



**BC Association of Specialized Victim
Assistance & Counselling Programs**

**STOPPING THE VIOLENCE OUTREACH PROGRAMS
REGIONAL TELECONFERENCE CALLS REPORT**

June 2008

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 About Stopping the Violence Outreach Programs

There are 53 Stopping the Violence Outreach programs in BC, funded by the Ministry of Housing and Social Development. These programs respond to the needs of adult women and their dependent children who have experienced or are at risk of violence. These programs support women to identify and access the services they need. They provide supportive counselling, referral to other community services and assistance with systems such as child protection and family court. They also work to ensure that a coordinated response is in place in the community. Programs provide community education to raise awareness about the effects of violence against women and the services needed to address it. As needed, they provide local transportation, accompaniment and advocacy.

1.2 About The BCASVACP

The BC Association of Specialized Victim Assistance and Counselling Programs (BCASVACP) is a charitable, non-profit organization that provides services to over 200 funded anti-violence programs across British Columbia:

- Stopping the Violence Outreach Programs
- Stopping the Violence Counselling Programs
- Community-Based Victim Assistance Programs
- Sexual Assault/Woman Assault Centres

Our mandate is to provide support and training, undertake research, develop and distribute resources and tools, educate the public and government bodies on the needs of victims of violence and the programs that serve them, develop and maintain standards for the provision of service, and foster the development of cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration.

1.3 About This Report

This report provides an overview of some of the Association's work to support STV Outreach programs over the past year. Part 2 outlines some of the support that the Association provides to programs on an ongoing basis. Part 3 outlines the structure of the teleconference calls. Part 4 outlines the issues brought forward by STV Outreach workers during the regional teleconference calls facilitated by the Association in May 2008. Another report describing the many projects and initiatives that the Association engages in on behalf of these programs has been provided to the Ministry and is available each year at our Annual General Meeting.

PART 2: BCASVACP SUPPORT TO STV OUTREACH PROGRAMS

2.1 Ongoing Support

Referrals, Information and Support

The mandate of the Association is to provide support and training; undertake research; develop and distribute resources and tools; educate the public and government on the needs of victims of violence and the programs that serve them; develop and maintain standards for the provision of service and work to foster the development of relevant intersectoral initiatives across BC. Specifically our services are listed below:

Toll Free Support, Debriefing and Information to Programs

The Association responds to calls on a daily basis from programs that need assistance with various issues. We provide referrals, support and information and work to connect programs with each other. We support front-line workers, administrators and Board members across BC. Some of the areas that we commonly assist with include: what to do when files are subpoenaed; interventions where women are at risk and systems are not acting; developing records management policy; child protection issues and apprehensions; the impact of support on the Outreach worker; accreditation; general policy development; and program management.

Regional Support Conference Calls

Each year, the Association coordinates regional conference calls to provide support and information to front-line workers. These calls create opportunities for front-line workers to share concerns and issues, problem-solve with each other, and identify priorities that guide the Association in work that needs to be done to mitigate the issues that arise.

Monitoring and Mitigation of Issues

Throughout the year, we hear about problems in the field that need resolution. Sometimes these problems relate to women's safety, other times to policy issues in the various systems women deal with. The Association documents the issues, monitors them over time and works to solve the problems at the regional or provincial level. Examples of how we have done this include: the identification by programs of family law issues, such as the increase in demand for support to women, the lack of training the programs have in this area and the lack of Legal Aid supports in general. We monitored this issue over a two-year period, raised the concerns with LSS, received funding from LSS to develop and provide training and a resource manual for workers. LSS used the pressures being communicated by us and others to increase the support offered through Legal Aid.

Newsletter

Our tri-annual newsletter is a forum for members and other subscribers to share information, learn from other programs, and find out the latest news from the

Association and around the province. The newsletter always includes feature articles on issues currently affecting programs and provides an opportunity for the Ministry to communicate with the programs as well by making submissions.

