preventing crime
THROUGH SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

focus on Ontario & Quebec

Dad's in prison...

In the small Quebec city of Trois-Rivières, an important idea is taking shape at the Maison Radisson, place of transition between incarceration and freedom. A whole team of researchers, social workers and administrators is working on the implementation of a new program called, "Growing up healthy with an incarcerated father." It is the first time that a transition house in Quebec is paying attention to the parental role of incarcerated men.

In Quebec, there are already several similar programs for incarcerated women. They respond to a much more obvious need, says Johanne Vallée, Executive Director of the Association des services de réhabilitation sociale du Québec: "The majority of women in prison are single parents – we more easily recognize their parental role."

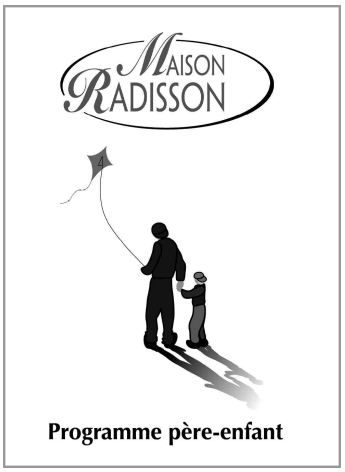
"If fathers can develop strong parental competence, that is a protective factor against the inter-generational transmission of criminality."

But until now, the parental role of male prisoners has escaped the attention of the transition house system, says Vallée, because they have much less predictable relationships with their children. Also, adds Martine Barette, the Coordinator of the program, the role of fathers has not traditionally been given as much weight as that of mothers.

Yet research shows that this relationship has a major impact. According to the program's research, 30% of children will suffer physical symptoms at the time of the incarceration – and the release – of their fathers. Boys are apt to develop antisocial and impulsive behaviours.

The long-term consequences are equally serious: children of inmates are five to six times more likely than the norm to end up in prison themselves. Although that is an American statistic, the creators of the Quebec program can attest to it from personal experience: "We realized that we were seeing the same faces – the son or the nephew of a former inmate would himself wind up in the transition house," says Barette.

Since the majority of inmates are men, a program that helps children grow up healthy with an incarcerated father can have a major impact on crime prevention. "It was at a conference on crime prevention that we realized the important impact that incarceration can have on parent-children relations, and we saw that there was almost nothing in place to address those problems," says Daniel Bellemare, the Executive Director of Maison Radisson. He took the initiative with this project because of his organization's close ties with researchers in criminology and psychology at the University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières, who contributed their expertise to the development of the program.



Programme père-enfant

The researchers first conducted a literature review to see whether such a program could help children and to fill a need identified by the inmates themselves. "We noted an increase in the problems faced by our clients. They seemed more socially excluded, less able to participate in their communities, more isolated," says Vallée, who links these problems with the disintegration of the social welfare network and increases in poverty. She thought this father-child program could help break that isolation.

The results of the literature review were encouraging. In the United States, where father-child

IN THIS ISSUE

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Dad's in prison (cont'd)

programs for inmates have been given an important place, several studies show conclusively that these programs can have a positive effect on both fathers and their children. A study by Carlson and Cervera, published in 1991, showed that fathers who had participated in these programs were able to reintegrate more easily with their families and into society as a whole. A study by Wilczak and Markstrom, published in 1999, indicated that children's development was improved when their fathers participated in the program.

These conclusions may seem strange to people who assume that a father in prison would set a bad example and have a negative influence on his children. Statistics from Correctional Service Canada show that a high percentage of fathers are incarcerated for violent offences, and that 34% struggle with addiction problems. But research also shows that in general, as long as the father does not have severe pathological behaviour – in which case he would probably not be granted visiting rights – his children will be better off if they retain contact with him.

Johanne Vallée

"A child's imagination is fertile," says Martine Barette, who interviewed several children as part of the pre-implementation phase of the project. Numerous studies showed that the worst possible strategy – and tragically, one that is most often used – is to lie to the children about why their father is absent. Profound anxiety often results, and the situation only gets worse when the children eventually figure out for themselves that their father is in prison.

The challenge, then, is to create a program which supports parents in their parental roles, despite personal obstacles, the trauma of their incarceration, and the material problems they face because of it.

