



**My Sister's Place**  
A Safe Place for Women and their Children

# ***NEWSLETTER***

**Fall/Winter 2009**

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## **Message from the Board Chair Fall/Winter 2009**

People in Transition (Alliston) Inc., My Sister's Place is a not-for-profit organization providing a broad range of services designed to alleviate the consequences of violence against women and their children, with the ultimate aim of its prevention and elimination.

This mission statement is taken to heart by every member of our team. The dedicated staff, the Board of Directors, our supporters and our community are all part of this team. Our ultimate aim is the prevention and elimination of violence.

Our work is on-going and we are having an impact! We are on the brink of new and exciting changes for My Sister's Place. The implementation of our Second Stage Housing initiative is being finalized. This is an amazing breakthrough in the

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## **Message from the Executive Director Fall/Winter 2009**

As we move into the holiday season, I am reminded, yet again, of those women and children who continue to endure any and all forms of violence in their daily lives.

To say I was shocked at the recent killing of women in the United States at a physical health facility by a man, who entered with an automatic weapon, is an understatement. Three women were murdered, and several others were wounded.

This is too reminiscent of our own national crime perpetuated against 14 young women on December 6, 1989 in Montreal.

Equally troubling are the news reports that women's groups in the United States attempted to organize a candlelight vigil to mourn the loss of the 3 women who were murdered, and to pray for those who were injured, and yet MINIMAL support was shown.

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services we offer our women and children. We are extremely grateful to CMHC for giving us this fabulous opportunity to expand our much needed services.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Anne Skeates for her dedication and great leadership over the last 4 years. She has steered us into a bright and meaningful future.

I am surrounded by professional and effective front-line staff, headed by our awesome Executive Director, Judith Stevens and by a diverse group of people who make up our board. I am very proud to be associated with all of these people who are instrumental in providing our services to women and children.  
“In Safety we Trust”

Catherine Chefero



**Catherine Chefero, Board Chair, My Sister's Place,  
2009/10**

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For those of us who have worked in this sector for a considerable amount of time, this is extremely disheartening. In the year 2009, it suggests that there is still minimal recognition given to the senseless murder of women!

The holiday season is a time for families to come together to celebrate, in whatever form they choose. Imagine, just for a moment, the woman and her children, who have to cower on Christmas Eve, as the Christmas tree is hurled against the wall, or presents (if even purchased) are destroyed. Imagine the fear she experiences when she has to bundle her children up, and flee to a safe refuge, such as “My Sister’s Place”. This is the reality experienced by many women, and their children.

That is why, each and every year, staff at “My Sister’s Place” work extremely hard to ensure that all women, and their children, in shelter, as well as those in the community who have accessed program services over the last year, are provided with as much support as possible to make their ‘holidays’ safe, as well as enjoyable as possible.

Since joining “My Sister’s Place” in 2005, I have witnessed the generosity of spirit, and kindness, displayed by this community, particularly during the holiday season.

Therefore, I wish to assure the community that all of your efforts are welcomed as we continue our work towards providing safety, security and a sense of well being for the women and children who are seeking refuge at “My Sister’s Place” from the violence in their lives.

May each and every one of you enjoy peace, health and happiness in the coming year.

Sincerely,  
Judith Stevens,  
Executive Director

## **Flew: Family Law Education for Women**

**Flew** is the acronym for **Family Law Education for Women**. It is a project of seven community agencies and funded by the government of Ontario. The project has created a series of plain language booklets dealing with 12 key areas under family law including Marriage and Divorce, Custody and Access etc. The pamphlets can be ordered from Flew by phoning 1-800-668-9938. Information is also available at their web site at [www.onefamilylaw.ca](http://www.onefamilylaw.ca).

This article will summarize the information given in the first six booklets. For more complete information, please read the booklets and as always, there is a disclaimer. This article is intended for general information; if you have a legal problem you should get legal advice, either by contacting a lawyer directly or going to a legal aid clinic. Flew has information on their web site about how to get legal help.

