



**Supporting, Connecting, Evolving:  
Ottawa's Response to Intimate Partner Femicide**

Forum Report

Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee:  
Ottawa's Response to 2004-2007 Recommendations

April 29, 2009

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The **Supporting, Connecting, Evolving: Ottawa's Response to Intimate Partner Femicide** forum took place on April 29, 2009 in honour of the National Victim's of Crime Awareness Week 2009.

We would like to give a special thanks to the Policy Centre for Victim Issues at the Department of Justice for funding this forum.

The forum provided the opportunity for many different agencies and organizations to come together to discuss the Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (DVDRC) recommendations from 2004-2007. The Domestic Violence Death Review Committee is a multi-disciplinary advisory committee of experts, established under the authority of the Coroners Act, which reports the results of domestic violence fatality investigations of the Chief Coroner.

The forum had three main objectives:

1. To bring together Community stakeholders to learn about successful implementation of DVDRC recommendations in Ottawa.
2. To strategize on how to respond to the recommendations of the DVDRC that have not yet been implemented.
3. To network and share ideas with leading experts, colleagues and community partners.

## **2. ABOUT THIS REPORT**

This report summarizes the speakers and recommendations made by participants at the forum in regards to what is working in the Ottawa community and what gaps still remain unanswered in regards to the 2004-2007 DVDRC recommendations.

Our forum was broken down into six central areas of focus:

1. Universal Screening
2. Service Coordination
3. Intersection of Family and Criminal Law
4. Working with Marginalized Communities (Focus on Aboriginal Women)
5. Public Education & Awareness
6. Risk Assessment for Lethality

## **3. ATTENDANCE**

Over 140 people were in attendance from the following agencies. A special thanks to all who participated:

### **Community Sector**

Canadian Hearing Society  
Catholic Family Services

Children's Aid Society  
Chrysalis House  
Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre  
Family Services à la famille Ottawa  
Harmony House  
Immigrant Women Services of Ottawa  
Minwaashin Lodge - Aboriginal Women's Support Centre  
Municipal Home Child Care Emergency Spaces  
Neighbours, Friends and Family Campaign  
Nelson House of Ottawa-Carleton  
Odawa Native Friendship Centre  
Ontario's Missing Adults  
Oshki Kizis Lodge  
Ottawa Child/Youth Housing Advocacy Initiative  
Ottawa Community Housing  
Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization  
Ottawa Victim Services and Support Link  
Parent Resource Centre  
Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre  
Somerset West Community Health Centre  
Western Ottawa Community Resource Centre  
Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments  
YMCA Community Mediation Program  
Youville Centre

### **Justice and Government Sector**

City of Ottawa  
City of Ottawa, Employment and Financial Assistance  
City of Ottawa, Social Services  
Correctional Service of Canada  
Crime Prevention Ottawa  
Crown Attorney's Office  
Department of Justice Canada: Policy Centre for Victim Issues  
Ministry of Community and Social Services  
Ministry of the Attorney General  
Office for Victims of Crime  
Ontario Works  
Ottawa Police Service, Partner Assault Unit  
Ottawa Police Service, Victim Crisis Unit  
RCMP  
Service Canada

### **Medical Sector**

Department of Family Medicine, University of Ottawa  
Ottawa Hospital, Sexual Assault and Partner Abuse Care Program  
Ottawa Public Health, Healthy Sexuality Program

Prenatal Partnership Program of Eastern and Southeastern Ottawa  
Sexual Health Centre

### **Education Sector**

Carleton University, Womyn for Change  
Ottawa Catholic School Board  
University of Ottawa  
University of Ottawa, Institute for the Prevention of Crime

### **Plus seven (7) Individual Community Members**

## **4. AGENDA**

We were very fortunate that Myrna Dawson, a member of the DVDRC, Associate Professor at the University of Guelph and Canada Research Chair in Public Policy in Criminal Justice was our Keynote speaker to educate us on the DVDRC committee and its recommendations.

Myrna explained that the primary goal of the DVDRC is, “to better understand, intervene and help in the prevention of domestic violence related killings through a process that does not assign blame to any one individual or agency with recognition that the perpetrator is ultimately responsible for the fatality. The DVDRC is the only opportunity that currently exists for people to look back and take stock of what our mistakes are.”

