



WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTRE



# Our Voices

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY MH 318, 2500 UNIVERSITY DRIVE NW CALGARY, AB T2N 1N4  
T: (403) 220-8551 E: WOMEN@UCALGARY.CA W: WWW.UCALGARY.CA/WOMEN

## Peer Support at the WRC

*Who are we?* The Peer Support Team currently consists of undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Calgary. We come from a variety of backgrounds, reflecting the diversity found within the student population in general. We are not professional counselors; however, we have taken seminars in active listening and crises management from the U of C Counseling Centre, as well as specialized diversity training. The team strives to be respectful, inclusive, open-minded, and non-judgmental. We provide assistance to any female-gendered individual including students, staff, faculty of the U of C, and community members.

that suits your interests and objectives as a volunteer. If you simply want to visit the Centre to learn what we are all about, we are more than willing to share our expertise and stories, as well as our fantastic selection of coffee and tea!

The Peer Support team is also here to offer guidance to women experiencing academic difficulties, feeling lost on campus, in crises, or those who simply require a friendly, open-minded confidante to help them get through a particularly stressful day. In this role, our main purpose is to listen with compassion. We also provide an access point towards gender-sensitive resources on campus and

within the community. To this end, the Peer Support team has developed an extensive resource database. We can tell you about the various counseling services available on campus and within Calgary, where to find assistance with academic concerns, give complete information regarding sexual health options, provide connections to various social networks on campus and within the city, and much more. The Centre's main purpose is to facilitate empowered sharing, learning, and teaching. Rather than attempt to solve problems for you, our team provides this wealth of information so you can come to an informed decision on your own.

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### *What do we do?*

When you pay a visit to the Women's Resource Centre (WRC), one of the first people you meet may be a Peer Supporter. Peer Supporters act as ambassadors, providing tours of the centre, introducing other volunteers and staff, and sharing our knowledge of the Centre's many programs and events. We can also help you find a program or community within the Centre



### IN THIS ISSUE ...

- **Discovering Peer Support at the WRC—One of the main pillars of our work!**
- **Taking Measure of Self Esteem**
- **Advisory Committee Profile: Dr. Claudia Emes**
- **Volunteer Profile: Jocelyn Kelln**

Peer Support Retreat at the Bow Valley Provincial Park, Fall 2007



## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*Women Encouraging Women  
to Succeed at UofC*

When we began conceptualizing the foundation for a Women's Resource Centre at the University of Calgary, we conducted many consultations with important stakeholders like students, faculty and community. We then looked broadly at programming, services and resources offered by other successful Women's Centres across Canada and the United States. One commonality arose as foundational – Peer Support. In the context of the WRC, women work with women in a non-hierarchical environment as peers to navigate challenges, questions and choices in their lives.

Peer Support programs exist everywhere, and are becoming core to organizations globally. So why this shift from a professional model of support to a peer-based model? First, our experience at the WRC demonstrates that women are more than capable of making the right decisions for their own lives when given access to adequate resources and information. Secondly, our experience suggests that women students at the U of C are generally more comfortable speaking to other female students when challenges arise.

Peer-to-peer support challenges traditional power relationships and focuses on mutual capacity building through the support process. Our peer support volunteers are extensively trained in communication and active listening skills, crisis, and work from a feminist anti-oppressive model. This model values the voice and experience of each woman as it relates to her life, choices, challenges and successes. I am honoured to work with an incredible team of Peer Support volunteers this year, led by two fantastic team leaders. They are compassionate, kind and ready to listen and connect with any individual who walks through our door.

*Stephanie Garrett*  
Stephanie Garrett  
Executive Director

(continued from page 1)

*What to expect in a Peer Support Session*

Within a peer support session, we aim to provide a safe space where all women can feel empowered to make their own choices and share their experiences without fear of judgment. The Peer Support team provides one-on-one support, which ensures that your concerns are heard and respected within the session. Conversations can be held informally, within the Centre's open spaces, or within secluded areas if privacy is a concern. Any information disclosed in a session will remain confidential; in most circumstances you are under no obligation to tell us who you are. If you would like a conversation to be held within a private space, we will let you know about our informed consent procedure; this simply means that we are required by law to report incidences of ongoing abuse or threats of suicide. By letting you know about our legal obligations, you can choose whether or not to share that information. This is the only situation in which we are compelled to break confidentiality and ask for personally identifiable information. At any stage within the session, you can always choose what information is shared, and whether or not to seek further assistance.

