

**Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs
Regional Teleconferences Report**

July 2009

1. OVERVIEW

1.1 About STV Counselling programs

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development (MHSD) funds 102 Stopping the Violence (STV) Counselling programs in communities across BC. These programs provide essential counselling and support, including information, referrals and—in some cases—system liaison services, to women who have experienced sexual assault, violence in relationships and/or childhood abuse.

1.2 About EVA BC

The Ending Violence Association of British Columbia (EVA BC) is a non-profit umbrella organization that supports over 200 provincially funded anti-violence programs across BC, including:

- STV Counselling programs,
- STV Outreach programs,
- Community-Based Victim Assistance (CBVA) programs,
- Sexual Assault/Woman Assault Centres.

Our mandate includes educating the government, public and other stakeholders on the needs of survivors of violence and the programs that serve them; fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination within and among communities; and supporting frontline workers and administrators from the programs we serve.

As part of our program support function, we:

- respond to individual program queries for information, support and referrals through our toll-free line,
- manage and contribute to seven listservs that link programs and systems across the province,
- publish a tri-annual newsletter,
- maintain a website with events, news bulletins, publications and resources,
- facilitate annual regional teleconference calls,
- organize training for frontline workers,
- develop tools and resources for frontline service providers,
- monitor, analyze and respond to issues that affect women and children's safety,
- interpret and demystify policy, legislation and case law that affect programs and the women they serve,
- develop program service standards and best practices,
- communicate program needs and concerns to government and other stakeholders.

1.3 About this report

In March 2009, EVA BC facilitated five teleconference calls with STV counsellors from across BC. This report summarizes the discussion and outcomes from these calls. In section 2, we explain the purpose and structure of the annual regional teleconference calls. Section 3 summarizes recent EVA BC activities. In section 4, we take a closer look at priority concerns raised by STV counsellors and recommend measures to address them.

2. ANNUAL REGIONAL TELECONFERENCE CALLS

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the regional teleconference calls is to:

- provide a forum for STV counsellors to network and exchange ideas,
- identify the training and resource needs of STV Counselling programs and counsellors,
- discuss challenges faced by survivors of violence, largely women and children,
- discuss challenges faced by STV Counselling programs and counsellors,
- identify gaps in policies, legislation and system responses,
- brainstorm ways to address these issues,
- share successes.

This report is a snapshot of what was discussed during the teleconference calls. Although there was insufficient time for counsellors to articulate each and every issue, this document provides the most pertinent information on the most critical issues and EVA BC's recommendations for addressing them.

2.2 Participants & structure

In all, 44 counsellors from 39 programs participated in this year's teleconference calls. By grouping counsellors from a number of regions together on each of the five calls, we were able to promote lively discussion and networking opportunities while providing a forum for region-specific concerns.

Table 1: 2009 STV Counselling teleconference call participants

April 21, 2009	
Region 1: North Vancouver Island Region 2: South Vancouver Island Region 11: North East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campbell River & North Island Transition House Society • Chetwynd Women's Resource Society • Comox Transition Society • Cowichan Women Against Violence Society • DiverseCity Community Resources Society <i>(exception: Region 4)</i> • Golden Family Centre Society* • Island Women Against Violence • Mackenzie Counselling Services Society • North Island Crisis and Counselling Centre • Powell River & Region Transition House Society • South Peace Community Resources Society

April 22, 2009	
Region 3: Lower Mainland Region 4: Fraser Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burnaby Family Life Institute • Castlegar & District Community Services (<i>exception: Region 8</i>) • Deltassist Family and Community Services Society* • Sea to Sky Community Services Society • Sunshine Coast Community Services Society • Surrey Women's Centre* • Tri-City Women's Resource Society • Vancouver & Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services Society*
April 23, 2009	
Region 5: Interior Region 6: Okanagan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 Mile House & District Women's Centre Society • Community Connections (Revelstoke) Society • Kelowna Family Centre • Shuswap Area Family Emergency (SAFE) Society • South Okanagan Victim Assistance Society • Vernon Women's Transition House Society • Yellowhead Community Services
April 28, 2009	
Region 7: East Kootenays Region 8: West Kootenays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundary Family & Individual Services Society • Fernie Women's Resource and Drop-In Centre • Summit Community Services Society • Trail Family & Individual Resource Centre • Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) (<i>exception: Region 3</i>)*
April 30, 2009	
Region 9: North West Region 10: North Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberni Community and Women's Services Society • Haida Gwaii Society for Community Peace • North Coast Transition Society • North Peace Community Resources Society • Prince George & District Elizabeth Fry Society • Queen Charlotte Islands Women's Society • Tamitik Status of Women Association • Tumbler Ridge Counselling Services

* Two participants from the agency.