The forum invited the following six panelists to share key initiatives happening in Ottawa under our six themes:

1. Richard Tomlinson, RN, BScN, CPMHN(C), Coordinator of the Sexual Assault and Partner Abuse Care Program at the Ottawa Hospital. Richard spoke about the importance of **Universal Screening** at the Ottawa Hospital emergency and the education of medical staff of the signs of domestic violence.
2. Vivian Lee Stewart, Assistant Crown Attorney. Vivian spoke about **Service Coordination**. She addressed the Partner Assault Support Team (PAST), which runs as part of the domestic violence court program at the Ottawa court house and their role in managing high risk cases.
3. Lise Parent, Parent Carr Barristers & Solicitors. Lise spoke about the **Intersection of Family and Criminal Law** discussing concerns such as custody and access and matrimonial home issues.
4. Bernard Swords, Justice of the Peace. Bernard spoke about **Risk Assessment for Lethality** in the context of bail hearings where JPs are required to use a balance of probabilities to assign bail conditions to perpetrators.
5. Sarah Morris, Physical Education and Health teacher at Lester B. Pearson Catholic High School. Sarah spoke about **Public Education and Awareness** in the context of her

experience using the 4<sup>th</sup> R (Relationships) Program introduced to Grade 9 students during physical education classes.

6. Castille Troy, Executive Director of Minwaashin Lodge. Castille spoke to the label of marginalization leading to detachment. She discussed the high rate of domestic violence in regards to **Aboriginal women** and the importance of not forgetting Aboriginal children and the effects on them.

## **5. BREAK OUT GROUPS**

Participants had the opportunity to choose a break out group of interest and discuss with fellow colleagues the successes and gaps in regards to Ottawa's initiatives. The following are summaries of the six break out groups and the comments and suggestions on how Ottawa should and can move forward.

### **5.1. UNIVERSAL SCREENING**

All front-line professionals who work with adults and children need to be mindful of how domestic violence can lead to intimate partner homicide. All front-line professionals must screen for domestic violence in all cases and be prepared with appropriate referrals and resources if needed. (Please see our Summary Sheets for a more in-depth explanation of the DVDRC recommendations.)

#### **5.1.1. What Has Worked Well?**

- Ottawa Hospital: universal screening tool
- Ottawa police screening tool: Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA)
- New Directions: promotes awareness and get perpetrators to own their behaviour

#### **5.1.2. What Gaps Remain**

- Opportunities for disclosure: agencies are under-staffed, reliance on walk-in clinics
- Disclosure answer: A checkbox that is answered "no" could mean "no disclosure" not necessarily "no violence"
- Referral process: lack of follow-ups with clients, agencies have adopted the "passing the buck" mentality because of high case loads
- Education for front-line workers: due to high staff turnover there needs to be continuous training
- Marginalized groups such as same-sex partners, transgendered and homeless women and children are often forgotten
- Newcomers: cultural screening may be complicated, societal norms not known, language barriers
- Legal system: judges, lawyers and JPs should attain training sessions in order to be better informed on violence against women
- Need for communication services for deaf individuals

## **5.2. SERVICE COORDINATION**

The need for service coordination is vital in order to ensure seamless services are delivered to women who have experienced intimate partner violence. (Please see our Summary Sheets for a more in-depth explanation of the DVDRC recommendations.)

### **5.2.1. What Has Worked Well?**

- Strong link between VAW and CAS
- Sheltersnet
- P.A.S.T. Team

### **5.2.2. What Gaps Remain?**

- There is a need to have continued annualized funding to coordinate services instead of the present situation which is project funded
- Further cross-sectoral training needs to be conducted between CAS and VAW
- Confidentiality and privacy policies limit coordination between agencies
- Although Sheltersnet has been established, we still need to be able to connect more efficiently nationally, provincially and locally
- P.A.S.T. Team limitation: Does not look at non-criminal cases, therefore advocates and women are being left out. A possible solution is the creation of a non-criminal high risk case management team.

## **5.3 INTERSECTION OF FAMILY AND CRIMINAL LAW**

Protocols need to be developed to allow police, lawyers, and the judiciary to pay attention to the dynamics of family violence. ((Please see our Summary Sheets for a more in-depth explanation of the DVDRC recommendations.))

### **5.3.1. What Has Worked Well?**

- Legal Aid Ontario Domestic Violence Empanelling of Family Law Lawyers
- Bill 133 and its attempt to criminalize family court breaches

### **5.3.2. What Gaps Remain?**

- Judges, lawyers and duty counsel need training on domestic violence
- Judges, lawyers and CAS need to remove neutrality towards violence
- Police may not be able to handle work load of Bill 133
- Reforming Divorce Act - judicial decision making is needed
- The definition of violence needs to be expanded beyond just 'physical'
- Qualified assessments should include a consult with VAW workers and the community
- Legal Aid is lacking in resources and needs increased funding
- Increased supervised access and resources to support and educate parents is needed

## **5.4. WORKING WITH MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES**

The need for resources and cross cultural training to be developed and delivered by trained experts from the community being served is necessary. Cultural competency training should be a mandatory component of all training programs for front-line workers. (Please see our Summary Sheets for a more in-depth explanation of the DVDRC recommendations.)