### **Alternative Dispute Resolution**

When you and your partner separate, you can go to court to settle property, financial and custody issues or you can, in some situations, try ADR. You would still need to get legal advice first, but it can be a cheaper and less confrontational way of dealing with disagreements. ADR is not appropriate where there has been abuse or where the parties can not talk to each other openly and freely. There are four different kinds of ADR: negotiation, mediation, arbitration and collaborative family law (where the partners work with lawyers to resolve issues)

### **Child Protection and Family Law**

The Child and Family Services Act is the Ontario law used to protect children from being mistreated. The government funds child welfare agencies usually called Children's Aid Societies, whose job it is to protect children from harm and to offer support to families. They also handle adoption.

If the CAS hears of a situation where a child may be in need of protection, the staff will first ensure that their services are needed. If they are needed, they will investigate. If a child is in need of protection because of abuse or neglect, they will try to work with the family where this is possible. If the family will not work with CAS or where CAS believes the child could be harmed, it can remove the child from the home. If your child is removed, the CAS must bring the case before a judge within 5 days. You should get legal advice right away.

### **Child Support**

When parents cannot agree about child support, they can ask the court to make an order. The courts look at the Child Support Guidelines which focus on the gross income of the parties and the number of dependant children. Parents on social assistance have to try to get support from the other parent and the amount they receive in support will be deducted from their social assistance payments.

Orders for child support and agreements for support are enforced by the Family Responsibility Office. The support money is sent to the FRO who then sends it on to the parent. If the payor is late or refuses to pay, the FRO can take various steps to collect the money including garnishing wages. This is true even if the payor lives outside of Ontario.

## **Criminal and Family Law**

In Canada most kinds of abuse are criminal. The most common kinds of abuse are stalking (criminal harassment), assault and sexual assault. If you have been a victim of any of these types of abuse, you can call the police. If, after an investigation, the police believe a crime has been committed, they will lay charges.

Some options available are to go to Family Court for a restraining order or for an order of exclusive possession of the family home. However this can take months. In an emergency situation, a judge can give an ex parte order (where the other party isn't present). This can be done quickly but will usually only last a short time.

If your abuser has been charged and released on bail, find out the terms of the bail e.g. no contact with the alleged victim. If the terms are breached, the police can re-arrest the accused.

Another option is to go to a Justice of the Peace and try to get a peace bond requiring the abuser to stay away from you, your family and home. This should be registered with the police (CPIC) so that if the bond is breached, the police can take action. Speak to a lawyer before signing a mutual peace bond which requires you to stay away from the abuser.

## **Child Custody and Access**

If parents cannot agree after separating about who should have custody of their children, then they can go to court for a custody order. Custody refers to the parent who is responsible for making decisions about the child's life. Sole custody means that one parent makes the decisions; joint custody means that both parents must make major decisions.

The home where the children spend most of their time is their primary residence and the parent who does most of the child care is the primary caregiver.

Access is the right of the non custodial parent to spend time with the children and to be kept informed about their health, well-being and education. Parents can agree on the amount of access or the court can impose schedules and conditions. The main concern of the courts is the best interests of the child.

## **Domestic Contracts**

Domestic contracts are legal agreements, including cohabitation agreements, marriage contracts and separation agreements. To be legal, they must be in writing and signed by both parties in front of a witness. Both parties should have independent legal advice before signing. Cohabitation contracts are for two people moving in together and can cover financial and property issues both during and after the relationship. It cannot deal with custody and access for children; this is only decided after separation. A marriage contract is similar but be aware that family law property rights can be changed by a marriage contract. A separation agreement is used when married or common law partners separate. It can cover custody and access issues as well as financial support and division of property. Separation agreements should be filed with the court to make them enforceable.

There will be an article covering the remaining six brochures in the Spring Newsletter. The topics to be covered are: Family Law Arbitration; Family Law Issues for Immigrant, Refugee and Non-Status Women; Finding Help with Your Family Law Problem; How Property is Divided; Marriage and Divorce; Spousal Support. You can order copies of all these legal information booklets from Flew, and they are available in 11 languages.

