

Dorothy McKenna

(November 13, 2008)

DM: I'm the Executive Director of Womanspace, have been for the past 15 years. Been involved with Womanspace and before it the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee since 1988.

Q: Tell us about your upbringing and early influences.

DM: I guess the biggest early influence in my life was my father, who was born in England and immigrated to Canada when he was 17 to go to what is now the University of Guelph. At that time it was an agricultural college, and he graduated in the dirty '30s in horticulture. Because it was the depression, there was no employment there so he moved into agriculture and worked for the Canada Department of Agriculture for his whole life. He was a big influence on me. I would have to say that he had extremely conservative views, probably verging on racist. He was brought up in some privilege in England and I guess absorbed what was around him. I obviously didn't absorb that much. I remember being part of Trudeau mania back in the '60s. I grew up in Newmarket, which is just north of Toronto, and he actually came there during one of his campaigns. I don't remember which one, but I was part of the admiring horde of young women. I would imagine I probably voted Liberal, but for most of my life I've been a staunch NDP supporter. I would have to say that my dad's influence were obviously not political ones on me. I was the only person in my family, apart from my father, to go to university. I actually qualified as a French teacher and have taught French through the years in four different countries and have taught everything from Kindergarten French immersion to university level French. I just kind of fell into this job, sort of accidentally.

Q: Talk a bit about your previous employment, and then about how you accidentally fell into this.

DM: My employment, like most women, was interrupted by childrearing. In my case, it was also interrupted when we moved to Scotland in 1977 where my husband went to do a law degree in his home town of Dundee. We had two small children and a baby on the way that we didn't know about at the time. At that point, when my youngest child turned two, at that point I'd been out of the labour force for nine years. I'd really only ever taught French in the secondary school system for one year, and didn't like it. It wasn't that I didn't like French – I really didn't like teenagers, or trying to teach them. Once I had children I was out of the labor force for nine years. We were living in Scotland in the Margaret Thatcher era and my husband was going to school. It was hard to survive. We lived on welfare for the three years that he was at law school. Then I happened to read a newspaper article that said they were terribly short of language teachers in Dundee, which is where we were living. So I presented myself. They took about six weeks to review my qualifications, and before I knew it I had a full time teaching job, which was an experience. For that one year I taught in an inner-city school in the poorest area of Dundee, trying to teach French, which I'm sure most of the kids considered to be entirely irrelevant to their lives. And I'm sure it was. So it was a very frustrating experience. Then my husband finished his law degree, didn't want to practice, didn't intend to practice, wanted to teach. Got a job at the University of Lancaster in England, so we pulled up stakes and moved from Scotland to England and lived there for four years. While we were in England I got a job teaching in a private girls' boarding school in the Lake District, so that was quite a contrast. Then he was offered a job here at the University of Lethbridge, so we came back to Canada in 1985. At that point we'd been gone for eight years. That's how we ended up in Alberta. Then I did supply teaching in the school system. That was how I ended up doing some French immersion Kindergarten and everything in between. Then in '89 I started teaching French as a sessional lecturer at the University of Lethbridge. I taught all the introductory French for high school graduates who had never taken French. They arrived at university and they had to have some French, so it was my job to bring them up to speed in two courses. So I did that for about four years and then we went off to Britain on sabbatical and when I came back there was no sessional teaching to be had. But when I left I had been on the board of ASWAC, the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee. There was a crisis when I came back. They

