

## **Safety from Domestic Violence: Using Evidence Based Practices to Keep Women Safe Calgary Regional Consultation Summary**

### **Regional Consultation Overview**

- There were two Regional Consultations held in Calgary. The first was held on June 14th, 2016 from 8 AM to 12 PM with the second held on July 21, 2016 from 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM.
- A total of 42 participants attended the consultations
- Participants represented:
  - Alberta Health Services - Public Health
  - Alberta Justice and Solicitor General - Probation
  - Alberta Justice and Solicitor General - Crown
  - Brenda Strafford Society for Prevention of Domestic Violence
  - Calgary Board of Education
  - Calgary Counselling Centre
  - Calgary Homeless Foundation
  - Calgary Police Service
  - Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter
  - Camrose Women's Shelter
  - Centre for Newcomers
  - Chinese Community Response to Family Violence
  - Discovery House
  - Family and Community Support Services (FCSS)
  - Family Law Office
  - HomeFront Calgary
  - Human Services - Alberta Works
  - Human Services - Child and Family Services
  - Human Services - Housing and Homeless Supports
  - Newcomers Centre
  - Punjabi Community Health Services
  - Rowan House
  - Sonshine Centre
  - United Way
  - University of Calgary - Public Interest Law Clinic
  - University of Calgary - Centre for Law and the Family
  - Wheatland Shelter
  - YWCA of Banff
  - YWCA of Calgary
  - YWCA Sheriff King Home

## Common Themes

### Relationships, Partnerships and Community Collaboration

Participants described collaboration and partnerships as essential in coordinating a collective response to women fleeing domestic violence in the area. Specifically, they thought that strong relationships between organizations allow the community to view domestic violence from a collective perspective; help promote trust and foster a safe atmosphere for women to access services; help engage both the organizations' decision makers and front line experts; and ultimately, helps move community to action. While there was a general consensus that collaboration is important, it is not always possible for the community to collaborate to the extent that they would like, due to several issues and challenges:

- Collaborative activities tend to be seen as a lower priority, due to lack of time and resources.
- Organizations are unable to access information they need because of legal and privacy considerations and lack of information sharing policies.
- Turn-over can become an issue, as new members can create a significant problem for the collaboration.
- Pockets of exclusivity/territoriality and competition for funding are issues in the community, resulting in a division amongst agencies and challenges in connecting and building relationships, ultimately impacting effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery.
- Lack of long-term project funding or funding for community impact projects is another related issue – funding is available for pilot projects but not for sustaining projects long-term or to directly fund collaborative efforts.
- While the community has been able to initiate several successful partnership efforts, there were challenges sustaining them and moving them forward in an actionable way.

Participants provided many examples of successful collaborative initiatives in Calgary and surrounding community:

1. Calgary Domestic Violence Collective (CDVC) is a community collaborative that coordinates a community response to domestic violence in Calgary and connects professionals and paraprofessionals working in domestic violence and related fields. The work of CDVC helps address many of the collaboration-related challenges, improves service access for individuals and families, enhances information sharing processes, and builds stronger capacity and knowledge base within community organizations.
2. HomeFront collaborates with police, the justice system and community partners to support families dealing with domestic violence, both those appearing in the specialized Domestic Violence Court and those without court involvement. HomeFront's High Risk Offender Management program and Domestic Conflict Response Team were highlighted as models of strong collaboration between community agency and the justice system. HomeFront was described as a backbone for the justice system and a "lightning rod" that keeps everyone together.
3. Calgary Police Services Domestic Violence Unit works closely with the community, continually developing innovative strategies to address the issue of domestic violence in the area. The units' two main directions include family protection and reconciliation/rehabilitation, with the case management team providing a continuum of services focusing on prevention and education, intervention and enforcement.

4. Strathmore shelter's referral process was highlighted as an innovative practice – where no one is turned away and everyone receives whatever services they need – possibly in the shelter or through counselling or direct connection with other services that are needed.
5. Alberta Works was described as making significant strides in connecting with the community, participating in consultations, working to build community relationships and developing a triage system to ensure that women and children in the community can meet their basic needs.
6. Alberta Health Services (AHS) is developing protocols to address the information gap that currently exists in the system. The protocols will ensure that AHS staff know how to screen for and assist patients experiencing domestic violence and refer them to resources that meet their needs.
7. Calgary also has a dedicated Family Violence Regional Coordinator who represents Alberta Human Services department and works closely with community agencies while supporting both regional needs and community priorities.