## FUNDRAISING

My Sister's Place held their first ever golf tournament at Big Cedar Golf Club in Innisfil on Saturday June 13<sup>th</sup>. A shotgun start at 7 a.m. brought out more than 75 people to golf, and enjoy a steak lunch while supporting My Sister's Place. We'd like to thank our generous sponsors who helped make this tournament so successful. The primary golf sponsor was Carrier Investment Management Group while Mackenzie Financial sponsored the closest to the pin, longest drive and the putting competitions. Individual holes were sponsored by Brisco's Furniture and Appliances in Alliston, Dr. Andrew Gater, Huronia Oral Surgery Group, Joco Financial Services, Krause and Butt Insurance, Tottenham Paint and Paper, the Train Station, Iconic Design, Investment Planning Counsel, the Woodbridge Advertiser, Train of Thought Books, Maverick Studios, Thomas Depot, Dominion Insurance, Susands and Associates Brokers Inc, Bradford Greenhouse, and Intact Insurance. Sand trap sponsors were Classic Colours, Sandryn Day Spa, SOS Interior Decorating, and Tag' Em Promotions. Golfing prizes were donated by Brisco's Furniture and Appliances, the Muddy Water Tavern, the Whistle Stop, Studio Hair Design, Benjamin Moore Paints, James Dennis, Tina Johansen Dedels, Sandryn Day Spa, Tag'Em Promotions, Pat McCauley Real Estate, Dr. Ian Lo, Man of Yorke, Mattress World, Blue Horizon, SOS Interior Decorating, Cantrex, Furniture Plus, Renaissance Investments, Bee Sew Busy, Beeton Foodland, SportMart, Big Cedar Golf Club, Appliance Experts, Libby and Sandy Hill, Earle Leard, Helena Guergis., Catherine Burns and Chris Rogers, Susan Birkenshaw, Karen Noll, and Jamie Burns. Much thanks to everyone who participated and all of our sponsors who helped us raise over five thousand dollars for the shelter's work!

Our tenth annual Road Toll took place in Tottenham, Beeton and Alliston on Friday June 26<sup>th</sup>. Tolls were set up at the intersections of Mill and Queen Streets in Tottenham, Main and Patterson Streets in Beeton, and Victoria and Church Streets in Alliston. Tottenham volunteers were joined briefly by the Honourable Helena Guergis, our local MP and the Minister of State responsible for the Status of Women. Much thanks to the communities of New Tecumseth who helped us raise over eight thousand dollars.

Much thanks to individuals who continue to make their special celebrations an occasion to donate to My Sister's Place. This summer, celebrants at a 30<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebration and a belated wedding celebration were asked to donate to the shelter in lieu of gifts. Finally, watch during the month of December for tickets for the Quilting Guild's annual quilt draw in New Tecumseth. We appreciate their continuing support. Donations for My Sister's Place garage sale at the annual Tottenham Toot 'N Holler in April are always welcome. Contact Joanne Burns at [wedecorate@rogers.com](mailto:wedecorate@rogers.com) or 905-936-3818.



Road toll volunteers, left to right, Jilly Burns and Nicole McGhee

## YOUR GIFTS AT WORK

**\$30.00** provides basic hygiene essentials (shampoo, soap, toothbrush, toothpaste, etc.) for a woman arriving at My Sister's Place.

**\$60.00** provides 2 days worth of groceries for the women and children residing at My Sister's Place

**\$250.00** provides 1 month of heating for My Sister's Place

**\$260.00** supplies 4 one way transportation trips from Alliston to Barrie for residents of My Sister's Place

## SECOND STAGE HOUSING PROJECT!

In early 2009, an ad-hoc committee was struck to pursue the possibility of finding second stage housing for shelter clients. Our goal is to create the next steps for women who need additional time to recreate their lives after leaving an abusive relationship. With support from Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, we were able to secure funding for the project which will continue into 2010. The funding will be used to build a small 5-unit building on site.

A \$500,000 interest free grant forgivable over a 15 year term was formally announced by Helena Guergis, our MP and Minister of State (Status of Women) on August 25/09. This building is being designed by Derek Bradley of Bradley Architectural Designs. He is also following the project through to ensure the correct permits are obtained and that tenders for contractors are written. He will be part of the process of selecting and monitoring the contractor as the project takes off.

### GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY FOR SECOND STAGE HOUSING

The Honourable Helena Guergis was one of many dignitaries who attended the ground breaking ceremony at My Sister's Place in Alliston on August 25. Ms. Guergis has been a long time supporter of the shelter. She spoke of the need for more action on the issue of violence against women and noted that statistics show that the situation has not improved in the last 15 years. She also announced that Canadian Mortgage and Housing is advancing My Sister's Place \$500,000 in the form of a forgivable loan to build longer term housing for women and their children who are victims of domestic violence.

Also in attendance were representatives of the Town of New Tecumseth, including councillors Christine Brayford and Jamie Smith. Ms. Brayford presented a certificate of recognition to the Board Chair, Anne Skeates, to commemorate the occasion. The Alliston District Chamber of Commerce was represented by Vice-President Diana Jazwinski and by Crystal Kellard the office manager. Deborah Handler, Program Supervisor with the Ministry of Community and Social Services came to lend her support and Derek Bradley, the architectural technologist for the project, was available to answer questions on the proposed building. The event was organized by Leslie Pawlowski, Consultant, Communications & Marketing with Canadian Mortgage and Housing.



Pictured left to right, Jamie W Smith and Christine Brayford, Councillors, New Tecumseth, Hon. Helena Guergis, MP, Susan Birkenshaw, Chair, Second Stage Housing, MSP, Anne Skeates, Board Chair, MSP.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING



The theme of the Annual General Meeting of People in Transition Inc. “My Sister’s Place” on September 21, 2009 was “Celebrating Our Successes”. Board members, shelter staff and community members gathered to focus on the past, present and future of the shelter and its goals. Judith Stevens, Executive Director of My Sister’s Place, provided a brief history of the shelter and its current status. “My Sister’s Place” came into being as a result of a small group of concerned community members coming together in 1977 to discuss issues of growing concern within Alliston, specifically the number of women presenting themselves at local hospitals and churches due to physical and emotional abuse at home. Statistical information was gathered from Stats Can, the provincial government (of the day), and local police detachments and from health agencies. All of this gathered information proved that abuse was widespread in this area, and appeared to be growing worse. With the support of The Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Contact Information Agency was formed to provide women with a ‘listening ear’, contact numbers and appropriate community referrals to other agencies. While an initial attempt to open a shelter in Tottenham failed, due to insufficient supports, a committed group of like-minded individuals persevered, until in 1984, the agency called “People in Transition” was incorporated, and a house was bought in Alliston. In May 1987, My Sister’s Place opened. By 1994, the need for more space for women and staff led to the purchase of the house immediately to the west of the existing shelter and renovations began to link both houses. The enhanced shelter’s administration and community programs building was officially opened in September 1999.

In 2009, My Sister’s Place continues to serve women and children within South Simcoe County who are seeking refuge from domestic violence. Its huge catchment area includes Innisfil Beach Road south to Bradford, west to Airport Road, north to Hwy 90 (Borden/Angus) and south to Hwy 9. This includes Tottenham, Beeton, Alliston, Cookstown, Bradford, Borden/Angus, and everything in between. My Sister’s Place has twenty four trained, full time and part time staff that remain committed to providing the best services they can to the women and children, who seek our help. Our women’s program counsellors provide counselling to the women who come to My Sister’s Place, as well as making the appropriate referrals to other staff members, or community partners who complement the services required. We are open to women and their children on a 24-hour basis, seven days a week, 365 days a year. The women and their children who seek refuge at My Sister’s Place are only able to stay within the shelter for a period of five weeks. People in Transition have identified the need for second stage transitional housing for these women and their children. Our new second stage housing project, when complete, will provide apartment style housing for 6-9 months for those who need time to rebuild their lives in their own community.

Anne Skeates, board chair of My Sister's Place from 2005-2009 provided a "wish list" for the future of My Sister's Place, both concrete and idealistic. My Sister's Place wishes to continue to provide outstanding service to women and children in crisis as well as educating and communicating with our communities about violence. Future dreams for assisting our clients include the creation of a networking group with business women, stable funding without strings for women to start businesses or re-enter the employment market and the completion of our 2<sup>nd</sup> stage project that will provide stable housing and supports for women rebuilding their lives in their own communities. All of these initiatives would allow women "to dream" and move forward with their lives. Finally, Anne envisions an organizational chart for the People In Transition My Sister's Place that continues to put women and children first and a society that promotes the resolution of conflict with communication and mediation rather than violence.

