in the press to the disappearances and probable deaths of prostituted women in Vancouver and Edmonton in particular, the trafficking of women and children and calls for peace and social justice from many individuals and groups.

The result of the outcry of Dr. Thobani's speech has been unprecedented massive academic support for her speech, her right to make the speech, the academic impact of the Conference overall and the very real importance of the Conference information. In addition, the National Association of Women and the Law invited Ms. Dr. Thobani to speak about the conference and her experiences in relation thereto.

It is clear from the many requests that we are receiving for transcripts, tapes, compact discs, MP3s and video tapes, that there are many Canadians and many others internationally who are extremely interested in following our progress on women's equality issues. The Women's Resistance Conference has sparked interest from a number of fronts at the international level. In addition to the work that Sweden is doing to link up with activists and academics who are working on the issue of Trafficking of Women and Children, the work with Mexico, Cameroon and Nepalese women who attended the conference also continues as those groups returned to their home countries in order to further the information they gleaned at the Conference. In addition, women in Eastern Europe, Central and South America, Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, have expressed significant interest in replicating our efforts in their countries, as well as their interest in participating in the ongoing discussions regarding a number of the issues that emerged out of the CAEFS-CASAC Conference.

Even some of the most seasoned conference attendees and political personalities described the conference as having provided life-changing experiences for many women, particularly young women. A number of the front-line workers and academics felt that the conference completely reinforced and energized them, a process that can only serve to renew efforts to organize locally, regionally, and provincially, not to mention nationally. Francophone anti-violence workers in particular indicated that despite the few glitches with respect to translation at the conference, they found the quality and value of content so significant that they were unwilling to disrupt the conference in order to make their very valid and important point about the need to accommodate varying linguistic needs.

Finally, a number of women talked about the need to ensure that women's groups remain committed to working together and that the state is recognized as, "more likely to be in the position of oppositional partner than the other women working within the movement." Quebec women, for instance, have indicated that the conference has caused them to now be thinking about the criminal justice system more and differently, and that the conference has also spurred them to see the importance of working more closely with the Pan Canadian women's movement. In addition, a number of the Quebec-based women's groups have indicated plans to replicate the Women's Resistance Conference in Quebec focusing on issues for Québécoise.

In terms of accessibility, many women discussed with gratitude and appreciation, the fact that there were very few personal needs or minority interest demands that we could not meet during the conference. It is our view, that the strategy of choosing a lead person to provide support within each disadvantaged group that we could identify before the conference, working with them to improve access and support for other like-positioned women for and during the conference was a very important and key political decision.

Conference participants generally relayed their view that these decisions were good ideas. In some cases the support could have been more fully developed – for women with disabilities in particular – but it was interfered with by the unpredictable funding and the unfortunate consequences of the lateness of the resourcing that was available. Such requests as the provision of materials in Braille and interpreters for the hearing impaired (ie. special materials, tools or processes for disabled organizers), were impossible to accommodate on our budget.

The strategy of ensuring that several streams and themes were equally involved throughout the conference was also reported as an important and valued strategy. While we were planning the conference, it also reminded us who was missing and forced us to work harder to ensure that women with the lived experience of prison, rape crisis centres and/or shelters were involved in the conference. It also ensured that it was a very good representation of front line workers, academics, professions, policy makers and students, as well as the women with the lived experience. The main improvement that CAEFS and CASAC would like to see for any future events would be the provision of additional resources and time in order to ensure that the political organizing is even more complete.

The privileging of the dispossessed, particularly prisoners, abused women and their front-line advocates, meant that the speakers from those constituency groups were never tokenized or isolated. In addition, all of the women who were involved who might be seen as representing these constituency groups indicated that they felt that their involvement was extremely well valued and that they had a constituency base at the conference which consistently confirmed, enhanced and/or supported what they were saying. This latter reality, in the experience of both CAEFS and CASAC, is what makes the difference between women being tokenized and exploited, versus being respected as the rightful authorities of their own lives and experiences.

