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Résumé de l'article

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# “If it saves one life, all the effort . . . is worthwhile”: Crossroads for Women/Carrefour pour femmes, Moncton, 1979-1987

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*Carrefour pour femmes / Crossroads for Women est l'une des trois maisons de transition qui ont vu le jour au Nouveau-Brunswick au début des années 1980. Comme la plupart des maisons de transition fondées au Canada dans les années 1970 et 1980, Carrefour pour femmes / Crossroads for Women dépendait de subventions gouvernementales à court terme et des dons, et ne pouvait verser que de faibles salaires à son personnel. À la lumière d'entrevues auprès d'activistes et des dossiers privés du refuge, cet article explore comment les organisatrices ont concilié la contradiction entre leur travail en faveur de l'égalité des femmes et le fait de verser des salaires peu élevés au personnel féminin de la maison. Les organisatrices ont réussi à obtenir de l'aide gouvernementale pour le refuge, mais elles ont eu moins de succès pour ce qui est de changer les mentalités sur la valeur du travail des femmes.*

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IN THE 1970S THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT ended the silence surrounding wife battering and challenged the shame associated with family violence by connecting women's personal experiences of abuse to patriarchal relations. Women's groups in communities across Canada opened transition houses and safe-home systems to help women and their children leave abusive marriages. Transition houses were more than a safe place to go; they were also the hub of a movement to change society's attitudes toward family violence and to put pressure on governments for legal reform and stable funding for woman-centred services. Based on their experience as frontline service

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providers, activists developed a new analysis that explained wife battering as a manifestation of unequal power relations between women and men, rather than the product of family pathology.<sup>1</sup> Government reports investigating wife battering eventually adopted the feminist position that ending violence against women was essential to achieving women's equality, but feminists continue to struggle to ensure that strategies for change focus on the systemic reasons for abuse.<sup>2</sup>

Soon after the first transition houses opened in Toronto and Vancouver in 1972, campaigns to organize shelters for battered women were launched in other Canadian communities. By 1980, there were 63 transition houses in Canada.<sup>3</sup> The number of shelters increased dramatically after 1983, when the federal government began to provide Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation loans to groups planning such facilities. By 1987, there were 264 transition houses in Canada.<sup>4</sup> This article focuses on one of them: Crossroads for Women/Carrefour pour femmes in Moncton, New Brunswick, which opened in the summer of 1981 and was the first bilingual shelter in the province. The analysis is based on the privately held records of the transition house as well as on interviews with activists who organized Crossroads/Carrefour and with women who worked there during its early years of operation.<sup>5</sup> I disagree with those who believe that women's organizing against wife battering in small cities and rural areas was inherently more conservative, and consequently less radical, than activism in major urban centres.<sup>6</sup> Instead, I argue that women's understanding of their communities, as well as the relationship between provincial governments and feminist

1 Analysis by Canadian activists can be found in Gillian Walker, *Family Violence and the Women's Movement: The Conceptual Politics of Struggle* (Toronto, 1990) and Ruth Roach Pierson, "The Politics of the Body", in Ruth Roach Pierson et al., *Canadian Women's Issues Volume 1: Strong Voices* (Toronto, 1993), pp. 109-13. For an American perspective, see Susan Schechter, *Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement* (Boston, 1982). I am indebted to the women who agreed to be interviewed and to the staff and residents of Crossroads/Carrefour who welcomed me into the transition house and fed me while I conducted this research. Huberte Gautreau introduced my research project to the board, which granted me access to the records, and Gabriel LeBlanc, the executive director, helped me find documents and patiently answered my questions. A postdoctoral fellowship with Margaret Conrad, who holds a Canada Research Chair in Atlantic Canada Studies at the University of New Brunswick, funded the research. I thank her and the anonymous reviewers for insightful criticism of earlier versions of this article.

2 Canada, *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence-Achieving Equality: Final Report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women* (Ottawa, 1993). For a critical analysis of this report, see Andrea Levan, "Violence Against Women", in Janine Brodie, ed., *Women And Canadian Public Policy* (Toronto, 1996), pp. 319-54 and Lise Gotell, "A Critical Look at State Discourse on 'Violence Against Women': Some Implications for Feminist Politics and Women's Citizenship", in Caroline Andrews and Manon Tremblay, eds., *Women in Political Representation in Canada* (Ottawa, 1998), pp. 39-72.

3 Linda MacLeod, *Wife Battering: The Vicious Circle* (Ottawa, 1980).

4 Linda MacLeod, *Battered, But Not Beaten . . . Preventing Wife Battering in Canada* (Ottawa, 1987), p. 3.

5 In compliance with the University of New Brunswick Policy on Research Involving Humans, the interviewees signed a consent form indicating that they could be identified and quoted in publications. All of the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, and are currently in the possession of the author. The tapes will be donated to an archive after the project is completed.

6 Leslie Kenny and Warren Magnusson, "In Transition: The Women's House Saving Action", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 30, 3 (1993), p. 363. Mariana Valverde argues that

groups, influenced their strategies. As this article demonstrates, the organizers of Crossroads/Carrefour may have been cautious about identifying the shelter as a feminist organization, but they were nevertheless committed to systemic change that would help abused women and promote women's equality.

Crossroads/Carrefour was not the first refuge for battered women in the province. In northern New Brunswick, the Religieuses Hospitalières de Saint-Joseph had established homes for abused women and their children in St. Basile (Centr'aide LeRoyeur) and Bathurst (Vallée-Lourdes) in 1978 and at Tracadie (Accueil Sainte-Famille) in 1979. Fredericton Transition House opened in January 1980 and Saint John women established Hestia House in 1981.<sup>7</sup> Crossroads/Carrefour was different from other New Brunswick shelters, however, in that it adopted a collective structure. The goal of operating as a collective was to promote the independence and well-being of the women who worked in the shelter as well as the women seeking refuge from abusive husbands.

Like other transition houses in Canada, Crossroads/Carrefour relied on short-term government grants and per diems – piecemeal funding that was insufficient to cover operating expenses. At times there was not enough money to cover the payroll, which caused economic hardships for the staff. Crossroads/Carrefour was not alone in this dilemma. Relying on women who were willing to work for little or no remuneration was a controversial issue in feminist services because it conflicted with the emerging critical analysis of the undervaluation of women's work. At Crossroads/Carrefour, organizers were more outspoken than the staff about the unjust treatment of shelter workers. In press releases and public speaking engagements, they criticized the government for discriminating against women, stating "Crossroads has two groups of abused women: its clients and its staff".<sup>8</sup> While organizers recalled that securing funding to pay decent wages was a priority, staff insisted that working at the shelter was "never about the money".<sup>9</sup> Political commitment to ending violence against women motivated them to continue to work at the shelter despite personal economic insecurity.

