

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

July 2009

1. OVERVIEW

1.1 About STV Outreach programs

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development funds 69 Stopping the Violence (STV) Outreach programs in communities across BC. These programs respond to the needs of adult women and their dependent children who have experienced or are at risk of violence. STV Outreach workers provide supportive counselling, refer women to other community services, help them navigate the child protection and family court systems and provide local transportation and accompaniment as needed. They also work to raise awareness about the impacts of violence against women and the services available to survivors and to ensure a coordinated community response.

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 Outreach programs,
- STV Counselling programs,
- Community-Based Victim Assistance 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 three teleconference calls with STV Outreach workers 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 Outreach workers 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 Outreach workers to network and exchange ideas,
- identify the training and resource needs of STV Outreach workers and programs,
- discuss challenges faced by survivors of violence, largely women and children,
- discuss challenges faced by STV Outreach workers and programs,
- 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 workers 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, 24 workers from 19 programs participated in this year's teleconference calls. By grouping workers from a number of regions together on each of the three calls, we were able to promote lively discussion and networking opportunities while providing a forum for region-specific concerns.

Table 1: 2009 STV Outreach teleconference call participants

March 11, 2009	
Region 1: North Vancouver Island Region 2: South Vancouver Island Region 5: Interior Region 6: Okanagan Region 11: North East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Axis Family Resources (<i>exception: Region 10</i>) • Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society • Kamloops Community YMCA/YWCA* • Laichwiltach Family Life Society • Nelson Community Services Centre • North Island Crisis and Counselling Centre • North Peace Community Resources Society • Shuswap Area Family Emergency (SAFE) Society
March 12, 2009	
Region 7: East Kootenays Region 8: West Kootenays Region 9: North West Region 10: North Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrow & Slocan Lakes Community Services • Boundary Family & Individual Services Society • Fernie Women's Resource and Drop-In Centre* • Golden Women's Resource Centre Society • Ksan House Society • North Coast Transition Society • Northern Society for Domestic Peace

March 19, 2009	
Region 3: Lower Mainland Region 4: Fraser Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cythera Transition House Society* • North Shore Crisis Services Society* • Sea to Sky Community Services Society • Sunshine Coast Community Services Society*

* 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 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 Outreach core training

In response to program requests, we developed and delivered two 12-day offerings of core training for STV Outreach workers last year. There are currently no funds available for this training in the 2009/10 fiscal year. We are monitoring demand, however, and hope to negotiate funding from the Ministry of Housing and Social Development for a full offering in the 2010/11 fiscal year.

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

Workers are increasingly accompanying clients to court and supervised access visits with children, monitoring child drop-off/pick-up and using personal vehicles in their day-to-day work with clients. As a result, they are more visible than ever to client's abusers. Workers serving rural and remote areas of the province face the additional risk of traveling to jurisdictions without cell phone service.

Status

One worker reported being assaulted in her office by a client's ex-partner and others indicated that they had been threatened as a direct result of their work. Nearly all workers 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, alarm systems, telephone check-in protocols and log books with phone numbers and addresses where workers can be reached. Others lack adequate financial resources for anything but basic measures.

A number of programs cautioned against mandating rigid worker safety requirements, noting that STV Outreach workers require a certain amount of flexibility in order to respond to women in crisis in a timely manner.

Recommendations

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

Organizations that employ STV Outreach workers 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 Outreach programs based on best practices in communities across BC.

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

4.2 Worker well-being

STV Outreach workers 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 should have access to independent clinical supervision/case consultation of their choosing for the purpose of debriefing.

Status

STV Counselling and Children Who Witness Abuse programs receive funding to provide their counsellors with clinical supervision/case consultation, but there is currently no equivalent provision for STV Outreach workers. We argue that, given the nature of their work, it would

be inequitable not to provide the same support to STV Outreach workers that is given to STV and Children Who Witness Abuse counsellors.

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

Recommendations

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

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

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development (a) incorporate clinical supervision/case consultation provisions that permit workers to choose their own provider into STV Outreach contracts; and (b) provide dedicated funding to support implementation.

4.3 Regional training

Programs noted that the majority of training opportunities are in Vancouver and that agency budgets do not always allow for workers to travel outside their communities. As a result, workers requested more regional training.

