

Need for Times Change hasn't really changed in 35 years

**Text and photo
By Katie Didyk**

When Times Change, a free educational and employment counselling service for women opened its doors in September 1974, the office was equipped with only a manual typewriter, some paper, and a staff with a strong commitment to help women regain their footing in the workforce.

But as Times Change, now operating in a very well-equipped office at Bloor and Sherbourne, celebrated its 35th anniversary on November 25th at the City Archives, it was obvious that some things stubbornly still stay the same.

Long-time staffer Holly Kirkconnell recalled of the early days "Back then, we wanted to help women who were displaced in the workforce by technology as so many women still are, today. So many of the issues that women faced years ago, still exist today. Women still need support and a safe place to go to help strategize and succeed and to formulate a new vision for their lives."

Times Change joined representatives from the city's women's service organiza-

tions for an evening of networking and celebration with Ontario's fairness commissioner, the Honorable Jean Augustine.

In her remarks Augustine inspired women's agencies to remain relevant. Looking back on her own struggles, she said "I needed a Times Change at the time." Augustine battled adversity during her rise to prominence on Canada's political scene. Born in Grenada, she immigrated to Canada in 1959 only to discover that her foreign teacher's training was not valued. Sheer persistence and a strong belief in herself led her to hack a trail through uncharted territory. In 1993, she became one of the first Black women elected to the House of Com-



Networking for Women: The Hon. Jean Augustine, Ontario's Fairness Commissioner (left) poses with Times Change Women's Employment Services' Ummu Shamte.

mons. Augustine still champions immigrants, education and women's issues and she suggested that workers in similar fashion staple - "the little black dress" found in many women's closets. She emphasized the value in always striving to be current, sustainable and relevant when providing social services.

"It's important for Times Change to celebrate 35 years of helping women and adapting to change with other representatives of women's organizations because we've shared in so many of the same challenges," explained Board vice-president, Arshia Raafat. "We're hoping that together in this room we can look to

the future and make plans that will continue to help us succeed at what we do best."

Each year, over 1,400 women visit Times Change, which has earned a solid reputation as a leading provider of women's employment services in Toronto? Clients are from a variety of different backgrounds. They may have been out of the workforce for years while raising children or recently laid off in a bad economy. But their needs are similar- to examine their options, learn new skills and regain their self confidence in a supportive environment.

For more information, see: www.timeschange.org or contact: Katie Didyk, Intake/Outreach Coordinator, 416-927-1900 x. 222