At the same time, we do encourage peers to take advantage of the wealth of information we provide! We believe that in order to become empowered to make their own choices, women need to have access to any worthwhile information that is relevant to their particular situation. We have developed our resource database with the understanding that not all organizations will provide comprehensive information. Consequently, we will direct you towards gender sensitive resources where applicable; particularly in regards to sexual health options and crisis counseling. We have also taken care to include resources relevant to the GLBT community, immigrant women, and aboriginal women. We have explored local organizations, the campus, as well as online resources to find information and organizations that aim to enhance women's self-knowledge, life and career skills, and their sense of connection with various communities that exist within Calgary. By providing considerate support, as well as all of this information, we hope that you can leave the Centre with a new sense of direction and inspiration.

The Peer Support Program is funded by The Calgary Foundation.



## *Advisory Committee Profile* **DR. CLAUDIA EMES**

Dr. Emes is a professor in the faculty of Kinesiology. Her teaching research and publishing is in three areas: disability, ageing, and higher education. Service activities both in the community and at the university have always been a large part of her portfolio. She has

been Chair Person of numerous university committees including the University Budget Committee, Curriculum and Academic Review, and the GFC Appeals Committee. In the community she works with Special Olympics and the YWCA. She has administrative experience as an Academic Associate Dean for two terms.

Her appointment as University Advisor on Women's Issues coincided with the development of the Women's Resource Centre. This exciting venture has provided a new resource for women on campus. It is a place of kindness and safety where women can receive support, share ideas and learn from each other. It also provides a connection among other university resource centres across the country and a voice for women at the University of Calgary.

The Women's Resource Centre is proud to have Dr. Claudia Emes as its Advisory Committee Chair. In this role, Dr. Emes brings together individuals from all sectors of society to strategize on the overall plan of action for the WRC.



*Is self-esteem an outdated idea?* Self-esteem as a concept has risen and fallen in popularity. For a while it was a watchword for parents – children’s self-esteem was a factor that could make or break them as a learner, sending them skyrocketing to glory or impeding them throughout their scholastic life. The question can then be asked: *Must everything be about feelings?* Shouldn’t hard work and responsibility create their own rewards?

Self-esteem has many definitions in psychological literature, but what most modern definitions come down to is simple. Self-esteem is a person’s

Most women try to measure up to familial, peer, and media expectations of appearance. Larger women can step into a classroom and face the immediate humiliation of not fitting into a desk-chair combination, or having trouble scooting between rows of seats. They wonder who has noticed and what they must think; even considering if class attendance is worth the embarrassment. Any woman walking through a crowded hallway can glance at other women she thinks are thinner, better-dressed, or prettier and experience a sinking sensation of inferiority that can lead to depression or a focus on appearance that can drag down other areas of her life.

For students who are also professionals or parents, there is constant pressure to maintain high performance levels in all spheres of life given their multiple and demanding roles. Women fear to be seen as ‘bad mothers’ if they take time for education, and fear failing as students if they give time to parenting, work, leisure or voluntarism. Academic success is highly structured and ranked from outside, and measuring up can become an obsession. More women than men are undergraduates, but there is still the lingering feeling among many women that they must prove themselves worthy of post-secondary

# Taking Measure of Your Self-Esteem

experience of human worth, competence, and capability; it’s the extent to which they allow themselves to be happy. Everyone values themselves based on external reinforcements and internal judgments. Low self-esteem comes into play when individuals rely only on external indicators to assess themselves and do not personally acknowledge their own abilities and worth.

- If you disappeared tomorrow, do you feel anyone would notice?
- When taking stock of yourself, do you include your strengths?
- Do you worry that people talk about you?
- Do you have a hard time accepting compliments at face value?
- Do you worry about how you look, your weight, what you wear and what you eat?
- Do you ever call yourself names when you make a mistake?

If you answered ‘no’ to the first two questions or ‘yes’ to any of the others, you’ve likely experienced some of the effects of low self-worth—and you’re not alone. When asked about the top issue facing women on campus, Peer Supporters identified self-esteem as something that goes largely unspoken, but that underlies many of the issues women bring forward as major challenges. Women on campus frequently expect themselves to be ‘the whole package’: beautiful physical appearance according to mainstream standards, intelligence as reflected with high GPAs, and popularity amongst the ‘right crowds’—among other factors.



education by excelling. When the normal stress and strain of university life become overwhelming, they are more likely to wonder if they would feel that way if they were smarter, prettier, or better-connected.

