

continued from page 7

herself, she is not working as one right now because she cannot afford to be a volunteer. She has children to support and needs a paying job.

### MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN'S LITERACY ISSUES

Helen Thundercloud says "the tragedy is that women don't get paid (or paid well) for their work. This relates to power issues. We find it's usually white males who are in power, and they're not especially interested in the fact that there are a lot of marginalized people and women for whom literacy is a real problem." Literacy workers have never been studied as a group, says Betty-Ann Lloyd, a researcher in adult literacy in Halifax.

"But experience tells us that literacy workers are primarily women from frontline caretaking kinds of jobs. In programs that tend to be unionized or are run through school boards, there are a higher proportion of men (about 25 per cent) than in community-based, volunteer programs (about 5 per cent).

"She says most people under 45 have basic literacy skills, unless they are disabled. "Women usually leave school to take care of their kids, and so they have some basic skills. But if they change jobs, or do something different, they can go from being 'literate' to 'illiterate' overnight, and may need to upgrade their skills."

Government statistics show that 25 to 40 per cent of women want some form of academic upgrading, Lloyd says.

Peggy Holt, a literacy worker at the New Brunswick Community College in Fredericton, addresses the fact that some people say just as many men need literacy upgrading.

"In my experience, it is women who haven't had an opportunity to have literacy. And even when the numbers of men and women in literacy classes are almost equal, men tend to be mostly single and young and don't seem to need the same support systems women do."

Holt did her thesis on why women discontinue academic upgrading. "I re-

alized that when women dropped out, it also meant their children lost an opportunity for a new life. If you can get one



woman out, you can also get a whole family."

For Holt, it was also a "personal thing. I am a 'survivor,' and feel a need to help other women get their education because I want them to survive also."

She develops a lot of her own materials to make them pertinent to learners' experiences, and is applying to be one of 15 women who will work on a book about literacy practices and exercises to do with students, organized by the Canadian Council on Learning Opportunities for Women (CLOW).

### BATTLING THE ISOLATION

Aisla Thomson from the CLOW says that women wanted the conference and the network because "women are feeling very isolated in their work. There were no umbrella organizations that represented literacy workers where there could be a dialogue and exchange about issues of importance to women. It was almost like going back to the early consciousness-raising that happened in the late '60s."

In *From Margin to Center*, American feminist author Bell Hooks writes: "If, in a single year, women stopped spending thousands of dollars to organize conferences that are attended by only a select group of individuals, the goal of that year could be mass outreach in every state, with the intention of taking feminism out of the university and into the streets and houses of this society."

There is an element of truth in this statement, Thundercloud says.

"When we look at people who go to conferences, it ain't people who we are trying to 'educate.' Those people stay at home, living their lives, while others of a different status go to study the problem.

"And I can speak from the perspective of being an aboriginal. Indian Affairs has been running our lives for more than 100 years. They get together and say, 'This is the problem with our Native people, and these are the measures we will take to make it better.' And so it can go with literacy workers," she said.

Still, Thundercloud says it is important to have literacy conferences. "The exchange of ideas is important. But we also have to find other ways of getting together so that literacy workers don't come back and say, 'This is what we learned, and this is what we will do to you.'"

Breen says, though, that "sometimes we just want to talk to each other, for starters.

"Most women at the conference in 1992 found it empowering. We did it in a very feminist, circular, non-linear way. We had no speakers, no experts, or facilitators even, for much of it. We just had talking circles around different questions."

Currently, there are six "Wandering Notebooks" circulating around the country. The idea is to provide a forum for women involved in literacy to share their thoughts, experiences and stories about the issue, to be published later.

(Source: CUP Quebec Bureau)

## Let's hear it for the Kenyan Youth

By Millie Trainor

IN THE FALL OF 1993, SOME Nairobi youth attended a five-day *Adolescent Fertility Management Seminar* presenting the usual safe-sex propaganda. At the end of the seminar, the wonderful young people asked to share their views. The following is a statement:

1. Youth should respect their parents and involve them in matters relating to sexuality and fertility awareness.
2. Programs should be started on radio, TV and other media, churches, mosques, chief's barazas, etc. to help parents guide the youth on sexual matters.
3. Chastity before marriage should be emphasized to youth.
4. Total abstinence, self-restraint and self-control by youth is the only way to stop AIDS.
5. Sex is sacred and its only place is in marriage. It is not for fun and adventure.
6. Contraceptives of all kinds and types should promote immorality among youth and must be discouraged. They should be declared illegal.
7. Condoms have no place in the fight against AIDS.
8. Funds tied to the promotion of contraceptives should be used for youth morality programs.
9. Society should face youth problems such as juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, unemployment, and abandonment.
10. Religious education should be emphasized and strengthened in all institutions to help the youth develop a deeper sense of morality.
11. The youth reject sex education in schools.
12. Literature on music, pornography, etc. should be restricted.
13. The youth condemn abortion.
14. Adults should be role models for youth in matters of sex.

If this is a "developing country", youth (who comprise over 50% of the population) are certainly developing the right way!

