

## WOMAN TO WOMAN DISCUSSION GROUP

### Letter

We are women in transition. We have escaped abusive marriages and relationships—some with just the clothes on our backs. We have begun the difficult task of rebuilding our lives and laying the foundation for our children's future.

*What happens to people like us?*

Many of us have had to relocate in order to be safe. Most of us are on social assistance while we re-establish ourselves in the community. Yes, we need to find jobs and childcare but right now most of us are preoccupied with just surviving.

*"I live on a bowl of bran cereal every day so that I can feed my kids."*

*"It kills me to tell my children there's nothing to eat when they are hungry."*

*"I'm sorry, you can't have milk today, we're rationing."*

*"I had to give up my kids so that I knew they would be fed."*

*What happens to people like us?*

Did you know that welfare (now called Ontario Works or O.W.) rates are based on the assumption that a woman and 2 children will need less than \$600 per month for rent and utilities? Did you know that O.W. deducts, dollar for dollar, the national portion of our Canada Child Tax Benefit? Did you know that O.W. deducts, dollar for dollar, child support from our cheques? When our children's fathers pay support, our children do not benefit. When they do not pay support, the amount he should have paid is deducted anyway, and we can't buy food or pay our bills that month. "We're used to budgeting, but how do I support my 3 children on less than \$700 a month?"

*What happens to people like us?*

There is no money for "extras" like a telephone.

*"At 3:30am, I had a gallbladder attack and had to walk 4 blocks to my mother's with my 5yr old child."*

*"My 4 yr old daughter was violently ill in the night. I had to walk her to the hospital at 2am with my 2 yr old son."*

*"My son has chronic asthma. I fear not being able to get help quick enough if he has an attack."*

*"How do I get a job when I can't buy a uniform or work clothes, I don't have a phone for prospective employers to call me back, and I can't afford a babysitter? O.W. will reimburse some work expenses, but I have to be able to pay for them to begin with."*

Winter is coming. Our hydro bills are not paid. We worry about extra billing on our gas bills. We suffer from the effects of stress and sometimes get depressed because every day is a struggle. We are being driven back to our abusers or to the shelter.

*What happens to people like us?*

*This letter was collaboratively written by 18 women who attended a weekly discussion group at a rural women's shelter in southern Ontario. The purpose of the group was to link the personal to the political as a tool for making sense of women's personal experiences of violence, and for connecting them with other women who share similar experiences. Lastly, each group ended with a call to action: "what are we going to do about it?" This letter to the editor of our local newspaper was written by women from the discussion group.*