

Status of Women Council of the NWT



# Untold Stories 3

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## Introduction

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The Status of Women Council of the Northwest Territories is proud to present “Untold Stories 3.” This is the third in a series of publications that the communities in the Northwest Territories use as a resource for facilitating understanding of the effects of family violence. This book contains stories of violence and caution is recommended when viewing. Please refer to the numbers in the back of the book if you or someone you know is experiencing violence and would like support.

There are many types of family violence; physical, psychological, emotional, financial, abusive control, sexual, neglect, stalking, familial homicide, cyber abuse, and witnessing or exposure to violence.

The stories, poems, and pictures in this edition were all submitted by NWT residents to The Status of Women Council since the last edition in 2002. If you submitted material for this publication and do not see it represented here please know that both you, and your story are valued. It will be considered for other editions in the future. The information that would identify locations and the names of the people in the stories are changed to protect privacy.

These stories come from truly brave and resilient women of the north. We can not thank you enough for being who you are and walking with us on the journey to end family violence.

**“A woman is like a tea bag – you can’t tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.”**

~Eleanor Roosevelt

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# Untitled

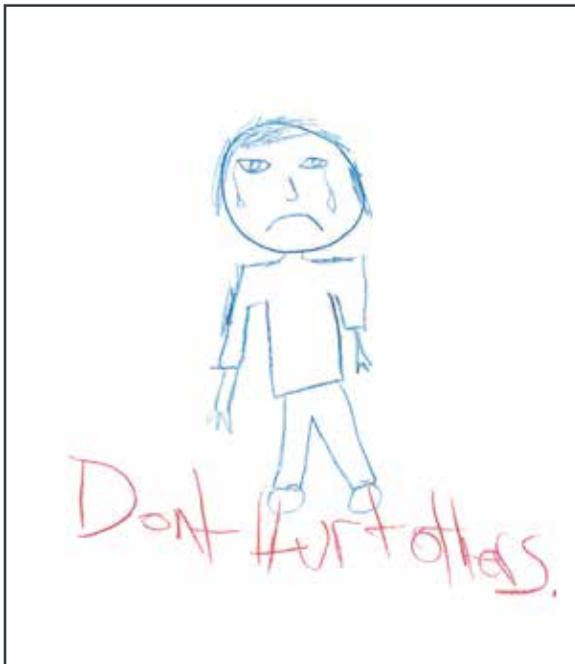
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Wills are iron  
Voices are strong  
And piercing

We intend to shatter man's imposing shadow  
Every fellow woman to fall, broken  
Is just another reason to fight  
Not with fists and abuse  
But with protest and petition

Together we are strong  
Together we are powerful  
Together we can bring about change  
To benefit the whole world.

~By Edward Hunt



**"I'm no longer accepting  
the things I cannot  
change...  
I am changing the things I  
cannot accept"**

~Angela Davis

"Don't Hurt Others"  
drawing by six year old boy

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**“Kind words are short and easy to speak,  
but their echoes are truly endless”**

~Mother Teresa

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# Social Response

## What is a social response to violence?

A social response is how people, agencies and communities respond to victims of violence once the violence is exposed. (Richardson & Wade, 2009)

### Poor Social Response or Perspective

A poor social response or perspective is any action or non-action that supports the perpetrator and does not support the victim.

Below are a few thoughts or perspectives that people may think about victims of violence. On the right is a different way to look at the situation.