Vallée notes that we often make the error of thinking that an imprisoned father is necessarily incompetent in his paternal role. In reality, there are a whole spectrum of parental abilities among inmates, and it is on these existing abilities that the program is built.

The project team developed a series of workshops to educate the participants and to engage them in discussions about their parental roles, the development of their children, the negative impact of their separation, and behavioural problems their children face. Activities are planned with the help of workshop participants, and supervised by the social workers, to give fathers the chance to practice their newly-acquired expertise.

Most Canadian correctional institutions have facilities for family visits. Pictured here are the Private Family Visiting Units at Montée St-François Institution in Québec.

Workshops began last December at the Maison Radisson and two other sites. Barette, who facilitates the workshops, has been happy with the results. "Often they have good parenting techniques," says Barette. She notes that participants express lively interest in each others' experiences. "They'll say 'I like the way you do that. Can you give me more details?' "

It's rewarding work, she says. "If fathers can develop strong parental competence, that is a protective factor against the inter-generational transmission of criminality."

She recognizes, of course, that parental aptitudes are just one "protective factor" among others. Another very important one is the father's relationship with his partner, which can be quite conflicted. Johanne Vallée says that mediation services are now being offered to inmates, their partners, and the children. Frequently, "there is a real feeling of rage in the partner, that she was left with all the responsibility during the incarceration."

There are many other protective factors which the transition houses try to cultivate through an array of other programs dealing with challenges such as addictions, unemployment, and poverty. The "Growing up healthy with an incarcerated father" program is taking an important step in the right direction by tackling an issue previously neglected in Quebec. Vallée hopes that the program will be adopted by many transition houses and that similar programs will be created for the other key phases of incarceration, namely the arrest and the period of the sentence itself.

To find out more about the Maison Radisson, please see
www.mradisson.ca

A brief on the program can also be found, in French, at
http://www.asrsq.ca/Fr/Membres/Mem_Lis_04_Gra.htm

The longer research report and a short article summarizing it are available from the Maison Radisson, though only in French:

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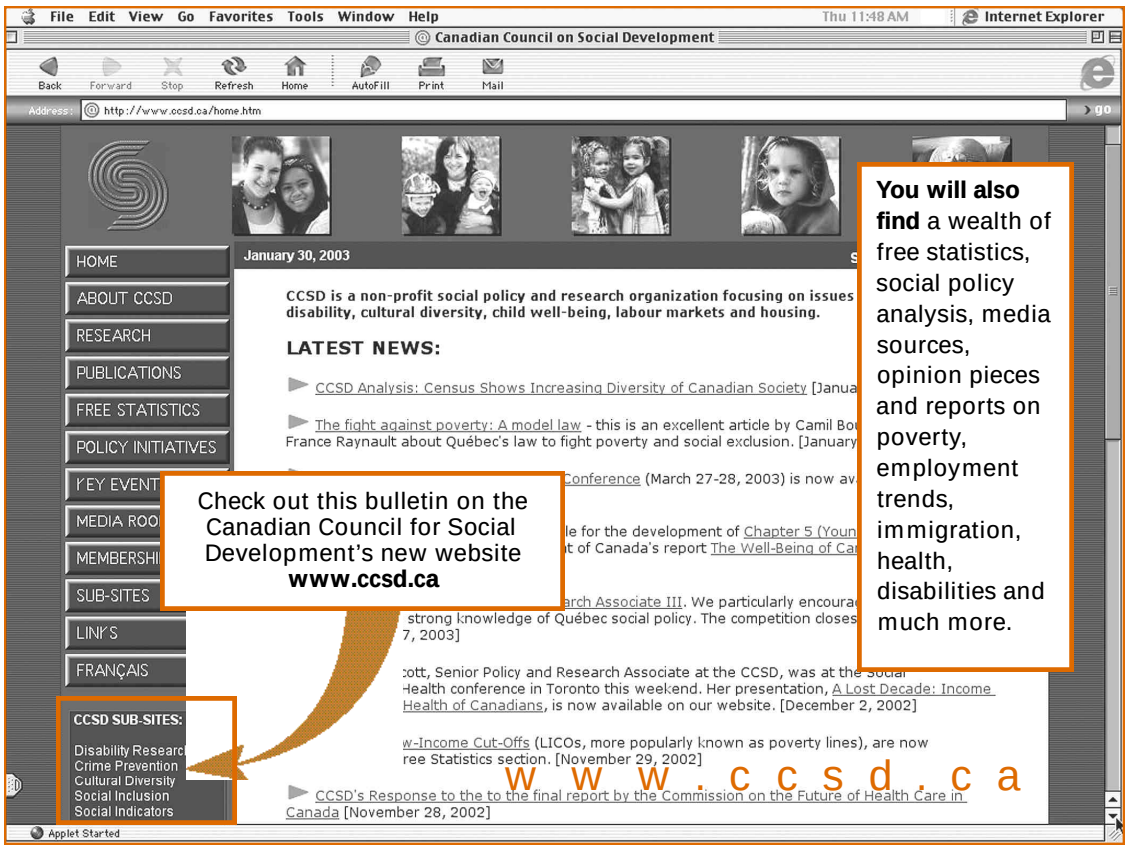
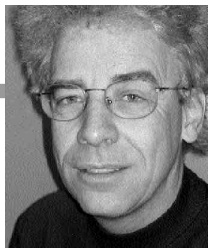