This article explores how Crossroads/Carrefours organizers negotiated the contradiction between working for women's equality and paying women low wages for valuable work. While many feminist groups struggled with this issue, it is important to note that in some shelters poor wages created conflicts between workers and managers. In her analysis of the labour dispute at Byrony House in Halifax, for example, Maureen MacDonald explains that the shelter board took up the neo-conservative argument that in hard financial times shelter workers should not expect

the anti-violence movement was only a force in Canada's larger cities throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s. See Mariana Valverde, "A Postcolonial Women's Law? Domestic Violence and the Ontario Liquor Board's 'Indian List'", *Feminist Studies*, 30, 3 (Fall 2004), p. 584.

7 Rina Arseneault, interview by author, tape recording, Fredericton, New Brunswick (NB), 3 March 2004 and "Refuge for Moncton's battered women to open in April", *Moncton Times-Transcript*, 28 January 1981, Crossroads Records, box 2, file Newspaper Articles. The Crossroads Records are located at Crossroads for Women/Carrefour pour femmes (C/C) in Moncton, NB.

8 "Causes of the Financial Problems of Crossroads/Carrefour", November 1985, Crossroads Records, box 3, C/C.

9 Yolande Saulnier, interview by author, tape recording, Moncton, NB, 28 March 2003; Arseneault, interview by author.

higher wages.<sup>10</sup> This article examines the struggle around employment practices at Crossroads/Carrefour by situating it in the larger political context of women's organizing in New Brunswick, where Acadian women played key roles in the provincial women's movement and in the establishment of shelters. A discussion of the collective structure that distinguished Crossroads/Carrefour from the other transition houses in New Brunswick follows, and the article concludes by examining negotiations for provincial government funding. After nearly a decade of struggle, the organizers had effectively mobilized community support for the shelter and changed the view that family violence was a private matter, but they could not change government opinion about the value of women's caring work.

### **Organizing Crossroads/Carrefour**

Long active in the movement for francophone rights in New Brunswick, Acadian women were quick to respond to the women's movement; they demanded recognition for the crucial role that women played in maintaining Acadian culture and lobbied for reforms that would lead to women's equality.<sup>11</sup> La Fédération des dames d'Acadie, founded in 1968, addressed women's issues in the Acadian community and played an important role in launching early provincial feminist campaigns. A university course taught in 1972 by Corrine Gallant, a philosophy professor at the Université de Moncton, was another catalyst for formal feminist organizing. Gallant recalled:

I started an evening class. . . . There were eighty women coming to talk about [women's issues]. It was consciousness-raising. . . . At the end of that session, women came to me and said, "We're not going to stop meeting on Tuesday nights. We're going to continue meeting". So this was the first feminist group here. We continued meeting and we organized big meetings where we invited all of the women in New Brunswick. It was mainly French speaking. There were English women who were interested, but we proceeded mainly in French.<sup>12</sup>

Various consciousness-raising groups in the city were formalized in 1973 when women founded LES FAM, an acronym for Liberté, Égalité, Sororité – Femmes Acadiennes de Moncton. The organization's goal was to implement the recommendations of the 1970 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada*, in particular the creation of provincial advisory councils on the status of women.<sup>13</sup> The decision to lobby for an advisory council was taken in 1974 at

10 Maureen MacDonald, "Chalk One Up for Sisterhood", *New Maritimes: A Regional Magazine of Culture and Politics*, 13, 6 (July/August 1995), pp. 4-15, 17. I thank Matthew Baglole for bringing this dispute to my attention and Judith Fingard for sending me this article.

11 Cécile Gallant, *Les Femmes et la renaissance acadienne/Women and the Acadian Renaissance* (Moncton, 1992).

12 Corrine Gallant, interview by author, tape recording, Moncton, NB, 29 March 2003. She later developed a course entitled "The Philosophy of Feminism", which became part of the philosophy curriculum at the Université de Moncton.

13 Gallant, interview by author; Elspeth Tulloch, *We the Undersigned: A History of New Brunswick Women, 1784-1984* (Moncton, 1985), p. xviii; Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa, 1967), p. 392.

a conference held in Memramcook. Delegates agreed that a council affiliated with the government would be in a stronger political position to lobby for women's issues than grassroots groups. Gallant supported the foundation of a provincial organization because she believed it would hasten the achievement of feminist goals. She recalled that "in 1970 we were asking for daycare" and other reforms and "in 1975 [we were] asking for the same things. It [was] time to organize something official so that somebody [could] take care of it and solve all of the problems".<sup>14</sup> In the early 1970s many feminists shared Gallant's optimism that women's problems would disappear once people recognized the systemic underpinnings of women's oppression. Richard Hatfield's Progressive Conservative government passed legislation to create the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women (NBACSW) in 1975, but did not appoint its first members until two years later. Madeleine Delaney-LeBlanc was appointed to chair the council, whose offices were located in Moncton.<sup>15</sup> This location was deemed more appropriate than Fredericton because the council thought that it was important to show that it was independent from government. The council also initially planned to move its offices to each new chairperson's community, and Moncton was Delaney-LeBlanc's hometown.<sup>16</sup>

The NBACSW was unable to solve all of the issues women faced, but it proved to be an effective lobbying group and encouraged local initiatives to address women's issues.<sup>17</sup> When domestic violence emerged as a topic of concern, the NBACSW initiated public discussions about wife battering and encouraged women's groups to develop services for abused women. In conjunction with Public Legal Information Services, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating people about their legal rights, the council published a booklet entitled *Battue/Battered*, which advised women in abusive relationships about their legal rights and the options available to them. Published in 1979, it was the first of its kind in Canada.<sup>18</sup> The booklet recommended solutions for wife battering that shifted the blame from women to men. It argued that it was "unjust . . . that many women are forced to leave their homes, taking their children with them, while the man who is the cause of the crisis, remains in possession of the home".<sup>19</sup> The advisory council demanded improved legal aid services and long-term counseling for both women and abusive men. In addition, it recognized the need for short-term measures to protect women and insisted that the government support the establishment of transition houses throughout the province. Research conducted by the council three years later stressed the urgent need for more shelters because the domestic murder rate in New Brunswick was higher than the national rate. In its submission to the federal Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs

14 Gallant, interview by author.

15 Tulloch, *We, The Undersigned*, pp. 69-79.

16 Rosella Melanson, e-mail message to author, 28 October 2005. Melanson worked at the NBACSW in 1979.

17 For a discussion of the role that provincial advisory councils on the status of women played in mobilizing the women's movement as well as the relationship between advisory councils and government, see Janet Guildford, "A Fragile Independence: The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women", in Judith Fingard and Janet Guildford, eds., *Mothers of the Municipality: Women, Work, and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax* (Toronto, 2005), pp. 281-304.