didn't have any money, or the money had not come from Status of Women. They didn't really have a coordinator either, but they did have an office that needed to be looked after and I ended up doing it. I said I would do it. I did it for nothing, and then when the money did come in I actually got paid at the rate of \$10 an hour for having done that. But then they hired somebody. In those days what happened is we got about \$21,000 a year and that had to cover everything. Whatever project you were doing, which in those days was really programming, and the rent, and whatever salary you're going to pay to whoever, and all the other expenses. So it really wasn't very much money, and whatever project you did ran from September to April. Then in the summer, we didn't have money to pay a coordinator, and we couldn't say, well would you be willing to hang around until we get more money for a different project? So we always lost the coordinator at the end of April. Then we'd get a STEP grant from the province, the Summer Temporary Employment Program. I was actually able to do that, because when I was working I was working 20 hours a week. If you worked 20 hours a week or less you could be the STEP employee, it didn't have to be student. So that would get us through the summer and then we'd have to hire a new person. That was a time of great instability and lack of continuity. You were forever changing the coordinators. There was no way to build up relationships with funders or with community organizations or anything. Plus, ASWAC itself did not have a good name in the community. They'd had a previous coordinator who shot her mouth off a lot and said some wild and ill-considered things. The public did not react well to it. Remember this was the early '90s. Two years in a row I worked for 10 or 12 weeks without pay, just until the money came in, and then they hired somebody. The person they hired the first time around, they actually hired two people, one of whom was my own daughter. For that reason I disqualified myself from the hiring procedure: didn't apply, didn't sit on the board, didn't do anything, because it would've been a conflict of interest. Then the whole thing happened again the next year, so that would've been '95. Didn't have a coordinator, the money hadn't come from Status of Women, nobody knew where it was or when it was coming. So the second time I stepped into the breach. There was no activity at all and membership had fallen off. There were only three of us on the board. . . . I need to do this chronologically and I got out of order. I should've talked about how ASWAC became Womanspace because that happened before we went to

Britain. That happened in '91 or '92. I don't remember how I ended up on the board of ASWAC, but I did. There were only three of us and we were very concerned. We felt that the organization was dying, that there was no interest. Membership had fallen off and we didn't really know what to do. So we hit on the idea of doing a telephone survey. We made up this survey on women's issues in Lethbridge and perceptions of ASWAC as an organization. It had a fairly rocky history and some past coordinators who had turned the public off and made ASWAC a name that wasn't respected. Certainly the media didn't respect it. So we conducted this survey. It took us several months; we did it over the phone. What came out of this survey was that people thought that the current office was not a good space. It was inaccessible because it was up a long flight of stairs. It was a place that women did not like to go to after dark. It was kind of down a side street and it just wasn't a nice space. So that was one of the things, they thought we should move. They thought the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee itself had a bad name locally and that we ought to change the name. The third thing was that they felt the organization had no organization, it wasn't organized at all. They would have meetings where it was considered unfeminist to take minutes because it was using the tools of the patriarchy, I remember that. So there was no way ever to hold anybody to account or to figure out who had said that they would do this or that. There was no way to track that. So there was a small group of women, and Jacqueline who's coming in later was part of that group, and so was I. We put out a call for a reorganization meeting. At the first meeting 35 women showed up. That process went on from May through the summer. We settled down eventually to a small group of 10 or 15 women who were committed to doing something about it. One of those women was a local lawyer called Rhonda Rustin. I don't think she lives in Lethbridge anymore but she's been involved in the residential schools case, trying to get compensation for the survivors in southern Alberta. We had asked her to speak at our Take Back the Night rally, and then after that we asked her to be on the board. She was on the board long enough that she actually took charge of the incorporation process. So we incorporated as a society and she took care of all of that. Then the rest of it was holding a competition to see what the name was going to be, and that was how Womanspace came to be. Then another group of us went around looking for office space. Our first office space in this building was down in the basement. It was a