Our strategy of insisting that academics not present in a lecture style was met with mixed but some success. We encouraged academics to use the conference, not to just flatly report research findings, or theories. Instead, we very much encouraged the academic participants to utilize the Conference to advance and generate new theories and findings, as a result of their contact with the grassroots-based women and women with lived experience of victimization and criminalization. Many academics reported that the Women's Resistance Conference was by far, the best they had ever participated in, in terms of a conference that furthered their own learning and challenged their otherwise establish expertise.

As Russ Immarigeon, a conference attendee who co-edits the American publication, *Women, Girls and Criminal Justice*, reported in the February/March 2002 (v. 3, n. 2, at p. 31) edition,

"...a clear accomplishment of the conference was that it was able to bring a diverse assortment of academics, governmental workers, community activist, formerly incarcerated and incarcerated women, practitioners, and researchers together to share concerns, feelings, histories, issues, perspectives, and working prospects for change."

b) Sponsoring Organizations

While CAEFS and CASAC enjoyed considerable success in organizing and implementing the "event", both organizations feel that the assurance of resources much earlier in the planning process would have significantly impacted the manner and nature of conference planning in this case. In any situation, planning a conference is an undertaking that can impose a large strain on organizations. This conference would have been impossible for any organization to do without external core funding, a reality which poses a major contradiction in terms of the manner in which the Status of Women Canada funds and responds to women's equality-seeking groups.

Most appropriately, the Status of Women Canada expects and supports the involvement of grass roots groups and individuals in the activities they fund. Unfortunately, however, if CAEFS had not already

enjoyed a fairly stable base of operations, the planning for the conference would have been quite significantly undermined. Accordingly, while we are very appreciative of the resources that were provided, we think that our experience is not likely unique, and that many of the groups that could be providing very important contributions to conference presentations and/or formats, cannot be sustained by the current manner in which Status of Women allocates funds, project funding being a significant contributor to this reality.

Fortunately, the conference organizers were able to draw on the resources of CAEFS and the significant preliminary planning work that had been conducted by the CASAC Advisory Committee three years earlier in Winnipeg. In fact, many of the issues raised at the Winnipeg Conference became a portion of the Women's Resistance Conference. For instance, a number of the themes, plenary speakers, and inclusion plans for women in and from prisons and shelters emerged from that meeting three years ago. The Winnipeg planning meeting also provided the impetus for the inclusion of ideas for the manner in which support could be provided to participants during the conference, in terms of personal care designates and supporters.

In terms of human resources and advance planning of and for the conference, the first choice of CAEFS and CASAC with respect to organizing the Conference, would have been to second one or more of our staff members, in order to organize the event. Our second choice would have been to hire a staff through one or both the organizations. Unfortunately, because of the rather long and arduous application process in terms of the funds received from the Canadian Government, we were forced to utilize our third choice in terms of staffing the planning process for the Conference.

The decision was a \$45,000 choice, which could have meant two new half-time positions within each of the organizations which could have increased not only the contacts, not only the quality of the Conference but also the contacts, skills and overall capacity of both organizations long term. If we had been able to hire two additional half time women externally, we would have undoubtedly been able to pull from a pool of women who are allied to our respective organizations, who also could have assisted us in developing the Conference in a more methodical and holistic manner. This would also have kept the skills and contacts from the Conference within the organizations and the wider women's movement – a reality that would have contributed to the capacity building of both organizations as well as equality seeking women's groups throughout Canada.

As a result of the lateness of the announcements with respect to resources, however, we were left with the only option we had at the last minute which was to hire a company. Unfortunately, this also meant that we spent a great deal of time with the company trying to assist them in understanding our organizations, what the work of our constituencies is, as well as the skill levels that are required, we lost all of that expertise once the conference and therefore the contract with the private company expired. This should not be understood as indicating that we did not value or appreciate the work of the company on behalf of CAEFS and CASAC. Quite the contrary, the company worked very hard and was generally very good at addressing a number of organizational matters. We were stuck, however, with the reality of mistakes made that had significant political implications for both organizations.