Status

EVA BC recognizes the time and cost burden of travel for programs outside the Lower Mainland and acknowledges the need for regional training.

We make every effort to offer training in regions where there is a critical mass to make it economically feasible. With only 62 STV Outreach programs across all of BC, it can be challenging to reach that number in any single region. One option is to offer training that appeals to multiple sectors. For example, in 2004, we offered family law training to Transition Houses as well as STV Counselling, Community-Based Victim Assistance and Police-Based Victim Assistance programs in 14 regions across BC.

Training is a challenging issue for both programs and the Ministry of Housing and Social Development. Each year, EVA BC receives funding for STV Counselling training. When the Ministry began funding STV Outreach programs in fiscal year 2004/05, this training budget remained unchanged. We received one-time funding for STV Outreach training in fiscal year 2008/09, but the need for an ongoing training budget for these programs has not been addressed.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development meet with EVA BC to negotiate a reasonable, fair and equitable training budget for STV Outreach programs.

4.4 Level of counselling

Workers are unclear as to the level of counselling they are mandated to provide to clients. Their contracts with the Ministry of Housing and Social Development refer to “supportive counselling”, but do not define this term anywhere.

Status

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.

Recommendations

EVA BC work with the Ministry of Housing and Social Development to identify the level of counselling required by clients and to ensure that STV Outreach contracts allow workers to provide this support.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development provide funding for EVA BC to develop a Best Practices Manual for STV Outreach programs.

4.5 Caseloads and waitlists

A number of programs reported that their STV Outreach 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.

Status

Some STV Outreach programs serve large geographical areas and lack alternative services to which clients can be referred. Many programs are funded for only 17 hours per week.

Recommendations

STV Outreach 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 Outreach 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 Outreach hours in communities with significant caseloads, waitlists or other service pressures.

4.6 Accreditation

Programs spoke about the onerous nature of the accreditation process and expressed concern about certain philosophies, policies and procedures required for accreditation that may conflict with their roles and responsibilities as STV Outreach workers.

Status

EVA BC's Records Management Guidelines, in keeping with BC's *Personal Information Protection Act*, recommend that only the information required to provide service is collected. The Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Services (CARP) and Council on Accreditation's (COA) documentation and records management requirements, on the other hand, mandate the collection of extensive information about clients on intake. The primary concern is that programs are highly vulnerable to having their files subpoenaed and any irrelevant information in these files could be used to attack clients' credibility.

EVA BC understands that accreditation requirements concerning records management can be waived on a case-by-case basis, but we believe that a sector-wide exemption would be more efficient.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development work with CARP and COA to allow anti-violence agencies seeking accreditation to replace the usual records management standards with EVA BC's Records Management Guidelines.

4.7 Referrals

Many STV Outreach programs rely on client referrals from other agencies and organizations in their communities.

Status

Programs reported varying degrees of success in receiving referrals. Workers noted the positive impact of public education on community awareness and service use. However, with so many programs being part-time, this creates other services pressures.

Workers also shared strategies for collaborating with other services, including sharing local crisis lines, having a centralized agency intake process and coordinating the distribution of program information in the community.

Recommendations

STV Outreach programs take measures to raise public awareness of their services by distributing printed materials, meeting with relevant community contacts (e.g., school counsellors) and participating in relevant community processes (e.g., local Violence Against Women in Relationships Coordination Committees).

STV Outreach programs meet with other frontline anti-violence workers in their communities to map out referral protocols with distinct roles for each service.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development and the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General develop an agreement that outlines referral expectations.

4.8 Multilingual service

It is crucial that women who have experienced violence have access to support services in their first language. One program identified the need for more Farsi-speaking workers, in particular, in their community.

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 the Community Coordination for Women's Safety program, 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, workers 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 Outreach 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.

4.9 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, any support they receive may prove detrimental to their application for immigration on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

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 the Community Coordination for Women's Safety program, 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 and the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance to determine their current policy regarding the provision of services to abused women with or without status.

EVA BC advocate to ministries an exception for abused women, that regardless of status they be provided with essential services to keep them safe.