dark and dingy place down in the basement of this building. But it was wheelchair accessible and it was reasonably visible and women didn't feel unsafe going there at night. So we were actually in the basement of that building for six years. In November 1992 we had a grant opening as Womanspace, then we started the slow process of gaining some credibility in the community, which probably took about six years. Meanwhile, ASWAC provincial was getting into trouble. I know that at one point they had, they really didn't get along well with Status of Women, the federal department, Status of Women Canada. At one point they were getting their money on a quarterly basis and they had to provide reports before they would get the next installment. When we were doing the reorganization we had someone who was involved with ASWAC here who had gone to live in Edmonton, which is where ASWAC provincial was headquartered. One of the questions that came up was were we going to maintain our connection to ASWAC provincial. A number of people said, well I don't know what they do for us; all it means is that when they have meetings they're always in Edmonton or Calgary, which means we have to travel, we have to pay our own expenses, and we don't feel we got much benefit out of it. So we phoned Cheryl, who now lived in Edmonton, to say, okay what's your advice? She said, there's things coming down the pipeline; I don't think that ASWAC as a provincial organization is going to last, I think you'd be smart to get out now. So we did. We didn't do anything formal, we just quit going and didn't call ourselves ASWAC anymore. In '97 or '98 or '99 is when ASWAC provincial collapsed as an organization. By that time nobody here remembered that we used to be ASWAC, so we didn't get tarred with that brush, and we had always been funded separately anyway. I think when ASWAC was first set up, the office was in Edmonton and Calgary was a branch office. Then Lethbridge came along in about '85 or '86, so it was always funded separately. Consequently, we really didn't get tarred with that brush, which was a very good thing. So I remained on the board of the transitional organization. It wasn't that ASWAC closed down and Womanspace was born, ASWAC just sort of morphed into Womanspace. It was still the same people doing the same things, but we had just changed our name and incorporated as a society and started to become a more organized and accountable and structured organization than it had been before. Then we started to build a relationship with the media; that was really important. We wanted to get to the point

where if issues came up, daycare issues or any issue that related to women, that they would phone us for comments. And they did. The other part of that was going to organizational meetings for things like international woman's day, the Montreal massacre memorial, things like that. So going to those meetings, participating in the organization of events and saying, okay we'll do this, and then doing that, carrying through. That helped to make us more of a legitimate organization. But we still had the continuity problem. My involvement was interrupted by going to Britain on sabbatical in '93-'94. Then when I came up there was the big crisis. The money hasn't come, we don't know where the money is, we don't even know if the project is going to be approved, but there is no money. They didn't have somebody to watch the office, either. I was back from Britain and unemployed because my job at the university had disappeared, which meant I was available. Somebody had to do something so I said, okay I'll step into the breach. I have absolutely no idea what to do. I had no office training and didn't know how to type. When I was going to school typing was in the same time slot as Latin, and I took Latin, therefore I didn't take typing. I took Latin because I was in the university headed stream, therefore I had to take as many languages as I could get. So I never learned to type and that was a huge impediment. In fact, I didn't learn to type until I was 54, one year when I was laid off. I was laid off one summer on EI and I persuaded them to fund a course for me. I think it was run by a college in this building at the bottom of Mayermack McGrath Drive that used to house the local airline, Time Air. The college had a satellite computer business applications. So that was when I learned to type and learned how to use a computer, but up to that point if I wanted a letter done I'd have to get a volunteer somehow. I didn't know how to file, I had no idea what to do with the correspondence that came in. There were two former coordinators who now had different jobs, who still lived in the city. So I would call them up and say, what do I do about this, what do I do about that? Help me here. I did that two years in a row for about 10 weeks. The second year that I did that, that would've been '95, the money came, they were going to hire somebody. The board said, it would be stupid to advertise when you've done the job twice now and you know what to do; why don't we just hire you? That was 1995. So I've been doing it ever since. The thing is, and this is something that I bemoan frequently, we don't depend on my salary. I'm a white middle class woman who really doesn't have to

work. That's the reason why we've got the continuity. There have been several periods of time that we've been without money or with very little money, and I have been able to hang around. Previous coordinators, we had one woman who was absolutely excellent. She was a Métis woman so she understood those issues. She worked at Womanspace and she also worked at Harbor House, she had both jobs. Harbor House is the women's shelter, she did part time work at the women's shelter. Sometimes she would work nights there and then sleep for a few hours and then come into Womanspace and take care of the office work. She also did part time work at the native women's transition home, so she was stretched to the max. When we ran out of money to pay her, she couldn't afford to stick around and wait until the money came in, so we lost her. I think it's still an issue, that's where there are so many white middle class feminists who do the work, because they're the only ones who can afford to do the work. Woman of color, Métis women, aboriginal women, they can't afford to work for the pittance we can afford to pay them. There are no benefits, so you don't get sick time, you don't get maternity leave. We have somebody right now, this current project, the first person we hired, after she'd been here a few months she discovered she was pregnant. At the same time she was offered another job. At that other job she was going to be able to get benefits and acquire maternity leave, so of course she went and did that. She's still doing our project part time, she's job sharing with somebody else. But I'm the only person here who's actually on salary. Everybody else we hire on a contract basis. That's the reality of women's lives and women's work, it's this precarious what we call no-standard work – no benefits, no full time, not permanent, you don't know that you've got a job from one year to the next. The reality of that means that it's women like myself. We don't depend on my salary to survive. If we did depend on my salary to survive, we wouldn't survive. I've kind of gone around in a circle... We spent about six years building up the credibility of the organization, and did do that. When we had a grand opening in 1992 we actually got a certificate from the MLA which is out in the front office there, congratulations on the grand opening of your office. We have managed to coexist peacefully with the powers that be in Lethbridge ever since. The continuity comes from the fact that I'm always here. A lot of the history of the organization is in my head. It's a good thing you're doing this, because I've had people say, if you got hit by a bus we'd be in big trouble. So I need to not get hit, but I would