**"VISION , HEART AND WISDOM": ANNE SKEATES, BOARD CHAIR: 2005-2009**

At the AGM of People in Transition Inc, My Sister's Place, attendees honoured Anne Skeates who is stepping down as the Board Chair. Anne has been a member of the board for seven years, four as Board Chair and she remains on the board for one more year as Past Chair. Anne is a woman who places issues of importance to women and families at the centre of her value system. She credits this focus to her upbringing where the equality of all people, regardless of gender, was central to her family, as well as respect for all human beings. Raising her five children in a loving family as well as her strong faith have reinforced for her the importance of the work that My Sister's Place does in the community.

An impressive array of accomplishments are attributable to Anne's "passionate and committed" leadership of the board. Anne's efforts drove the refurbishment of the shelter and its reopening in 2005 under the leadership of a new, strong and capable Executive Director, Judith Stevens. Anne believes that her "profound respect" for Judith and their strong teamwork have worked to foster a focused, committed, team of professional staff who are continually upgrading their skills through training and professional development. Anne is also proud of the extension of shelter services through the funding and opening of satellite offices in Bradford, Tottenham and Beeton. In partnership with her husband Doug, Anne created the ongoing "Trees for Shelter" fundraising initiative which continues to plant and sell trees in the community. This has been operating for the last four years and has raised more than eight thousand dollars for the shelter. As part of the executive team, Anne helped to successfully negotiate staff contracts as well as guide the dream of a second stage housing facility to fruition, as My Sister's Place begins to build their second stage housing facility in 2010. Equally as important, Anne spearheaded the drive to update the legal and government documents needed for complete compliance with current law and non-profit practice.

Just as important as these concrete accomplishments, is Anne's leadership style. Long-time board member Dave Johnston describes her style as "gentle but firm", a leader who stands up on issues of importance to her but who is always looking for consensus, common ground, compromise and conciliation. Anne is always positive, optimistic and cheerful, listening politely and with respect to all opinions. Her energy, persistence and acceptance of diverse opinions have allowed her to move the shelter through difficult times and reach its goal of better serving the women and children who need help. Others have noted that Anne is a life-long learner who

has always been eager to extend her education and participate in a wide variety of professional learning opportunities, above and beyond what would be expected of a board chair.

In her speech at the AGM, Executive Director Judith Stevens commented on her first impression of Anne during the interview for her job. She noted that Anne is a woman with a “genuine true smile” that goes up to her eyes. This reflects her personality: a “woman of vision, heart and wisdom”, a “true believer” in the cause of ending violence in all relationships. In recognition of her volunteer service to My Sister’s Place, the boardroom in the shelter has been named The Anne Skeates Boardroom and a plaque has been installed to honour the accomplishments of this driven and accomplished lady. Much thanks to Anne from all of the staff and the Board of My Sister’s Place for her many years of volunteer service.



Anne proudly displays the pendant she was presented with by My Sister’s Place. It is in the form of a tri-scullion, which is an ancient representation of feminine energy. It is Celtic in background and is made of an agate with silver inlaid with small semi-precious stones

### **FRIENDS OF THE BOARD**

The designation ‘Friend of the Board’ is meant to honour individuals who have made a significant contribution to the support of My Sister’s Place.

The ‘Friends of the Board’ for 2009 are:

Nell Heier

Peter Heier

Debbie Hudson

Michael Keith

Marilyn Lansing

Mike MacEachern

Sharon Pendergast

Doug Skeates

The Board of My Sister’s Place wishes to thank these individuals for their continuing dedication and unselfish commitment to ending violence against women and their children.



## Please remember.....

**Geneviève Bergeron**

**Maryse Laganiere**

**Hélène Colgan**

**Maryse Leclair**

**Nathalie Croteau**

**Anne-Marie Lemay**

**Barbara Daigneault**

**Sonia Pelletier**

**Anne-Marie Edward**

**Michèle Richard**

**Maud Haviernick**

**Annie St-Arneault**

**Barbara Klucznik Widajewicz Annie Turcotte**

This year on December 6th, Canadians gather to remember the twentieth anniversary of the deaths of fourteen young women who lost their lives at L'Ecole Polytechnique and all of the other women who have lost their lives due to violence. Please join us at the Town Square Courtyard in Alliston in front of Community Service Centre South Simcoe at 7:00 pm to remember these women and recommit ourselves to ending violence. Refreshments to follow.

