Cowichan Women Against Violence Society works from a feminist perspective to provide a supportive environment primarily to women and children who have been affected by abuse. We support diversity, change, choice and growth though counselling, advocacy, emergency shelter, community development and education.
"For most of recorded history, parental violence against children and men's violence against wives was explicitly or implicitly condoned. Those who had the power to prevent and/or punish this violence through religion, law, or custom, openly or tacitly approved it. ....The reason violence against women and children is finally out in the open is that activists have brought it to global attention."

Riane Eisler

From the Executive Director

“One in three women may suffer from abuse and violence in her lifetime. This is an appalling human rights violation, yet it remains one of the invisible and under-recognized pandemics of our time.”

Nicole Kidman

These are some of the truths Cowichan Women Against Violence (CWAV) Society have been speaking about for the past 34 years. We support women and children individually as they deal with the pain and trauma that accompanies abuse and violence. We collaborate with others to name this pandemic. As an agency, we strategize for local solutions that are founded in community actions that can increase safety for women and children.

I became ED in January 2014. It has been an eventful and rewarding year. Our board, management team and staff continue to do exceptional work on behalf of our clients. It is with deep gratitude that I thank them on behalf of our members, funders and the community.

Much of the support CWAV Society provides seems invisible. Speaking truth often takes place in the shadows. In this report you’ll find a sampling of stories about women and families that are on paths to healing and greater well-being. We hope they highlight the transformations that accompany the work that we do.

Please check out the listing of CWAV Society’s funders. Our foundation and government partners provide the revenue we need to offer our counselling and crisis-support programming; and, for our transition house, our pre-employment program and our community development work. The organizational, business and individual donors sustain the number of hours of children’s counselling that we provide beyond our government funding and supplement other programming.

CWAV Society understands that the needs are greater than our capacity to provide service. Like you, we regularly read the stories of women killed by an abusive partner because they are trapped in an unsafe situation. We are pained by ongoing and chronic victim blaming. We grieve about the murdered and missing aboriginal women.

CWAV Society is continually looking for ways that we can address these gaps. We recently embarked on a new program that allows us to provide financial and planning assistance to women at risk of homelessness.

We have applied for a number of grants that would allow us to expand our children’s programming to schools and to focus our community development work on youth safety and women’s health. We are looking for new funding to connect women from our pre-employment program to meaningful work. Most exciting, we’ve started to explore development of a supportive and affordable housing project.

CWAV Society is proud to be part of such a vibrant and caring region and to be members of a strong and dynamic non-profit community. Thank you for your support.

Jane Sterk
Executive Director
CWAV Society
From the Board Chair

I became aware of CWAV Society almost 20 years ago because I needed help. I am a survivor of sexual assault and I was having a tough time. I had recently moved to the area and was feeling overwhelmed and alone. Luckily I had made a few friends in the Valley who knew to point me to CWAV Society. I still remember the feeling of relief and joy that I felt when I found out that there was an entire Society dedicated to helping women like me. Just the fact of CWAV Society’s existence helped me heal. I tell this story in the spirit of the theme for this year’s Annual Report Speaking Truth.

In the past year many famous and powerful women have come forward and acknowledged that they are also survivors of sexual assault. I believe that these women are crucial role models in our society. They inspire those of us who are less famous and less powerful to tell the truth about what has happened to us. They call necessary attention to the truth that violence towards women happens to all kinds of women. It is my hope that the telling of these hard truths will create more and more allies in our task of ending the violence here in our beautiful Valley and around the world.

I am proud and grateful to be the Chair of the Board of this vital and amazing Society and to be able to continue the work of helping women speak their truth.

Patricia Blair
Board Chair
C WAV Society

“Speak the truth, even if your voice shakes.”