like to retire at some point. It's very difficult, because there's no obvious successor. I would have to say to anybody that we decided, let's say I decided to leave, retire, and we were going to hire someone to take my place. We'd have to say to that person, and if you want to get paid, then you need to be able to write a grant proposal that includes in it your salary, because that's the only way you'll get paid. Our thing is that in all the years we've been in existence we've never received any form of core funding, never, not for anywhere. It's always project funding, short-term time limited. The longest project we've ever run has been two years, and the one we're doing right now is 18 months. Right about now we need to start coming up with an idea. It was this time last year that I wrote the proposal for our current project, so right now we should be coming up with an idea for the next one. It's a very difficult existence as an organization, because on the one hand people depend on us, and on the other hand there's no core funding.

Q: Can you talk a bit about the programs?

DM: We don't do programming. You can't do programming without core funding.

Q: But you do have some projects.

DM: This is our major project right now. It's intimately connected to the government insofar as when the Harper government came into power in 2006, almost the first thing they did was to make drastic changes to Status of Women. At the same time that they eliminated the court challenges program they went after Status of Women, changed the mandate dramatically. Up to that point, in '97-'98, Status of Women went through a reorganization process. Up to that point in time you could do programming, which was essentially come up with a project and you'd do all the same things but you'd just call it something different each time, but it was essentially programming. The work that we did, a lot of it was event focused. In those days we had four major events a year. We would do the night rally and march in September, after 1989 we would do the Montreal massacre memorial, then we would do a women's film festival, which had to stop when the National Film Board shut down. When they stopped renting videos then we had to stop

doing our film festival. Then we would do International Women's Day. So the whole year focused around those four events, and bits and pieces of programming in between. In '97-'98 they changed the mandate so that you had to do policy changing initiatives. Whatever you did had to affect policy at the municipal, provincial or federal level. That was a huge shakeup and it was then that a lot of the women's centers in Alberta just disappeared. They couldn't handle the transition to all of a sudden go from programming – and they also eliminated the funding for annual events. So it was like one minute you were doing annual events and programming that was always the same, and the next minute you had to come up with something that was a policy changing initiative. We were one of the few women's centers that survived that transition. Our first policy changing initiative was two-fold. We set up the campus women's center at the University of Lethbridge. At that time there was no women's center on campus. Part of our project was a separate little piece that opened the women's center and funded it. We built obsolescence into it in that the focus was that they would have to become independent within a certain period of time, which they did. They incorporated as a society in their own right and they're an independent entity that's still running. The other half of that project was we set up a project where we were doing advocacy skills training. We knew there were lots of organizations and helping agencies in the city with staff who were advocating for clients, but we had observed that they were doing this with no training in what advocacy is and what the skills of advocacy actually are. We developed an advocacy training program and as a sidebar we did a plain language adaptation, a plain language version of the Alberta welfare manual. I don't know if you've ever seen it, but that manual is two huge binders 1400 pages long, written in governmentese. It was written for the workers, it wasn't written for the clients. A client couldn't possibly understand. So we observed that there were a lot of clients who weren't getting benefits they were entitled to. The main one that we focused on was something called the natal benefit. At that time a woman who was on welfare, if she was having her first baby and was on welfare, she was entitled to up to \$350. That was meant to buy the big ticket items like the crib and the stroller and so on. We don't know for sure that it was a don't ask don't tell policy, but nobody knew about it. So we used that as an example and developed a plain language version of the welfare manual that specifically focused on benefits for