18 The first federal report was published in 1980. See MacLeod, *Wife Battering: The Vicious Circle*.

19 NBACSW, *Battue/Battered* (Fredericton, 1979), p. 7.



on Wife Abuse in 1982, the NBACSW reported that, in 1978, 59 per cent of homicides in New Brunswick were domestic murders, compared to 36 per cent in Canada.<sup>20</sup>

To encourage women to organize services for abused women, the NBACSW showed the film *Alice, Who did that to Your Face?* to women's groups across the province. The film shocked those who were unaware of the severity of the violence that many women experienced in their homes. Huberte Gautreau, a professor at the Université de Moncton and one of the founders of Crossroads/Carrefour, remembered the impact of the film on her: "I couldn't accept that women couldn't have control, that men were at times violent. . . . I hadn't even thought about it before. . . . I had the impression that homes were not violent. I was kind of surprised when all of a sudden I was faced with that kind of reality".<sup>21</sup> Women started to investigate the need for shelters in their communities and discovered high rates of domestic violence.

The NBACSW received many calls from women in abusive relationships who lived in Moncton. Because of the shame associated with domestic violence, some of these women claimed that they needed the information for a friend. Delaney-LeBlanc suspected that they were themselves battered women and, when she asked them if they were in abusive relationships, women generally admitted that they were.<sup>22</sup> There were few services to which she could refer them. The YWCA admitted women who were abused, but charged a fee for the room and would not allow women to bring their children with them.<sup>23</sup> The Department of Social Services provided crisis counseling and temporary accommodation in a motel.<sup>24</sup> These ad hoc measures provided some protection for women in crisis situations, but did not offer counseling that helped women to leave abusive relationships. Recognizing the need for a shelter in south-eastern New Brunswick, Delaney-LeBlanc raised the issue at a NBACSW meeting.<sup>25</sup>

A group of women who were involved in feminist groups took action on Delaney-LeBlanc's suggestion to investigate the need for a transition house. The women began to meet in September 1979 and, in January 1980, formed a board comprised of nine women from anglophone and francophone backgrounds, including two university professors, a doctor, a lawyer, a housewife and an artist. They incorporated as Crossroads for Women/Carrefour pour femmes in July. Initially, the board's goals were ambitious. They proposed to open a women's resource centre that would include a transition house. To generate interest for a women's centre, organizers held monthly

20 New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, "No Turning Back: A Future for Battered Women: A Submission to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare, and Social Affairs", report prepared by Susan Shalala, 4 February 1982, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, C/C.

21 Huberte Gautreau and Beth McLaughlin, interview by author, tape recording, Moncton, NB, 27 March 2003. Gallant also recalled that she initially doubted Delaney-LeBlanc's assertion that Moncton needed a shelter. See Gallant, interview by author.

22 Arseneault and Gallant, interviews by author.

23 YWCA to Board of Directors, Crossroads for Women, 9 June 1980, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C; Children's Foundation Committee of the New Brunswick, Protestant Orphans' Home Application for Financial Assistance, 22 April 1981, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C.

24 "The Abused Mother", February 1980, Crossroads Records, box 772, file Social Service Department, binder, C/C; Crossroads for Women to Richard B. Hatfield, 24 February 1984, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C.

25 Gallant, interview by author.

public meetings in 1980 where women discussed a variety of issues, including battered women, women and health, women in fiction, and women and art. The meetings were well attended; organizers estimated that 60 to 95 women attended the strategy session in November.<sup>26</sup> In December 1979, the board received an eight-month grant for "Project Women's Centre" from Canada Employment and Immigration to hire three researchers to evaluate services for women in the Moncton area and to investigate the need for a transition house.<sup>27</sup> The researchers surveyed women to rank the need for a shelter and to gauge interest in a resource centre that would provide information about family planning, legal rights, budgeting, sexual assault and spiritual and mental health; 84 per cent of the women who responded ranked services for abused women as the highest priority.<sup>28</sup>

Canvassing medical and legal authorities to determine the most urgent shortcomings in the existing social-service network produced similar results. In discussions with doctors, social workers, family court workers and police officers, organizers learned that 89 women who had been physically or mentally abused had sought help from local services in March 1980. Some of these women had sought refuge at the Fredericton Transition House, 182 kilometres away.<sup>29</sup> The board of Crossroads/Carrefour also sought advice from the organizers of established transition houses in other provinces; these latter activists responded that dealing with family violence exclusively was itself an overwhelming task, and they urged the Crossroads/Carrefour board to limit their mandate only to opening a transition house.<sup>30</sup> Following this input from women and community groups, the organizers abandoned their plans for a women's resource centre. The board met weekly to expedite the opening of the shelter and arranged to meet with local women's clubs to solicit financial and political support for the project. Federal grants from the Secretary of State and the Department of Employment and Immigration job-creation programmes covered operational expenses, salaries and renovations.<sup>31</sup> The original staff consisted of six full-time and three part-time employees working as crisis interveners. Some of these women had themselves been in abusive relationships, and

26 Handwritten notes on an advertisement for a meeting organized by the Crossroads Board of Directors, 15 November 1980, Crossroads Records, box 2, file Newspaper Articles, C/C and untitled list of events organized in 1980, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Publicity, C/C.

27 Canada Works Application Form, 1979-1980, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C.

28 Press Release, 12 May 1980, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Publicity, C/C; untitled information sheet, October 1980, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C.

29 Press release, n.d. [c. April 1980], Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C. Other studies confirmed the incidence of wife abuse in the community. A study of the Moncton Family Court found that between December 1978 and December of 1979, the court had heard 112 cases in which violence was an issue and had prepared 70 peace bonds for women against their husbands. See "Speech by Doris Gallagher", n.d. [c. 1981], Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Public Speaking 1981-1988, C/C.

30 Untitled synopsis of responses from transition houses, 14 March 1980, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C.

