

# Final Report: YWCA Court Support Project

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## Executive Summary

The purpose of this project was to help supplement local YWCA research and inform a local domestic abuse initiative interested in creating a collaborative hub. This report is broken into two sections – a literature review and a research paper, and although the two, at first, seem unrelated, they are very much connected.

The literature review was conducted to supplement local research done by Karine Rogers at the YWCA Peterborough, Victoria, and Haliburton regarding the legal system and the challenges abused women experienced in service delivery. This literature review, in an attempt to include Canadian Aboriginal and immigrant women's experiences, focuses on how these two marginalized populations experience unique challenges when interacting with domestic abuse services and the legal system. The research illustrates how both abused Aboriginal and immigrant women experience various systemic, social, cultural, and economic barriers due to intersecting systems of oppression.

One potential solution for the gaps and challenges experienced by abused women, including Aboriginal and immigrant women, that was identified in the YWCA's research with domestic abuse service providers was the creation of a domestic abuse hub, or a collaborative centre. The purpose of the research paper was to examine best practices and challenges for collaboration between domestic abuse service agencies in order to inform key parties interested in creating a domestic abuse hub in the city of Peterborough. Key findings were that there needs to be a significant amount of time spent fostering positive relationships between agencies, as well as consistent communication; a coordinator can help facilitate collaboration and is highly recommended; shared policies are needed to address differences in professional methods and to

ensure safety of the victim; and finally, that other collaborative structures may serve as inspiration, but a localized approach will be more successful than copying a specific structure.

## **Key Words**

*Collaboration, social policy, violence against women, domestic abuse, aboriginal women, women, immigrant women, criminal justice system, social services, non-profit, hub, feminism.*

## Literature Review

### Introduction

Aboriginal and immigrant women each experience unique risk factors that make them vulnerable to experiencing violence and abuse by their partners.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Aboriginal women in Canada experience violence at a rate three times higher than non-Aboriginal women.<sup>2</sup> Immigrant women, while statistically are not more likely to experience violence than Canadian women (although this is likely due to underreporting and language barriers evident in surveys conducted exclusively in English or French), experience domestic violence differently and are often invisible in mainstream domestic violence discourses.<sup>3</sup> The intersecting systems of oppression related to race, class, and gender affect Aboriginal and immigrant women's experiences in accessing services and seeking help in dealing with abuse. Aboriginal and immigrant women who have experienced abuse encounter similar barriers in accessing services including a lack of economic resources, social or geographical isolation, community backlash and racism. However, it would be incorrect to suggest that the experiences of Aboriginal and immigrant women are the same, as both populations experience unique access barriers related to their intersectional identities that produce these inequalities in service. Included in the literature review below are several studies that highlight the various systemic, social, cultural, and economic barriers that many Aboriginal and immigrant women experience in Canada when attempting to access domestic violence services or the legal system.

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<sup>1</sup> Ekuwa, *Nowhere to Turn*; McGillivray and Comaskey, *Black Eyes All the Time*.

<sup>2</sup> Standing Committee on the Status of Women. *Interim Report. Call into the Night: An Overview of Violence against Aboriginal Women*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ekuwa, *Nowhere to Turn*, viii.

## Literature on Abused Aboriginal Women's Experiences Accessing Social Services & the Criminal Justice System

Bopp, Michael, Julie Bopp and Phil Jane Jr. *Aboriginal Domestic Violence in Canada*. Ottawa:

The Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003. 8 December 2011 <<http://www.fourworlds.ca/pdfs/DomesticViolence.pdf>>.

This report provides a comprehensive discussion of the internal (community based) and external (policy based) determinants of family violence within Aboriginal communities. In building on previous studies, the authors examined the previous literature on Aboriginal domestic violence and healing and consulted with practitioners and experts from fifteen Aboriginal family violence services. They argue that the interconnectedness and uniqueness of Aboriginal communities (including personal and community wellness, location, the absence of consequences, and community leadership, among others) may prevent women from seeking or accessing help for domestic violence; conversely, these same factors may also lead to the creation of greater support for women who have experienced abuse in communities that take a stand against family violence. A highly significant barrier for Aboriginal women receiving adequate help is communities that do not recognize the problem of family violence and are unwilling to help women. External factors, including government policies and programs, the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples, and national and global trends, are also noted as contributing to the successes and failures related to family violence initiatives.

*Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence*. Thunder Bay: Ontario

Native Women's Association, 1989. 20 November 2011 <<http://www.oaith.ca/assets/files/Publications/Breaking-Free-Report.pdf>>.

In the first study of its kind in Ontario, the Ontario Native Women's Association examined the systemic problems that Aboriginal peoples experience and how these problems contribute to family violence. Interviewing both service agencies and Aboriginal women, the Ontario Native Women's Association discovered that perceived levels of violence were significantly higher and occurring at more serious levels than had previously been reported. The Ontario Native Women's Association argues that the systemic oppression entrenched in the *Indian Act* has led to increased lack of self-esteem, overwhelming feelings of lack of control, and anger in Aboriginal peoples, which has contributed to the cycle of violence, poverty and alcoholism that has become epidemic in Aboriginal communities. Exacerbating the problem for Aboriginal women is the lack of many of the resources that are available to their non-Aboriginal counterparts in Ontario and different barriers to accessing relevant services. For example, services for Aboriginal women are limited geographically, are not culturally relevant, and can cause re-victimization via racism. Many of the Aboriginal women interviewed considered the colonial-based justice system as a last resort, believing in holistic community-based solutions rather than simply punishing their abuser. Despite this research and proposal being over twenty years old, in comparison to newer data and literature, very little has changed, and the situation remains just as urgent.

Hamilton-Wentworth Chapter of Native Women. *Final Report: Strengthening the Circle to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women*. Toronto: Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 2009. 20 November 2011 <<http://www.oaith.ca/assets/files/contemporary-issue-facing-aboriginal-women.pdf>>.



This report seeks to identify and address the issues that affect Aboriginal women's (and their family's) ability to receive assistance from programs run, or funded by, the Ministry of Community and Social Services after experiencing violence. *Strengthening the Circle* provides a summary of the content presented at the third Summit to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women in Hamilton, Ontario, including the results of brainstorming workshops. A reoccurring sentiment was that Aboriginal women do not benefit from being treated as a segmented individual; this is when services fail women because their intersectional identities need to be addressed simultaneously, as do physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. A major barrier for many Aboriginal women fleeing violent situations is the lack of affordable housing available to them, in addition to a lack of response from Ontario Works in providing immediate resources to women in crisis. The value of *Strengthening the Circle* lies in its summary of opinions from a range of key players, including Aboriginal leaders and organizations, government organizations, non-profit organizations and women who have experienced or dealt with family violence.

McGillivray, Anne and Comaskey, Brenda. *Black Eyes All of the Time: Intimate Violence,*

*Aboriginal Women and the Justice System.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

Questioning previous studies regarding Aboriginal women and violence and their lack of “autohistory” as told by participants in their own voices, McGillivray and Comaskey set out to conduct community-based participatory research with Aboriginal women from Manitoba. Focusing on Aboriginal women’s experience of violence and their perception of the justice system’s response, *Black Eyes All of the Time* contextualizes the research done on Aboriginal women’s experience of violence, the history of colonialism and the various rights discourses that

exist by juxtaposing research with women's own stories. The Aboriginal women who participated in the interviews frequently referred to the role their community played in silencing their pleas for help. Public shaming, families refusing to help, the protection of accused political figures, and banishment of the victim from her own community, were all ramifications of trying to seek solace in one's own community following experiences of abuse. The chapters discussing the colonial context and evolution of conditions that have exacerbated situations of intimate violence are juxtaposed with the women's voices of experience describing the lack of protection and care they received from authority figures because of their race and gender. Fear of being charged in self-defence or not being seen as a "worthy" victim caused many women not to seek help from the police, while when others did, they experienced long response times (or no response at all) and a lack of enforcement of restraining orders. The value of this work is how it has preserved the voices of Aboriginal women who have experienced abuse, allowing them to explain their stories in their own words and the shortcoming they found in the criminal justice system. McGillivray and Comaskey do an excellent job of situating Aboriginal women's voices in discourses on intimate violence, human rights, colonialism, and reform measures, making this study and research an invaluable source for bringing the personal and political together in a cohesive manner.