We are acting locally, but are we thinking globally?

Guest Column by Ross Hastings



It would appear that these are good times for crime prevention! Prevention has been accepted as a key component of our response to crime and victimization, and our governments have backed up this commitment with significant funding support.

We have come a long way in a relatively brief period of time. In 1993 the Horner Report both acknowledged the limitations of traditional approaches to justice and proposed a shift towards prevention. Shortly after, in 1994, the newly-elected Liberal government fulfilled an electoral promise by launching Phase I of the National Crime Prevention Strategy (http://www.prevention.gc.ca), an initiative which included the creation of an independent, volunteer-based, National Crime Prevention Council.

To give a sense of perspective, the budget of the Council was just over half a million dollars in 1994. When Phase II of the Strategy was launched in 1998, the level of investment was raised to 32 million dollars a year - 64 times more than the Council received on an annual basis. Few initiatives grow so fast!

However, like many fast-growing efforts at this level, the crime prevention strategy is experiencing a number of growing pains that limit its effectiveness and could even threaten its survival. We all know that fads come and fads go, and this strategy could easily fall by the wayside if it is unable to prove itself. In this respect, there is reason to be concerned that the future of the crime prevention strategy is more precarious that we might want to admit.

There is even the risk that a strategy might actually favour those communities who are best able to ask for money rather than those which most need help.

The strategy's most pressing problem is that it is primarily project-based: it is designed to respond to small, short-term proposals which emanate from local communities. This does have some advantages: it keeps the focus on community security, which is a precondition for individual safety and security; it involves communities as financial and organizational partners, and so expands available resources for crime prevention; and it creates wonderful opportunities for communities to take charge of their fate. But there are risks.

The main drawback to this model is its over-reliance on communities and an overestimation of their capacity to do effective prevention. At the moment, many of the projects which receive support need to be more consistent with a social development orientation and need to demonstrate a sufficient appreciation of what is effective, sustainable or transferable. They may address issues of child development and family welfare, but they often neglect to follow the National Crime Prevention Council's recommendation to view these problems in the context of wider social and economic inequalities.

Also, there are enormous variations in the willingness and ability of different communities to address their problems. There is even the risk that a strategy might actually favour those communities who are best able to ask for money rather than those which most need help. We have to do more to help communities articulate their needs and priorities.

Finally, many of the sources of social inequality, which in turn drive criminal activity, are to be found at the provincial, national or international levels. We need to start looking at the types of approaches which might help overcome the limits of localism.

I don't mean to be a naysayer - there have been important gains made by the National Crime Prevention Strategy. My point is rather that we had better take a hard-nosed look at where we stand – what has been funded, how it has made a difference, what hasn't worked and where the gaps are – and decide upon a strategic direction that will enable the National Crime Prevention Strategy to fulfill its promise.

Ross Hastings is a Professor of Criminology at the University of Ottawa.

The opinions expressed in this guest column do not necessarily reflect those of the CCSD or the National Crime Prevention Strategy. Your feedback is welcome. Please send your comments to the editor's attention at creery@ccsd.ca.

