

June 20, 2008

ACWS Marks 25 Years 1983 - 2008

We're turning 25! Who would have guessed, 25 years ago, that the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters would mark its silver anniversary by hosting the first-ever global gathering of shelter workers?

Not only have we put out a worldwide welcome mat for *Discovering the Common Core: Practical Frameworks for Change*, but the response is overwhelming. From Australia, Afghanistan, Belarus, South Africa, Tasmania, Uganda and many other countries, shelter workers are laying plans to journey to Edmonton in September—and many are making sacrifices to come.

I think of the woman from Kenya for whom submitting an abstract meant taking a bus to the internet café many dusty kilometers away during the height of that country's recent unrest. "When two elephants fight, it is the grass which suffers most," she wrote, naming rape, burning, looting and killing as the order of the day. "Thank you for doing this!"

We have so much to gain by connecting with our sisters and brothers from around the world. It is my hope that this gathering will spur a legacy of best practice and global action such as we cannot even imagine—a noticeable swing toward a world that not only declares the rights of women and children, but holds true to those commitments in public and private life.

It can happen. Just as early gatherings built the momentum that brought HIV/AIDS to public consciousness, so occasions such as this add the power of unity to the voices on the frontline in this crisis. Voices all too often silenced by fear of losing hard-won ground.

Twenty-five years ago, a handful of shelter leaders came together in the hope that coordinated action would correct the injustices and inequities that were forcing them to operate in crisis mode. A quarter century later and more than 40 shelters strong, we celebrate all that ACWS has accomplished even as we scramble to help members cope with an economic boom that is escalating demand, stealing staff and bringing human trafficking to our doors.

Every day, we see miracles worked against all odds in every shelter, and in our own office. At 25, we know what it means to stand together—and what solidarity can accomplish. How fitting, then, to celebrate our anniversary year by standing with shelter workers from around the world. We look forward to welcoming them.

- Jan Reimer