For example, the company staff were responsible for informing conference participants that women did not have to pick up headsets because most of the events of the day would be conducted in English. The company also failed to initially negotiate the taping of the translators. The result was that CAEFS and CASAC were forced to negotiate on the spot at the conference, with the collective translators regarding their fees for having their translation tape recorded. The company did not understand CAEFS and CASAC as organizations and therefore could not know the political implications of slighting the collective of translators and their union or the importance of having the French translation on audiotape and videotape. In their view, this was an inefficient business decision. In ours, it was a vital organizing decision.

In addition, the company did not understand our decision to privilege the application of sparse resources to most benefit the dispossessed. For instance, even though it was not part of their decision-making the

company staff advised more than one presenter that their registration fees would likely be waived. Moreover, when allocating their work time, the company presumed that keynote plenary speakers and presenters would have professional contracts rather than agreements with CAEFS and CASAC based upon political alliances. While such contracting is certainly the norm for many conferences, as we have already discussed, in this conference, there were many presenters who also paid registration fees and funded their own attendance at the conference.

Similar culture and privilege clashes arose in terms of participant registration, accommodation and provision of food and refreshments during the conference. It was clear that the company had rarely dealt with individuals who do not possess credit cards and/or have many other experiences of dispossession and marginalization. They later indicated that the only previous experience they could draw upon was a conference they organized with Aboriginal groups. On the other hand, the company staff reported that they learned significant new information and lessons regarding the nature of grassroots conference organizing and were happy for the many new ideas and possibilities our conference taught them about how to privilege those who otherwise do not usually enjoy privileges of any sort.

In the future, both CAEFS and CASAC would prefer to be able to hire staff internally in order to organize such an event. By being able to organize internally, additional support for meetings, conference calls, other technological support, et cetera, could be provided by the organizations and could benefit the organizations long after the completion of the conference. There certainly was sufficient work throughout the conference planning process and the conference itself to allow CAEFS and CASAC to hire someone to do the technological support both before and following the conference.

Such in-house technical support could have included managing the web site, preparation of pre-conference materials, registration of conference participants, the dissemination of the conference agenda, as well as the conference evaluation process. Ideally, CAEFS and CASAC would have benefitted from a joint staffing model whereby such technical support would have been provided in-house in order to promote an even more meaningful and long-standing partnership and alliance between our organizations and others who participated in the conference.

As a result of the situation as it did unfold, both organizations have been left without sufficient resourcing both at the planning and follow-up stages of the conference. While we realize that this came partially as a result of our decisions regarding who to privilege in terms of the conference participation, given the interest of the Women's Program in encouraging grassroots organizing and support for grassroots involvement in such conferences and planning events, it is our view that the entire process needs to be reexamined through the lens of less well resourced groups.

From the outset, CAEFS and CASAC were committed to ensuring that the Conference planning process was as transparent as possible. This meant that all decisions regarding the agenda, as well as all budgetary decisions, were made in an open and transparent manner. Although the work was extremely demanding, and at times emotionally charged, the result of the work has been the enhancement of a growing alliance between both organizations and other equality seeking women's groups.

We valued transparency as a method of ensuring as much democracy as possible, as little discomfort as possible and as little distraction as possible from the core issues. We were very aware that organizing the conference was also an exercise in building a coalition across very big divides. We wanted to be sure too that fatigue, intellectual upset and emotional intensity did not give rise to misunderstandings of feminist intent. As such, from the outset, conference participants were kept advised of all the key decision-making by CAEFS and CASAC. The feedback we have received regarding the results of this process is that the transparency of both organizations with respect to the entire conference helped prevent many women from becoming paranoid or resentful when differences arose and/or where issues were not clearly defined.

