

Voices for Choice

by Canadians for Choice

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What does being "Pro-Choice" really mean?

Today in society, some Canadians seem to forget that being pro-choice is about more than supporting a woman's right to choose what to do when faced with an unwanted pregnancy. Certainly this belief is an important part of being pro-choice, but it is not the only value that is held by pro-choice groups and individuals. When related to sexual and reproductive health, Canadians for Choice affirms that being "pro-choice" encompasses supporting the following rights:

- The right to decide if, when and with whom to have sexual relations
- The right to choose if, when and what type of contraceptive and STI protection methods to use
- The right to choose to express one's sexuality in different ways
- The right to decide whether, if, when and whom one wants to marry
- The right to decide whether or when to have children
- The right to benefit from scientific progress
- The right to be free from exploitation, abuse, sexual assault and sexual harassment
- The right to liberty and freedom from forced sterilization, forced abortion or forced pregnancy
- The right to safe, legal, professional, affordable and accessible health care
- The right to accurate information and education
- The right to life and the right to treatment of life-threatening conditions and infections
- The right to decide what to do when faced with an unplanned pregnancy



CFC staff Tracey Bellingham and volunteer Jessica Yee at "Safe Sex in the City"

Being able to exercise all of these rights is critical for women and men to be able to make informed choices about all aspects of their sexual and reproductive lives. Although a person may identify as being pro-choice and only consider their position as a reflection on how they feel about abortion, there are many more individuals who choose to embrace all aspects of life, especially those related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, when they affirm their pro-choice beliefs. This issue of *Voices for Choice* focuses on what it means to be pro-choice and on the importance of openly affirming your beliefs to the world. Although much of Canadians for Choice's work continues to be focused on abortion, it is important to remember that our ability to make choices is a right that intimately affects our lives on many levels. As you read through this issue of *Voices for Choice*, we encourage you to contemplate what being pro-choice means to you and to discuss and share your definition with those you feel comfortable talking to. If you would like to share your definition with the whole country, please see the 'Pro-Choice Canada Contest' section at the back of this issue.

Safe Sex in the City event raises community awareness about choices in healthy sexuality

On August 30th, 2007 Canadians for Choice hosted an awareness and fundraising event called Safe Sex in the City. This event was possible through the collaboration of many groups and individuals who donated their time, money and products to bring the community together to celebrate healthy sexuality. With performances from local dancers, artists and musicians, attendants spent the night celebrating choice in safe sex and learning about some of the services offered by Canadians for Choice. Masters of Ceremony's Nadia Kharyati

and Jeremy Dias made sure everyone was entertained with fun sex facts (ex. it is illegal to dress up as a penis while legislature is sitting in Nevada) and encouraged the community to make safe and pleasurable sexual choices. In the end, over 100 people were introduced to Canadians for Choice and were educated on the importance of encouraging healthy sexuality in Canada. Canadians for Choice would like to extend a huge 'thank you' to everyone who made this night such an enjoyable success!



Featured organization: Canadian Youth for Choice

by Lisa Middleton, CYC Coordinator

“The pins that said ‘Stand up 4 Choice’ and ‘Know your S.exual H.ealth I.nfo T.oday’ were especially popular.”

Canadian Youth for Choice (CYC) is a network of Canadians aged 12-29 who advocate for sexual and reproductive rights for youth on a national level. CYC envisions a country where these rights, along with non-biased and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information and services are available freely and equally to each and every youth. CYC is supported by the Canadian Federation for Sexual Health (CFSH). CYC was created in 2005 as a response to the growing number of anti-choice youth organizations across Canada.

In the past CYC has held numerous youth conferences that focus on various sexual and reproductive health issues (SRH), upcoming campaigns and Canadian policies regarding youth and SRH. Currently CYC is wrapping up the “Know Your Rights” campaign. The campaign involved five CYC members and the CYC coordinator traveling across Canada talking to youth and Members of Parliament about sexual and reproductive rights and sex education by setting an interactive/youth positive tent at various festivals across Canada. Most importantly CYC had youth and Members of Parliament sign their support for a charter called

the “Charter of Youth’s Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights”. CYC’s overall goal is to have the charter enacted into official legislation for Canada.