SAFE in the city

We interviewed Anne Michaud, Coordinator of the Women and the City program of the City of Montreal. Michaud has worked for 25 years in the field of violence against women, first in rape crisis centres and, for the last 10 years, in her present position. Her program works in partnership with community organizations to encourage the City to take account of women's security needs. We spoke with Michaud just before the 13th anniversary of the murder of 14 young women at the Ecole Polytechnique, that December 6 which forever engraved the tragic image of violence against women in the minds of Montrealers.

Why did you choose to work in the field of preventing crime against women?

Very early on, I became conscious of the inequalities that exist between men and women. At the time I did my undergraduate degree in political science there were no "women's studies," but I did almost all of my projects on women's issues. I participated in the creation of the Mouvement contre le viol (Movement against rape) and became its coordinator. From there I became active on the municipal, provincial, federal, and finally, international levels.

What is the mandate of the Women and the City program?

We have an overall mandate to develop strategies to address the inequalities between genders in municipal administrations, including vulnerability to crime. The various problems of inequality are linked. We have noted for example, that women's fear of going out at night is an important obstacle to their participation in recreational programs. And factors such as poverty and a lack of housing continue to create security problems for women and their families.

Can you describe some of your specific projects to reduce crime against women?

An important way to improve women's security is to integrate their views into decisions about the design of public environments. We worked with groups of women, community groups and public organizations to arrange hundreds of safety audits which allow women to identify the changes necessary to improve their security in public areas.

As a result, the design of the new subway stations follow women's security criteria. They are, for example, built with glass facades that allow women to "see and be seen." They have optimum lighting which also improves visibility. They have accessible telephones and good local maps to provide directions. The transportation authority was very receptive to women's demands for these improvements, which also benefit the population as a whole.

A whole spectrum of other projects and programs was developed with our local partners. They include the "Between Stops" program of the transportation authority, which permits women and girls to disembark between bus stops at night. As well, there are self-defence courses for women and education and advocacy campaigns for both women and men.

How does your approach differ from similar projects in other large Canadian cities?

In Montreal, we made a real effort to get different sectors to work together, so there is a lot of collaboration between community and public organizations. For example, Tandem Montréal, a crime prevention program for the City of Montreal, has started a campaign with small businesses to encourage them to commit to help women in danger. They can put a sticker in their window saying, "Women's security is close to our hearts." All of these initiatives are necessary and complementary. And many of them were inspired by those established in Toronto in the early 1980s.

Between 55% and 60% of women are still afraid to go out at night alone in their neighbourhoods. In 10 years, that hasn't changed.

Do you think the tragedy of December 6th influenced Montreal's approach?

December 6th is a powerful symbol of the need to continue to work to put an end to violence against women. This year, Mayor Gérald Tremblay requested that the city's 29,000 employees take a minute of silence in solidarity.

In the 10 years you have worked in this area, have you seen any concrete improvements in women's security?

It's difficult to determine how many crimes are actually committed against women, or to measure changes in women's feelings of safety. According to the latest Statistics Canada figures, only 10% of sexual assaults are reported. A woman who reports being a victim of domestic violence has, on average, been victimized 35 times before. We cannot count on statistics but rather have to carry out qualitative inquiries, which are much more expensive. What we can see, unfortunately, is that between 55% and 60% of women are still afraid to go out at night alone in their neighbourhoods. In 10 years, that hasn't changed.

How does this rate compare to that in other large Canadian cities?

It's about the same all over, between 50% and 60%.

A woman who reports being a victim of domestic violence has, on average, been victimized 35 times before.

How could that perception of insecurity be changed?

Insecurity is not just a perception, it's a reality. It's the effect of different forms of violence against women and inequalities which still persist.

Why are women so reticent to report crimes committed against them?

It's clear there are still many things that need to be improved in the way the justice system deals with women. Judicial procedures often make women relive their trauma, despite all the efforts that have been made to change that. The system continues to blame women and to create a sort of schizophrenia: we tell women that their fears are irrational, it's all in their heads – then we give them a list of instructions on what they should do to avoid being victimized. Another problem is that there are few resources to deal with violent male partners and aggressors, other than prison.

Programme coordinator, Anne Michaud

How could you intervene in this domain?

We have to carry out a program of demystification, education, and training of counselors across jurisdictions, and to invest more on inquiries into the experiences of women. We still live in a culture of violence against women – in the media, we still see plenty of stereotypes which cast women in the role of victim. Instead, we have to do the opposite: put women at the centre of the action and orient our interventions to reinforce the capacities of women.