Author Unknown
Board of Directors
2014–2015

Patricia Blair — Board Chair
Elouise Johnson — Vice Chair
Faye Griffith — Treasurer
Aniko Martin — Secretary
Angela Underwood — Board Member

Anne Hilker — Board Member
Chris Mazur — Board Member
Maggie Hughes — Board Member
Sharon Moss — Member at Large

251 board
volunteer
hours

10 board
meetings
held

21 board committee
meetings held

37 motions brought
forward and approved
Somenos means resting place in the Hul'q'umi'num' language of the Cowichan people. We provide shelter and support for women and their children needing safety from violence and abuse. We cater to the unique needs of each woman through a variety of services such as crisis counselling, family support, and community referrals. We are inspired by the new growth we see in the woman and children who stay here.

This past year we experienced numerous staff changes with several dedicated, long-term staff leaving temporarily or permanently. We miss them. With our new staff coming on board, the team improved its age diversity. Despite the challenges of recruiting and training, team members have been exceptional in adapting to our 24/7 staffing schedule.

The team is looking at ways to further support our clients. We’re reviewing house guidelines, redesigning common areas and looking into whether we could provide some child care support for women at the house.

Recently, Somenos House was selected to provide the Homelessness Prevention Program for women at risk of homelessness because of violence. This program assists women with planning and securing housing, including some initial financial support.

The past year has seen lots of upgrades to the house. We have new wiring and windows and a repainted exterior. We completed repairs related to a carpenter ant infestation that managed to damage a supporting beam. We started work on improving the efficiency of our heating/cooling system.

At Somenos, our goal is that every woman leaves feeling supported, clearer and stronger in herself and her options. Thank you to the many community supporters who have contributed towards the multiple repairs and renovations at the house. Your support helped us keep the house welcoming and safe so we can achieve this goal.

Tina Schoen
Supervisor, Somenos House

“One of the marvelous things about community is that it enables us to welcome and help people in a way we couldn't as individuals. When we pool our strength and share the work and responsibility, we can welcome many people, even those in deep distress, and perhaps help them find self-confidence and inner healing.”

Jean Vanier, Community and Growth
323 referrals
226 women 97 children = 6% compared to last year

of 323 referred
20% were not sheltered due to house being full

house managed
670 non-resident crisis calls

142 Sheltered = 2028 bed stays
98 women & 44 children
One day, I woke up to a world that I never thought I’d be living in. I was in my early twenties, a student at University and the mom of a toddler. Being a mom and being a part of a family is all I longed for, as well as having a degree in healthcare. I was living a nightmare.

My house was filled with anger and rage, hurt and depression. I was in an abusive, controlling relationship. I was desperately unhappy. Because this was my first real relationship, I struggled with knowing what was healthy or not healthy.

I knew I had to leave. I kept asking myself, “When do I do it? When do I leave? When is a good time?” In reality, there is no good time but there was a right time. The right time for me was realizing that I couldn’t continue to live the way I was living.

My advisor at school suggested I call Somenos House. I made the call, met with a worker to go over some paperwork, and left my partner all within about an hour. Once I settled myself and my toddler in our room at Somenos House, I felt a combination of relief and panic.

During my stay, I went through a range of emotions – loneliness, fear, grief, frustration, joy. The workers listened as I
sorted out my next steps. They were there any time I needed someone to bounce ideas off and supported my decisions. The house helped me connect with other organizations and supports so I could find the right place for me and my son when I left the Transition House. By learning about different forms of abuse, I got clearer about what I need in a relationship.

When I reflect on my time at Somenos, I’m sometimes overcome with tears at the kindness, acceptance and advice I received. I learned that it’s okay to lean on someone. I’m left with gratitude and admiration for the women who work at Somenos.

Which leads me to today. After I left Somenos House, I moved into my very own apartment. I am continuing my studies and soon I hope to be accepted into nursing. My child is growing and thriving.

I look back and see how much I learned from my trials. I no longer focus on the hurt, anger, rage and depression. I see it as a lesson in life that I passed.

My ex went through a lot of changes too. He went from anger and depression to seeking his own help. My son likes being with his dad and I can trust that he’ll be safe.

I’m figuring out who I am and what I want in life. I feel more confident and courageous all the time. If anything bothers me, I am able to find a solution. Today I am an average mom, an average student, and a strong, goal-oriented young adult.

Former Somenos House Resident

“I’m figuring out who I am and what I want in life. I feel more confident and courageous all the time.”