

Safety from Domestic Violence: Using Evidence Based Practices to Keep Women Safe Red Deer Regional Consultation Summary

Regional Consultation Overview

- The Red Deer Regional Consultation was held on June 8th from 12:30 PM to 4:30 PM
- A total of 26 participants attended the consultation
- Participants represented:
 - Alberta Health Services
 - Alberta Justice and Solicitor General - Central Alberta Protection Order Program
 - Alberta Justice and Solicitor General - Rocky & District Victim Services
 - Alberta Justice and Solicitor General - Wetaskiwin Victim Services
 - Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association
 - Central Alberta Refugee Effort
 - Central Alberta Sexual Assault Centre
 - Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter
 - City of Red Deer
 - Domestic and Relationship Violence Initiative Committee
 - Golden Circle for the Coordinated Community Response
 - Human Services (Child and Family Services)
 - Human Services (Housing and Homeless Supports)
 - Mountain Rose Women's Shelter
 - Outreach Centre, Maskwacis
 - Ermineskin Women's Shelter
 - Red Deer City Police (DV Unit)
 - Red Deer Housing Team

Common Themes

Relationships, Partnerships and Community Collaboration

Consultation participants described as a critical priority the need to strengthen community collaboration and develop close relationships and networking. They talked about how the effectiveness of community collaboration has fluctuated over the past several years and highlighted the need to rebuild partnerships so that they can be sustainable over the long-term. The participants listed a number of elements that needed to be in place in order for the community to move forward in a collaborative manner:

- Developing policies and procedures and outlining responsibilities to guide the work of the collaborative and the work of management and staff of participating organizations to sustain the collaborative; this is particularly important in the face of high staff turn-over and change-prone environment in both government and the non-profit sector.
- Building leadership that seeks to establish a collective mindset across the organizations with the goal of building a sustainable and effective collaboration. Tensions can build and the existence of egos can destroy collaboration; keeping an engaged, shared commitment would strengthen a living, breathing collaborative spirit.
- Potentially establishing a backbone organization could help in ensuring that the collaboration continues despite changes in policy or in people;

- Ensuring that all organizations working with women and children fleeing domestic violence are included as active partners in the community collaborative, in particular women's organizations, the Crown, police, and the government organizations.
- Improving information sharing between and within agencies;
- Viewing women's safety as a community responsibility, with each organization having a clear understanding of their unique role in achieving it;
- Developing collaborative initiatives in a way that they both address the gaps and optimize available resources .

Community members also highlighted the need for larger systems to provide support to the community in its efforts to build and sustain collaborative efforts. Without support from the government, funders and policy makers, communities do not have the capacity and resources to continue to work together. They provided the following suggestions for these systems:

- Standardize provincial level policies and support their implementation;
- Look beyond micro (community-based) collaboration and work to establish macro collaboration that engages systems with mandates to enhance safety for women fleeing domestic violence;
- Develop flexible funding and reporting requirements, rather than using a "one size fits all" approach, to allow for more collaboration to occur between community as well as larger systems –building inclusiveness and diminishing the drain on organizational resources.

Domestic Violence Education and Awareness: Engagement of men and boys

Participants described domestic violence as everyone's problem, requiring engagement of women and girls as well as men and boys. Although a large majority of victims who are impacted by domestic violence are women, preventing domestic violence requires the engagement of men and boys as well as the community as a whole. They raised a number of important questions they thought the community needs to address in order to educate men and boys about their role in the prevention of violence against women:

- As a community, how do we create a new standard such that young boys who grow up with abusive fathers do not continue the cycle of violence?
- Why do women consistently outnumber males as staff in sectors that work to address domestic violence and enhance women's safety?
- How do we enhance community understanding of how boys are socialized into men and the impact of this socialization on violence against women?

Women Centred Services

Participants spoke to the importance of gendered analysis, and how it can help the community become more effective in enhancing women's safety. They acknowledged that infusion of a gendered perspective requires a cultural shift within the community, and increased focus across all types of services on root causes of domestic violence, including supports for women and treatment programs for men. Ultimately, there is a need to do a better job in protecting women and in turn, change the culture that perpetuates violence against women.

Wrap Around, Client Centred Services

Community members understand how trauma that results from exposure to domestic violence impacts women's ability to navigate systems and access services they need. Often, women do not have the capacity to connect with the right organizations and are, therefore, reliant on agency staff to help them navigate and understand the different services available. The agency staff in turn, encounter service

gaps and barriers, particularly when working with housing organizations, Child and Family Services, AISH, Victims Services, and Alberta Works. Lack of financial resources is a major challenge in accessing housing as well as obtaining proper identification. Helping women to appeal refusals for access to services is another significant barrier since it can take months to process while women usually have a limited amount of time in which services can be delivered. These are a few examples of barriers that need to be addressed in order for the region to provide the wrap around services and help women need to transition to stability. In general, services and policies have to be in place that are sufficiently flexible to support individual women's needs.

Legal and Justice System

Use of Emergency Protection Orders (EPO) was raised as one important issue associated with the involvement of the legal and justice system in keeping women safe. Specifically, participants talked about how EPOs are helpful in removing the abuser from the home but do not always prevent the abuser from violating the order and harming the victim. More cross-system collaboration supported by additional resources and clear policies is required to protect these women.

Culturally Sensitive and Inclusive Practices for Indigenous Women

Intentional and meaningful relationships have been developed in the region between community organizations and Indigenous communities. These relationships helped cultivate opportunities to learn from each other and identify barriers that impact Indigenous women's capacity to reach out for help.

These barriers were as follows:

- The provincial and federal funding boundaries and allocation criteria create many challenges for on-reserve agencies in terms of program availability and sustainability – on reserve shelters not receiving an increase in federal funding for over 8 years provided as one example;
- Despite demonstrating success in enhancing the lives of women and their children experiencing domestic violence, several pilot on-reserve programs did not receive on-going funding support;
- Many of the services provided on reserves are unpaid, delivered as extra work by agency staff or by volunteers;
- Sustainability of several existing programs is uncertain, because of limited resources and staff burn-out.

Culturally Sensitive and Inclusive Practices for Newcomer Women and Vulnerable Groups

An increasingly diverse newcomer population has posed challenges for the region in developing cultural competency, working in different languages, ensuring confidentiality, reducing isolation, and in general, improving service access for newcomer women. Participants again emphasized the importance of flexibility in working with all women and particularly newcomer women. For example, while empowerment-based approaches are considered as a best practice in supporting women, it can be detrimental for newcomer women, resulting in community isolation and increased risk for victimization and challenging sustainability of new behaviours that contradict cultural norms. Community members suggested it might be beneficial to provide workshops for men, discussing how women are treated in this country and what constitutes a crime; in this way, western cultural expectations can be introduced, and positive and safe conversations with regards to these expectations can be encouraged.

Participants also highlighted significant gaps in services that exist for LGBTQ community as well as women who live in rural and remote locations.