Website

Our website provides 24-hour access to information and resources for program staff, volunteers and others in BC and beyond. All Association tools and resources are posted on this site so as to cut down on time consuming borrowing of resources or the need to print and distribute multiple copies per program.

Listserves

Programs have access to a listserv for their sector, where direct, on line dialogue can occur between programs. Having emails from the Association or other workers arrive to programs directly, this acts to reduce isolation, provide program staff with a place to ask questions regarding clients or other issues and is also a place where the Association posts information on time sensitive issues, such as changes to policy, and legislation that affect women who have been victimized.

Interpretation of Policy, Legislation and Case Law

We conduct research and analysis of policy, program and legislative issues that affect member programs and the people they serve. For people who have been victimized, the criminal and civil legal landscape is complex and ever changing, as is policy and programs related social assistance, employment programs, criminal injuries, etc. The Association conducts this analysis and distributes information about relevant legal and policy issues and new case law to programs to assist them in understanding complex areas of law and policy so they can pass this information on, easily, to their clients.

Assistance to Government

Throughout the year the Ministry requires input on issues from the field, therefore the Association often conducts focus groups, surveys and needs assessments so we can provide that information to the Ministry. In addition, we act to inform the Ministry of emerging issues and sensitivities so as to assist the Ministry in setting directions and making decisions. Over the past few years we have assisted the Ministry in the areas of the MIS Form review, the Self Monitoring Tool development, Technical equipment needs assessments and distribution of funds for computers, needs assessment re: gaps in services, community by community, STV Evaluation.

Education of Other Relevant Sectors

As a way to improve and advance the profile of STV Outreach Programs and other anti violence services, as well as to improve the response women receive from other sectors, the Association provides education to other sectors such as family law advocates and lawyers, police and police victim services, emergency managers, emergency social service coordinators, corrections, etc.

Training

The Association coordinates and delivers training for anti-violence programs which increases the consistency and quality of services, increases knowledge and skills, reduces isolation and creates networking opportunities. The identification of training needs is done through our annual regional teleconference calls as well as through our daily contact with programs. We apply for special funding to assist with the actual costs of delivery such as participant travel, accommodation and meals, facilitator fees, materials, etc. We have been successful in accessing funds from the Federal government to augment the training funds from the Ministry.

Resource Development

Guided by the feedback and priorities articulated by the programs, we develop resources and tools to assist service providers and to reduce duplication of efforts across BC. Examples of resources we have developed include the Records Management Guidelines, the STV Counselling Best Practices Guide, the Generic Policy Manual, and the Emergency Preparedness Workbook. We raise funds to pay for the development, printing and distribution costs of these larger resources but manage these development projects as part of our direct services to the programs.

2.2 BCASVACP Updates

STV Outreach workers on the teleconference calls were provided with a quick update on recent BCASVACP initiatives, including:

Third Party Reporting Training

The BCASVACP and Community Coordination for Women's Safety have worked with the RCMP, municipal police and the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to find ways that victims can get information to police without having to engage with the justice system. RCMP and municipal police in BC have now adopted a provincial protocol for third party reporting. Training was provided to Community-Based Victim Assistance Programs, Police-Based Victim Assistance Programs and police in May and June 2008. The next step is the development of written materials for other anti-violence programs.

The Renewing Resources For Safer Communities Project

This is an innovative partnership between the anti-violence sector and the resource sector (particularly forestry and mining) that aims to improve the resource sector's capacity to respond to violence in relationships. The BCASVACP and the Ending Relationship Abuse Society (ERA) have come together to manage this one-year violence prevention project, working in partnership with WorkSafe BC, the BC Federation of Labour, and the United Steelworkers Union.

Increasing The Safety Of Immigrant And Refugee Women Project

This 3-year project, funded by the Law Foundation will consult, analyze and undertake action to address serious policy gaps or problems that compromise the safety of refugee, immigrant and non-status women who experience violence.