What rays of hope do you see in preventing crime against women?

The impact of creating safer public spaces is considerable. And at the political level, at the level of awareness, I see changes. Since the creation of the new City of Montreal in January 2002, the issue of equality between men and women, in public safety among other things, has been identified as a priority.

The new city has dedicated funds to create a consultative committee of women and to establish a formal Women and the City office. It has also committed itself to using gender analysis in municipal administration, and setting in place a policy of equity between the genders as well as safety standards for public spaces. This will be a challenge, particularly in a new city that has doubled both its population and its territory. But thanks to collaboration between the sectors, we feel confident we can meet this challenge.

Anne Michaud is the Coordinator of the Women and the City program for the City of Montreal. She can be reached at (514) 872-6156, anmicho@ville.montreal.qc.ca

For more information on the Women and the City program of the City of Montreal, see their web site, http://ville.montreal.qc.ca/loisirs/05_dev_social/05_femme_ville.htm.

The importance of crime prevention programs for women was underlined by the first international seminar on women's security, which took place in Montreal on May 9-11, 2002 (http://www.femmesetvilles.org). Under the heading Themes, you can find a collection of resources compiled by Anne Michaud. Also of interest is the site of the Comité d'Action Femmes et Sécurité Urbaine (only in French), www.cafsu.qc.ca

Community Alternatives
in a Conservative Era

Jodie Golden, Executive Director of the Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa, refuses to be discouraged by the bleak scenario facing women in conflict with the law in Ontario. Certainly, she says, "the current attitude of getting tough on crime, and the cuts to education, welfare and mental health resources have meant an increase in women accessing our services." But somehow, the Ottawa Society has managed to expand its social development programs to keep women out of the criminal justice system.

Apartment 301 is probably the most original achievement of this local association. A residence offering a supportive environment to women with a history of conflict with the law, it opened its doors in September 2002 to six homeless women and two families. Each resident is matched with a Community Support Worker who assists her to attain personal and social goals. Community volunteers mentor the residents on special projects.

The residence is just one of many programs provided by the Ottawa organization (see next page). But Golden says it is important because lack of affordable housing is such a key factor in crimes committed by women. Many incarcerated women are charged with minor property crimes such as shoplifting, which are often motivated by problems of poverty and social marginalization.

Supportive housing also helps address mental health problems and social isolation. Research shows that more than half of women in conflict with the law have mental health issues, and most also report histories of physical or sexual abuse. Incarcerated women tend to be single, unemployed, and have a Grade 9 education or less.

The Rajah quilt has a story of its own:

Female prisoners made the original Rajah quilt, with sewing supplies donated by Elizabeth Fry herself, while on their way to Van Diemen's Land, Australia, in 1841. This replica, created by the Ottawa Valley Quilters Guild, was donated to the Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa in honour of their 45th anniversary.

Golden says the community's support for Apt. 301 is pivotal to its success. "With the help of support networks in the community, these women can acquire the confidence and skills to live independently." Once they feel ready to move out on their own, the Elizabeth Fry Society helps them find permanent accommodation.

"This is the first time I've been able to call somewhere home and get the non-judgmental support I need to move on and create something for myself," says one resident.

EFry Ottawa, in partnership with Correctional Service Canada, will bring attention to the link between the lack of affordable housing and criminalization at a conference on March 19, 2003 entitled "Pathways Home: Successful Reintegration for Women." [To register for this free one-day conference, send an e-mail to info@efryottawa.com by February 28th, 2003. For more information, visit EFry Ottawa's website: www.efryottawa.com.]

A glance at the statistics emphasizes the importance of EFry Ottawa's work. Ontario now locks up more young people than any other province in Canada – and any state in North America – according to Joan Winchell, Acting Executive Director of the Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario (CEFSO).

To house all these prisoners, the Ontario government is creating a network of American-style "super-jails." In Southern Ontario, 350 incarcerated women from smaller communities are readying to move to the massive new Maplehurst Correctional Centre in Milton, Ontario, the biggest prison in Canada.