women and their kids. Our version was 72 pages long. It was written in plain English and had a reference number at the top of every page that referred back to the big manual. The idea was we thought agency people would use it to advocate for their clients, which they did do. But what also happened was that the clients were able to self-advocate. I guess word got around, I don't know how, but they'd phone us up and say, I think I might be entitled to so and so, can you help me? So they'd come in, I'd photocopy the page from the manual and say, here, take this to your worker. So that was us affecting policy. We did that project for a year and a half and then we did another one in rural southern Alberta, the same one more or less. We had the cooperation of Population Health, which was a division of the health region. The second time around they actually printed those manuals. I can tell you the government was none too happy. We heard comments coming back even from some of the agencies saying, I don't think those people really should have access to that information. The point was, it was public information. Anybody who wanted, they could go to the library and look at the Alberta welfare manual, but they'd have had to wade through 1400 pages, and usually it was two or three years out of date. That was our very first policy changing initiative, policy changing on the university campus on the one hand by opening a women's center, and within the city affecting welfare services. So we got right into policy changing initiatives, it was our thing and we got quite politically active. We did a lot of advocacy, a lot of lobbying, a lot of political action. We were heavily involved in the movement to get a daycare started at the University of Lethbridge; we were part of that movement for two years. We got involved with Public Interest Alberta. We actually went looking for, what we wanted to do was to try to help set up a network of feminist organizations in the province. When we went looking we couldn't find any. So many of them had charitable status and they were terrified of risking their charitable status. We never had it. We actually applied three times and were turned down three times. Then we looked at it and said, well the list of exclusions of what you could do reads like a list of what we do, so we don't want it because it would restrict our actions. So we don't have the charitable status. So we became an advocacy organization that did lobbying. We tried to do a lot of political education of women because one of the areas that we got interested in was the abysmal lack of interest and involvement of women in politics, particularly young women. So a

couple of our projects involved civic engagement and trying to get women more interested in politics, because we figured if we got women more interested and more involved in politics, then that would be a way of bringing what are considered to be women's issues, like daycare, to the table. We were involved in that, we did well. We did quite a few research projects, we did a two-year project on women in non-standard work, which was very successful and which we still refer back to over and over again. Then we became involved on a provincial basis, because when we went looking for other feminist organizations and really couldn't find them because of their funding issues, we found Public Interest Alberta and discovered that here was a provincial advocacy organization that was actually on the same page as we were, or maybe we were on the same page as they were. They didn't really have a presence in Lethbridge at that time. They're Edmonton based with some involvement from Calgary, but they didn't have any kind of a presence here in the south. They had a task force on the living wage and the first thing we did with Public Interest Alberta was to organize a local focus group on living wage. I had said to Bill, I can get the mayor to come. And the mayor did come. So that was the beginning of our involvement with them. Then they had a showing of a film on peat oil, Beyond Suburbia. They had taken that film to Edmonton and Calgary and Red Deer and then we held a showing here in Lethbridge and got 100 people out to it. That was just before their spring conference and their AGM. At their AGM Public Interest had positions open on their board so they asked if someone from Womanspace would sit on their board, so that was me. I'm now in my second year on the board. That gave us that provincial focus and we became involved in several of their campaigns – the living wage taskforce, the seniors taskforce, the childcare taskforce. It was all very fortuitous because at the time that the whole childcare thing when the provinces signed the agreement with the federal government, Alberta was one of the last provinces to sign, and that was also the time when the daycare action committee was going at the University of Lethbridge trying to get a daycare at the University of Lethbridge. The two co-chairs were both from Womanspace. We were very heavily involved in that and we were very good at it as well. Then all of a sudden the Harper government came in and the first thing they did was they took the word equality right out of the mandate, the idea being that women were equal, therefore Status of Women no longer needed to work for equality. Then the other thing