4.10 Clients with mental health and/or substance use issues

Working with clients with mental health and/or substance use issues continues to present a number of challenges for STV Outreach programs. They are working to:

- understand that clients may not share everything about their mental health and substance use up front,
- be prepared for the physical, mental and emotional implications of mental health and substance use,
- deal with clients being late for appointments or failing to show up at all,
- know how to be supportive and coordinate effectively with mental health and other services.

Status

STV Counselling and Community-Based Victim Assistance programs first raised this issue several years ago. 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. We believe that a similar training module for STV Outreach workers could be developed cost-effectively and would be beneficial from a service quality standpoint.

One STV Outreach worker has found it useful to develop contracts with individual clients facing mental health and/or substance use issues outlining how they will work together.

Many programs expressed interest in training to guide them through this complex area of their work.

Recommendation

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development provide funding for EVA BC to develop and deliver a new STV Outreach core training module on violence, mental health and substance use, modeled on the STV Counselling core training module.

4.11 Access to family law legal support and advocacy

In 2002 and again in 2008, the provincial government significantly reduced funding for Legal Aid. The resulting cuts to services and the lack of lawyers willing to take on family law Legal Aid cases means that STV Outreach and other anti-violence workers are spending more and more time helping clients access Legal Aid and prepare to represent themselves in court.

Status

Workers report more women staying in abusive situations because they have no legal support to deal with custody battles.

In January 2004, EVA BC and BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses produced the *Family Law Resource Manual for Community-based Advocates Assisting Women Dealing with Violence Issues* with funding from Legal Services Society and the Ministry of Community Services, now the Ministry of Housing and Social Development (available at www.endingviolence.org/publications). Workers also have access to the Community Advocacy Support Line, Community Legal Assistance Society and Povnet. One particularly industrious STV Outreach worker has turned to the local law library and librarian for additional support on legal issues.

Although these resources provide useful information, they do not adequately equip workers to deal with the often complex legal needs of their clients. Experiences with local duty counsel vary considerably among communities, but generally fall short of meeting service needs.

Recommendations

STV Outreach programs continue to contact Legal Service Society's Community Advocacy Support Line with their family law legal questions.

STV Outreach programs continue to share legal information, resources and expertise using EVA BC's STV Outreach listserv and work together to support women who must travel outside their community or region to access court-related services.

EVA BC develop family law training for STV Outreach workers that supplements the legal content covered in the STV Outreach core training.

EVA BC arrange for a family law expert to "guest appear" on the STV Outreach listserv and post responses to questions from STV Outreach workers across BC.

EVA BC compile a list of family duty counsels in BC, distribute it to all STV Outreach programs and make it available on our website.

EVA BC meet with the Legal Services Society to discuss the concerns raised by STV Outreach workers regarding women's access to Legal Aid.

EVA BC work closely with West Coast Women's Legal Education and Action Fund and the Ministry of Attorney General to ensure women who have experienced violence have equal access to justice in BC.

EVA BC's Community Coordination for Women's Safety program, in collaboration with Legal Services Society: (a) develop a list of lawyers in BC who are willing to take on family law Legal Aid cases; and (b) negotiate support for the cross-regional representation of women in high-risk situations.

4.12 Legal system response

Programs are concerned about the legal system's treatment of women who have experienced violence.

Status

Workers reported cases of clients being treated poorly by Legal Services Society staff when accessing information and support services. We heard that many clients are turned down for Legal Aid the first time they apply and that women who have been charged with assault do not qualify for Legal Aid because a jail sentence is not likely.

Even if a woman does qualify for Legal Aid, many communities face a severe shortage of lawyers who are willing to take on their case or able to provide adequate service. Workers reported cases of women being contacted by their lawyer the day before their trial date and not being kept up to date on case developments. Certain communities also reported that the number of duty counsels, and the assistance they are able to provide at the courthouse, is inadequate. In some communities, perpetrators are purposely contacting as many family law lawyers as possible to create a conflict of interest that prevents the survivor from accessing these services.

Workers reported that information from criminal court is not shared with, or used in, family court (e.g., violence against women is not considered when determining custody of children). In some communities, the same judge presides over criminal and family law cases, sometimes both in the same day. There are, however, no provisions for family courts to consider criminal proceedings, level of risk, the existence of protective conditions or a history of violence. This leaves women and children vulnerable to re-victimization by the abusive partner.