In terms of other lessons we learned, the decision to develop strategies to provide support and promote marginalized groups worked extremely well on the whole. There was a remarkable synchronicity between

the number of women who were subsidized, received caucus rooms, were included as plenary presenters, spoke at the microphone during the plenary sessions, presented workshops and utilized the services that generally were provided for them.

C. Agenda for Action and Conclusions

1. Future Work for CAEFS and CASAC

The Women's Resistance Conference generated many new activities and interests for both organizations, as well as many other individuals and organizations working on women's equality and social justice issues in Canada. Of particular interest to both CAEFS and CASAC, however, is the growing interest within both organizations for a national meeting to discuss what women should be doing about several issues that are of significant interest to both organizations. For instance, the issue of self-defence and the manner in which the law is applied to women who defend themselves is an issue for both organizations about which significant law reform work remains to be done. For both groups, it is an issue of community understanding of legal information, a matter of policing and criminal prosecution, a matter of criminal justice reform regarding self defence and provocation, as well as the gendering of charging, prosecuting and sentencing.

In addition, issues pertaining to cognitive disabilities and mental health issues within the populations of women served by both organizations are also a growing concern. In halfway houses and transition houses alike, women with cognitive and mental disabilities pose significant challenges with respect to the need for protection and development of agency in the provision of services with and for those women and others for whom the shelters and halfway houses have been established historically. Furthermore, the complications of intersection with issues of addictions and chronic poverty and homelessness compound these problems.

In addition, both organizations would like to discuss strategies for addressing issues pertaining to violence against women and the increasing criminalization of women. We share an interest in the criminalization of women's adaptations to poverty, sexist physical abuse and sexually predatory behaviour. These interests require resourcing however, and therefore, both organizations look forward to future funding opportunities in order to enhance the potential for working together on local, provincial, regional and national issues.

One of the specific needs that a number of women's groups who attended the conference outlined – indeed, the women's groups from Quebec underscored – the need for an electronic/computer server for women's services. The women in Quebec have joined together to develop such a service, however, the progress at the national level seems to be flagging in this regard. The Industry Canada promise that their resourcing would result in the computerization of women's groups is anything but delivered. CAEFS and CASAC seem to be in the lead in experimenting with digitalization within the Anglophone national groups, however there is much to be envied in the Francophone experience and funding. Accordingly, CAEFS and CASAC encourage the Women's Program to advance this interest by ensuring that the women's organizations that are performing the work in this area are adequately funded to continue to pursue these goals.

In addition, both CAEFS and CASAC have agreed that the organizations require time and resources in order not only to support policy development and legislative reform initiatives, but also to develop internal mechanisms for strengthening the new alliances and learning that has emerged from the Conference. The work has begun within both organizations in order to ensure that the energy and enthusiasm from the Conference continues. The time, or energy and concentration that are required to coordinate such work without additional resources are proving extremely difficult to maintain by both organizations.

Several issues and initiatives have arisen as a result of the CAEFS/CASAC Conference, Women's Resistance: From Victimization to Criminalization. In addition to the development of consultations on issues between and amongst women's groups, the conference has resulted in a number of non-equality seeking groups inviting CAEFS and CASAC to participate in discussions with respect to restorative justice, the definition of and orientation of new Law Commission projects, discussions regarding the sexual exploitation of children and youth and their relationship to women's equality, the sponsorship of a youth

group focused on sexual exploitation of children and youth, utilizing a feminist analysis and framework, several inter-organizational and community meetings, consultations, and joint planning initiatives regarding a number of the issues discussed during the conference, particularly child protection, juvenile justice, decarceration strategies, anti-regressive law and order initiatives, immigration, pay equity, violence against women as a matter for the federal government, women's equality as an issue of human rights as well as of international trade and development.