### **5.4.1. What Has Worked Well?**

- Programs that have increased communication and press releases
- Community partnerships and consultation with the community
- FN, I, M Initiative (CAS)
- Cultural competency training, cultural considerations such as food
- Making the overture and taking initiative
- Positive motivation, Restorative justice
- Respect (learning from the source)
- Elder Involvement and a Sense of Belonging

### **5.4.2. What Gaps Remain?**

- Improvement in police services
- Strategic planning is needed to voice priority
- Sustainability, accountability, continuity is needed
- Interpreters and other overlapping needs
- Increased training for front-line workers
- Culture/ Food/ Traditions: more than basic needs also spiritual
- Concrete action such as custom adoption
- Support networks and unclear communication
- Tokenism/patronizing/entertainment
- Superficial cultural competency and appropriation

## **5.5. PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS**

The need to better educate both the public and professionals who come into contact with victims and perpetrators of domestic violence is essential. (Please see our Summary Sheets for a more in-depth explanation of the DVDRC recommendations.)

### **5.5.1. What Has Worked Well?**

- P.A.S.T. staff has been engaged in case meetings
- Train the trainer: Youth relationship initiative such as In Love and In Danger
- Neighbours, Friends and Family: material in 6 different languages/cultural adaptation
- Using contacts: network in schools to approach topics and ideas of interest
- WISE: Creating strategies
- CAS: Outreach has had some effect in Faith Communities
- Using drama and theatre as an educational medium
- White Ribbon Campaign
- New Directions: perpetrator education and holding perpetrators responsible

### **5.5.2. What Gaps Remain?**

- In Love and In Danger: not mandatory and needs to be assigned to both teacher and students, should be across all of Ontario
- Consistent education: cyber bullying, outside bullying
- Is violence against women information being given? We need to identify if info is being passed from teachers to students
- Gap in cultural representation: CAS
- Attention to dating violence in elementary school is missing
- Not a lot of prevention: difficult topic to talk about
- Groups /schools /community centres need to have speakers on DV
- Fear of disclosure: language this is used/image of abused women
- Bias: perception of what perpetrator or victim looks like
- More resources: commitment from government
- Need political action in Canada: international illusion that things are solved here
- Incorporating men in a way that does not undermine women and reality of gender inequality, Engage young men in public education
- Members-only section of OCTEVAW website need to be open to more people

## **5.6 RISK ASSESSMENT FOR LETHALITY**

The need is recognized for the use of training in risk assessment tools across sectors in assessing aggressors and women who are experiencing intimate partner violence is recognized. (Please see our Summary Sheets for a more in-depth explanation of the DVDRC recommendations.)

### **5.6.1. What Has Worked Well?**

- High Risk Program at VCU
- Neighbours, Family & Friends program
- Ontario Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment clinical version (ODARA)
- Legislation to use risk assessment tools
- Collaboration of helping professionals
- Community liaison committee

### **5.6.2. What Gaps Remain?**

- We need a variety of ongoing tools and more flexibility in the tools to allow for different groups
- Disconnection between professionals/ frontline workers and criminal justice system
- People need to be confident and provided with knowledge on different tools
- Confidentiality issues (what the victim feels comfortable sharing with agencies) and inability to share information with stakeholders
- Different risk assessment tools being used by different agencies (should all use the same)
- Cultural differences: need more education especially on Aboriginal communities
- Dual charging (victims being treated as offenders)
- Building trust to create a risk assessment

- ODARA is heavily based on policing form (so risk looks low if there is no police involvement), We all know that many women/victims do not report to the police so this is not representative
- Start education programs around dating violence and gender equality even younger than grade 9

## **6. NEXT STEPS**

The question now is, “What is our next step?”

The following report will be used as a guideline for action by our Advisory Committee and OCTEVAW Justice Committee.

We hope to set out a plan by early 2010 where community consultation can once again be encouraged. We will make sure the community is aware of the process as it unfolds through our website homepage. [www.octevaw-cocvff.ca](http://www.octevaw-cocvff.ca)

We would like to thank everyone for participating at our forum by expressing concerns and sharing ideas! If you or your agency would like to participate on either committee above please contact one of our Co-Chairs:

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