The group generated multiple solutions and action steps for the community to move forward, building on strong collaboration and effective practices already in place and addressing existing barriers:

- Develop new ways of sharing information: ask “can we ask someone to call you”, make it part of practice, use a trauma sensitive approach acknowledging that a phone call could be retraumatizing;
- Partner with individuals who are knowledgeable about cost-benefit analysis and how it can inform service – this would improve service provision overall as well as provide community with valuable information about what needs to be done and why; those who are not interested in social discussion will be moved by the financial considerations;
- Reduce duplication in training initiatives: develop one governing body that would be in charge of training and develop one consistent and standardized training approach;
- Ensure that collaborative initiatives are built around time-limited, measureable, achievable and tangible actions and deliverables; so that there is continuous forward movement to the initiative and a sense of progress;
- Create an opportunity for more regularly scheduled meetings by using innovative forums and technology (e.g., on-line meetings);
- Use existing momentum to engage in community-wide advocacy, a return to historical roots where advocacy required strength, determination and courage;
- Legislate collaboration and its elements (e.g., information sharing, support for trauma-informed approach, warm hand off and sharing of information from one organization to another); including a focus on collective accountability and outcomes;
- Ensure that collaboration takes place at the highest levels; with decision-makers from all systems at the table;
- Build community-based rather than system or government-based leadership approach;
- Place women at the centre of the collaborative; making them the focus of the work, listening to their voices, focusing on their safety and involving family members.

### *Domestic Violence Education and Awareness*

The discussion suggested that significant efforts are already being made in Calgary with respect to raising awareness and providing information about domestic violence and its prevention. Participants provided two school-based initiatives as examples of the work in the community. First, shelter school liaisons have been working with local schools to provide domestic violence prevention programming focused on grades 2, 6 and 10. Second, Wiseguys staff who act as male role models, work with high school boys to change perceptions about masculinity and to teach them how to build healthy relationships.

While some good work is underway in Calgary, the participants thought that more needs to be done to strengthen the awareness of the broader community. In general, they thought that a comprehensive model was needed to engage men and boys in domestic violence prevention work, particularly focusing on men in leadership roles, discussing healthy relationships and how to effectively deal with conflict. They also suggested that the broader community, staff and government organizations could be better informed about the dynamics of the struggles faced by women who are ambivalent about leaving their abusive partners; about the plight of vulnerable groups experiencing domestic violence; and how power, control and sense of entitlement factor in violence against women and girls.

### *Wrap Around, Client Centred Services*

Calgary's women's shelters were described as the main point of contact for women fleeing domestic violence (and for men as in the case of Strathmore shelter). A recent injection of funds to resource shelter provision of intensive case management supports will better support women receiving assistance they need in navigating the array of services available to them. There remain however, some significant issues challenging shelter service provision.

First, the participants discussed the lack of transitional housing that needs to be available after emergency and second stage shelter stay. Both of those options are time limited and are not sufficient for some women who need more time in a safe place and before they are able to move to independent housing. Second, shelter space in Calgary is insufficient and many women looking to access shelters are turned-away because shelters are full. Calgary's women's shelters are currently engaged in a collaborative effort to develop a shared intake process to help women quickly find shelter and programming that supports their individual choices and needs.

In addition to shelters, the participants highlighted several other programs and services that were well positioned to provide wrap around, client centred services:

- The Genesis Center reaches out to newcomer women by holding community-based groups, working to build strong relationships with community members and engaging settlement practitioners in conversations about domestic violence. Discussions are underway for other community organizations to host Genesis Centre groups.
- Shelter outreach working together with Victims' Services is another effective practice that helps develop strong partnerships, build awareness and enhance women's safety.
- Connect Calgary brought together practitioners from multiple sectors to work together in one place, supporting a one-stop-shopping approach for women. However, the number of partners who can come together to deliver Connect services has been substantially reduced due to funding cut-backs.

Directions for improvements in achieving wrap around, client centred services in the region included:

- Creating long-term and realistic solutions to best support women in rural and remote locations, focusing, in particular, on developing trust and connections, addressing shortage of shelter space, and improving access to transitional and affordable housing as well as services in general;
- Developing programming to help women build their natural and informal support networks in order to build capacity and empower them to make changes in their lives;
- Improving access to mental health and addiction services – oftentimes, people manage trauma through addiction;
- Suggesting that a shift is needed from the singular focus on navigating the justice system to building connections with all community systems because the majority of women experiencing domestic violence never access the justice system;
- Delivering programs and services to optimize the window of opportunity and be available when victims are reaching out.