The history of public attitudes towards self-esteem may change, but when women are constantly trying to measure up to others’ expectations instead of fulfilling their own, a major challenge for women’s advancement and equality still exists. Women may not always know how to talk about the experience of low self-esteem, and they may not want to talk to a counselor about something that is often made to feel trivial. Peer Support can provide an outlet for women who are ground down by stress, strain, and self-criticism. Hearing others’ experiences, thoughts, and feelings – and how similar they often are – can be a turning point in creating a more balanced life and self-concept.

*Written by: Victoria Maldonado (Masters of Social Work Practicum Student)*



# Volunteer Profile

## JOCELYN KELLN

Jocelyn Kelln is the Co-Team Leader for the Peer Support Program at the WRC. Jocelyn has an interesting background, beginning with a year in the faculty of Engineering, then deciding to take her Aviation Diploma at Mount Royal College.



After five years working as a commercial pilot, Jocelyn realized she wanted a career change so she returned to school once again, and is currently in her last 2 semesters of a BA in International Relations, hoping to pursue a career with the Canadian Foreign Service.

Jocelyn was first introduced to the WRC in the fall of 2006. Jocelyn recalls the time well, "It was such a welcoming and comfortable space on campus that I found myself wanting to be involved, which led to my

becoming a part of the inaugural peer support program and then to being in a leadership role with the program this year. If someone had told me years ago that I would be involved with a Women's Centre, I don't think I would have believed them. I was always 'one of the guys' and my educational and career choices seemed to reflect that."

Ironically, Jocelyn recalls that it is actually that time spent in male-dominated fields that helped her to develop closer relationships with other women.

*"If someone told me years ago that I would be involved with a Women's Centre, I don't think I would have believed them . . . I was always 'one of the guys' and my educational and career choices reflected that."*

When asked why she decided on a leadership role with the Peer Support Program, Jocelyn says that she believes Peer Support is

essential to building a community of women. "When you have a strong community of women," she says, "this strength spills over into everything else."

If you ask Jocelyn why she would recommend volunteering with the Peer Support Program, her enthusiastic response comes easily, "It gives you a chance to help other women, to give back to the University community, and to gain personal and professional development. [Volunteering with the Peer Support Program] ... means having the power to shape our own education, which is, after all, why we're at University in the first place."

### I support the Women's Resource Centre.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

- I would like to volunteer.
- I would like to be notified of events & information
- I would like to have a copy of the WRC Newsletter
- I would like to donate to the WRC

There are several ways to donate to the Women's Resource Centre including online donations by credit card. We also accept donations by cash, cheques, and new books for our growing Women's Resource Library. A tax creditable receipt is provided with each monetary donation.

#### Enclosed is my donation of:

- \$50       \$75       \$100       \$\_\_\_\_\_

#### Send donations to:

Women's Resource Centre, MH318, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, Alberta, T2N 1N4

Online Donation: [www.ucalgary.ca/giving](http://www.ucalgary.ca/giving)

## How can you support the WRC?

### Supporting the WRC by volunteering

Volunteers are the heart and soul of the WRC. All of our programs are led by volunteers representing different sectors of the community campus including students, staff, faculty and members of the Calgary community. The WRC team works to facilitate the projects, ideas and creative initiatives of our volunteers and the centre is defined by and for the women who volunteer with us and enjoy our space.

Volunteering is an excellent way to take advantage of our beautiful space, interact with women from diverse backgrounds, and learn through dialogue and research.

### Supporting the WRC through sponsorship

Sponsorship is an excellent way to see tangible growth and success at the WRC. Our yearly outcome-based assessments include important consultations with the users of the centre as well as key community stakeholders. When you support our centre you will receive a yearly package highlighting our activities, challenges and successes as well as newsletters describing upcoming events and including feature articles.

## GET INVOLVED WITH THE WRC ...

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, a mentor or a sponsor, drop by our centre, visit our website at [www.ucalgary.ca/women](http://www.ucalgary.ca/women), call us (220-8551) or email us at [women@ucalgary.ca](mailto:women@ucalgary.ca)

