



## Amber Dean facilitates “No Means No” Train the Trainer



Left: Roshena Chatur, Justine Staniforth, Jenn Longstone and Amber Dean. Above: Sarah Woolgar, Kelly Roulette.

West Coast LEAF’s public legal education programming began 2006 with a weekend devoted to training dedicated “No Means No” volunteers, educators and West Coast LEAF staff. Twelve participants learned about the program, including the program’s catalyst, *R v Ewanchuk*, and worked through classroom scenarios that could arise when teaching youth about their legal rights and responsibilities related to sexual assault and consent.

Amber Dean, our former Education Coordinator, trained these women who will act as “No Means No” trainers and support facilitators. Included in the group were participants who

will assist us in delivering the program outside the school system and to diverse communities throughout the province.

West Coast LEAF has had requests for “No Means No” from Nanaimo, Kelowna, Kamloops, and Terrace and we hope that our new trainers will travel to these communities within the next year. During the next month these volunteers will gain practical experience as they support the current session of “No Means No” at Sir Charles Tupper school in East Vancouver.

As the new program director, I would like to introduce myself and tell you a bit about my background.

Originally I was involved in the visual and theatre arts, and during the 1990s I worked for CanWest Global as an on-air news update person. Eventually my sights turned to law and I was called to the Ontario Bar Association in 2003. I became a member of the BC Law Society in 2004, when I moved back to Vancouver.

While my career path has been diverse, one goal I have kept throughout my life is to address the issues of social inequality — being an Ojibway First Nations woman who grew up in Canada.

I feel an affinity with the work we do at West Coast LEAF. I understand first hand what women experience when they have been discriminated against. Whether discrimination is based on race or gender, the emotional effects are the same. Only when a person is able to develop a voice

### On joining the West Coast LEAF team

by Kelly Roulette,  
WCLEAF Program Director



and is given a chance to relieve their anxiety through a legal avenue can discrimination be acknowledged and no longer internalized.

West Coast LEAF provides the opportunity for women to have a voice and speak out against discrimination through legal education, law reform or courtroom litigation.

West Coast LEAF does much more than just law-related work. In our Single Mothers Human Right Project we hope not only to address inequitable legal issues, but to restore dignity and importance to the work of women raising their children alone.

We may unconsciously think in terms of negative stereotypes. I once caught myself thinking of the negative connotation of the term “single mother” when I suddenly realized that I was raised by a single mother after my parents divorced when I was six. Because my experience growing up was relatively good, I did not associate the term “single mother” with my life

because of the social stigma undeservingly imposed on women who raise their children alone.

Despite many legal accomplishments achieved by West Coast LEAF, I find the real underlying work is to challenge negative stereotypes about women and equality issues. While it is difficult to overcome any negative stereotype, West Coast LEAF continues its mandate of focusing on and revealing the true nature of inequality. I hope to rise to the challenge and continue the good work of West Coast LEAF since many of its goals are close to my heart and similar to my own.

by Harsha Walia

In 2005, West Coast LEAF initiated the Women’s Equality and Religious Freedom (WERF) Project to address issues that emerge when religious freedom and women’s equality intersect. The overarching question of this project is: “How should the principles of substantive equality, that LEAF has been instrumental in developing, be applied when considering the complexities of the rights of individuals, particularly women, within religious and cultural minorities given our commitment to religious freedom, anti-racism and genuine multiculturalism?”

We strive to understand the impact of the arguments we advance by considering the varied perspectives of diverse communities. In identifying our concerns about the application of religious principles such as *Shar’ia* law to family law for example, West Coast LEAF is aware of the ways in which the debate feeds into anti-Muslim and racist rhetoric that have been particularly prevalent since 9/11.

The notion that Muslim women need liberation by Western forces from ‘backward’ *Shar’ia* courts perpetuates colonialism and racism, infantilizing racialized women by assuming they have no capacity for analysis and agency. Furthermore it homogenizes religions and cultures in ways that excludes pluralism and invalidates the reconstructions of cultures and religions from within. It relegates patriarchy only to particular religions or cultures, not acknowledging the universal systems of gender oppression.

However, the reality is that gender oppressive practices are justified in the

### Mobina Jaffer

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Liberation Movement. She has been active in efforts to resolve the ongoing humanitarian disaster in Sudan’s Darfur region. Over this time, she has visited the region many times and seen the effects of conflict first hand. She has devoted much of her efforts to ensuring that women are not left out of peace negotiations that affect their future, and are able to become active players in the work to rebuild the country.

## Women’s Equality & Religious Freedom Project

name of religion, despite the fact that their theological basis is often disputed. Once such practices become sanctioned as ‘private’ religious practices, they are shielded from scrutiny, leaving women in these communities in a more vulnerable position. This is particularly evident in the practices of the fundamentalist Mormon community of Bountiful, B.C

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Ayelet Shacher describes this reality in *Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural Differences and Women’s Rights*: “What makes this situation a truly complex problem is the fact that although they may be subject to such injurious burdens within their communities, women may still find value and meaning in their cultural tradi-

tions and in continued group membership. This phenomenon is especially visible in situations where the minority culture as a whole is subject to repressive pressures from the outside society.”

We therefore determined that the first step was to bring together people of faith, particularly those of faith from racialized minority communities, to begin the discussion. We began this process by hosting a Women’s Equality and Religious Freedom Consultation in December 04. The report from this consultation can be found at: [www.westcoastleaf.org/pdfs/werf\\_consultationreport\\_aug\\_2005.pdf](http://www.westcoastleaf.org/pdfs/werf_consultationreport_aug_2005.pdf).

It was evident from the Consultation that more questions than answers were generated and that it is necessary to have ongoing discussions with a Multifaith Advisory Committee on topics such as criminalization of polygamy and the use of religious arbitration in family law.

The goal is to use the discussions of the Advisory Committee to produce a final report that will guide West Coast LEAF in future litigation strategy by developing an approach that analyzes the intersections between Section 2(a) and 15 of the *Charter* in a manner that will ensure the advancement of substantive equality in the law, and ensures that such an equality analysis reflects the needs and interests of women of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious experience.

Harsha Walia is a local writer and activist and currently working part-time at West Coast LEAF on the WERF Project.

Sudan,  
March  
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