Recent Publications

- Keeping Women Safe: Eight Critical Components Of An Effective Justice Response To Domestic Violence
- Men Speak Up: Ending Violence Together (DVD)
- Backgrounder: Dual Arrest
- Freedom From Violence: Tools For Working With Trauma, Mental Health And Substance Use
- Safe Choices Program's Healthy Relationships And Service Provider Curriculum

PART 3: OVERVIEW: REGIONAL TELECONFERENCE CALLS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In April 2008, the Association facilitated three teleconference calls with STV Outreach workers from across all regions in BC. The purpose of these calls is to provide an opportunity for STV Outreach workers to connect with each other and identify critical issues facing both survivors of violence and the programs themselves, and to strategize about ways to address these issues. Workers utilize this opportunity to identify gaps in policies, programs and systems response; to bring forward priorities for resource development work; to identify training needs; and to share information.

The BCASVACP provides support on a daily basis to front-line workers and administrators, STV Counselling Programs and Community-Based Victim Assistance Programs around the province. Since 2007 we have extended that same support to the STV Outreach programs, and are assisting them in clarifying their roles and coordinating their services with the other programs.

The conference calls were two hours in length and were conducted using an open-ended agenda format. Twenty-two workers from 21 programs participated. Numerous other STV Outreach workers were able to communicate their issues or concerns before or after the calls by phone/fax/email.

The participants created the agenda of each conference call by identifying the topics, concerns and issues related to their work prior to the teleconference by responding to our request for this input. Regions were combined per call to decrease the total number of conference calls. This structure made it possible for rural workers to continue staying connected to other rural programs to address the unique challenges faced by women in more isolated or remote communities.

STV Outreach workers in all regions of the province highlighted emerging trends, strategized together to find creative solutions to problems, reaffirmed their commitment to supporting women survivors of abuse, and offered each other support and encouragement.

This report is a snapshot of the issues, based on over six hours of discussions with STV Outreach workers from all regions of the province. Although there was insufficient time for workers to articulate in-depth analyses of every issue impacting survivors in their communities, the report provides a grounded overview of many of the current issues and a sound basis for the Association's recommendations. Addressing these recommendations, even by way of acknowledgement, would provide another opportunity for the Ministry to demonstrate their ongoing commitment to supporting victims of violence and the programs they fund.

3.2 Participating Agencies

The three Regional Teleconferences were conducted on April 15th, 16th and 17th, 2008.

April 15th, 2008: Region 1: North Vancouver Island, Region 2: South Vancouver Island

- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Central Okanagan Elizabeth Fry Society
- Fireweed Collective Society
- Island Women Against Violence
- North Island Crisis & Counselling Centre Society
- Robson Valley Home Support Society
- Shuswap Area Family Emergency (SAFE) Society
- Fernie Women's Centre

April 16th, 2008 Region 3: Lower Mainland, Region 4: Fraser Valley

- DiverseCity
- North Peace Community Resources Society
- North Shore Crisis Service Society
- Tri-City Women's Resource Society
- Women's Resource Society of the Fraser Valley

April 17th, 2008 Region 5: Interior, Region 6: Okanagan Region 7: East Kootenays, Region 8: West Kootenays, Region 9: North West, Region 10: North Central, Region 11: North East

- Boundary Family & Individual Services Society
- Family Resource Centre of Invermere
- Golden Women's Resource Centre Society
- Kootenai Community Centre Society
- North Coast Transition Society
- Omineca Safe Home Society
- Summit Community Services Society
- Sunshine Coast Community Services Society

PART 4: ISSUES & RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CALLS

4.1 Working Collaboratively With Other Anti-Violence Programs

Workers reported that they place a high priority on collaborating with their colleagues in other agencies to ensure that services are as effective and efficient as possible. Strong community connections can also mitigate the impact of vicarious trauma. Barriers to this collaboration include:

- Not enough staff hours to ensure that community coordination committees are active
- Lack of resources to share information between communities in rural areas
- The need for a referral protocol to follow
- The need for clarification of the differences between STV Outreach, STV Counselling and CBVAP—at the same time acknowledging that flexibility is one of the strengths of the STV Outreach programs
- Some workers are combining STV Outreach and STV Counselling in one position, and are having challenges with tracking all of their different tasks

Recommendation 1

We recommend an increase in funding to STV Outreach programs to enable them to increase their hours of work. This would enable STV Outreach workers to participate in violence against women community coordination committees and other collaboration efforts.

Recommendation 2

Our CCWS program is a critical resource helping to build cross sector coordination. However, what is missing is a staff person within the community to maintain this communication. The Ministry, in collaboration with CCWS, should explore ways to provide staffing to coordination committees.

Recommendation 3

Effective communication and collaboration increase the effectiveness of programs and therefore save costs. We recommend that the Ministry maintain funding for our Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) program, which provides information, training, support and consultation for communities who are developing coordinated responses to violence against women.

4.2 Providing Transportation To Clients

A number of STV Outreach workers spend a great deal of time traveling from community to community and/or providing transportation to clients, particularly in rural areas where services are spread out across a large area. Challenges that workers face include:

- High cost of car insurance not always completely covered by agency
- Damage to interior of vehicles by clients or children not covered by agency
- Amount of time spent in transit takes up a large percentage of the hours allotted to the Outreach position
- Safety concerns for winter travel

Recommendation 4

We recommend that the Ministry survey STV Outreach programs regarding transportation-related concerns and that money be allocated to cover insurance, cleaning, and safety measures such as winter tires, etc.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Ministry consider increasing the hours of each STV Outreach program—in particular, the part-time programs—to ensure that there is enough time for staff to attend to all their many responsibilities.

4.3 Safety Concerns Related To Client Accompaniment

Many workers expressed concerns about their safety when providing services to clients with extremely dangerous ex-partners or when providing transportation to clients with addictions or mental health issues. Workers also have concerns for their safety when attending clients' homes.

Recommendation 6

The Association recommends that the Ministry support STV Outreach workers to maintain their safety at the workplace. We recommend that the Ministry consider such measures as:

- Training for workers in recognizing the effects of mental health issues and substance use and training in differentiating between unusual behaviour and behaviour that actually might endanger worker safety
- Training for workers in identifying and de-escalating potentially violent situations
- Providing cell phones for all STV Outreach workers
- Encouraging all agencies with STV Outreach programs to develop worker safety protocol for staff members working alone or with high risk clients
- Developing measures for providing an extra worker or RCMP/police accompaniment in situations where there are particular safety concerns
- Providing funding for the BCASVACP to develop a guide for employers to help them develop policy guidelines to protect workers

4.4 Providing Public Education

STV Outreach workers in many communities are doing a great deal of public education to raise awareness about Outreach services. Workers are eager to get ideas for strategies and partnerships to connect with immigrant communities more effectively.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Ministry and the Association continue to work closely with the Ministry responsible for the immigrant and settlement sector to ensure coordination and collaboration.

4.5 Domestic Violence In Isolated Aboriginal Communities

Workers reported on the social and geographical barriers to women in these communities getting help. Most women in these communities are dealing with abuse, whether historical or current.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Ministry consider funding a series of Aboriginal-specific Outreach programs similar to those for immigrant women.

4.6 Dual Arrests and Resulting Custody and Access Issues

Workers continue to report that women are being arrested when police attend domestic violence incidents. In some communities, STV Outreach workers have ended up doing supervision for women who have been restricted to supervised access with their children after the arrest. In other communities, women have not been able to see their children because of the lack of available supervisors.

In some cases, agencies lack information/analysis and will not provide services to women who have been arrested. Because in most cases of relationship abuse the abuser is male, it is important that agencies be prepared to question arrests of women. Workers suggested that even when a woman is arrested for assault, if she is able to access services, it may become clear that she is in fact being abused.