The Know Your Rights tour had three components: Attending youth friendly events, creating a documentary of the tour and meeting with Member’s of Parliament across Canada. The first half of the tour spanned over Western Canada from Ottawa, Ontario to Vancouver, British

Columbia. The Eastern half of the tour started in St. John’s Newfoundland and ended in Montreal, Quebec. At each stop, CYC set-up a youth friendly tent that contained inflatable furniture, a large poster of the charter, examples of contraceptive methods and interactive games. Games included “Name that Contraceptive” and condom rolling contests. At the events people were invited to sign the charter and to participate in a postcard campaign. Overall CYC collected 500 signatures in support of the charter, distributed approximately 6000 condoms and distributed thousands of postcards. The pins that said, “Stand up 4 Choice” and “Know Your S.exual H.ealth I.nformation T.oday” were especially popular and were worn by youth all over events. Additionally, CYC sold shirts which said: “My Mind, My Body, My Choice” and “Pro-choice” with the definition on the back.

In October CYC will be holding their third annual youth conference in Ottawa. The conference brings CYC members from across the country together in order to discuss CYC and issues involving sexual and reproductive rights. This year’s focus will be on strategic planning for the structure of CYC and how CYC can be more applicable/accessible to youth. On October 29, 2007 CYC will be concluding the “Know Your Rights” campaign by inviting all interested people and MPs to the unveiling of the final “Charter of Sexual and Reproductive Rights for Youth” and the premiere of the Know Your Rights documentary which followed CYC across country, investigated how accessible the emergency contraceptive pill was and talked to Canadians first hand on how adequate or inadequate their sexual health education was.

Canadian Youth for Choice currently has members all across the country from Vancouver to Iqualuit to Toronto to St.John’s. If you are interested in getting involved you can contact: Lisa Middleton- CYC coordinator at lisa@cfsh.ca or check out www.cyouthc.ca where you can find a copy of the Charter, purchase a shirt for \$10 and discover the benefits of becoming a CYC member!



CYC members talking to youth at the Craven Country Jamboree in Regina, SK

Why I Choose to Care by Julia Horel



Before working with Canadians for Choice, I had already considered myself pro-choice. A woman who chooses to have an abortion should be able to get one, and it seemed to me that the only issue involved is those people who march in protest of abortion – but their impact couldn't be huge. Abortion is legal, and that's that. During my interview for the position of summer research assistant, I had to be honest about my ignorance on a number of issues. *I really should have read up on this stuff*, I thought as I left.

I was glad to learn that even if I had tried to research the issue thoroughly, I would have barely scratched the surface in the few days between the interview and the start of my summer contract. The truth, which has become more and more apparent to me every day, is that there are more shades and complexities to the issue of choice than anyone could ever hope to master. There is always something new to learn, because the issue is constantly evolving.

One of the things I did know before I started, but which so many anti-choice activists fail to comprehend, is that pro-choice does not mean “pro-abortion.” Perhaps abortion is not an option a particular woman would consider if faced with an unplanned pregnancy, and that is fine. Pushing or coercing a woman into have an abortion is *not* a pro-choice action, and is in fact exactly the opposite: it's a lack of choice. Pro-choice is a belief that every woman has the right to make her own choices about her reproductive health, whether she chooses to continue or terminate a pregnancy. Pro-choice is understanding that no one but you has the right to make decisions about your body. We are people who know that abortion is a choice made by an individual, and understand that no one has a right to make that choice for someone else. The pro-choice position boils down to this: believe as you wish, make your own choices based on your own values and your own circumstances, and let others do the same.

My time working at Canadians for Choice has changed my outlook on freedom in Canada. I've learned how incredibly difficult it can be for thousands of women who are hindered from reached the services they need. I've been insulted by

several instances of rudeness encountered in my research from health care professionals. I'm appalled at how many people think it is their right to judge people based on their personal choices about their own bodies. I'm shocked by how tenuous our hold on freedom of choice is, at how people are still fighting to take that freedom away. I'm worried that most people know next to nothing about these issues, and above all, I'm amazed at how much I still don't know.