Standing Committee on the Status of Women. *Interim Report. Call into the Night: An Overview of Violence against Aboriginal Women*. Ottawa: House of Commons, 2011. 20 November 2011 <<http://www.parl.gc.ca/content/hoc/Committee/403/FEWO/Reports/RP5056509/feworp14/feworp14-e.pdf>>.

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women Canada presents a summary of the research and themes resulting from a yearlong study that heard from 150 participants in different Aboriginal communities across Canada including rural, urban and reserve communities. The report discusses many of the systemic causes of violence against Aboriginal women, using participants own voices to frame the discussion. A main concern presented in the report is the cycle of poverty, addiction, and prostitution experienced by many Aboriginal women, which contributes to violence against women, and leaves many women silent for fear of their children being apprehended if they seek help. The lack of housing (especially affordable), the underfunding of shelters, the remoteness of northern communities and a low social assistance wage serve as barriers to Aboriginal women seeking help from domestic violence. The Committee argues that the leading cause of violence against Aboriginal women is the ongoing legacy of colonialism and racism the Aboriginal peoples experience. Racism can be one of the greatest barriers to access and care for Aboriginal women who have experienced violence. Sadly, internalized racism - the idea that Aboriginal women themselves are to blame or deserve the violence they endure – in itself is a barrier, as it contributes to an unquestioning acceptance of the violence. It should be noted, however, that this report has received criticism by Amnesty International for not providing a comprehensive strategy in the final report to deal with the problem of violence against Aboriginal women and its systemic roots.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “New Parliamentary report on violence against Indigenous women a regrettable step backwards, says Amnesty International.” *Amnesty International*. 12 December 2011. <<http://www.amnesty.ca/media2010.php?DocID=1146>>.

## Literature on Immigrant Women's Experiences Accessing Social Services & the Criminal Justice System

Baobaid, Mohammed. *Access to Women Abuse Services by Arab-Speaking Muslim Women in London, Ontario: Background Investigation and Recommendations for Further Research and Community Outreach*. London, Ontario: Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, 2002. 20 November 2011. <[http://www.crvawc.ca/documents/FinalAccessToWomenAbuseServicesbyArabSpeakingMuslimWomeninLondon\\_001.pdf](http://www.crvawc.ca/documents/FinalAccessToWomenAbuseServicesbyArabSpeakingMuslimWomeninLondon_001.pdf)>

Baobaid's research focuses on the use of abuse services in London by Arab Muslim women, the barriers that prevent Arab women from using these services, as well as the experience of woman abuse agencies providing services to Arab Muslim women in London. Included is an overview of Arab Islamic values and religious teachings, juxtaposing Canadian laws and Islamic teachings from the Qur'an as complimentary in preserving and protecting the rights of women, despite how Islam has been distorted by mixing cultural teachings, manipulative interpretations of the Qur'an, and political motivations. In garnering perspectives from both Arab Muslim men and women on domestic abuse, focus groups were held, as well as interviews with organizations and community leaders. Baobaid's research depicts how cultural understandings of women abuse can serve as a barrier to women seeking help from service agencies. While many respondents understood physical violence to be abuse and a criminal action, they did not consider other forms such as emotional or economic to be abuse. A lack of knowledge of the services available was expressed by both men and women. However, a larger barrier was the negative stereotypes that many in the Arab Muslim community have towards the criminal justice system and service agencies. For example, there may be a belief that these

services weaken Islamic family values or publicize private matters, and these messages can be spread by men in traditional Arab Muslim communities to dissuade women from seeking help. Lastly, as noted in many other studies, social isolation may be experienced if a woman reaches out following abuse, and she may be met with an unsympathetic support system that legitimizes her husband's actions.

Cottrell, Barbra, Evangelia Tastsoglou and Carmen Celina Moncayo. "Violence in Immigrant Families in Halifax." *Racialized Migrant Women in Canada: Essays in Health, Violence and Equity*. Ed. Vijay Agnew. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2009. 70-94.