3. EVA BC UPDATES

Teleconference call participants were provided with the following brief updates on key EVA BC initiatives.

3.1 Immigrant women project

Thanks to funding from the Law Foundation of British Columbia, EVA BC has embarked on a three-year project to identify, analyze and undertake actions to address serious policy gaps and problems that compromise the safety of refugee and immigrant women and women without immigration status who experience violence.

For the initial phase of the project, EVA BC conducted a literature review of change-making initiatives around the world that led to policy changes. In February and March 2009, we conducted a number of focus groups with anti-violence workers, English language teachers and settlement workers in Prince George, Victoria, Kelowna and Vancouver to identify key policy issues. The next step involves developing a series of backgrounders on these issues and creating an action plan for policy changes to increase safety.

3.2 Peer anti-violence education (PAVE) project

Following our release of *Freedom from Violence: Tools for Working with Trauma, Mental Health and Substance Use*, residents and service providers in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DTEs) requested an abbreviated version tailored to working with women with substance use and mental health issues. We are in the process of developing a DVD and accompanying workbook aimed at promoting safety planning and encouraging conversations about safety among marginalized women. The customized toolkit is scheduled for release in Summer 2009. The PAVE project is funded by the Canadian Women's Foundation and the Vancouver Foundation.

3.3 Pre-election package

British Columbians headed to the polls on May 12, 2009. In an effort to help anti-violence programs focus public attention and determine where candidates and parties stand on issues related to violence against women and children, EVA BC prepared a pre-election package containing background information and sample questions. Programs were encouraged to raise these issues at all candidates meetings or town halls and in their local newspapers and/or direct letters to candidates.

3.4 2009 annual training forum

Every November, EVA BC hosts a training forum featuring keynote speakers and workshops on relevant issues for anti-violence workers across BC. Last year's theme of risk assessment and safety planning was identified based on program feedback during the annual teleconference calls. This year's training forum is scheduled for November 19-20, with the Annual General Meeting to follow on November 21, 2009. Theme to be determined with input from programs during the teleconference calls.

3.5 STV Counselling core training

We are planning two offerings of STV Counselling core training module 4 in the 2009/10 fiscal year. STV counsellors who have not completed modules 1-3 may still be eligible to take module 4. Please contact Habiba Rashid at evabc@endingviolence.org for more information.

3.6 New CCWS core training

Research and experience shows that a coordinated cross-sectoral response increases the safety of women and children. For the past several years, EVA BC's Community

Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) program has offered Community Leadership Training to help improve cross-sector coordination in communities across BC. In the interest of offering new learning opportunities for individuals involved in cross-sectoral work, CCWS is developing an additional core training module and related resources. The new three-day module will focus on information sharing, risk assessment and safety planning through a multi-sectoral lens. Additional details will be announced in early 2010.

3.7 Child protection worker curriculum

EVA BC, in partnership with the BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre and the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses, has developed new training for child protection workers who are dealing with relationship violence cases. The new curriculum, which builds on guidelines developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Children and Family Development, teaches child protection workers how to support—not penalize—women who are unable to protect their children due to relationship violence. Obtaining funding to provide the training to child protection workers is our first priority.

3.8 Women being mistakenly arrested

EVA BC has made a number of key strides forward since the issue of women being mistakenly arrested in instances of relationship violence was first raised. Through two member surveys, we identified a number of cases in communities across BC where we believe women were mistakenly arrested. We presented our concerns to the RCMP "E" Division Management Committee in June 2008 and provided details of 18 cases to senior operational managers at RCMP "E" Division in December 2008.

In October, RCMP "E" Division distributed a memo to each District Officer advising them to remind their Detachment Commanders of the Violence in Relationships Policy and referring them to the Primary Aggressor Policy. In January 2009, RCMP "E" Division reported back on many of the specific cases presented. Most recently, RCMP "E" Division agreed to include the Safety Issues Protocol (SIP) in its Violence in Relationships Policy and to evaluate compliance with the Primary Aggressor Policy as part of its annual detachment audit process.

