

**Sandra Thomson**  
**President, CFUW Ontario Council**

Following our very first virtual Annual General Meeting (AGM) in May, 2020, the Ontario Council Board spring boarded into action! A special meeting was scheduled for August to finish our business agenda, highlighted by the elections for the 2020-2022 Board of Directors.

Over the course of the summer, three “Crossover” Training sessions were held for the those nominated during the nomination process period and those individuals who expressed an interest in serving on the board. Preliminary discussions focused on our tag line of -Education-Action-Advocacy- with confirmation of the theme, “ Women Helping Women.” Once the elections were held in August, the board set our own priorities, concentrating on: Advocacy, Education. Membership, and Communications.

**ADVOCACY**

We were so proud of our four Ontario clubs – Markham/Unionville, Oakville, Ottawa and Stratford – who saw their resolutions passed at the National AGM. A Club Resolutions meeting was held with the principal writers of these resolutions on September 2, 2020 to discuss how Ontario Council could advance their resolutions provincially. Long Term Care (LTC) was a leading priority as the engulfing pandemic exposed the serious issues present in our nursing care facilities.

Specific Actions:

- Ontario Council worked with CFUW Oakville and published a template letter for clubs to use to connect with their local MPPs—to advocate for needed changes. Ontario Council signed on with CARP in support of the LTC homes’ needs and improvements. (LTC was cited as the #1 issue in the Ontario Council survey of 2019).
- Ontario Council addressed a separate letter to the Minister of Health, Dr. M. Fullerton, on the establishment of the commission to study LTC. A report is expected in April.
- Ontario Council addressed a letter to the Minister of Government and Consumer Affairs, L. Thompson, regarding Payday Loans. While acknowledging the positive changes to the Payday Loans Companies Act 2008, it was urged to consider a plan to educate our financially insecure members of the society regarding the practices of these companies.
- With respect to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) resolution, at least two of Ontario clubs created specialized land acknowledgements, set to video and music.
- With respect to the Climate Change resolution, some clubs have created specialized interest groups to further study and advanced the related topics.
- Ontario Council addressed a submission to the Ontario Government calling for an Educational Task Force to study the impacts of CoVID on students.

Human Trafficking remains a serious problem in our province. Currently the Ontario Council Resolutions Committee is reviewing a proposed resolution to address the educational component for the Grades 9 and 10 Health and Physical Education curriculum. Ontario Council has taken the following actions:

- A letter was addressed to the Attorney General, D. Downey, on the reinvestment of 2.5 million dollars cash and proceeds from criminals to help fight Human Trafficking in communities across the province.
- A meeting was held with Associate Minister J. Dunlop, Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, to discuss how Ontario Council can continue to support the government in fighting this crime—a crime involving predominantly young women and youth, with the average age of 13 being trafficked.

Ontario Council is very fortunate to have expert policy advisors serve on the Advocacy Committee in the following portfolios: early learning and child care, environment, housing, and poverty. Our environment advisor researched the potential changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and a submission was made to the government. The standing committee on education studied the potential changes to the Child Care and Early years Act 2014 and also made a submission to the government.

Ontario Council Board of Directors actively participated in the **16 Days of Activism** with publishing a message everyday which was communicated to our clubs and on our social media outlets. The Board was pleased with the increase in our social media presence and proud of our clubs who participated in the 16 Days with programs of their own.

The Ontario Council Advocacy Committee has just recently met to set our advocacy agenda for the remainder of the term....still so much work to be done!

## **EDUCATION**

During the summer, the Advocacy Committee met to discuss the popular Ontario Council Speakers Series program and Workshop program. Given we are conducting all meetings and programs virtually, a panel discussion was the agreed upon format.

- Our first program in October was *Elder Care – Protect the Vulnerable*. Three experts in the fields of long-term care planning, home care and alternative living accommodations for seniors enlightened approximately 150 attendees via Zoom.
- The second program featured three distinctive speakers to the theme of *Women in a CoVID Economy.* Highlighted were the topics of child care, the rise of gender base violence and women in the labour market.
- Our third program-*Mental Health: Prevention to Wellness*- will be featured February 27. This will again be a panel format with a focus on lived and professional experiences.

Ontario Council has eight standing committees: Finance, Resolutions; Governance; Advocacy; Education, Legislation, Status of Women and Human Rights and Constitution and Bylaws. There was a callout to the clubs for committee membership and several individual members applied and are currently serving.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Six Regional Directors (RD) cover 49 Ontario clubs. Though Ontario Council has seen a drop in our individual membership numbers, the Ontario Council Board applauds the efforts put forth by our

members to engage and keep their members connected. Nearly every club has a Zoom account (or avail themselves of the National account) and have been conducting activities virtually.

The Ontario Council Board is proud of all the clubs and their ability to adapt to online connections. Clubs have found creative means of “meeting’ for example, in playing bridge, hosting online cooking classes, book discussions, meet and greets, etc.

This pandemic was not going to deter us from getting together!

Ontario Council applauds the creativity and ingenuity of the clubs. Social media presence is highly visible and more newsletters keep the individual members well informed of activities. Regional clubs have partnered together to host speakers’ nights or invite other Ontario clubs to their speakers’ program and/or webinars. This has been the advantage of virtual connections!

Though our circumstances have been altered, by the pandemic, it has not kept us from lifelong learning or promoting for change in public policy, as are the purposes of Ontario Council.

Fundraising for scholarship funds has been another challenge for the clubs. Several have reverted from physical to online: auctions, book sales, house tours, raffles, selling of cards, etc. with great success. To help clubs during these altered circumstances, the Ontario Council Board voted to **reduce** their dues for the 2021-2022 dues year by half.

The Regional Directors have remained in constant contact with their clubs by hosting virtual meetings and attending clubs’ virtual speakers’ programs, webinars, etc. The RDs serve to promote their clubs’ activities and provide information and guidance. They keep the regional clubs connected too! They were responsible for assembling the “President’s Package” of information for incoming presidents and/or executive leaders for the clubs.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

Ontario Council’s goal to increase social media presence. The website ([www.cfuwontcouncil.org](http://www.cfuwontcouncil.org)) has been updated, with new pages for the Education, Legislation, and Status of Women and Human Rights Standing Committees. In addition to Facebook and Twitter, an Instagram account has been added to our communications channels. The Ontario Council newsletter (OC News) is produced monthly, sharing and informing our members of club events, current issues, and general information.