In short, the issues and initiatives discussed at the conference and the overall results of the conference point to the need and obligation of the Canadian government to continue to support such initiatives from the independent women's movement and especially from our organizations. The success of the conference clearly demonstrated the capacity of CAEFS and CASAC to mobilize and unify disparate branches of the movement for the improvement of the status of women in Canada.

2. Public and Legal Information

CAEFS and CASAC are currently promoting conference proceedings to various post secondary institutions across the country. Conference CDs and MP3s are being requested by many libraries, most frequently law libraries. International women's organizations are also requesting the proceedings and we are starting to circulate them to Eastern Europe, Africa, Argentina, Mexico, Australia, United Kingdom and the United States. We also plan to send all Supreme Court judges copies of the proceedings. We are also currently engaging commitments to post parts of the content on women's web sites nationally and internationally.

CAEFS and CASAC have also promoted the proceedings on several international list serves. We are particularly focused on those connected with ending prostitution, prison abolition, the intersection of race and prison, women's equality, social justice and human rights networks.

3. Advances in the Academy

The conference identified new expert leadership for criminologists and sociologists with respect issues of women's criminality, the violent victimization of women, women's resistance and the practical impact of law and law reform on women, particularly those struggling for equality. Front line workers, prisoners and victimized women also identified helpful professionals and knowledgeable and open academics with whom they commenced potential alliances.

Both CASAC and CAEFS have been approached by academics to participate in new research as a result of contacts made during the conference. For example, negotiations have commenced between academic researchers in Alberta and CASAC regarding recent changes to rape law in Canada. In addition, CAEFS has been approached to facilitate the publication of the writings of women prisoners by several Canadian and international journals. CAEFS has also agreed to contribute commentaries and chapters to several academic collections regarding the victimization, criminalization and imprisonment of women. Researchers are also discussing an examination of the Justice-sponsored, CASAC-organized consultations with equality-seeking women's groups.

4. Coalition Building and Grassroots Development

As a result of the Women's Resistance Conference, a new network has formed of women's equality-based groups the purpose of which is to share ideas, practices and development of practical and policy interventions for sexual exploited women and girls. New links have been made between pornography and the sexual exploitation of women.

CASAC and CAEFS have also commenced a new level of international grassroots to grassroots work. CASAC has raised more than \$2000 worth of support for third world women's groups as a result of the conference. CAEFS is also working in collaboration with women involved in work with women prisoners in Nepal, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Costa Rica and the United States. In addition, both CAEFS and CASAC have been invited to participate in international conferences and other women's fora to discuss such issues as violence against women, women in prison, women and AIDS/HIV, the North American experience of Commonwealth Law and its applicability to the South, city-based organizing for women.

In Canada, CAEFS and CASAC members, as well as other women's groups have agreed to work together to prevent the criminalization of women involved in prostitution. The CASAC membership has also agreed to work to determine whether they can come to a combined position regarding whether or not to criminalize the men who purchase sex.

Both CAEFS and CASAC confirmed their commitment to work in coalition to counter regressive law and order agenda, women's imprisonment and both organizations are working on strategies to insure that provincially funded and administered services do not contravene Charter and human rights protections. Both CAEFS and CASAC are working to develop national strategies to insulate the work of our membership from provincial pressures to abandon the equality-seeking nature of our work in favour of only providing services. These strategies will also serve to address provincial and municipal off-loading of responsibilities without the requisite resources for the most vulnerable and dispossessed. Both organizations have identified key Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Groups as key sites of engagement.

Representatives of CAEFS, CASAC, NAC, and NAWL have discussed the possibilities of joint meetings to discuss collaborative working possibilities on various issues raised at and by the conference. Member groups of CAEFS and CASAC are also continuing to develop future possibilities for digitization and other electronic links, and have explored the possibility of seeking resources from Industry Canada to further same.