Communities where women continue to be arrested are urged to contact Regional Coordinators Gail Edinger and Michelle Novakowski, Executive Director Tracy Porteous or Program Manager Harjit Kaur with any new cases.

3.9 Gang violence

Over the past year, we have faced a barrage of media reports on escalating gang violence in BC and across Canada. While the spotlight focuses on gang violence, EVA BC wants to ensure that policymakers do not lose sight of the dire need for action in the area of violence against women and children.

Between 1997 and 2005, there were 107 spousal and intimate relationship homicides in BC alone. Invisible in these femicide studies are the number of domestic violence-related suicides, deaths of children and deaths of other bystanders, as well as the devastating, often life-long effects that sexual assault, child sexual abuse and violence in relationships leave behind.

Programs have indicated that gang violence is affecting both the needs of the women they serve and the safety of anti-violence workers. EVA BC continues to work closely with Ministry contacts to identify solutions, including the need to increase supports to programs.

4. PROGRAM CONCERNS & EVA BC RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Worker safety

Many counsellors expressed concerns about their safety at home, in the office and on the road when providing services to clients with high-risk ex-partners.

Status

A number of counsellors reported being threatened, assaulted or stalked as a direct result of their work. Nearly all counsellors reported increased unease regarding their personal safety.

Some programs have implemented enhanced safety measures on their own accord, as a requirement of an accreditation process or in response to BC's Wayne's Law (2007).

Examples include:

- panic buttons and alarm systems,
- barred windows and locked doors,
- visitor check-in,
- business cards with counsellors' first names only,
- policies against visiting clients' homes, initiating contact in social situations, working alone in the evening and speaking with media.

Others lack adequate financial resources for anything but basic measures. Several counsellors pointed out the challenge of implementing safety measures and still accommodating drop-in clients.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development provide funding for measures that enhance the safety of STV counsellors, including the installation of panic buttons in all program offices.

Organizations that employ STV counsellors develop policies for worker safety and establish health and safety protocols.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development provide funding for EVA BC to compile a worker safety guide and checklist for STV counsellors based on best practices in communities across BC.

Before assisting new clients, STV counsellors complete a safety checklist to identify and evaluate risks to the worker.

4.2 Worker well-being

STV counsellors are at high risk for vicarious trauma as a result of daily exposure to sexual and domestic violence and child abuse. In order to ensure their personal well-being, frontline workers need access to independent clinical supervision/case consultation of their choosing for the purpose of debriefing.

Status

STV Counselling programs receive funding to provide their counsellors with clinical supervision/case consultation. Not all counsellors were aware of the amount budgeted for this service, but \$2,500 per FTE per year is the amount provided by the Ministry of Housing and Social Development. Policies on the acceptable use and carryover of funds from year to year seem to vary among agencies. Some counsellors are able to choose their supervisor, while others are not.

Programs in rural communities face the challenge of finding qualified individuals to provide clinical supervision/case consultation locally. Counsellors in some communities rely on telephone support while others pool their resources to hold in-person group sessions less frequently.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development incorporate clinical supervision/case consultation provisions that permit counsellors to choose their own provider into STV Counselling contracts.

EVA BC distribute a list of people across BC who can provide clinical supervision/case consultation for STV counsellors.

STV counsellors include their comments and concerns related to clinical supervision/case consultation with their statistical reports to the Ministry of Housing and Social Development.

4.3 Level of counselling

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development's STV Counselling contracts authorize counsellors to provide "mid-range" counselling, but do not define this term anywhere. This ambiguity raises questions concerning liability insurance coverage and reveals the need for program standards and/or best practices that fully articulate what the Ministry of Housing and Social Development expects of programs.

Status

Under the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU), the vast majority of STV counsellors fall under Grid 14. A few agencies have negotiated their STV counsellors to be classified as clinical counsellors under Grid 16, believing that clients would benefit from clinical counselling. Agencies with STV counsellors under Grid 16 have been forced to reduce hours of work and/or eventually return to the Grid 14 pay scale because the increased funding required has not been provided.

EVA BC has written a letter to the Ministry of Housing and Social Development to request clarification on the definitions of "mid-range" and "clinical" counselling and to initiate a discussion on the level of counselling actually required by clients of STV counsellors. A meeting is scheduled for early July 2009. Existing contracts are in effect until June 2010.