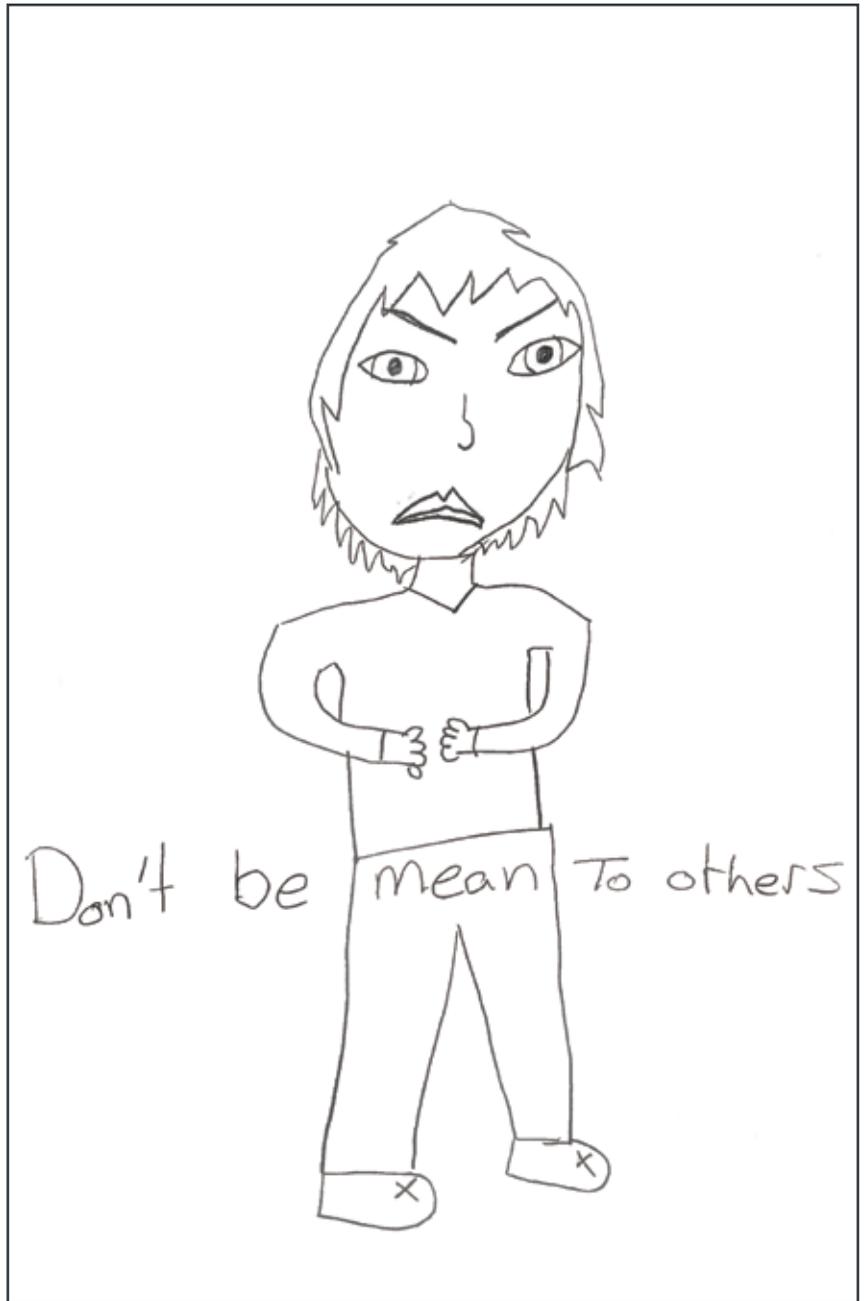
- She was drunk so what did she expect?
- Why doesn't she leave?
- It's none of my business. That's a family thing.
- Violence is part of their culture.
- She's just as bad as he is.
- If she didn't yell at him he wouldn't get so worked up and hit her.
- She finally said yes to sex but he had to tell her he would leave her if she didn't.
- I know that guy he would never do that.

### Positive Social Response or Perspective

A positive social response or perspective is any action that supports the victim and/or stops the perpetrator.

Below is a different way of looking at the statements on the left.

- He took advantage of the situation.
- What does he do to make her stay?
- How can I help support her without harm to myself?
- In Canada everyone has the right to live free from violence.
- Who has the power and control in the relationship?
- Abuse is a choice regardless of what is happening. He is still choosing abuse instead of a large amount of other options.
- Consent has to be given freely and without being forced. Forcing ultimatums on a partner to have sex does not mean she said yes it means you are asserting your power over her.
- The best way to gain access to a victim is by being in a trusted position. Less than 18% of sexualized assaults in Canada are strangers, meaning 82% are done by someone that the victim knows and probably trusts.



"Don't be Mean to Others"  
drawing by 11 year old girl

## Charity's Story

My cousin's common law gave me drugs for the first time when I was fourteen years old. Then he took advantage while I was very very high; it felt like I was drunk. I remember waking up the next day and feeling totally horrible about myself. A week later his brother did the same thing and I was fourteen, they were adult males. A lot of us girls had their virginity taken and they gave us drugs. There's a trail of women that they've hurt when they were so young.

I feel like my childhood was robbed. How could they have looked at a teenager in a sexual manner? It makes me angry and disgusted. I think that's why I had trouble with addictions and quit school. I lost all my friends shortly afterwards because they found out and they sided with the abusers. I was alone and depressed and I didn't want to tell my mom. They made me feel like it was my fault and that those men were never to blame.