Focusing on the experiences of immigrant women in accessing services for abused women, this study provides insight into the cultural, structural, and economic barriers faced. Of particular relevance is the geographical location of the study, Halifax, a city in a largely rural province with a relatively low immigrant population, as much of the research regarding immigrant women and abuse has focused on metropolitan areas such as London or Toronto, where the immigrant populations are significant in comparison. The authors argue "the problem lies in economic disparities and inequalities based on immigrant status, ethnicity, and gender that, on the one hand, spawns violence against women, and on the other, removes or does not provide adequate support to deal with it and successfully resolve the violence". The main methodology used is focus groups and one-on-one interviews with immigrants (the majority who consider English their second language and are visible minorities) and service providers. The authors often use participants' own voices to highlight the issues at hand, further allowing the authors to discuss how gender and race intersect to produce inequalities. The main findings of

the study include the lack of cultural awareness by service providers, the lack of knowledge of services and stability experienced by abused immigrant women and the depths of language as a barrier. A lack of cultural awareness by service providers makes it even more difficult for immigrant women to reach out for help, as they fear racism and discrimination, being misunderstood, and they do not see their values and norms represented in services available. These barriers are a lack of knowledge of services and their purposes, a lack of stability with regard to immigration status, employment, housing and custody that immigrant women fear if they leave their abusive husband or seek help. All these factors contribute to the vulnerability immigrant women feel, and as a result, impede their accessing of adequate services for domestic violence.

Shirwadkar, Swati. "Canadian Domestic Violence Policy and Indian Immigrant Women".

*Violence Against Women*. 10 no. 8 (2004): 860-879.

Shirwadkar, through exploratory research, seeks to find out what keeps Indian women from benefitting from Canadian programs and policies related to domestic violence, especially since Canada is considered a multicultural society, with some of the most advanced domestic violence policies. The article contrasts domestic violence in India and Canada, providing cultural context while reviewing policies and initiatives in both countries. The author then juxtaposes these governmental approaches with the lived experiences of Indian immigrant women living in Toronto. As in many other studies on the topic, the results indicate that family, community, and cultural barriers are significant in preventing women from accessing the legal system or social services, as others attitudes towards these institutions and processes influence their decisions. For example, middle class Indian immigrant women may have reservations about going to a shelter,

“which implies caste-class status” is still influential in Canada. "Canadian Domestic Violence Policy and Indian Immigrant Women" is valuable for its discussion of cultural ideas and system which may affect immigrant women's perceptions of and responses to domestic violence.

Smith, Dr. Ekuwa. *Nowhere to Turn? Responding to Partner Violence Against Immigrant and Visible Minority Women*. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 2004. 4  
December 2011 <<http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2004/nowhere/>>.

*Nowhere to Turn* discusses the issue of partner violence against immigrant and visible minority women in Canada, and barriers to accessing services for this population. The numerous methodologies used include a literature review, results from a two-day National forum, as well as focus groups with frontline workers from community organizations and key informant interviews. The study notes the parallels between immigrant and non-immigrant women's experiences of partner violence, while noting the unique risk factors that affect immigrant and visible minority women. Reoccurring barriers mentioned by the focus group and key informant interviews were that abused women had little knowledge of their rights and the resources available, were unable to speak English or French, and feared racism by police and further cultural stereotyping if she reaches out for help. In addition, many mentioned the lack of family supports immigrant women have. For example, an immigrant woman's cultural and faith community, which she may rely on, may reject her if she speaks out. Conversely, she may be forced to leave her community so that she cannot easily be tracked. Eukwa argues that argues that the "intersection of these social, cultural and systemic barriers are crucial to understanding - and addressing- the problems faced by immigrant and visible minority women who experience partner abuse".

Wachholz, Sandra and Baukje Miedema. "Risk, Fear, Harm: Immigrant Women's Perceptions of the 'Policing Solution' to Woman Abuse." *Crime, Law & Social Change*, 34 (2000): 301-317.

Wachholz and Miedema explore the perceptions and experiences of immigrant women in New Brunswick of police intervention, asking whether the “policing solution” is really a solution at all, or if it is part of the problem for immigrant woman dealing with abuse. The authors conducted six focus groups, interviewing forty-eight immigrant women, one-third of whom had experienced abuse. Women held numerous fears related to police intervention and mandatory charging, stemming from the marginalization they experience socially, culturally, economically, and even geographically. Based on the women’s experiences, the authors argue that the “policing solution” can have the opposite effect of its intended purpose (protection and relieving victims of responsibility); instead, police intervention can “mirror” experiences of abuse as it can cause social isolation (the most feared), unequal power dynamics between police and women, enhanced control and surveillance of families, and insecurity and uncertainty (particularly financially). For these reasons, an immigrant women may not involve the police when experiencing domestic violence, as she may see the process making her more vulnerable than before.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, Aboriginal and immigrant women each occupy a unique position in Canada, which is influenced by their intersectional identities, that affects the quality of services they have access to, or whether they access services at all. While this literature review has not focused on the recommendations made to remedy the inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and immigrant