Recommendation

EVA BC work with the Ministry of Housing and Social Development to identify the level of counselling required by clients, to ensure that STV Counselling contracts allow counsellors to provide this support, and to ensure that the government's risk management insurance policy will cover services being provided by STV Counselling programs.

4.4 Clients under 19 years of age

STV counsellors reported receiving referrals for women under 19 years of age and wanted to hear how other agencies deal with these clients.

Status

Statistics Canada reports that 54% of female victims of sexual assault in 2000 were under 18 (20% were under age 12 and 34% were between the ages of 12 and 17). Although STV Counselling programs, Transition Houses and Children Who Witness Abuse programs were expanded in 2005 (the first real increase in programming and service delivery since 1992), there are still no specialized counselling services for girls between the ages of 13 and 18.

The STV Counselling contract limits program services to BC women who are “nineteen (19) years of age or older; or where no other suitable services are available, are leading an adult lifestyle and are under 19 years of age”.¹ The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General provides limited emotional and justice system support through its Victim Services Program and the Ministry of Children and Family Development funds services aimed specifically at helping younger children who have been sexually abused. Neither the Children Who Witness Abuse nor the Sexual Abuse Intervention programs provide age-appropriate services for young women who want to be treated as adults.

EVA BC strongly believes that girls who experience sexual trauma and/or relationship violence at a young age need access to specialized counselling and that—with increased funding and expanded training—STV Counselling programs would be well placed to provide these services.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development expand the STV Counselling program mandate to include counselling services for young women between the ages of 13 and 18 who were sexually abused when they were younger, have been sexually assaulted, or are in abusive relationships.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development increase funding to STV Counselling programs to cover the additional training and service delivery costs associated with providing counselling to these young women.

4.5 Male clients

Counsellors were interested in hearing other agencies’ experiences with providing services to male clients who have a history of abuse (e.g., survivors of childhood abuse, perpetrators) and any special measures taken in situations where women and men receive counselling in the same building.

Status

There was confusion among programs regarding the services available to men with a history of abuse. Male victims can access community-based victim assistance through the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, but this does not include counselling. Male victims can also apply to the Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) to get access to counselling. However, STV counsellors expressed concern that, in most cases, a police report is necessary in order to receive compensation and benefits.

There was general consensus that provincial funding for men’s programs is needed as long as it does not jeopardize funding for women’s programs.

Recommendation

EVA BC develop a paper that outlines the organization’s position on working with men who have a history of abuse.

4.6 Victim services and the 2010 Olympics

Programs want to ensure that survivors of relationship violence and sexual assault are able to access the services they need before, during and after the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver.

¹ Sample STV Counselling contract with the Ministry of Housing and Social Development.

Status

The Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division (VSCPD) of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General struck a committee comprised of communities with Olympic sites and/or volunteer gathering areas. The group is currently estimating the additional resources that will be required to provide victim assistance services during the Olympic Games. Since the provincial government recently announced that funding would not be available for this purpose, VSCPD will be approaching the federal Department of Justice for support. The Ministry has also considered developing a multilingual website that would explain what to do and where to go in various situations.

Recommendations

EVA BC continue to liaise with VSCPD and disseminate updates through the STV Counselling listserv.

The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General ensure that funds are in place for victim services related to the 2010 Olympic Games. Approaching the Olympic Games without a heightened victim service response would be akin to not increasing security.

4.7 Caseloads

Many counsellors reported that their STV Counselling contract does not provide them with enough time to fill the needs of clients in their region, whether due to high demand, geography or the fact that many programs are only part-time.

In addition to counselling duties, certain agencies require their STV counsellors to organize community events and/or conduct community education. Some counsellors are also facing an increased administrative burden (e.g., related to accreditation).

Status

The time allocated to each client varies among agencies, but 1-1.5 hours is a common appointment length. Clients often start with weekly visits and then come less regularly as they progress over time; some even take natural breaks from their counselling and return later on. Certain agencies have a policy of working with clients for up to one year, at which point individuals can either request an extension if they are in crisis or go back on the waitlist.

It is common for counsellors to schedule time between appointments for paperwork and file notes and in case a client needs an extended session. On average, programs reported seeing between four and five clients per day.

Nearly all programs reported an increase in their caseload, resulting in some agencies starting waitlists and others lengthening their existing waitlists to as long as one year.