they did was to say that they would not fund any projects that involved any kind of political action or lobbying of any level of government, municipal, provincial or federal. They would also not fund general research on the status of women. So what did it leave? What it left was community service projects, which is kind of like going backwards – projects that helped women in the community. Which is fine, women to need to be helped in the community, but what we had always understood about the policy changing initiatives was you could have projects where let's say you bought diapers and formula for women who needed it. There's an endless supply of women who need diapers and formula and damage deposits and clothing and what have you. There's a never ending supply and you will never get anywhere until you take a look at the reasons why they need diapers and formula. Why is there this huge lack out there? So now we're back to what I call a diapers and formula project, which is not to say that it's not an amazing project. It's very much a service-based project. What we've discovered is that it's keeping four of us busy morning, noon and night. One of our worries is that we're losing our political edge because we don't have time for it anymore. Then I thought, aha, I'll bet you anything that's the reasoning behind it. Keep them busy running around looking after individual women and they will not have time to lobby, to advocate or to march in the streets. That's my theory and I think it's correct. This is a really good project. It finishes about a year from now, the end of November 2009. Our big worry is how do we suddenly turn off the tap? Everybody in town knows that if you need your income taxes done for free, if you haven't done taxes ever in your life, if you haven't done it for three or four years, if your child tax credit has stopped, you go to Womanspace and you get your income taxes done. Everybody in town knows that if you have lost your ID or if it's been stolen or if you never had proper ID in the first place, then you go to Womanspace and we arrange to get you your ID. We set you up with a bank account. That's part of the project, the ID and the bank accounts. We've been doing this income tax as a service to the community for about eight years. I began to notice that there were a lot of women, because I'd say, “do you have direct deposit into your bank account?” “Well I don't have a bank account.” Well that really shocked me. I said, “why don't you have a bank account?” It would be because either “I don't have ID” at all or “I don't have the proper ID” or “I used to have it and lost it, and therefore I can't get a bank account.” So what do

you do? Well we go to the Money Mart. The Money Mart takes 10 or 20% off the top of the cheque and loans them money at insane levels at interest, and they can never get out from under. So that was our motivation. Let's kill the Money Mart, let's get these women away from the Money Mart. For some reason Status of Women loves this project. When they did the funding announcement, which was last March, I had to go to Ottawa for three days to be part of their news conference. They loved this project, and it's a great project. Don't get me wrong, it's a great project. Then phase 2 after the ID and bank accounts, is to teach women about money and how it works. We've just finished a set of six information sessions. We provide that one-on-one advocacy and working with the clients. We have someone who does all the client work. She takes women to the bank to help them set up. She phones ahead, she gets somebody who will set with them, she helps them set up bank accounts, because they're intimidated, they're afraid of banks. Some of them have never been inside a bank. She goes with them to Alberta Credit Counseling to sort out bad credit histories. She goes with them to Job Links. But we could do it forever and never be finished. Our big worry is what happens when people phone up and we say, "gee, we're really sorry but we can't get you ID anymore, we don't have the money for that." We're trying to figure out other ways to get money so that we can keep that part of it going. It's a huge untapped well and the information and those services are not there, except for what we provide. But when I have time to think about it, it worries me and annoys me. We can't do research projects anymore, we can't do overt political action or lobbying. We have to kind of keep it quiet. Women have always been the mouthy ones in society. I think there's a very definite agenda with regard to Status of Women and women's groups – get rid of them, shut them down, starve them to death financially so they can't do anything. But somehow we have managed to survive. The problem is that I'm the one that writes the grant proposals and there isn't another person who at this point in time has those skills. When I retire I don't know what's going to happen. We hope that we'll be able to pass the torch. It would be a shame. When you talked to Addie this afternoon, she remembers A Woman's Place. It was on 6th Street downtown here back in the '70s. This organization goes all the way back to the '70s, more or less unbroken. I just hate the idea that one day it won't be here anymore. So that's all I've got to say about projects.

. . . to Scotland. We all went because we have connections there.

Q: What were you doing just before you left?