women, much of the literature stresses the need for education, increased funding for service providers that work with both populations, and policies and strategies that will begin to tackle the systemic issues at hand that affect Aboriginal and immigrant women's vulnerability to violence, as well as their inability to receive adequate services: racism, poverty, and sexism. However, this must be done in consultation and co-operation with both populations in order to ensure these actions are effective. In conclusion, the barriers to access that Aboriginal and immigrant women experience in Canada related to domestic abuse services is reflective of larger discourses surrounding race and gender, and the discrimination that Aboriginal and immigrant women face in other aspects of their lives.

# Enhancing Synergy Between Domestic Abuse Agencies in a Multidisciplinary Setting: Challenges and Best Practices

## Introduction

Ontario's response to domestic abuse has evolved over time, with services being created as needed, but without a larger strategy, which has resulted in a patchwork system that has service providers working in silos. As a result, collaboration on issues related to violence against women has been frequently recommended by Domestic Violence Death Review Committees and inquests in order to ensure communication and ease of service so that fewer women like Arlene May and Bohumila Luft, whose tragic deaths inspired the creation of such review boards, fall through the cracks.<sup>5</sup> In order to provide the best possible services, agencies will need to work together, sharing ideas, resources, and a sense of purpose. One possible way to collaborate in the domestic abuse field is through a multidisciplinary, co-located "hub" or one-stop service. This "hub" or one-stop service model can help provide more efficient, client-friendly services and could reduce redundancy within the system due to an increase in collaboration and communication.<sup>6</sup> However, collaboration can make many uncomfortable and be difficult because it means accepting and embracing change. It is important to recognize that there will always be issues when attempting to collaborate, such as differences in priorities, agency mandates, and difficult conversations. The research shows that the advantages of collaboration, especially in the domestic abuse field, are numerous for both agency and client, and far outweigh the potential issues and challenges that are likely to be encountered.<sup>7</sup> Evidence-based best practices offer

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<sup>5</sup> Karen Spencer, and Pamela Mank, "It's All About Team Work: A Co-ordinated Response to Family Violence," *Child & Family Winter* (2006): 19.

<sup>6</sup> Brenda Jacobs and Lesley Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice: Professional Challenges and Promising Practice*, Final Report (Toronto: Law Commission of Ontario, 2010) <<http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/24009/304481.pdf>> 15.

<sup>77</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse & Sexual*

solutions to many of these challenges, and stress the need for open communication, and positive relationships based on respect, trust and a common goal, which must take precedence in the initial planning stages so as to ensure the desired effect of seamless delivery of services that, for some women, can mean life or death. By being aware of the challenges they may face, and using best practices, Peterborough's domestic abuse service providers could create a successful community effort to treat and prevent domestic abuse and better cater to the needs of their clients than if they continue to work in their organizational silos.

## Background

### Peterborough Context

In the fall of 2011, YWCA Peterborough, Victoria & Haliburton conducted research as part of the Court Support Project in order to better understand woman abuse survivors' experiences of the legal system and their specific needs so as to provide recommendations in hopes of improving the system(s) and increasing women's safety.<sup>8</sup> The research, funded by Status of Women Canada, involved interviews with local women whom had previously been through the Peterborough Family Court's for issues related to domestic abuse. In addition to one-on-one interviews with local domestic abuse organizations, stakeholder meetings were also held with those working in the domestic abuse field. During the meetings, participants discussed the challenges and barriers for women accessing help and discussed possible improvements to the Peterborough Family Court system. The preliminary findings for the Court Support Project show that women who have experienced abuse may be unaware of the services available to them,

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*Violence: Is This the Right Choice for Frontenac County?* Discussion Paper. Kingston Frontenac Anti-Violence Coordinating Committee (2008): 3.