31 The programs were the Canada Community Development Program (CCDP), the Employment and Immigration Canada NEED grant and Canada Works. See Press Release, n.d. [c. April 1980], Crossroads Records, box 772, binder; untitled objectives of Carrefour pour femmes, October 1980, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C; *Information Handbook: Crossroads for Women, Inc.* (Moncton 1985), p. 59; and Gautreau and McLaughlin, interview by author.



the board hired them because their personal experiences would help them understand the clients' needs.<sup>32</sup>

Crossroads/Carrefours, the first bilingual shelter in New Brunswick, opened its doors on 28 June 1981. The original structure was a dilapidated four-bedroom house that the City of Moncton rented to the board for a nominal fee of \$100 per month.<sup>33</sup> The board invested \$25,000 of its federal operational grant to do extensive repairs, hiring construction workers under the name "Project Alice" to maintain the secrecy of the transition house.<sup>34</sup> Community volunteers and staff made the house liveable: women's groups provided linens and food, men's groups fixed the windows and maintained the grounds and, after the shelter opened, women who had stayed there donated their time and skills to make the home more cheerful. Rina Arseneault, who worked as a crisis intervener and eventually became the principal spokesperson for the shelter, listed some of the contributions:

We had an artist who came there who did some wonderful work. One woman painted our logo on the wall. It was gorgeous. She did a wonderful job. And one woman gave us a wonderful pamphlet . . . and that was another strength. All these women came [to Crossroads] with a lot of skills. And they were quite willing to help. We had one woman who, for at least six Christmases, made dinner for Crossroads. . . . For her it was important that she pay back. And that was her way. Others paid back in different ways. There was a lot of that happening at that time also. Women wanted to pay back for all of the support.<sup>35</sup>

Supporting the shelter offered women a way to contribute to the battered women's shelter movement.

Organizers soon realized that the house that they had rented from the city was not large enough to accommodate all of the women who needed a place to stay when they left violent relationships. Sometimes as many as 20 people were packed into the shelter, which had a maximum capacity of 12 residents. When the beds were full, families slept on the couches in the living room, leaving no common area to relax and

32 Saulnier, interview by author.

33 City of Moncton Operational Grants to Organizations Application, 2 October 1982, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C. The city also waived the sewage fees. City council decided to provide the house after members went to the meeting to ask for \$7,000. Mayor Dennis Cochrane explained that council offered the house because the presentation opened their eyes to the issue. See Gautreau and McLaughlin, interview by author.

34 *Information Handbook: Crossroads for Women*, p. 57.

35 Arseneault, interview by author. Lesley McMillan found similar patterns in a survey of refuge volunteers and workers in England. Many women became involved in anti-violence work not only to "give back" to the anti-violence movement, but also as a sign of their political commitment to ending women's oppression. See Lesley McMillan, "'It's About Care as Much as It's About Feminism': Women's Personal and Political Motivations for Volunteering in Refuges and Rape Crisis Centres", *Atlantis*, 28, 2 (Spring/Summer 2004), pp. 126-37. The logo was a butterfly flying over a rooftop. It represented women's transformation within a safe environment: "The roof and chimney . . . symbolized the warmth and safety of the transition house and the butterfly symbolized women's escape from bondage". See *Information Handbook: Crossroads for Women*, p. 58.

talk to other women. In the first three months the shelter housed 54 women and 65 children. By the end of the first year of operation, 178 women and 208 children had stayed there.<sup>36</sup> Although they were reluctant to turn women away, in March 1982 the collective decided that the shelter could not admit more than 12 people at one time due to limited space.<sup>37</sup> According to 1982 statistics, this decision created hardships. On one day alone, for example, the staff had to refuse accommodation to 13 women and children.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to cramped conditions, Crossroads/Carrefour faced a financial crisis from the outset. The federal government provided start-up funds, but expected the organization to secure money from the provincial government and community groups to sustain the service. In the first year of operation, the Canada Community Development Program granted the transition house \$73,097.60 – enough to cover salaries at minimum wage for the first year of operation. Federal funding was substantially smaller during the next two years, covering only 66 per cent of the wages in the second year of operation and 33 per cent in the third year.<sup>39</sup> Contrary to Ottawa's expectations, the provincial government proved unwilling to replace the federal grants. The shelter relied on community donations and women's church groups to keep the doors open. Arseneault remembers:

I've seen more basements of churches across New Brunswick than you'd ever imagine. I got served more teas. I knew where the best scotch cookies were. There's a lot of networking in the churches. And that has helped many transition houses, but also many women. We need to realize that. . . . The women's movement inside the church . . . did all of the organizing. [The women] and the leaders seemed to be two different things altogether. And I'm sure some of the women never told their pastor or their priest that they were in some ways networking and helping [the transition houses].<sup>40</sup>

Women's church groups made significant donations to the shelter during the years that the board was trying to secure stable funding from the provincial government. Before the transition house opened, Les Soeurs de Notre Dame du Sacré gave \$5,000 to Crossroads/Carrefour, the largest donation the shelter received, and women's church auxiliaries organized fundraising campaigns to furnish the house.<sup>41</sup>

Organizers and staff met with local groups to raise awareness about wife battering and to generate support for the transition house. Public education was part of the

36 "Transition house full as battered women seek help", n.d. [c. 1981], Crossroads Records, box 2, file Newspaper Articles, C/C; "Statistics 1981-1982", Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 2, file Statistics, C/C.

37 Undated notes, n.d. [c. March 1982], Crossroads Records, filing cabinet, file Minutes du personnel 1981-1982, C/C.

38 "Statistics attached to press communiqué", n.d. [c. 1982], Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C.

39 "Refuge for Moncton's battered women to open in April", *Moncton Times-Transcript*, 28 January 1981, Crossroads Records, box 2, file Newspaper Articles, C/C.

40 Arseneault, interview by author.

41 *Information Handbook: Crossroads for Women* p. 55; Speech by Doris Gallagher, n.d. [c. 1981], Crossroads Records, filing cabinet, file Public Speaking (1981-1988), C/C.

mandate of Crossroads/Carrefour, but it was also an important vehicle for fundraising. Arseneault was torn about this: "I used to hate it because I thought I was selling [the issue]. . . . I wanted people to have knowledge about this. But then they would send their cheques. And the better you get [at selling the issue], the more money you'd get, but then you'd have to sell this. . . . I remember feeling that struggle inside of me".<sup>42</sup> Although activists wanted to make family violence a political issue, it was often more effective to present it as a charitable one. Helene Robb, a teacher who joined the collective as a volunteer in 1984, recalled that men's groups tended to be moved by the poor conditions for children in the shelter: "You get more money from people who have pity than you should. It's awful to just use pity and parade the poor little children, but that still works to get money unfortunately".<sup>43</sup> The strategy was effective; the Lions Club built a playroom for the shelter when Robb informed the organization that children did not have room to run outside or to play in the transition house.