I quit going outside of my home because I would see them when I went out. I used to be popular and happy and my mother knew I was depressed. Some women cannot live without a man, abusive men can be smooth talkers, and they can lie really well. It's hard not to be depressed when I think about it. To resist what was happening and to keep myself and family safe I blocked what had happened out of my mind. I didn't want to see these men anymore so I choose not to go out. I read books, it was nice, and I could escape that way and be somewhere else. I had a sister who was married with a couple kids somewhere else and I moved in with them.

My sister's husband would go into the room when I was sleeping. I could feel someone watching me and I would wake up and see him and he would run away. Other men would do that in my home community before I moved away. I would scream and they would run away, my people don't lock their doors, that are normal for them. My sister's husband abused me for four years emotionally, physically, and financially. I was blamed by the women in my family for all these things. This reminded me of when I was younger and I felt I needed to get away from these people.

I got help from resources in the community that I lived in and applied for housing. Now I have my own place with my kids and I don't talk to those people anymore. My kids are my world.

As I grew older I wanted to stay in my community, but the doctor told me I needed someone to help with my daily activities or I would have to move. My husband passed away a long time ago. So I was alone. I always loved my niece Tracy and she needed a place to stay so we decided she would come stay with me for a bit to help out. I was so happy to have help with getting wood and groceries; it gave me more time to connect with the land.

My niece would take me to the bank and the store it felt good to have her there. That winter Tracy told me it would be easier on me if she just did the shopping while I stayed warm at home. She was so helpful for so long; I thought it would be ok to sign my cheque over to her. That way my niece could do things faster and just put the rest in my account for me.

Tracy tried her best, and she was very kind at times. But at other times, she would lose her patience with me and how slow I moved. Sometimes she pushed me out of the way when she was in a hurry. Sometimes I would fall when she did that and it made me sore. Then I'd move even slower because it hurts for a long time after. She tried to wait for me, but I would hear her calling me names, and she was always slamming the doors and stuff when she got like that, it shook the whole house, I was worried it would break.

One time my neighbor heard me shouting and called the police because I was calling for my niece to come help me in the bathroom. The police came and took me to the hospital because I had a broken hip and my head was bleeding pretty bad. Tracy had gotten upset that I

had made a mess and pushed me off the toilet and left the house not knowing that I was really hurt. Bless that neighbor.

When I was in the hospital I met Jillian she was a social worker. We talked lots about home and what I needed help with. She went to the store with me on the way home and that was when I found out I had no money. Tracy had my card but when I talked to the lady at the counter she told me I had less then five dollars. My niece always got me the groceries but I guess she was keeping the rest. The social worker sat with me and I told her everything, I love my niece and I told her I also love my community but being hurt like that really scared me and now I had no money.

The social worker talked to the doctor for me and got me home care so I could stay. Then she got me meals on wheels and took me to the food bank which helped until my next cheque came. I phoned my sister and said it would be good if Tracy moved back home so she could go to school. My sister understood. Things got better slowly and now my neighbor comes for tea while her son brings the wood.

## We mourn then work for change

After the pain has passed  
And the scars have set  
You feel alone  
Like being trapped at the bottom of a dirty well  
No one around for miles

You wake up in the morning a glassy  
Broken feeling in your stomach  
Looking at your reflection  
The bruises won't be hidden this time  
As the sun begins to peek  
The first rays begin to warm your face  
Tingling heat through your body  
There are people to help  
There are friends to care  
There are family members to talk to  
We are here for you  
If you are hurt, scared or hurting  
You are not alone

~By T. Foliot



Photo of December 6<sup>th</sup> Vigil, Yellowknife NT (2014)

My parents separated before I was born, my older brother and I lived with my mother. Physical abuse was always a part of my life so I don't really know when it started. My mother suffered from mental health problems. I never knew what type of mood she would be in when I came home. It was normal for her to say I was a loving daughter and then scream and swear at me saying that my dad didn't want me. I am still effected today because she would follow me when I would try to walk away from her when she yelled. That's often when the physical abuse would happen. If I'm arguing and I need to step away for a moment, I can't have my partner follow me. It feels like I have no control in being able to take some personal space.