Photo by Kathleen Semanyk

Ottawa Efry Volunteers and Executive Director standing in front of the Rajah Quilt after a long day of pre-move-organizing and furniture arranging in Apartment 301. From front left to right: Chris Durham-Valentino, Lyn Parry, Lynne Lalancette and Chloe Black, and back row from left to right: Micheline Vallée,Tammy Bambrick, Danya Vidosa, Jodie Golden (ED) and Susanne Wallner. Photo by: Blair Hall.

Winchell worries that this mega-jail model will seriously disrupt the community-based programs that Elizabeth Fry Societies rely on to keep women from becoming ingrained in the criminal justice system. Although the average woman's sentence is just 40 days, she says "incarceration can put you on the downward spiral forever" unless there are community supports to hold the pieces together during your sentence. Women can easily lose their home, their children, or other fundamental anchors in the community which they will then have to spend years trying to regain.

"Women trying to keep in touch with their children or elderly parents may have difficulty," says Winchell. "It will be a huge hardship."

Winchell frequently visits the nearby "super-jail" of Penetanguishene, which is being run by an American firm from Utah as a pilot-project for the Ontario government. She has observed that the women lack programs and access to health care. Although she says this is not that unusual in new prisons, Winchell bristles at the thought that the Ontario government might decide to privatize the prison permanently. Both the Elizabeth Fry Society and the John Howard Society are taking a strong stand against privatization.

The publicly run mega-jails do incorporate some new programs that the Elizabeth Fry Societies have worked hard to obtain, addressing issues such as cognitive skills, addictions, anger management, literacy, and health. Winchell is encouraged by the programs and looking forward to working with the Ministry to evaluate them. She is also pushing them to develop new programs, such as a dedicated facility for native women.

EFry staff meeting with a resident of Apt 301

Of course, Winchell would like to see the Ontario government make more of an effort to address systemic issues of poverty instead of building mega-jails, and works with a coalition of anti-poverty groups to that end. In the meantime, she and her colleagues are studying the new federal Youth Criminal Justice Act (www.canada.justice.gc.ca/en/dept/pub/ycja/youth.html), which has a strong prevention focus. They are already using the Act to work with local institutions on alternatives to incarceration.

Trying to find creative solutions during challenging times, Golden and Winchell remain true to the Elizabeth Fry tradition of addressing poverty, homelessness, abuse and marginalization as the root causes of women's criminalization.

Information about the Ottawa EFry Society was provided by Jodie Golden. For information about the national advocacy work of Elizabeth Fry Societies, see http://www.elizabethfry.ca/.

EFRY OTTAWA PROGAMS

Hooked-up is a peer support system for women living or working on the streets. Two staff go out into the community weekly to provide them with a safety kits of mittens and personal hygiene products. Staff also inform the women about self-protection and alternative choices, and services such as food banks and clothing depots. This program has helped some women return home and has created a rapport of trust where clients have accessed other EFS services.

The Opportunities Program assists women to define their personal goals by helping clients find suitable employment or volunteer placements.

Discharge Planning: Discharge planners liaise with community partners to help women develop plans that will enable them to live crime-free upon their release back to the community. Volunteers provide support through weekly jail visitation sessions and mentoring on weekends.

"When I was incarcerated, I would have been lost without the EFry people helping me to keep contact with my family and find housing, and then I would have been homeless and back on the streets and eventually back in jail," says one former client.

Youth Services: Youth counselors provide advocacy and support during incarceration and again at the time of reintegration into the community. Programs include shoplifting prevention, family counseling, group counseling in areas such as conflict resolution and assertiveness, and job search assistance. Youth are also engaged in community and recreational outings such as hiking to improve their social skills and practice effective communication.

At times local police services actually refer young women to the Elizabeth Fry programs as an alternative to charging the women through the criminal justice system.

As one youth client said, "The EFS youth worker really helped me to understand my behaviour and normalize my anger. She got us involved in extra activities that I used to think were boring but now look forward to as a different way to express myself. The rock-climbing with other young women my age was my favorite way so far to meet other young women and to talk about things I can't with my parents."

Apartment 301 offers women and children a supportive environment in which to live.

Volunteers and in-house counselors help the women to work on personal goals and reach out into the community. As one resident has shared, "Apartment 301 is a place for women to learn new skills and be supported by a group of staff and community members who give us the space and time to get things together. It has kept me sober and free of trouble." *See main story for more.*