Crossroads/Carrefour promoted itself as a woman-centred service, but its organizers and staff were reticent to identify as feminist because they did not want to alienate people who held negative opinions about the women's movement. Yolande Saulnier, one of the original crisis interveners who had previously worked as a kindergarten teacher, did not think that Crossroads/Carrefour was a feminist organization, but added "we wanted our rights. We still had husbands and children and families. . . . We just wanted women to be able to cope with their lives without leaning on someone or needing somebody to help her".<sup>44</sup> Distancing themselves from the negative stereotypes associated with the women's movement was a strategic decision because some people in the community thought that the transition house's purpose was to break up families. Arseneault explained that although many women were committed to feminist goals, they refused to call themselves feminists: "People were not ready, and they did not want to be called feminist. . . . They were humanist or they were peer supporters, but they were not feminists. They gave care. . . . You had to demystify feminism. It's okay. We're not going to burn our bras. We're talking the same language. I don't know what they were so scared of, but there was a lot of fear".<sup>45</sup> Organizers maintained a feminist analysis, but strategically rejected the word "feminist" so as not to narrow the base of support for their initiative. They focused on raising awareness about battered women, not the broader women's movement. Despite its public facade, the shelter operated according to feminist principles. Counseling was based on the feminist conviction that women were the experts on their own lives while the governance of the shelter was based on the premise that the board and staff should share power collectively.

### **Working without a Boss: Collective Organizing**

The organizational structure of the shelter was an issue from the very beginning. After six months of being organized as a board and staff, Crossroads/Carrefour reorganized

<sup>42</sup> Arseneault, interview by author.

<sup>43</sup> Helene Robb, interview by author, tape recording, Moncton, NB, 28 March 2003. Robb was a member of the collective until 1998.

<sup>44</sup> Saulnier, interview by author.

<sup>45</sup> Arseneault, interview by author.

as a collective.<sup>46</sup> This decision reflected the board's commitment to creating a service and a work environment that would promote women's independence. To prevent the development of a hierarchical relationship between the board and staff, members of the board of directors were called volunteer collective members. These women managed the transition house, applied for funding, lobbied government for support and accepted the legal responsibilities of a board. Staff members were responsible for the day-to-day operation of the transition house and for counseling, but they also played an important role in the governance of the organization.<sup>47</sup> Huberte Gautreau proposed the idea and had to convince new staff and volunteers that organizing as a collective was feasible and necessary because abused women needed new models for family life: "It was a concept that was not accepted by most of the new volunteers and staff. We always had to have training for that. Sometimes we had workshops on the collective. We were always trying to sell the idea of the collective. . . . We wanted to create a new model. . . . We wanted to show [the women who were battered] that this house could be an environment without a boss so that they could do the same thing at home. Why would you need a man to bring you down?"<sup>48</sup> Some women were not able to work in a collective environment and left the organization. Those who accepted the structure once they were more familiar with how collectives operated became adamant supporters of it. Organizing as a collective showed abused women that there were alternatives to unequal patriarchal family relations and activists promoted the new service as a place where women would be able to form co-operative relationships. An advertisement announcing the opening of the transition house in the Acadian newspaper *L'Évangéline* asserted that battered women and their children had a right to refuge: "Une femme en état de crise a le droit de choisir les moyens qui pourront le mieux lui permettre de réévaluer ses relations avec les hommes et les femmes".<sup>49</sup> Bringing together battered women would give them the opportunity to help each other by fostering mutually supportive relationships among women, and personal empowerment among the staff was intended to foster the same in the women who stayed there.

Collective organizing presented residents with alternatives, but it also helped staff

46 Gautreau and McLaughlin remembered that they had tried to include a man in the collective, but they were not successful because he resisted the non-hierarchical structure. See Gautreau and McLaughlin, interview by author. In June 1983 the collective passed a motion that no men could be members of the collective. See Crossroads/Carrefours Minutes, 22 June 1983, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet, file CACSW, C/C.

47 In June 1981 the collective agreed that staff would be knowledgeable about the finances of the shelter. See Staff Meeting Minutes, n.d. [c. June 1981], Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Minutes du personnel, C/C. The collective also invited former clients to meetings about how to improve the services in the shelter. See Staff Minutes, 13 October 1981, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Minutes du Personnel, C/C.

48 Gautreau and McLaughlin, interview by author. Collective organizing did not always flatten hierarchical relationships in feminist groups, and some feminists criticized it because working for consensus delayed decision-making. See Jo Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness", in Jane Jaquette, ed., *Women and Politics* (New York, 1974), pp. 202-14 as well as Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin and Margaret McPhail, *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada* (Toronto, 1988), pp. 229-55.

49 Advertisement for Carrefour pour femmes, Inc. in *L'Évangéline*, 26 June 1981, Crossroads Records, box 2, file Newspaper Articles, C/C.

to become more confident. Saulnier explained: "It gave us more power, more independence. I came here to work and I had to take charge of the house. Also for the clients that were here. She would come here and there was no boss. She had had to live with a boss all her life. 'You do this. You do that. Don't do this'. But here the collective was more like a group. I wasn't here to be a boss. I was just here to make sure that the house would function".<sup>50</sup> Because all tasks were shared in the collective, women were obliged to perform tasks that made some of them nervous. For example, all staff members were expected to speak in public to promote the transition house. Initially this was daunting because none of them had experience in public speaking. Over time, most of them overcame their anxieties.<sup>51</sup> While it was a common practice for feminist services to operate as collectives, Crossroads/Carrefour was the only New Brunswick transition house that did so.<sup>52</sup>

The staff's commitment to collective organizing was one of the reasons that an early attempt to organize a provincial coalition of transition houses was not successful. In October 1982 New Brunswick shelter workers met at a conference on violence against women held in Fredericton to establish a provincial coalition. A survey of all transition house workers in the province conducted just before the conference found that the majority preferred governance structures that allowed them to have input on decisions. Comparing abusive homes to hierarchical relationships, the authors of the survey insisted that the government fund shelters without forcing them to give up their autonomy because "[like] the battered woman, the transition house needs to be autonomous".<sup>53</sup> Based on the results of the survey, shelter workers proposed that the coalition adopt a collective structure. The boards of other shelters refused to do so and, consequently, Crossroads/Carrefour workers became ambivalent about the proposed coalition. While they recognized that the coalition would be in a better position to bargain with the provincial government for standard wages and benefits for workers, Crossroads/Carrefour employees were also concerned that the specific needs of each shelter would not receive adequate attention.<sup>54</sup> Transition houses continued to negotiate individually with the government until the New Brunswick Association of Transition Houses was founded in 1987. As a result, disparities developed, with each shelter adopting different pay scales, policies and procedures. In the absence of a coalition and adequate government funding, Crossroads/Carrefour was supported by local groups and municipal governments in the Moncton area.