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the issue be referred to CCWS with the understanding that the program would work with local policing and women-serving agencies on this problem. CCWS is working with RCMP E Division on this issue and hope to be providing training to police in this next year.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Association conduct a survey of all programs to ascertain the extent to which programs are involved in this area, and analyse the issues and proceed as recommended by the programs.

4.7 Working with Clients with Mental Health and/or Substance Use Issues

Workers continue to see clients with these issues, are finding that they need to develop creative solutions to the challenges that this brings, including:

- The impact on women of using substances, both prescribed and illicit
- Women showing up late for appointments or not showing up at all: the challenge of being open to client needs and also setting boundaries
- The need for effective collaboration with mental health and other services in order to create some stability for clients

Recommendation 11

That the Ministry work with the BCASVACP to develop a module of core training for STV Outreach workers working with survivors who have mental health and/or substance use issues.

Recommendation 12

That the Ministry work with BCASVACP and the Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) program to initiate and engage cross-sector discussions on developing better collaborative responses to issues involving survivor's safety.

4.8 Statistics Not Reflecting The Work Being Done

Workers are concerned that the statistics they compile for the Ministry do not accurately reflect the work that they are doing with clients. For example:

- Workers are asked to record the number of clients they have and not the number of hours spent with each client, yet many clients are high needs and require many hours of service and many different types of services
- There is no clear way to record drop-in appointments, which form a significant part of the workload

Recording statistics is time-consuming, and workers would like to be confident that the work they are doing to collect statistics is as useful as possible.

Recommendation 13

We recommend that the Ministry provide funding for the Association to organize a focus group with STV Outreach Workers to gather ideas for improving the statistics collection forms. We will provide a report on the ideas to the Ministry.

4.9 Financial Assistance Needed for Clients

Workers find that clients are often unable to afford things like storage, which could make the difference between staying in, or leaving an abusive relationship.

4.10 Cuts to Courthouses and Legal Aid

Workers find that many clients are suffering from the lack of courts in smaller communities, particularly in the north of the province. This results in workers providing transportation to courthouses in other communities.

There is a serious shortage of Legal Aid workers in the north of the province. Some workers also reported that clients had trouble getting Legal Aid unless an Outreach worker came with them, in which case they received better treatment. In other situations, Legal Aid has required women to show restraining orders or proof that the abuse has been reported.

Recommendation 14

We recommend that the issue be referred to CCWS with the understanding that the program would work with Legal Services Society on this problem.

4.11 Urban/Rural Service Differences

In rural areas, workers face particular challenges. These include:

- Many hours spent traveling from client to client
- Having to spend an entire day to travel to and from a meeting with colleagues
- Being ignored or excluded from meetings because their program is so small

- Having difficulty accessing services such as FASD supports that are located in other communities
- Services that are centralized in a nearby larger community may not address the particular needs of the smaller surrounding communities
- Civil cases taking longer to resolve, so workers are required to provide support over a longer period than an urban program might need to

Recommendation 15

We recommend that funding for STV Outreach programs take into account the size of the service area, the geographic region, travel time and expenses when calculating the number of hours required.

4.12 Inadequate Wages

Workers are struggling with low wages; many earn less than \$20 an hour, and in unionized environments there is often no opportunity for increased wages within the current salary grid. In some cases, other workers such as STV counsellors or alcohol and drug counsellors have been reclassified by their union. Some workers have raised concerns that it seems they are doing equivalent work to other sectors such as mental health where wages are higher. Some programs have had a decrease in hours yet still have the same demand for services. There is inconsistency within the sector as well, depending on the agency.

Low wages make recruitment and retention of staff very difficult.

Recommendation 16

We recommend that the Ministry allocate funds to all programs to address the wage inadequacy and inequality in the sector, in addition to reducing workload pressures in programs.