Counsellors suggested the following reasons for their increased caseload:

- the economic situation,
- changes to services at other agencies (e.g., mental health, victim services),
- an increase in self-referrals and referrals from other agencies,
- a desire for one-on-one counselling from counsellors with a feminist perspective who are willing to work with clients “where they’re at”.

Recommendations

STV Counselling programs continue to communicate their caseload and waitlist situation in program reports to the Ministry of Housing and Social Development and in communications with their local Member of the Legislative Assembly.

STV Counselling programs collaborate with other community service providers to delineate roles and create protocols to coordinate services.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development increase the number of STV Counselling hours in communities with significant caseloads, waitlists or other service pressures.

4.8 Waitlist management and no-shows

Counsellors were interested in hearing if, and how, other agencies prioritize clients in a waitlist situation. They also expressed concern regarding the impact of “no-shows” both on their ability to serve other clients and on their statistical reports to the Ministry of Housing and Social Development.

Status

Prioritization practices vary considerably among agencies. Some deal with clients on a first-come, first-served basis. Others prioritize cases based on any number of factors (e.g., multiple calls from the client, referrals from other agencies, availability of alternative supports, nature of violence, risk of client suicide).

Other practices include:

- separate intake processes for the waitlist and program,
- single counselling sessions for clients who cannot wait,
- drop-in or group support,
- limiting the number and/or length of sessions with each client (limits vary among agencies),
- referring to other agencies if available and applicable.

Some programs have no-show policies that they share with the client at the outset (e.g., two no shows and the client is put on a waitlist). Such policies, however, are not common, as many clients are already marginalized and may suffer memory loss or have dissociative tendencies. Other counsellors try to work around no-shows, booking clients that regularly don't show at the end of the day and using the time to catch up on paperwork.

Recommendation

Given the nature of the service being provided (i.e., trauma-based counselling), the Ministry of Housing and Social Development avoid making assumptions about no-shows, STV counsellors are already hard-pressed to fulfill their accountability requirements to the Ministry, so time will never be wasted. In addition, a no-show client will usually involve follow-up phone calls to re-book, which often results in support services being provided over the phone.

4.9 Accreditation

Programs spoke about the onerous nature of Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Services (CARP) and Council on Accreditation (COA) accreditation processes and expressed concern about certain philosophies, policies and procedures required for accreditation that may conflict with their roles and responsibilities as counsellors.

Status

Initial accreditation from the COA currently costs 10,000 USD. Renewal, while less expensive than initial accreditation, requires agencies to implement the most recent standards, which can be a time-consuming process. Even when accreditation applications are managed by an administrator or third party, counsellors must still provide information on how work is done within the agency.

One type of accreditation requires that client intake be completed within three counselling sessions. Women often want to tell their story over multiple sessions, uninterrupted, and many are not ready to begin telling their story right away. When the standards of accreditation bodies contradict the roles and responsibilities of STV counsellors, agencies are put in a difficult and confusing position.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development review COA and CARP accreditation standards, for discrepancies with the role of STV counsellors and work with COA and CARP to resolve these issues.

4.10 Police response

Counsellors expressed concern regarding the police response to women who have experienced violence in certain communities.

Status

Counsellors reported the following examples of concern:

- Instead of determining if charges should be laid in a relationship violence case, police are asking survivors whether or not they wish to press charges.
- Police are not providing clients with case numbers or case details.
- Clients are being mistakenly arrested.

Programs are encouraged to contact our Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) program if they require a copy of the relevant RCMP policy or assistance in working with police in their communities.

Recommendations

STV Counselling programs continue to contact EVA BC's Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) program with specific concerns about the police response in their communities.

STV Counselling programs remind police in their communities that it is not up to women to make decisions about charges.

EVA BC continue to work closely with RCMP "E" Division to follow up on individual cases of women being mistakenly arrested.

RCMP "E" Division monitor the issue of women being mistakenly arrested closely to ensure that the primary aggressor assessment is consistently applied in all relationship violence cases.

4.11 Multilingual service

It is crucial that women who have experienced violence have access to support services in their first language.

Counsellors specifically mentioned that police need to ensure that women have the opportunity to provide police statements in their first language, instead of relying on another family member who can speak English to provide an account and/or interpret.