50 Saulnier, interview by author. All of the informants recalled that not having a boss improved working conditions and presented a positive living space for the clients.

51 Saulnier and Arseneault, interviews by author.

52 Fredericton Transition House and Hestia House in Saint John adopted modified collective structures; in its third year of operation the Fredericton Transition House revoked the staff's voting privileges on the board. Maison Notre Dame in Campbellton maintained a traditional hierarchical relationship between the board and staff. See "On Internal Structure (Decision Making)", n.d., Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 2, file Transitions Houses, C/C.

53 "On Internal Structure (Decision Making)", n.d., Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 2, file Transition Houses, C/C.

54 Crossroads employees discussed the collective during their staff meetings. See Staff Meeting Minutes, 15 April 1982 and 7 December 1983, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Minutes du personnel, C/C.

### **Negotiating the Value of Women's Work**

Improving staff salaries was an important issue because organizers were opposed to creating a service that reproduced women's oppression. The guidelines of federal job-creation programmes that funded the shelter hindered the attainment of this goal. Since the purpose of job-creation programmes was to provide temporary employment to help move people from social-assistance programmes into the work force, programs stipulated that employees work at minimum wage so that they would not become dependent on government programmes.<sup>55</sup> This was a condition that the organizers of Crossroads/Carrefour would not accept. Beth McLaughlin, a teacher who joined the board in 1981, explained why it was important to improve salaries:

[The salaries] were roughly \$8,000 per person. . . . And we all said women cannot live on that. It was just recreating exactly what we were trying to get people out of. So we committed to raising \$12,000 [to increase the wages]. Still it wasn't a huge amount of money, but we reckoned that they could at least live on that. It wasn't poverty wages. And I think that was . . . the way we dealt with what was going on. . . . We looked at it through the same lens. . . . Is this abuse or is this enhancing or empowering women? So I think that was a very strong part of our mandate.<sup>56</sup>

Keeping women's income above the poverty line meant that the salaries had to be adjusted yearly according to increases in the cost of living. To meet the collective's commitment to increase wages by 13 per cent each year in order to improve the initial wages and to keep up with inflation, collective members, including staff, organized fundraising events to supplement insufficient government grants.<sup>57</sup> Drawing on women's traditional fundraising techniques, they sold chicken fricot on Assumption Day, fudge at the mall for International Women's Day and organized dances, auctions and car washes. Local television and radio stations donated their facilities to host a fundraising variety show and telethon. Perhaps the most creative event was the cyclethon from Moncton to Miscou Island, organized by two professors from the Université de Moncton, which raised \$700 for the shelter.<sup>58</sup> These projects were creative and fun, but they were also tiring and time-consuming as well as producing only minimal returns. In the first five years of operation fundraising garnered \$119,963, but this amount covered merely one-quarter of the operating costs each year.<sup>59</sup> Although

55 For a discussion of these programs, see Nancy Janovicek, "Feminist Initiatives, Government Limitations: Feminist Services, Politics, and Voluntarism", in Audrey MacNevin, Ellen O'Reilly, Eliane Leslau Silverman and Anne Taylor, eds., *Women and Leadership* (Ottawa, 2002), pp. 57-75.

56 Gautreau and McLaughlin, interview by author. McLaughlin was active in the women's movement in Toronto, where she had worked at a shelter called Nellie's, and in the New Brunswick women's groups when she returned to the province.

57 Staff Meeting Minutes, 22 March 1982, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet, file Minutes du Personnel, 1981-1982, C/C.

58 Untitled list of fundraising events, n.d. [c. 1984], Crossroads Records, box 3, file Femmes Battues, C/C; "Press Release: Crossroads for Women, Inc. receives donation", July 1981, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C. The cyclists were Pauline Bourque and Huberte Gautreau.

59 *Information Handbook: Crossroads for Women*, p. 53.



finding money to pay wages was an important reason for organizing these events, the collective did not make this known. According to Arseneault, the collective thought that, even though community support for the transition house was growing, people did not want to donate money for wages.<sup>60</sup>

Staff knew that their personal survival depended on the success of fundraising campaigns. Arseneault recalled: "We're saying we're here to help women, but how can we help each other. The money was terrible. But there was always a sense that we could get more money. So we'd work for our salary. It was important to sell the fudge and the blankets and the tickets. It was as much for the house, the food, the electricity and all of that as it was for our own food and electricity. There was always that dichotomy of trying to stay alive and believing in the issue. How do you do that?" The collective experimented with ways to incorporate perks into the job to help women make ends meet. Since there was no money to compensate staff for daycare expenses, staff could bring their children to work.<sup>61</sup> Despite such concessions, many employees had difficulty dealing with the economic instability and demands of the job as well as with the stress of counseling women who had been abused. One employee reported that she cried every day after work. Another woman, trained in social work, resigned within the first year of operation because the work was too stressful and unpredictable. In addition, the collective worried about burnout; none of the staff had taken time off during the first year of operation because there were not enough workers to cover vacations.<sup>62</sup> Recognizing the demands of a 24-hour operation, volunteer collective members worked some of the night shifts to relieve overworked staff.<sup>63</sup>

The financial situation became so desperate that the collective discussed closing the shelter because they did not have enough money to pay staff and operating costs.<sup>64</sup> According to Saulnier, the workers refused this option: "We said no. We will find some money. No one is going to close this house. It's needed".<sup>65</sup> Arseneault explained that staff was willing to make personal sacrifices because they were committed to helping abused women: "There were three months when there was no money for salaries at all. There was nothing. We were just trying to keep the doors open. . . . There was a buy-in that had to happen. You needed to believe in the issue. It was not work. We believed in the issue and that's why we worked there".<sup>66</sup> When funding was obtained, the staff members were compensated for some of their back wages, but there was never enough money to pay them the full amount.

Provincial funding for Crossroads/Carrefour was minimal. In 1981 the Department of Health and Community Services provided a \$70.00 comfort allowance for each resident and approved per diem funding of \$10.00 per resident.<sup>67</sup> This amount proved

60 Arseneault, interview by author.

61 Arseneault, interview by author.

62 *Information Handbook: Crossroads for Women*, p. 62; Staff Meeting Minutes, 11 January 1982 and 8 February 1982, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet, file Minutes du Personnel, C/C.

63 Gautreau and McLaughlin, interview with author.

64 Peter R. Boisseau, "Bureaucrats Condemning Crossroads?" *Moncton Times-Transcript* [1986], Crossroads Records, filing cabinet, file Newspaper Clippings, C/C.

