

**City for All Women Initiative**  
**Statement presented June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2004**  
**Health, Recreation, and Social Services Committee**  
**In support of motions presented by Councillor Diane Holmes**

**Presenters: Suzanne Doerge and Jacqueline Nyiramukwende**

**Bonjour, Nous sommes très contentes de pouvoir parler avec vous aujourd'hui.**

My name is Suzanne Doerge, and I am Project Coordinator of the City for All Women Initiative. I am joined by three members of our Steering Committee, Jacqueline Nyiramukwende, who will also speak, Jeanette Robert and Sandy Onyalo, who are available to answer questions you may have.

We are delighted to express our support for the three recommendations you have before you today.

The City for All Women Initiative is the second phase of an earlier project in which City staff and women's organizations worked in partnership to identify and address women's access to municipal services. Based on the success of that project and the request of the City to follow-up, we were able to secure additional federal funding from Status of Women Canada for this second phase.

In the initial project, we learned that women, especially women of marginalized groups, are less likely than men to be in positions where they can make and influence decisions made by the City. While the project discovered examples of City activities that address issues of concern to women, there was not a comprehensive gender lens being applied to City planning and practices. This second project is designed to address these issues.

This new one-year project, the City for All Women Initiative, began in January of this year. While awaiting an opportunity post-budget for these resolutions to come to this committee, we have been busy preparing to work with City staff. To get a more complete picture of diverse women's experience in having their voices heard by the City, we conducted a survey of 29 women's organizations. This is on file in the Clerk's office.

In that survey, organizations expressed concern that the lack of gender disaggregated data and a gender lens in City planning has led to policies and practices that appear to be gender neutral, but are not. To give one example:

**Homelessness.** When the city or others in the city speak of homelessness, it is usually spoken of in generic terms, referring to the male experience of homelessness, with the overt examples of men sleeping in the streets of the city. Rarely is women's experience of homelessness, which is vastly different from men's spoken of with as much passion and concern. There are homeless women in Ottawa, but, as they are often with children and

are more susceptible to physical violence, their homelessness and poverty is not visible in the same way.

In order for the City to address homelessness and poverty, we need to disaggregate the experience of homelessness by gender, as well as race, age, ability, sexual orientation.

In the survey, most women's organizations also expressed that they don't understand how the municipal system works and doubt their capacity to influence it.

To address these issues, we have begun to organize a training programme in the fall in which 15 women's organizations will learn how to make their views and interests known to City Council. In addition, we have identified practices that make city consultations more accessible to diverse women. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the City on this.

The City for All Women Initiative corresponds with similar initiatives taking place in cities around the globe. Countries such as Australia and South Africa are using gender budgeting to identify ways to most effectively utilize limited dollars. Governments are realizing it is not sufficient to simply address "women's issues" but it is necessary to systematically integrate gender considerations into policy, planning and decision-making processes. .

In 2003, the City of Ottawa passed its Equity and Diversity policy. This project can be one way of implementing that policy, while showing leadership among Canadian cities.

I invite Jacqueline Nyiramukwende to speak from her experience.

Hello my name is Jacqueline Nyiramukwende. I want to speak to you about why I think it's important that the City of Ottawa participate in the City for All Women Initiative.

It takes a lot of courage and strength for a new immigrant woman to stand up and walk out of that state of isolation, fear and confusion; not to mention, some times out of an abusive relationship!

We are pleased to be able to access the services available in the City; however, we wonder how willing and accessible the City is to responding to diverse women's concerns? How is a new immigrant woman with so many barriers able to catch the City's attention? How do we contribute to new practices and policies that reflect the concerns of the full-diversity of women in this City?

As new Canadian women, we have skills to bring to creating a better city for everyone. But unless the City takes care to hear from the women in our communities, as well as the men, they will not get the full picture. Men are still in control of what women can and cannot achieve; I raise this concern because I live it in my community work everyday.

Many new Canadians have come from countries where we feel afraid to speak out for our rights. As women we face additional barriers with low self-esteem and lack of confidence.

Diverse women representing many communities and organizations have begun to participate in the Working Group of this project. Through their participation, women have shown their desire to influence and contribute to creating a better and more equitable city.

**So what are we asking of you today?**

We ask the committee to recommend that the City participate in the project. This participation does not involve financial support. It does involve staff working in partnership with the community to strengthen the gender and diversity analysis in some current City initiatives. In so doing, we would hope to demonstrate the benefits to the City of taking gender and diversity into account.

One thing that makes me happy and strong today is that women have reached a point of celebrating their differences and the contributions they have to make. It would feel even more strengthening to know we had the political support of our local government behind us.