Status

This was one of the issues identified during consultations for EVA BC's three-year Immigrant Women Project, funded by the Law Foundation and conducted in partnership with CCWS, MOSAIC and Vancouver Lower Mainland Support Services. Phase 3 of the project, now

underway, will see EVA BC seek policy changes in this area. In the meantime, counsellors were encouraged to access language interpretation support through VictimLINK. This service is available 24/7 via telephone.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development provide funding to enable STV Counselling programs to access language interpretation services in their communities.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development develop a cross-Ministry protocol and program to ensure language interpretation services are available in all BC communities.

Ongoing cultural competence training be required for police, Legal Services Society intake workers, child protection workers, private bar lawyers, judges and others who come into contact with women who have experienced violence.

4.12 Clients who are immigrant, refugee or without immigration status

Uncertainty around a women's immigration status makes it difficult for her to access services such as income assistance or subsidized housing and job training programs. This treatment, in turn, perpetuates larger issues such as homelessness or women staying in abusive relationships.

Status

Programs reported that clients who leave their sponsors have difficulty accessing financial assistance, affordable housing and other services. Even if successful in leaving an abusive sponsor, any support women receive may be detrimental to their application for immigration on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

Immigrant women who have been sponsored to Canada and then face domestic abuse are placed in a precarious situation if they choose to leave. While they may claim welfare to support themselves their receipt of welfare makes them ineligible to sponsor a family member(s) in the future. For example, they are unable to sponsor their parents unless they first pay back the welfare monies paid to them. Any application to sponsor without paying back these monies will be refused. The women do have the ability to appeal such a refusal to the Immigration Appeal Division (the "IAD"), however, this is time consuming and costly. For many immigrant women who are alone in Canada, the inability to sponsor their family from abroad for support makes it difficult for them to move forward. In fact, this hurdle leads to many women staying in, or returning to, abusive relationships.

Women acting as sponsors for their spouse to immigrate to Canada, make a commitment to assume financial responsibility for three years for that spouse. In fact, they are required to sign off on a contractual undertaking between themselves and the federal government and its provincial assignees to provide such support in order for their sponsorship to be processed. If they fail to provide such support and the sponsoree goes on welfare, the sponsor is liable to repay back those monies—the "sponsorship debt."

These were just some of the issues identified during consultations for EVA BC's three-year Immigrant Women Project, funded by the Law Foundation and conducted in partnership with CCWS, MOSAIC and Vancouver Lower Mainland Support Services. Phase 3 of the project, now underway, will see EVA BC seek policy changes in this area.

Recommendations

EVA BC meet with the Ministry of Housing and Social Development to determine its current policy regarding the provision of services to abused women with or without status. (Note: It is our understanding that because STV Counselling programs are not statutory programs, they can provide services to abused women with or without status.)

The federal government ensure that its immigration laws, regulations and policies are applied, first and foremost, with the aim of keeping women safe.

In the spirit of international human rights codes and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the federal government protect any woman that is abused in Canada.

The federal government ensure that its laws, regulations and policies do not re-victimize women.

4.13 Clients who are no longer in crisis

Counsellors were interested in learning how others work with clients who are no longer in crisis.

Status

Counsellors help women build self-confidence and teach them how to recognize and nurture healthy relationships, sometimes using the counsellor-client interaction as a model. It is crucial that clients understand that they don't need to be in crisis in order to have an ongoing relationship with their counsellor.

Recommendation

Counsellors continue to refer to EVA BC's *Best Practices Manual for STV Counselling Programs* and to identify and/or distribute useful resources through the STV Counselling listserv.

4.14 Clients with mental health and/or substance use issues

Many counsellors do not feel qualified to work with clients with severe mental health and/or substance use issues. Specific questions included:

- Should I be working with people with severe mental health and/or substance use problems?
- Is it unethical to require that clients take their prescription medication as a condition of counselling?
- Is it ethical to refer someone to a private practice more than an hour away?
- Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is not covered under "mid-range counselling", but I think it would be really helpful for my client. What are my options?

At the same time, counsellors expressed concern that referring clients with mental health diagnoses to mental health workers would leave them without a critical trauma-based counselling component.

Status

STV Counselling and Community-Based Victim Assistance programs first raised this issue several years ago. More and more counsellors are reporting being referred clients from mental health workers. Many agencies lack protocols for coordinating with mental health and drug and alcohol workers on these cases and some do not even have these services in their communities.