### *Legal and Justice System Processes*

The region has made significant strides in improving legal and justice system processes, primarily through collaborative efforts between community and justice partners as well as innovative and culturally accessible programming and initiatives dedicated to addressing the issue of domestic violence. As they are being implemented, the region continues to develop, refine and enhance the programming, continually building on successes and identifying and addressing barriers as they emerge.

### Legal System Navigation

As noted in previous sections, Calgary is home to a dedicated domestic violence court, which along with HomeFront's casework supports, provides an opportunity for a cross-disciplinary team to discuss each case that comes before the court, and contribute to timely court resolution and victim support. Participants did identify several challenges in this area, including limited availability of a court liaison, financial barriers and long wait times for legal services and the need for additional assistance to support court system navigation.

### The Role of Calgary Police Services Domestic Conflict Unit (DCU)

A dedicated Domestic Conflict Unit (DCU) works to investigate, assess and intervene with domestic conflict cases in the area. The unit provides traditional enforcement services and also works to make positive connections with families, increasing awareness in the community about the work of DCU and building trust. DCU works closely with other community organizations (e.g., HomeFront), having developed Memorandum of Understanding and information sharing agreement, ensuring that changes in staff and management do not impact the effectiveness of the collaboration. Similarly, Airdrie has a dedicated RCMP Domestic Violence officer – one of only five such officers across Alberta.

### Domestic Conflict Response Team (DCRT)

DCRT is a partnership between Homefront and DCU, working with pre-charge files as well as charged files that have not yet appeared in the domestic violence court. The program provides immediate response from the police officer and HomeFront caseworker, supporting families in negotiating legal issues, providing emotional support and making linkages with needed community resources. Unfortunately, the recent increase in domestic violence calls to police has significantly increased the DCRT caseload, resulting in the program focus that is currently, almost exclusively, on higher risk files.

### Working with Indigenous Communities

Several examples of innovative programming in the region have been developed to work with the Indigenous communities and to address barriers currently present within the mainstream legal system for Indigenous peoples. Siksika Family Violence initiative was provided as one such example. In this program, RCMP develop a safety plan with the offender, ensuring that he will not breach court orders and that he be responsible and accountable for keeping his partner and children safe. There are also opportunities for Indigenous families to participate in traditional courts that support the resolution of conflict using traditional ceremonies and approaches. The Gladue Report provides support to Justice personnel in utilizing thorough assessment reports to enhance Indigenous peoples experience in the Justice System.

### Emergency Protection Order Program

Calgary Emergency Protection Order program (CEPOP) was described as an effective and accessible program that provides women with free and timely access to legal aid, risk assessments and safety plans. It works closely with women's shelters, Homefront and police service and contributes significantly to the safety of women and children. While the program continues to develop, participants highlighted several emerging issues the program needs to address, including: offenders' ability to breach EPOs without being held accountable; resistance on the part of some of the police officers to issue EPOs; and women not being ready to accept an EPO even though it is warranted. In the opinion of some of the participants, some of these issues could be addressed if the program was better known or criteria for its access were better understood.

### Disconnect between Criminal and Family Courts

Participants described lack of communication between criminal and family court as a major barrier for information sharing, effective case resolution and keeping women and children safe. They talked about a disconnect that occurs when criminal court orders (e.g., no contact) are contradicted by family court orders (e.g., visitation rights). They also spoke to a lack of understanding that is sometimes evident in the family court proceedings with respect to domestic violence and its role in custody cases, how children may be used to further manipulate and harm the victim, the impact of trauma on children resulting from domestic violence and the potential risk parenting orders or supervised visits pose to women and children.

### Pre-Charge Support

Some of the participants emphasized that a very small proportion of women are reporting the abuse, with a vast number of them not wanting to become involved with the justice system, suggesting, therefore, an increased focus on supporting families in pre-charge situations. Further to this point of view is the notion that the justice system is not in the business of providing support or domestic violence services, particularly to victims experiencing trauma and that involvement of the broader community, outside of the justice system, is necessary.

### Offender Treatment Programs

There are several offender treatment programs in Calgary, providing both mandated and voluntary treatment for domestic violence perpetrators. According to participants, these programs are consistent with best practice models and are a strong compliment to other justice and community based initiatives in the region. The participants also highlighted some issues that need to be considered with respect to offender treatment programs in Calgary and surrounding areas.