This is why I care. Women across Canada are routinely blocked from accessing abortion services (services which has been deemed medically necessary by the Canada Health Act) by anti-choice doctors who abuse these women's trust by refusing to help them find services. Women are told terrible myths about abortion and what will happen to them if they choose to have one. Women in Prince Edward Island have no access to abortion services, and access in New Brunswick, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the North, and most remote areas in Canada is severely restricted. There are exceptions in reciprocal billing regulations between provinces that force women who are out of their home provinces to pay exorbitant fees in order to access abortion services. Hospital operating rooms and clinics lack the funding necessary to provide enough hours of service, and some provinces (illegally) refuse to fund clinics at all. Anti-choice organizations posing as “crisis pregnancy centres” use persuasive tactics to “counsel” women into carrying pregnancies they do not want to carry. Hospitals I contacted are terrified of having their status as abortion providers revealed to the public. There are countless other examples of rights being violated and negative behaviour toward reproductive choice being perpetuated. This is why I care.

This issue needs to be brought into the open. Women and men need to learn about the threats to their freedom of reproductive choice, and they need to be comfortable expressing their needs and wants to those who have the power to make changes. Every discussion, no matter how short or private, increases awareness. Choosing to care is the first step. Think about where you stand. Talk about it. Create dialogue. Crush the taboo that surrounds issues of sexuality and reproduction. This is your health; this is your body; this is your mother, your sister, your daughter. This is you, and this is your *life*.

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We would like to gratefully acknowledge **Julia Horel** who worked with Canadians for Choice as our Research Assistant over the summer. Julia's contributions have been invaluable and we are so thankful for her dedication and passion. We wish her all the best as she continues her education.

Pro-Choice Canada Contest

Donors Speakout

"When I was 22 and just graduated I became pregnant. In 1967, abortion was illegal. I couldn't afford a private, safe abortion so I went to a backstreet abortionist. A few hours after the procedure I collapsed on the street and was taken to emergency. The next thing I remember is waking up to 'We think we've saved the baby.' My only option was to refuse all medication and food and make myself so unpleasant that I was sent to the psychiatric department where I was judged sufficiently 'deranged' so that I could have an abortion. I hope no one needs to go through this now."

-CFC donor Martine,
age 61

If you or someone you know requires information about abortion services, please call Canadians for Choice toll-free at:

1-888-642-2725

This information line is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Join us in celebrating 20 years of safe and legal reproductive choice in Canada!

Tell us why a "Pro-Choice Canada" is so important and you could win a trip to Ottawa and the chance to be on national television!

More expressive through art than through word? Submit your pro-choice work of art and you could have your artwork featured on the cover of a book!



In January 2008, Canadians everywhere will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Morgentaler decision that decriminalised abortion in Canada and gave women the right to control their reproductive health. We want you to reflect and celebrate with us!

Tell us in your own words through an essay, song lyrics, a poem, a rant or a testimony why the pro-choice movement has been- and continues to be so important. Or, you may choose to express your pro-choice sentiments through a painting, a drawing, a photo or another form of visual art. Enter the contest as many times as you want, the options are endless!

If you like the idea of empowering Canada but would rather do so anonymously... that's ok too! We will be accepting submissions from both participants who wish to share their thoughts publicly and from participants who would like to see their work published anonymously in a book of pro-choice compilations. Of course, in order to be considered for the contest you cannot be anonymous, but we would love to hear from you either way.

For more details, or to enter the contest, please visit www.canadiansforchoice.ca or call us at **613-789-9958 x225** or toll-free at **1-888-642-2725 x225**.

Canadians for Choice

Your Donations at Work!

In October 2006, Canadians for Choice responded to the increasing demand for accurate information about sexual and reproductive health services by developing a toll-free number that Canadians can call 24 hours a day to ask questions and get referrals for services related to sexual and reproductive health. Now, nearly a year later, the phone line has been advertised at various events and on multiple websites and we are receiving more calls than ever before. To date, Canadians for Choice staff have answered questions to over 430 callers. Most callers are looking for information about abortion services, however, questions and referral requests span across all areas of sexual health. Canadians for Choice is only able to maintain this important service because of the generous contributions from our donors. On behalf of all Canadians, thank you for supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights by facilitating a venue through which accurate and compassionate information can be offered.

Contact Information

300-260 Dalhousie St.
Ottawa, ON K1N 7E4

Phone: 613-789-9958
Toll-free: 1-888-642-2725
Fax: 613-789-9960

DONATE

To make a donation to Canadians for Choice, please send a cheque or money order to the address above. To make a credit card payment, please contact us and we would be happy to arrange it for you. Don't forget to ask about our "Leave a Legacy" option! You may also donate online at:



www.canadiansforchoice.ca