

## COMMUNITY HEALTH ADVOCATE PROJECT

Brenda Kent

The Community Health Advocate (CHA) Project was initiated last year, after many years of trying to secure funding. Brenda Kent started as the CHA Coordinator/Trainer in July 1998, and worked towards completing the project as outlined in the proposal to the Vancouver/ Richmond Health Board.

The overall goal of the CHA project is parallel to the mission of the Vancouver Women's Health Collective - to help women help themselves to take control of her own health care. The way in which this goal was to be fulfilled was to train 9 women of various grassroots communities to be advocates for women in her community. The Advocates are speaking out for women in their communities for safe, respectful, and appropriate health care. The Advocates are all volunteers, donating their time to help women in their communities feel empowered to speak out for their health care needs. Violence and disrespect in the health care system will be reduced with women find their voice and feel confident in DEMANDING proper treatment.

Community networks were formed (actually, re-established in most cases) and support for the project was gained in various communities of the Van/Rich region. A manual and training package was developed and twelve Advocates were recruited. These Advocates participated in three days of advocacy training in late November, and then worked hard to establish themselves as a contact in their communities. They set up their advocacy plans, worked to expand their own networks, and promoted their services.

Support for the Advocates is on-going, as is the need to continue to nurture the established relationships with community partners. The following organizations have endorsed this project by providing a safe space, and/or support for the Advocates to do their advocacy work : *South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, UBC Women's Centre, Multi-Cultural Family Centre, Downtown Eastside Senior Centre, South Asian Women's Centre, Richmond Women's Resource Centre, and Women with Disabilities Health Action Group.*

Currently, we have 9 Advocates working on the project (we have lost three Advocates due to attrition). They have committed for at least a year, and will hopefully continue past that time if we receive further funding in September to continue the project. An extensive evaluation is taking place through the Vancouver/Richmond Health Board which will help us to identify where we have reached our goals, and where we still need to do some work. Advocacy work is

slow. It takes a long time to gain trust in the community and each case that an Advocate deals with can take several hours, *but* it is *important* work. The outcomes of the evaluation will help us determine the direction and focus for the coming months.

Brenda Kent has resigned as the Coordinator, and the position will be filled in early May, 1999