- There are limited opportunities for outreach services to support offenders when they go back to their families, providing aftercare and treatment follow-up and ensuring stability of treatment impact.
- The new development of domestic violence court now including treatment as part of bail condition is perceived as positive – with clients much more motivated to complete treatment when there is a possibility of a criminal charge.
- Community needs to pay more attention to the trauma these men are experiencing and more resources are required to support them with their issues that may be precursors to domestic violence.
- The face of the community has changed significantly; the sector is now dealing almost exclusively with vulnerable groups, whose recidivism rates are significant.
- Treatment has to reflect the unique perspectives of Aboriginal men; most treatment groups are guided by a dominant white discourse, without connection to Indigenous culture and traditions.
- Wrap around approaches to treatment that have been described as successful and result in decreased recidivism rates are those that make treatment available as soon as possible after the incident, refer the victim to shelter/outreach programming and ensure that children receive services as well.

The group also acknowledged that while offender treatment programming was very well resourced in the area, there was limited funding of services for victims. As a result, some organizations use couple counselling (not seen as a best practice in domestic violence treatment) as a way to eventually connect the victim with individual support.

#### Culturally Sensitive and Inclusive Practices for Indigenous Women and Their Children

The group spoke at length about the importance of supporting Indigenous families. They understood that the overrepresentation of Aboriginal families in the justice system is a result of complex and long-term historical issues related to residential school, colonization and marginalization of First Nations peoples. These issues continue to surface as service providers struggle to support Indigenous communities in culturally appropriate ways, understanding that there will be no quick fix here. There is still much to do in this area, as reflected in the group's discussion:

- Even though much work has been done in the region to educate and inform communities about residential schools and the effects it has had on Indigenous families, there continues to be a lack of knowledge and understanding of the long standing effect of colonization and the importance of culture, traditions and ceremonies for Indigenous peoples– this education has to start early on in our schools;
- Engaging Indigenous communities and leaders and hearing, through them, authentic Indigenous voices, is essential – different suggestions included hiring more Aboriginal staff; including leaders in community meetings, conversations and consultations at all levels; going to the Aboriginal communities; and bringing in Elders to provide advice and guidance – essentially collaborating, co-creating and building a shared decision making structure;
- Carving out time in the busy, crisis-response oriented service delivery to build relationships with Indigenous people and communities and to work to understand their culture and perspectives;

- Developing culturally appropriate services, including dedicated units (e.g., Aboriginal Liaison programs); creating strategies focusing on specific community needs; revisiting program rules and expectations (e.g., who is considered to be a family in a shelter); and using traditional native teachings as the basis for program delivery;
- Improving coordination between urban and on-reserve services, acknowledging that most women will seek to return to their culture, their people and their families;
- Addressing the issue of the lack of resources to support services for Indigenous families – Awo-Taan Healing Lodge is the only agency in Calgary specifically dedicated to addressing the issue of domestic violence in Indigenous communities; there is also a lack of resources for transportation and lack of funding dollars allocated to First Nations communities to deliver services on their own;
- Addressing the inequities and divisiveness in the community, particularly with respect to Indigenous and newcomer communities and how resources are distributed to support them;
- Helping build capacity for domestic violence service delivery within Indigenous communities.

The participants highlighted several programs in the area as examples of effective services for Aboriginal families:

- Strengthening the Spirit initiative seeks to work with Indigenous communities to support their capacity to develop a coordinated justice response;
- United Way has recently released funding targeting Indigenous organizations guided by an advisory committee including Elders and peer advisors and creating a cross-cultural approach to program design and decision making;
- Calgary Counselling Centre has a dedicated trained service provider to work with Indigenous clients;
- Native Friendship Centre is available to work with Aboriginal families whatever the issue is; and,
- Awo-Taan Healing Lodge services are inclusive of all cultures and use traditional Aboriginal healing, guided by the Seven Sacred teachings and other traditional wisdom.