Once I came home when I had forgotten to do the dishes and my mom took a skateboard to me and was whacking me over my head with it. While I was covering my head, my brother showed up and he actually punched her a couple of times. This was the first time either of us had become violent with her. He was physically larger and fought back for me. My brother felt terrible about it but she never touched him again. I lived with her after that and she continued to be violent with me. My brother and I became really close due to the abuse. At times I was separated from him emotionally and physically because of the violence. I tried to keep the house clean and I realize now that she would still flip out.

She was still my mommy so I wanted a relationship with her. Only now am I building a relationship with my father after about fifteen or twenty years. I used to protect my mom and my family by

being social, polite, happy, mature, and smart so that the world would think that everything was ok. It took me years to say to my friends that I'm having a bad day and to not always smile and say that everything is ok. I tried really hard to make everything look perfect so I could control moms reactions. I understood that the violence was wrong but I didn't know that she was as sick as she was.

We got into an argument about power to dry clothes, she was yelling and I tried to walk away. She shook me really hard and I ran to a friends house. She called and lied and said that I was in a violent rage and that isolated me further from friends. The psychological manipulation never stopped until three years ago when she disappeared.

There's no shame in coming forward to talk about family violence, and sharing your stories. Often when you share that brings stuff up for other people and sadly its not that uncommon. I think every situation is different and every person is different but I feel that by talking about it, you remove the judgment's of others and shame even though there really is nothing to be ashamed of.

## Isabelle's Story

With my first serious boyfriend Jason, I didn't understand what abuse was or what I was going through was abuse until much later. He was originally my knight in shining armor. It was like he built me up so that he'd be able to tear me down faster. He made me feel like I was an amazing person but he would do those side jabs where he would say "But no one else will want you." That was the start of the emotional abuse I later learned. He wanted me to spend all of my time with him and not my friends or family which caused fights with others. My parents would go to sleep and he would sit outside my window and talk to me at three in the morning so I was never away from him even though we weren't living together. He could always find me, I really enjoyed that and I thought wow he really cares.

I was twelve he was seventeen. Six months later we had not had sex yet because I didn't want to do anything until we were married and we were too young to be engaged so he bought me a ring. He said it was a slave ring and that I had to wear it a specific way to show I was taken. After that I agreed to become one with him and have sex. It started off sweet and then became quite violent and painful, I asked him to stop and he became more aggressive and did not stop. From that point on I became his property. I didn't tell anybody about it, I was too ashamed to tell my parents and I was afraid of telling my friends. I felt like I didn't have any real friends, we were close enough to laugh at things like kids do but I didn't feel comfortable saying, "I think I'm being raped." It's was like I knew I was dirty and I shouldn't have done it in the first place, I know better now. I had to be at his beck and call at all times when not reporting

home with my family or in class. Sometimes I would do things that would upset him because I wanted to hang out with friends or I needed to get my homework done and that's when he became even more violent. He made me feel that nobody else could love me so I should be grateful for this level of attention. I responded by thinking I could handle it myself, and tried to kill myself.

At his aunts house I told him I wasn't able to go on a hike with him because I didn't feel safe alone with him. He pushed me down the stairs and started hitting me where nobody would be able to see with a weight set and his fists. He broke some ribs but I didn't go to a doctor because then people would know.

To maintain safety I made sure that he felt like he was in control. I'd close my mind off when things were happening. I'd upset my parents so they'd ground me because even though he'd be right outside my window I knew he wouldn't come in. I maintained perfect attendance at school that way I couldn't miss a single class or people would notice. I tried to stay in public areas or at least somewhere people might walk in. I wrote poetry. I didn't want my mom and dad or anyone to find out because I didn't want it to bother them and I didn't want them to know that I had sex. I felt ashamed that I couldn't handle my own problems.

My birthday came and my family had bought me a car. Jason had decided he wanted to be there when they gave it to me but my parents wanted it to be a family thing. So I went out and drove around and was really happy, the happiest I had been in a long time. When I got

## Isabelle's Story Continued...

back to my grandparents house, he had been calling there constantly (no cell phones). So when I finally answered the first thing he did was swear at me and berate me. Because I had been so happy and then had that happen I started to cry. My father saw that and didn't take that too well and kept asking what was wrong. My dad hung up the phone and when Jason tried to call back my dad left telling me to stay with my mom. I was panicking while my mom and grandma were asking what was wrong. I didn't want to tell them about what had been going on and I felt guilty about not telling them. My mom said it doesn't matter and we decide to think about it later and went out to have some cake. My dad came home later and told me I was not allowed to see Jason again.