EVA BC responded by hosting the 2007 training forum entitled “Freedom from Violence: Navigating the Intersections of Trauma, Mental Health and Substance Use”. We also developed the *Freedom from Violence* Toolkit in November 2007 and a new STV Counselling core training module on violence, mental health and substance use, which was offered for the first time in March 2009.

So far, the response has been very positive. Counsellors reported that the training will help them be more collaborative with these systems and will raise their credibility with other service providers and emergency personnel. Some agencies expressed concern that, by offering this fourth module, EVA BC is encouraging referrals from mental health workers by creating an expectation that STV counsellors will offer completely integrated services. EVA BC created module 4 to acknowledge and support counsellors who are already doing this work and not to suggest that counsellors should take on more work in this area. Moreover, since STV counsellors are the experts in BC regarding counselling related to sexual and domestic violence, it only seems fitting that they have the tools required to see all women.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development work with EVA BC to improve information sharing and collaboration with mental health and drug and alcohol programs.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development continue to provide funding for STV counsellor training on this difficult and complex area of their work.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development ensure adequate funding and compensation is available for STV counsellors in recognition of the fact that they are provincial experts in this line of work.

4.15 Clients with strong religious beliefs

Counsellors were interested in learning how others deal with clients whose strong religious beliefs may be negatively affecting their health (e.g., with respect to child bearing).

Status

A small booklet by Marie M. Fortune called *Keeping the Faith: Guidance for Christian Women Facing Abuse* was recommended as a resource. Counsellors also discussed other venues for liaising with religious communities, including providing information during marriage counselling and inviting religious leaders to attend EVA BC’s Annual Training Forum.

Recommendation

EVA BC develop training materials on tools and competencies for working across faiths.

4.16 Clients with children

Counsellors noted that women staying in shelters often cannot send their children to school.

Status

In certain communities, the shelter and local school board have arranged for “home schooling” within the shelter. Some women are concerned that the instruction provided is too limited.

Recommendation

EVA BC work with the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses to identify ways of ensuring that the children of women staying in shelters have access to school and can maintain their regular activities.

4.17 Community coordination

Programs discussed the challenges associated with setting up and maintaining Violence Against Women in Relationships (VAWIR) Coordination Committees and, more generally, community coordination.

Status

Community coordination experiences vary considerably among communities. Counsellors are regularly told that children and youth, not women, are the priority of systems in their communities.

A number of agencies noted the importance of having individuals with a passion and/or keen interest in the issues, but also the challenge of maintaining momentum when these people move on. Some counsellors encouraged others to start by building informal networks (e.g., discussing issues over breakfast, presenting to other local agencies on the STV Counselling program's work).

CCWS continues to work with individual communities to develop new models and improve existing models of cross-sector coordination on violence against women. Programs are encouraged to contact CCWS for support by telephone or email, or to arrange in-person strategic planning workshops, coordination initiative meetings or focus groups.

Recommendations

Police, Ministry of Children and Family Development workers, mental health workers and workers from other social services that respond to families receive ongoing training on the links between violence against children and teens and violence against women in relationships and be made aware that young women and girls are at highest risk for relationship violence and sexual assault.

The provincial government make participation on VAWIR Committees a valued part of every job description. Members of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Mental Health and Community Corrections should reach out to VAWIR initiatives and disseminate the knowledge they gain within their workplaces.

4.18 Affordable housing

The lack of social housing in BC means women fleeing abusive relationships have few affordable housing options once they leave a transition house.

Status

Programs reported that affordable housing, including rental accommodation, is increasingly rare in their communities. More and more women seem to be accessing second stage housing because it is affordable and not necessarily because they are ready to work through their issues.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development acknowledge that the lack of affordable housing is a barrier to women fleeing abusive relationships and a threat to their personal security and that of their children.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development increase funding for affordable housing in all BC communities, particularly small and rural communities.

4.19 Small community concerns

Programs spoke of the ongoing challenge of “overlapping boundaries” in smaller communities. One example raised was situations where family members of agency employees or counsellors need to access agency services.

Status

Counsellors tend to deal with these situations on a case-by-case basis, sometimes in consultation with other counsellors, weighing their potential conflict of interest against their ethical obligation to provide counselling.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development provide funding for EVA BC to develop a Code of Ethics for STV Counselling programs.