65 Saulnier, interview with author.

66 Arseneault, interview with author.

67 Crossroads/Carrefour Minutes, 16 February 1981, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet, file Board Minutes 1980-81, C/C.

inadequate when federal funding was withdrawn in 1984, but the provincial government refused to increase its contribution. During their lobbying efforts with government representatives and in press releases, supporters of the shelter admonished the provincial government for ignoring abused women and for generally discriminating against women. One month after the federal funding had ended and “panic was at its height”,<sup>68</sup> a representative from the Department of Social Services, with the assistance of the NBACSW, conducted a fact-finding study to determine how much support it should provide for the shelter. The report found inefficiencies in the operation of the service in Moncton and attributed them to the collective philosophy informing governance structures. Nevertheless, it recommended that the Department of Social Services continue to purchase services from Crossroads/Carrefours and that the government either increase the per diem rate or provide the shelter with an operating grant. To improve the relationship between the collective and the government, the study advised the department to assign a liaison who was sensitive to the needs of battered women.<sup>69</sup>

The Department of Social Services implemented the recommendations of the report, but this did not alleviate the problems at the shelter. In 1984 the provincial government committed to covering 80 per cent of the operating costs for all New Brunswick transition houses. The government based its funding on its own estimation the shelter’s overhead rather than the actual budget of Crossroads/Carrefour. The collective calculated that the province actually paid only 60 per cent of its operating costs. The government also agreed to pay a per diem for ten residents even when fewer people were staying at the shelter, and it raised the per diem rates by 90 cents to \$16.90. The collective, however, was not satisfied with this increase. They maintained that the low per diem rates that the transition house received discriminated against women, noting that it was far less than the \$35.00 per diem that the John Howard Society had negotiated with the provincial government for its halfway house.<sup>70</sup>

The new arrangement with the Department of Social Services worsened working conditions at the transition house. Government payments were often late, putting pressure on the board and employees who were never sure that they would have sufficient funds for payroll. The government only provided enough money to pay salaries for four full-time and one part-time staff, forcing the collective to reduce staff to one person per shift. Consequently, the level of services declined. With only one person staffing the house, workers could not escort women to court or to the hospital during emergencies; likewise, they were not able to counsel women in the shelter while they answered telephone calls from women in crisis. In March 1985 the collective asked for additional money to hire a staff member to answer the telephone.<sup>71</sup> The Department of Social services did not respond to this request until

68 *Information Handbook: Crossroads for Women*, p. 72.

69 Department of Social Services and NBACSW, “Fact-finding Study Respecting Crossroads/Carrefour”, May 1984, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet, file 112, C/C.

70 Crossroads/Carrefour Minutes, 16 February 1981, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 1, file Board Minutes, C/C; Crossroads/Carrefour to Richard Hatfield, 24 February 1984, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C; *Information Handbook: Crossroads for Women*, p. 72.

71 Staff Meeting Minutes, 20 June 1984 and 8 August 1984, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Minutes du Personnel, C/C; “Identification and Description of Needs”, n.d. [c. 1984], Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Fundraising, C/C.

June, when a social worker visited the shelter and agreed that it was important to have more than one person working during the day.

Wages remained low. In 1985 the starting salary for a full-time employee was \$13,156 for a 37.5-hour work week while the most experienced staff earned \$16,000 per year, less than their counterparts in other provinces.<sup>72</sup> There had been no cost-of-living adjustment since June 1984. Activists argued that the government's treatment of the workers was abusive: "As well as being overworked, the Crossroads staff is grossly underpaid. This is another reason for high staff turnover. It is not easy to recruit persons with the necessary qualifications to work for substandard wages and no pension or medical plans".<sup>73</sup> Provincial bureaucrats were not moved by the organizers' rationale for increased salaries for staff. Helene Robb recalled her frustration with the government position:

It was a struggle, a constant struggle. [Family violence] wasn't really recognized as a problem. . . . So we were sort of militant around that issue. I remember going up to the premier of the province and almost grabbing him by the lapels of his suit and saying, "I'm doing this because I feel this has to be done. I don't get paid for it. I'm a volunteer. It has to be done. I'm not doing this for self-interest. It's for everybody in the province. Why don't you pay a decent amount of money to transition houses?"<sup>74</sup>

Investing in new services did not accord with the government's agenda to reduce debt and spending. Beth McLaughlin maintains that politicians in the mid-1980s believed that it would not reflect badly on them if they ignored the shelters.<sup>75</sup>

Politicians may have believed that family violence was an issue they could dismiss, but New Brunswick newspapers were highly critical of the province's parsimonious funding of Crossroads/Carrefour. Despite support for the government's fiscal agenda, a 1986 editorial in the Moncton *Times-Transcript* argued "there is a difference between being careful with the taxpayers' monies and being so close with the purse-strings that the taxpayers' nose is cut off to spite his/her face". The accompanying cartoon showed an inebriated man in the background. In the foreground a badly beaten woman on the telephone explained to a friend: "He didn't seem to want to wait until Crossroads got its government funding. He decided to beat me anyway".<sup>76</sup> This

72 This included three hours for staff meetings and two-and-a-half hours of committee work. See "Terms and Conditions of Employment", September 1984, Crossroads Records, box 772, file Employment Policies, C/C; "Causes of the financial problems of Crossroads/Carrefour", November 1985, Crossroads Records, box 3, file Femmes Battues, C/C. The starting salary at Bryony House in Halifax was \$16,000 and in Regina it was \$21,000. The average salary for women working at Hestia House in Saint John was \$18,000.

73 Crossroads to Richard Hatfield, 23 May 1985, Crossroads Records, box 3, file Femmes Battues, C/C; "Causes of the financial problems of Crossroads/Carrefour", November 1985, Crossroads Records, box 3, file Femmes Battues, C/C.