It is our custom on December 6th to remember not just those women slain at L'Ecole Polytechnique but also other women who have lost their lives due to violence. The following is a list of the women and children murdered in Ontario since January 2009 where the intimate partner was charged or committed suicide. Please remember them as well.

Linda Eaton & son Daniel	61, son was 36, mother of two other children
Cybil Dawn Stoney	37
Nadia Gehl	28
Muruwet Tuncer	41, mother of 4
Laurie Funke	48, mother of 4
Sherry Martin	52, mother of 3
Pamela Olara	33, mother of 4
Helen Slichta	71, grandmother, mother
Ingrid Hutt	61, grandmother, mother
Kerry Walters & Starla	25, daughter was 11 months
Michelle Simon	45, mother of 6
Dayna Jamieson	34
Maria Nzokilandevi	53, mother of 3
Hilda Agawa	63
Heidi Ferguson	39, mother of 2





## HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!

As we prepare for the holiday season and the anticipated increase in delivery of services, My Sister's Place is asking community members to support our Holiday Fundraising Campaign. Many women and children experience an increase in domestic violence during this time of year. Holiday celebrations coupled with economic and family pressures often contribute to increased domestic violence.

The South Simcoe community has always been generous in their support and we ask you to once again help us. All of your donations go towards helping the women and children that we serve and your contributions make a significant difference in their lives. Financial contributions can be made payable to "My Sister's Place" and can be sent in the enclosed self-addressed envelope or you can donate online at [www.mysistersplace.ca](http://www.mysistersplace.ca).

The annual Children's Holiday Party will be held in December again this year and will feature crafts, face painting, refreshments, games and a visit from Santa. As well, in December, women will be given a chance to come to My Sister's Place in order to "shop" for the holidays and reduce the stress and fears around the holidays. If you would like to donate gifts or supplies for this year's holiday events, please contact Colette, Children's Services Counsellor at 705-435-9400 Extension 222. Thank you for your support!

**Best wishes to all for a safe and healthy holiday season from the staff, management and board of My Sister's Place.**

Jill  
Susanne  
Kelly. Jane  
Kathy Ann S Penny  
Warren  
Patricia  
Maiva  
Carol Lisa  
Bernice Horan  
Pam Danielle  
Colette  
Cathy Pam Cassin Carolyn  
Cathy

## WHAT'S HAPPENING!

People in Transition (Alliston) Inc., "My Sister's Place" would like to welcome the following new staff members to our team:

Jennifer Barton, Women's Program  
Jo-Anne Roos, Women's Program  
Brittany Ryman, Women's Program  
Danielle Harrison, Women's Program  
Heather Croft, Women's Program

And

Maria Campbell, Executive Assistant/Volunteer Coordinator

All of these women bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to their positions, which enhances the essential services we continue to provide to women and children who are seeking refuge from the violence in their lives.

## COMING EVENTS

**November 25, 2009**—The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women

**Sunday December 6, 2009**— Candlelight Vigil in the Town Square Courtyard in front of Community Service Centre South Simcoe at 7:00 pm to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Montreal Massacre.

**December, 2009**— My Sister's Place Children's Holiday Party

### We need your support!

In order to continue to provide much needed services to women and their children in South Simcoe who are seeking a life free from violence, we need your donations. You can send cheques to PO Box 533, Alliston, ON L9R 1V7. Single or monthly donations can be made through Canada Helps on our website at [www.mysistersplace.ca](http://www.mysistersplace.ca). Tax receipts will be issued for any donation of more than \$10. If you have gently used clothing, linens or other household goods, please call 705-435-3835 for information about where to drop these items off. 'In Memorium' donations can be made at any of the funeral homes in our catchment area.

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and may not necessarily reflect those of People in Transition (Alliston) Inc., "My Sister's Place." If you have any comments, questions or suggestions about anything you've read in this newsletter, please contact our Executive Director, Judith Stevens, by phone at 705-435-9400 or by email at [pitmsp@bellnet.ca](mailto:pitmsp@bellnet.ca).