#### Culturally Sensitive and Inclusive Practices for Vulnerable Groups

The participants spoke at length about service provision for newcomer populations, focusing on the need for culturally competent services, understanding the issues that newcomers experience and addressing the multiple service barriers that are present for newcomer women and children who are fleeing abuse. They understood the complexities of the newcomer experience, highlighting the language issues, cultural integration struggles, financial issues and in some instances, newcomers' having to deal with exposure to trauma in their home countries. The group particularly highlighted the following issues that have to be considered when working with newcomer populations:

- Because of confidentiality concerns within smaller ethno-cultural communities and fears of police and government intervention, women refrain from accessing formal resources and instead, go to their doctor, community lawyers and other informal supports; in some cases, they do not access any help, choosing to suffer in silence. Similar issues exist for newcomer men who perpetrate violence and who are not likely to volunteer for treatment.
- In some communities, cultural norms and traditions prevent women from receiving services, or participating in specific service modalities, creating challenges for wrap-around service delivery.



- Those without status, temporary foreign workers or privately sponsored workers are particularly vulnerable, as they are often abused (and financially abused) by employers or physically abused in domestic situations and are at risk of being abandoned by sponsors without any recourse.

Service-related issues further complicate the newcomer experience in service access and include:

- Lack of understanding of new immigrants and challenges they face in disclosing domestic violence; inability within the organizations to keep up with changing population and needs;
- Lack of cultural competence and cultural awareness within some organizations (“people speak the language of culture but the processes and face of organization is mainstream”);
- Limited access to language supports;
- Lack of services addressing the significant trauma that some newcomers experience, as well as other related issues including mental health, physical health and addictions;
- Lack of general service access (e.g., newcomers having to go downtown to receive supports);
- Lack of financial resources or public funds to support families without status or with precarious status (e.g., through Alberta Works).

Participants highlighted several initiatives or programs currently underway in the sector that help newcomers in domestic violence situations address (albeit not without challenges) complexities of their experience:

- Immigrant Case Management Group supports multi-sector case planning for immigrants with domestic violence issues;
- Alberta Immigrant Association training helps organizations work more effectively with immigrant women (e.g., how to develop action plans and empower them to move forward);
- School-based settlement workers help children and youth with language barriers and acculturation, but their caseloads are extremely high;
- Shelters act as a last resort for those newcomers without status or with precarious status; however shelters are a temporary and short-term option;
- HomeFront is working with one of the ethno-cultural communities to develop a culturally-appropriate collaborative response model, focusing on building family engagement with the justice system.
- The Genesis Centre provides an accessible place for newcomer families to meet and houses services for newcomers.

The group offered multiple solutions and directions for change in working with newcomer women and their families:

- Strengthening collaboration between settlement organization and domestic violence service providers, to help develop culturally competent services, enhance organizational knowledge about immigrant experience and support communication and engagement with ethno-cultural communities and leaders,
- Provide services in the north east Calgary, where most of the newcomer families live (e.g., the Genesis Centre);
- Strengthen the capacity of schools to support newcomer children and youth who are exposed to domestic violence, by recruiting more settlement workers and developing more programming;
- Build resource base and capacity of smaller settlement organizations, where newcomer families may feel more comfortable, to address domestic violence within ethno-cultural communities;

- Consider needs of newcomer families when developing service protocols, information sharing agreements and assessment tools – instead of helping, service providers may unknowingly create more barriers; flexibility is important;
- Service provision is currently compartmentalized around issues – e.g., domestic violence, drug strategy, etc.; instead, the community should coalesce around specific populations that need a range of services – e.g., homeless, newcomers.

### Other Vulnerable Groups

Participants also identified several other population groups that were particularly vulnerable to domestic violence:

- A significant number of women with disabilities experience abuse but they are overlooked in the health system – a hotline and a team response would be a positive development for Calgary;
- LGBTQ communities are not taken seriously when they report abuse;
- Women in rural and remote communities are isolated, can't access services and are ashamed to speak about their experience;
- Men are also emotionally and physically abused and there are no resources available for them in the community. They rarely come forward and only come to attention of authorities when they retaliate;
- The issue of elder abuse is significant but is not addressed in community.

### Lack of Specialized Services for Children who have Experienced/Witnessed Domestic Violence

Children represent another vulnerable group that is not always considered when dealing with domestic violence in the family. The impact of their exposure to domestic violence and the resulting trauma is not fully understood, their needs are not reflected in legal proceedings and there are few programs that are specifically tailored to their needs. Children are an important group for domestic violence work prevention as the cycle of violence can span generations if their needs are not addressed. The participants suggested that, in addition to programs that already exist (e.g., Calgary Counselling Centre Responsible Choices for Children and Parents), more programs for children of domestic violence are needed to break the cycle of domestic violence. They also talked about the need to work with the fathers in order to obtain dual consent that enables children to access treatment.