74 Robb, interview with author.

75 Gautreau and McLaughlin, interview with author.

76 "Why the Obstructionism?", Moncton *Times-Transcript*, 10 October 1986. Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Newspaper Clippings, C/C. An editorial in September 1986 expressed the same

lack of sufficient government funding meant that donations from the community were the lifeline for the shelter. The Saint John *Telegraph-Journal* reported that Moncton citizens contributed more money per capita to their city's shelter than did the residents of Fredericton and Saint John.<sup>77</sup>

In 1986 the collective negotiated an additional \$30,000 from the provincial government, but the home remained on the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, the collective realized that they could no longer function in such small premises, which at the time was the smallest transition house in the province. In May 1987 the occupancy rate was 106 per cent, and staff turned away 8 women and 12 children.<sup>79</sup> When organizers heard that Hatfield had dismissed the need for a larger shelter because he believed that Crossroads/Carrefour was underused, the collective wrote a letter to Nancy Clark-Teed, the minister of Health and Community Services, to correct his misperception, explaining that during that week women and children were sleeping on the floor. Regardless of the overcrowded conditions, the RCMP had insisted that the collective admit another woman and her children because their lives were in danger and "Crossroads was the only safe place".<sup>80</sup> By the end of 1987, the collective finally persuaded the provincial government to cover 80 per cent of the shelter's actual budget; support from the United Way paid the remainder.<sup>81</sup> In December of that year the collective closed the deal with a \$5,000 grant from the city on a new house that would accommodate 18 people. They moved into the new location in February 1988.<sup>82</sup>

The new location alleviated the overcrowded conditions in the shelter, but the government still refused to increase staff salaries. McLaughlin maintains that most people did not acknowledge the experience and skill of front-line workers. The commonly held view was that "these women weren't very well-educated. They were working in a transition house. It was kind of that mainstream attitude that this was a poor person's issue. Let the poor look after them".<sup>83</sup> The collective had convinced the community that domestic violence was a political issue, but it was less successful in changing attitudes about the value of women's work.

Many women were not able to survive on the poor wages and moved on when better employment opportunities arose. The women who continued to work at the

opinion: "Help is Warranted", Moncton *Times-Transcript*, 6 September 1986, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file Newspaper Clippings, C/C.

77 "Moncton Shelter Struggles to Survive", Saint John *Telegraph Journal*, 18 October 1986, Crossroads Records, box 776, binder, C/C.

78 Peter R. Boisseau, "Province ensures Crossroads will continue, but no frills", Moncton *Times-Transcript*, 1 December 1986, Crossroads Records, box 776, binder, C/C. The provincial contribution increased to \$145,000; the Crossroads/Carrefour budget was \$181,401.

79 Crossroads/Carrefour Minutes, 7 May 1987, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet, file Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, C/C.

80 Crossroads Collective to Nancy Clark-Teed, Minister of Health and Community Services, 11 June 1987, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 3, file 105.5, C/C.

81 "Historical Highlights, Crossroads for Women, Inc., 1991", Crossroads Records, box 772, file Divers, C/C. The United Way expected Crossroads/Carrefour to abandon its collective structure. The collective set up a "paper board" or a "two-faced model" to meet the funding requirements. See Gautreau and McLaughlin, interview by author.

82 President's Report attached to Crossroads/Carrefour Minutes, 3 December 1987, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C.

83 Gautreau and McLaughlin, interview by author.

transition house throughout the numerous funding crises explained that the opportunity to improve women's lives outweighed their personal financial circumstances. Before taking a position at the transition house, Arseneault, who had recently graduated from university with a degree in psychology, had a summer job as an apprentice in the women's ward of the psychiatric hospital. This experience made her wonder "why it was so easy to keep women out of society when they didn't fit the mould that they were supposed to fit into". She wanted to work at Crossroads/Carrefour because the shelter might have an impact before women lost control of their lives.<sup>84</sup> Saulnier was also motivated by more than salary. She started working at Crossroads/Carrefour in 1981, two years after she had left an abusive relationship. She had returned to her husband many times because there were no social supports to help her recognize that she did not deserve the abuse and that she could live independently. This experience sustained her dedication to keeping the transition house open. Saulnier analyzed her political commitment to the transition house as traditional caring work: "To me it was never like a job. It was more like helping people. . . . To me it's almost like a second home. It's a part of my life".<sup>85</sup> In short, crisis interveners who stayed at the shelter throughout the years of uncertain funding were less concerned with the low wages and economic instability than organizers were. Belonging to a movement dedicated to improving women's lives was more significant than the undervaluation of women's caring work.

In their reflections on the struggle with the provincial government for stable funding, volunteer collective members echoed the staff's commitment to helping abused women. In an interview with the *Times-Transcript* in 1986, Doreen Gallagher explained "We've no way of knowing how many lives we've saved, but if only one life was saved it has been worth the effort".<sup>86</sup> The little house that was the first home for Crossroads/Carrefour certainly made a difference in many lives. Between 1981 and 1987, it was a safe haven for 833 women and 1,042 children.<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

In her study of family violence and the women's movement, Gillian Walker recalls a discussion with an anti-violence activist who "wondered whether [the battered women's shelter movement] had achieved anything beyond creating a lot of (poorly paid) jobs for feminists in transition houses".<sup>88</sup> This pessimistic assessment of the movement's accomplishments points to a central paradox that feminist services faced: women leaving abusive relationships needed jobs with good salaries and benefits to

84 Arseneault, interview by author.

85 Saulnier, interview by author.

86 "Limited funding has been a continuing problem for staff", Moncton *Times-Transcript*, n.d. [c. 1986], Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C. Organizers used the same words when they detailed the renovations to the house in an application for funding in 1982. See "City of Moncton Operational Grants to Organizations Application", 2 October 1982, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C.

87 Statistics from 1981-1987, Crossroads Records, filing cabinet 2, file Statistics, C/C. Organizers used a similar argument when they detailed the renovations to the house in an application for funding in 1982. They concluded the application by stating: "If it saves one life all the effort in establishing and maintaining it is worthwhile". See "City of Moncton Operational Grants to Organizations", 2 October 1982, Crossroads Records, box 772, binder, C/C.

88 Walker, *Family Violence and the Women's Movement*, p. 219.

live independently, but transition houses reproduced the very working conditions that prevented women from obtaining the economic pre-requisites for self-sufficiency.

As this paper documents, however, women's groups that opened shelters accomplished much more than this. Not only did Crossroads/Carrefour provide refuge for hundreds of women and children in need, but organizers also attempted to create a work environment that fostered the organization's emancipatory political goals. Adopting a collective structure helped women – both staff and volunteers – become more confident in accepting responsibility and leadership roles while also providing an alternative to patriarchal relationships for the women who stayed in the shelter. The organizers also placed a high value on the experience that women brought to their jobs as crisis interveners and the skills that front-line workers developed by counseling battered women. When they lobbied the government for stable funding for the shelter, they insisted that the government acknowledge this expertise by providing the means of paying adequate salaries. The organizers of Crossroads/Carrefour were as dedicated to improving the lives of their staff as they were to helping abused women and their children, yet they perhaps accomplished more in terms of the latter. They did help convince many people in the community as well as the federal and provincial governments that abused women and their children deserved government support and that support was eventually forthcoming, but the organizers of Crossroads/Carrefour were less successful in their campaign to improve the salaries of the women who worked in the shelter.