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## Project protects victims of violence



Sgt. Robb Daly (left) of the Vernon RCMP and Debby Hamilton of the Vernon Women's Transition House Society watch as Vernon Supt. Reg Burgess signs the final protocol of a pilot project that enhances the safety of victims of domestic violence.

*roger knox/morning star*

By [Roger Knox - Vernon Morning Star](#)

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A pilot project created in Vernon and aimed at enhancing the safety of victims of domestic violence is garnering province-wide interest.

The Vernon RCMP detachment and Vernon Women's Transition House Society started the project in January 2009, and full implementation of the new model is underway in the North Okanagan.

"We tried to create a protocol that would allow us to communicate openly amongst service groups, the police and Crown counsel to ensure the safety of victims of domestic violence," said Sgt. Robb Daly of the Vernon RCMP, co-chair of the project along with Debby Hamilton from the Women's Transition House Society.

A committee called ICAT – Integrated Case Assessment Team – uses a collaborative approach of

information sharing within legal boundaries. Before the project started, the Privacy Act served as a barrier for the RCMP in that they couldn't communicate openly with the investigations they were undertaking or sharing information they had obtained, and those same Privacy Act rules applied to B.C. service groups.

ICAT obtained a grant from the province that allowed it to write a protocol allowing open communication for high-risk domestic violence cases. Those cases were identified through a risk assessment process which was worked on for a year.

"This agreement for information sharing and working together is a culmination of two years of efforts by all of us at this table," said Hamilton, who, along with Daly, was joined by a dozen representatives of local agencies who form the ICAT committee in announcing the project.

"The document creates the framework to help women and children at highest risk of death or serious harm become safer."

After the risk is reviewed, a comprehensive safety plan is drawn up using resources in the justice system, government agencies, health, aboriginal and community social service organizations. This creates a safety net that helps the entire family become safer.

There's also a plan in place to help the offenders.

"We have a proactive intervention plan that is enacted for the offender, knowing this will reduce the risk," said Hamilton. "We believe these actions will ultimately protect others such as extended family, friends and co-workers, since they're so often the co-victims of the most dreadful outcome."

Daly points out that the group did not set out to change the laws, rather use the laws that are in place to ICAT's advantage to assist victims of domestic violence and enhance their safety.

ICAT identified its first high-risk case in February. To date, there have been 14 high-risk cases assessed, and 11 of those have been safely concluded. All of them have involved women as the victims, though the new project also works for men who are victims of domestic violence.

The Vernon pilot project is drawing interest from other areas of B.C., and Daly hopes it will go province-wide.

"That's up to the solicitor general," he said. "We're getting a lot of phone calls on how we are doing it."

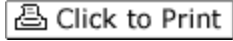
Vernon RCMP Supt. Reg Burgess signed the final protocol at the detachment Monday, adding his signature to join those of agency heads who have also signed the document.

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