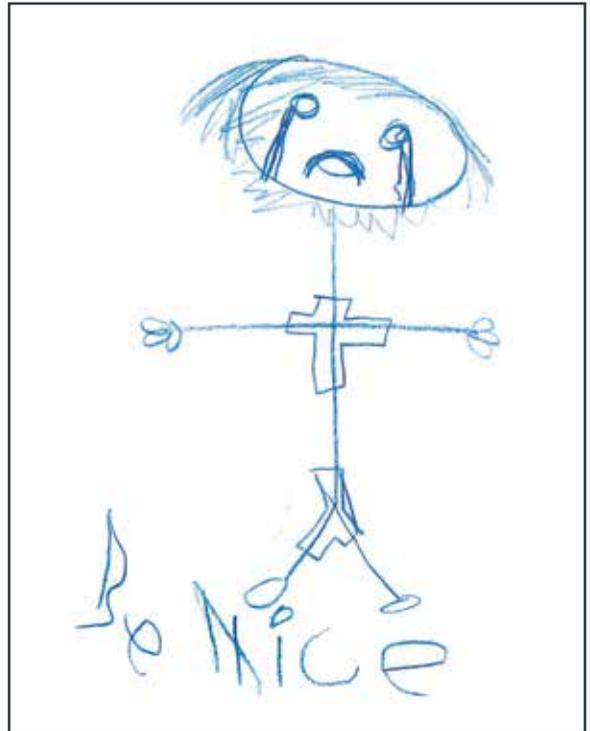
I went for three days without contact and then Jason started leaving little presents like pictures of flowers in places that were locked. I found them in my grandparent's garage and inside my bedroom. He still lurked but I had a justification for not being near him, and I didn't want to be near him anymore. He stalked me for a while, about two years after that I did end up meeting him for coffee and he was trying to get back together. By that time I had moved on, found out that I wasn't worthless and gained a little more confidence.

After having some time away from him I had realized that what happened messed with my head. I had reconnected with my friends as well. I told him to stop, that I would be contacting RCMP or placing a restraining order or that his life would get very difficult if he continued to leave little presents to attempt to contact me. He moved to the same cities that I

was moving to when I went to university and after coffee I only received two messages. The messages described what I was wearing and that I looked nice, but because I didn't engage or respond I haven't received any messages since.

**“Friends can help each other. A true friend is someone who lets you have total freedom to be yourself - and especially to feel. Or, not feel. Whatever you happen to be feeling at the moment is fine with them. That’s what real love amounts to - letting a person be what (s)he really is”**

~Jim Morrison



“Be Nice”

drawing by 5 year old girl



“Happy Family - Abused Family”

drawing by 9 year old girl

I was a single parent in public housing overwhelmed with working two jobs. I was trying hard to get by but not quite making it. An ex boyfriend from high school came along and he wanted to help out, he was very family orientated and he really wanted to settle down. We started dating and the longer we were together the more he would encourage me to stay at home with my kid. As the relationship progressed we got married and I became pregnant.

All of a sudden his behavior started to change. I was under a lot of pressure to be at home, to be a good mom and anytime I would go to work he would make me feel really guilty about it. Like I was being a bad parent for doing it. But we didn't have a lot of money and he wasn't working a lot so I kept trying to take care of us by working. He started drinking more and one night he came home and said, "You know anyone can get a divorce but I knew that once you were having my baby you'd be stuck with me." That's when the ugliness really came out. I had my daughter and we had a son together. I tried really hard in that relationship, if I was doing things that were making him unhappy I was seeing my behavior as the reason he was being unhappy. It was a lot of pressure to keep him happy and take care of the family.

I started seeing a councilor and I was diagnosed with depression. During the bad times I would go to my doctor and I would say, "I'm really depressed, the medication is not working." After a long time of getting to know me the doctor said "Are you sure that it's the medication that's not working?" I said, "Well I'm crying all the time and I'm showing these signs of

depression and I take medication so that it's manageable." He replied by asking, "Why are you crying?" I said "because of things that happen at home." He said "Are you sure it's the medication that's not working?" I thought about it for a little while and I thought ok maybe it's not the medication that's not working. So I called a friend and she agreed with that. That was a big wake up call for me. It was encouraging me to look at my situation. To decide which things I could do stuff about and the things that no matter how hard I worked and how hard I tried they would stay the same. He needed to change his behavior towards me, and he needed to go.