In September 2007, EVA BC made a written submission as part of the Ministry of Attorney General's consultation on changes to BC's *Family Relations Act*.

Recommendations

Legal Aid intake staff, lawyers and judges receive specialized training to deal with relationship violence and/or sexual assault cases.

The provincial government, led by the Ministry of Housing and Social Development, study the possibility of allowing survivors of relationship violence and/or sexual assault to testify from a different room or from behind a screen in family court in order to avoid contact with the accused, similar to measures provided for in federal Bill C2, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Protection of Children and Other Vulnerable Persons).

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development work with the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to ensure that women who have experienced relationship violence and/or sexual assault have the right to refuse mediation with the perpetrator.

4.13 Other system responses

Several programs expressed concern about the police response to relationship violence cases in their communities. Examples cited included failure to take action when a “no-contact” order is breached and failure to notify survivors when offenders are released. Other programs expressed concern about how Crown and courts are handling breaches, especially those that occur with the consent of the survivor.

Status

In 2006, EVA BC’s Community Coordination for Women’s Safety (CCWS) program developed the Safety Issues Protocol in collaboration with RCMP “E” Division as a way for frontline workers who have concerns about police practices that affect women’s safety and who have exhausted local avenues of recourse to have their concerns addressed at the detachment level.

In 2008, CCWS collaborated to produce *Keeping Women Safe: Eight Critical Components of an Effective Justice Response to Domestic Violence*. This report contains a number of recommendations about bail, including the need for amendments to the federal *Criminal Code* that place the onus on the defense, instead of Crown, to demonstrate why an offender should be released.

Recommendations

All workers conduct risk assessment and safety planning with women who are dealing with abusive relationships. If action is required by a system and has not been taken, workers contact either EVA BC or CCWS for support.

STV Outreach programs contact CCWS Regional Coordinators to facilitate coordination with systems in their communities.

EVA BC push for *Criminal Code* amendments concerning protection order breaches in recognition of the fact that order breaches are a strong predictor of lethality.

The provincial government implement a bail safety project similar to the one recently created in Ontario.

The federal government amend the *Criminal Code* to include a “reverse onus” that requires the defense to demonstrate that there is no risk before an offender can be released.

4.14 Women being mistakenly arrested

Over the past few years, programs across BC have repeatedly alerted us to a growing trend of women being mistakenly arrested. EVA BC believes that the failure of attending police to apply the RCMP’s primary aggressor assessment is the underlying problem. The recent increase in women being mistakenly arrested coincides with a high rate of retirement among RCMP officers, which leads us to believe that new recruits may be inadequately trained on BC policies such as the primary aggressor assessment.

Status

Workers across the province applauded EVA BC and RCMP “E” Division’s collaborative efforts to address this issue (see section 3.8 for an update on recent activities). It seems that the issue has improved in some communities, but several programs are still reporting new cases of women being mistakenly arrested. The majority of cases brought to EVA BC’s attention have been in RCMP jurisdictions. Workers are encouraged to report any cases—whether under RCMP or municipal police jurisdiction—so that collective action may be taken if necessary.

Recommendations

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 this issue to ensure that the primary aggressor assessment is consistently applied in all relationship violence cases.

4.15 Substance-facilitated sexual assault

Substances such as date rape drugs and alcohol are commonly used to perpetrate sexual assault.

Status

One program reported a recent increase in sexual assault cases involving date rape drugs, while others noted the ongoing and frequent use of alcohol. Schools are looking for resources to raise awareness about these issues among youth.

EVA BC developed a number of resources for outreach in schools as part of our 2006 For the Dignity of Women Project (available at www.endingviolence.org/public_education_tools). We also participated in an educational video on date rape drugs, which will be released shortly and used in select schools across North America.

Recommendations

STV Outreach programs continue to alert EVA BC of cases where date rape drugs and alcohol are used to perpetrate sexual assault.

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development work with the Ministry of Education to increase the amount of school time dedicated to violence prevention activities.

4.16 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 indicated that the move towards gentrification in some communities is resulting in condos being erected in place of social housing. Transition houses have made it clear that their beds are not a substitute for government-subsidized affordable housing.

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 across BC.