DM: I was teaching sessionally at the University of Lethbridge. I had been doing two courses per semester for four years, teaching the introductory level French. But just on a sessional basis. When I left I presume they got somebody else to teach those courses. When we knew exactly when we were coming back I wrote and said I'd like to apply to teach again. The answer I got back was, well those courses are not taught by sessionals any longer. The regular professors have to do it, because there have been such deep cuts. It wasn't just education, it was the Klein years when they were doing the let's get rid of the deficit, we want to run a balanced budget. So they just created a different sort of deficit. The areas that got deeply cut were welfare, education and health. There were very deep cuts to the University and there was no longer the money to hire sessional instructors. The regular professors had to take over the teaching of those introductory level courses, and there was no job for me. I came back and thought, what am I going to do? But then I got home and within a week or so I was presented with this crisis here at Womanspace, and what were we going to do about it? I stepped into the breach at that point, and I've been here ever since. The deep cut thing, that's what gave rise to our other projects. We noticed that at least 80% of the phone calls we got from women (mostly our dealings with clients was done over the phone, they didn't very often come into the office; they'd look for the word woman in the phonebook and they'd see Womanspace, so they'd call) 80 to 90% of the issues were poverty issues. They didn't have enough money to survive on. Welfare was cut, huge cuts to welfare and they have never recovered. We found there were women who would not eat so their kids could eat. We took part in a traveling project, the Calgary Status of Women. They were doing a project on minimum wage work and they came and did a focus group in Lethbridge. I remember this one young woman, she was a young single mother, she had a two year old, she had three different minimum wage jobs. The one that she liked the best was delivering newspapers at 5 in the morning. She would take her little guy with her in his stroller, and that was the only time she got to spend with during the day. The rest of the day he had to be in

subsidized daycare because welfare required that she be out working. They did that focus group and then they produced a report called Watering Down the Milk. We've still got a copy of that in our literature thing. That came from somebody they interviewed who said she would water down the milk so it would go three times as far for her kids. Then the health region started to notice rising levels of child poverty and malnutrition, which is still the case. I have another hat that I wear – I'm co-chair of the Southwest Alberta Coalition on Poverty, which has been ongoing for eight years since 2000. The poverty in this region is between 18 and 20% child poverty. Child poverty means that kids live in poor families. One of the reasons why they live in poor families is because the welfare rates are so low. When the energy prices spiked and all of a sudden utility costs went sky high, what we were finding was that the only wiggle room in the budget was the food budget. They were buying fewer groceries in order to pay the gas bill. That was point at which in 2002 we started the community Good Food Club; we actually started a food co-op, which also became an independent society in its own right. They've got satellite Good Food Clubs in all the surrounding communities. That was in response to the fact that women and their kids were going hungry. It's cheaper to buy crappy food, like fast food and Kraft Dinner and potato chips, that's cheaper than buying good quality fruits and vegetables and meats. That was the basis on which we started the Good Food Club. How did I get into that one? It used to be housed in this office from 2002 to 2005. That office next door with the glass door was the food club office. But they found they couldn't pay the rent and they moved out into a home office. After the first two years they incorporated as a society and now they've been taken under the wing of the health region, so the health region really sponsors Good Food Club now.

Q: What do they do?

DM: It's a once a month, preorder, prepay grocery buying club. They restrict themselves to fresh fruits and vegetables. There's a Hutterite colony that grows for them in the growing season and the rest of the time they get it from an outfit in Medicine Hat that supplies fruit and vegetables to restaurants. Then the meat they get from Old Country Sausage in Raymond. There's about three meat choices but a huge variety of produce. It's

high quality produce, not second hand stuff that would otherwise go to the landfill. Because they buy in bulk, I don't know how many members they've got now, but I would bet probably about 2000 members. When they left this office they had 1400 and now they have a satellite one on campus and there's Tabor and Coaldale and the Blood Reserve, seven or eight of them. They all operate more or less the same way. The idea is that there's an order form that comes out, so people preorder and prepay. The insurance issues were such that the food had to already belong to them when they picked it up, otherwise we could never have afforded the insurance. The Lethbridge one, it's a once a month pickup. It's the second Thursday of the month and the United Church down here on 4th Avenue and Westminster, they donate the use of their gym one day a month. All of the food comes in there and it's sorted out into the individual orders in the morning by volunteers, then people start coming at 1 o'clock to pick up their groceries.

[END]