

## MBA GRADUATE

# Social activist finds a home at Western

Jan Richardson says she found respect for her feminist views.

By Burt Dowsett  
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Jan Richardson didn't expect to find much tolerance for her views on social issues in a den of MBAs-in-training.

And she was delighted to be proven wrong.

Richardson, executive director of Women's Community House, which operates two shelters for abused women in London, graduates today with a Masters of Business Administration at the University of Western Ontario's fall convocation.

"I found friendship, I found fun, I found laughter, I found respect for my feminist ways and an openness to understand the difference I brought to the classroom," Richardson says of her classmates. "I didn't expect that I thought I would be faced with difficult resistance."

That doesn't mean there weren't disagreements.

"We had great fights. We battled out issues," says Richardson. "A vacuum in my life got filled in the learning — from each other and the professors." The 38 new MBAs began their

studies in September, 1992, in an executive program geared specifically to people working full-time. (A minimum of 10 years management experience was a prerequisite.) Students came from varied backgrounds, including banking, the health industry, technology, insurance and multinational corporations.

"I was more of an anomaly in the program... and I'll argue there are many transferable skills and systems from non-profit (organizations) to business," says Richardson. "We're the groups that have been doing more with less forever."

**INTENSE:** But Richardson also realized she had a lot to learn from other students and professors in the program. That's what drove her to enrol in the intense course that claimed 25 hours a week of her time, on top of her 50-hour work week at Women's Community House.

In 10 years on the job, her staff had increased to 60 from 10 and "I needed that quantum leap in learning to run a \$2-million operating budget.... It's the largest shelter in the country."

"That was the pull. I also needed to be challenged.

"I am a driven person. I work hard and I needed to be stimulated in new and exciting ways, and the program gave it to me." Balancing school, work and



MICHAEL JORDAN / The London Free Press

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raising her son — Alex, now 14 — in that two-year period forced her to become "very focused.... Family and a few friends were all I was able to manage." Now, she is struggling to read-

just to a less harried lifestyle. "I've had trouble adjusting to leisure time. It's hard for me to pick up a leisure book rather than a text book."