At the local or grassroots level, the conference has inspired many new partnerships and activities. CAEFS and CASAC consider it a mark of the success of the Women's Resistance conference that many new initiatives are springing up across the country. For instance, there is an increased willingness on the part of anti-violence workers to work with criminalized women. In addition, steps have been made toward the unification of an anti-prostitution position for anti-violence workers in Quebec within the context of the current work of the FFQ.

Additionally, the conference engaged critics of the systems of policing, courts and corrections, wherever placed in the hierarchy, in a productive dialogue which served to raise the general level of consciousness and inspired new and imaginative pioneering partnerships to challenge the status quo. Conference participants have expressed tremendous interest and agreement to form new partnerships and coalitions to monitor and critique police behaviour across the country. There was also widespread dissatisfaction with community policing which inspired the establishment of monitoring mechanisms to track police response to violence against women.

Ordinary women learned that restrictions on their wages, working conditions and operating expenses are not so much a matter of organizational decision-making but more a function of provincial and federal government decision-making. Also, many front-line workers learned of the relatively small economic gap between them and the women they serve, as compared to them and professionalized women. The large number of front-line workers, criminalized and victimized women caused professional women to consider the particular nature of their privilege and the particular expertise of the women without their privilege on matters of law, especially in relation to matters of violence.

As a result of the Women's Resistance conference, women who participated in the conference gained increased insights into the linkages between victimization, prostitution, criminalization, mental and

cognitive disabilities of women and girls. Some of these women have decided to engage in activities designed to address such linkages. In particular, women are working to develop strategies to identify and address the need for adaptive strategies in order to assist these women in organizing to address their dispossession and oppression.

Finally, we wish to reiterate that the ability of both CASAC and CAEFS to develop additional action plans is in large part limited by the reality that time, energy and financial resources of the two sponsoring organizations were absorbed by the conference, directly as a result of inadequate funding and the timing of the allocation of same. This reality notwithstanding, we will continue to build upon the form and substance of the conference.

Women who participated in the conference, repeatedly described the planning processes utilized by CAEFS and CASAC as a new set of "best practices" for women's organizing, conferences and consultations. Many individuals and organizations have indicated their interest in modeling the manner in which the conference demonstrated and validated the following:

- a. inclusive and inter-sectoral debate,
- b. inclusive decision-making,
- c. transparent partnerships, economics and follow-up processes,
- d. incorporation as opposed to separation of the young women and girls, as well as many others, especially those on the front-line and those with the lived experience, in all decision-making,
- e. the preparation of translators,
- f. the utilization of public space and broadcasting,
- g. support of and for other national women's groups,
- h. sponsorship and support for international organizing.

Both CASAC and CAEFS look forward to building on the demonstrated success of the entire conference experience and thank all who made it possible.

A p p e n d i c e s

Appendix I - Conference Expenditures

Women's Resistance Conference Expenditures	
Expenditures by Budget Item	Amount
Travel	
• Staff Travel	\$ 5,500.00
• Cost for Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Meetings	\$15,000.00
• Travel and Accommodation for Speakers	\$24,654.16
• Subsidies for Low Income Participants/Presenters	\$50,974.56
• Honouraria, Child & Attendant Care	\$ 4,000.00
Publicity	
• Production/Distribution of Bilingual Brochures/Posters/Web Site/ Registration Forms/Packages/Final Report	\$15,573.38

Salaries	
• Event Staff	\$11,000.00
• Company to Coordinate Registration	\$42,941.88
• Ad Hoc and Advisory Committees from CAEFS and CASAC, staff time to oversee and monitor financial and implementation activities	\$ 24,000.00
Translation and Language Interpretation	\$27,451.22
Facilities and Refreshments/Meals	\$40,110.23
Office Supplies, Photocopying, Postage, Telephone/Fax/Conference Calls	\$6,472.28
Artistic Displays/Poetry Readings/Musical Performances	\$3,500.00
<u>Total</u>	\$316,331.87

Appendices II and III not available online at this time