What really helped was my friend not judging me and offering practical help like watching my kids. When you identify the reasons why people stay its not always just because they love their partner. A lot of the time women are balancing pressures of having to provide for their children, and provide the basic needs for their families. Leaving someone who is abusive is very complex because they might also be paying the rent, or maybe the lease is in their name. When you look at those practical reasons for staying then you can understand her situation more and support her in ways that she has identified.

## Write Your Story

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If you have experienced violence use this space to write your own story. Think about what you did to respond to the violence. How did you maintain safety for yourself and/or your family members? What got you through to today?

A stale breath  
Every inch of fist piercing my jaw  
No one to stop him  
No one to comfort me  
Nowhere to run  
I just want to be safe  
My fists  
Pound against his chest  
Like rabbit paws  
Helpless against the wolf

My mind wanders  
The baby crying in the nursery  
My own screams  
Must have awoke her  
Her natural sense that  
Something's wrong  
Something is wrong  
No one to comfort her  
No where to run

Many women suffer  
Who will comfort them  
They have no where to run  
They think they're alone  
That nobody cares  
...but I care  
We care  
Something can be done  
Something must be done

~By Casey Anderson

# Help Numbers

## Family Violence Crisis Lines

Alison McAteer House (Emergency Protection Order designate)	Toll Free Yellowknife	1-866-223-7775 873-8257
Family Support Centre (24 Hours)	Hay River	crisis: 874-6626 874-3311
Transition House (24 hours)	Inuvik	777-3877
Sutherland House (24 hours)	Fort Smith Toll Free	872-4133 1-877-872-5925
Women and Children's Crisis Centre	Tuktoyaktuk	977-2000
Centre for Northern Families	Yellowknife	873-2566
<b>Victim Services</b>		
Yellowknife (collect calls accepted)	Yellowknife, Lutsek'e, Dettah, N'Dilo	920-2978 873-5509 cell 765-8811
Hay River & Outreach Worker	Hay River, Hay River Reserve, Enterprise, Ft. Providence, Ft. Resolution, Kakisa	876-2020 874-6701 874-5707
Fort Good Hope	Fort Good Hope, Coville Lake, Deline, Norman Wells, Tulita	598-2247 cell 447-2015
Inuvik & Outreach Worker	Inuvik, Aklavik, Ft. McPherson, Holman, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Tsiigehtchic, Tuktoyaktuk, Ulukhaktok	777-5493 777-5480
Fort Simpson	Ft. Simpson, Ft. Liard, Jean Marie, Nahanni Butte, Trout Lake, Wrigley	695-3136 cell 695-6732
Tlicho	Behchoko, Gameti, Wekweefi, Wha ti	392-6381 ext. 1332 cell 447-2934
Fort Smith	Ft. Smith	873-3520 cell 621-2273
Manager, NWT Victim Services	Yellowknife	920-6911
Coordinator, NWT Victim Services	Yellowknife	920-6244
<b>Other Contacts</b>		
Kid's Help Phone	Toll Free	1-800-668-6868
NWT Help Line (24 hours)	Toll Free	1-800-661-0844
Status of Women Council of the NWT & Coalition Against Family Violence NWT	Toll Free Yellowknife	1-888-234-4485 920-6177
NWT Disabilities Council	Toll Free Yellowknife	1-800-491-8885 873-8230
Seniors' Information Line	Toll Free Yellowknife	1-800-661-0878 920-7444
Legal Services Board (collect calls accepted)	Yellowknife	873-7450
A New Day Program for Men	Yellowknife	873-2201
YWCA Project Child Recovery	Yellowknife	920-2777 ext. 313

Again we would like to thank all the brave women who helped contribute a piece of their history so that others know they are not alone. A special thank you to the teenaged poets and young artists that added their contribution as well.

Thank you for reading this book. We hope that you have gained strength from these women's courage and that you know more about family violence.

**“I can't change the direction of the wind,  
but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.”**

~Jimmy Dean



Photo of Take Back the Night March, Yellowknife NT (2012)

Family violence comes in many forms. In this book you will find stories from women who have lived through violence and are now able to talk about their experiences. They talk about how they healed and what they did to respond to the person who chose to abuse them. If you are experiencing abuse from a family member or partner please know there is hope, you are worth feeling safe. Abuse is a choice the abuser makes that is not your fault.