<sup>8</sup> Karine Rogers, "Family Court: The Gateway to a Violence-Free Life? A Study on Issues for Women in Domestic Abuse Situations Navigating the Peterborough Family Court," Draft Report for YWCA Court Support Project, (March 2012), 4.

frustrated with multiple service locations and wait times, and feel that seeking adequate help can be complex, stressful and discouraging.<sup>9</sup>

Local service providers have also expressed interest in collaborating to better serve the various needs of women who experience abuse in Peterborough City and County. During the early stages of research for the Court Support Project the staff of the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Response Program at the Women’s Health Care Centre (WHCC) simultaneously began investigating the possibility of implementing a domestic abuse service-delivery “hub” in Peterborough. While both projects were independent of one another, they complemented each other, as the collaborative hub model was also recognized in the research for the Court Support Project as a potential strategy for addressing many of the identified challenges and barriers for women accessing the justice system for issues related to domestic abuse.<sup>10</sup> Meetings were held by the Women’s Health Care Centre to gauge local service providers’ interest, and the consensus from participants was that there was enough feedback to warrant further research and work to try and establish such a service locally. As a result, this research project was designed, in partnership with the YWCA, to help provide background information in regards to the challenges and best practices of collaborating using a domestic hub service-delivery model in order to inform the current initiative in Peterborough.

### **The Service-Delivery Hub Model**

The concept of a co-located service-delivery hub (also commonly referred to as a “one-stop” service) was developed by San Diego in 2002 through the creation of the city’s Family Justice Center. Family Justice Centres have a “two pronged approach to intervention” which

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<sup>9</sup> Rogers, “Family Court: The Gateway to a Violence-Free Life?” 10-21.

<sup>10</sup> Rogers, “Family Court: The Gateway to a Violence-Free Life?” 30.

involves maintaining the victim's safety through a variety of means, while also investigating and holding abusers accountable via the justice system.<sup>11</sup> In order to meet this mandate, the Family Justice Centre houses 27 different agencies (including domestic abuse advocates, police, prosecutors, legal aid, counselling, and services that provide long-term assistance) that work together to provide holistic care at one central and easily accessible location. The concept of a collaborative, co-located model was not created by San Diego, but the city has improved and expanded upon existing models with a great degree of success, and as a result, Family Justice Centers have been established all across the United States, while the model is also looked to internationally as well.<sup>12</sup>

Adaptations of the Family Justice Centres have appeared in Canada in the form of domestic abuse hubs, although the Canadian model is recognized as being more “victim-focused, rather than justice-focused” in comparison to the San Diego model.<sup>13</sup> Whereas the Family Justice Centres work more closely with law enforcement and legal professionals in order to investigate and prosecute a case, the Canadian model focuses more on empowerment and safety, and provides women the choice of which services to engage with, including the option to avoid interacting with the legal system whatsoever.<sup>14</sup> In the Canadian context, these collaborative domestic abuse service sites are referred to as hubs. The hub model is defined as a multi-disciplinary, co-located service that houses “different professionals with distinct skills sets provid[ing] services holistically whilst respecting professional boundaries and roles”.<sup>15</sup> Ontario is home to three physical domestic abuse hubs: the Waterloo Family Violence Project, Durham Region's Intimate-Relationship Violence Empowerment Network (DRIVEN), and most recently,

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<sup>11</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 13.

the Safe Centre of Peel: Collaborative Assistance for Victims of Abuse and Violence, in addition to Brantford's Virtual Hub.

The need for such collaborative efforts has been sadly illustrated by the failures of the police, domestic abuse organizations, and the criminal justice system in the various Domestic Violence Death Review reports, which have found that, in the majority of cases, the violence was known to friends and professionals.<sup>16</sup> A hub service-delivery model that embraces collaboration and communication has the potential to prevent such tragedies from happening, as well as a host of other advantages. The current domestic abuse system largely does not acknowledge or adequately address the complexity of the issue, and the diversity of woman abuse survivors, whereas a hub model offers a multitude of services, both short and long-term, and allows for multiple points of entry.<sup>17</sup> Other noted benefits include: a reduction in redundancy of services and information, greater accessibility of services, and the potential to address Aboriginal and other cultural needs through a holistic model that empowers survivors.<sup>18</sup>

## Methodology

To prepare for this research paper, I participated in three of the Court Support Project's group meetings with key project stakeholders as they identified & prioritized innovative solutions for service improvements related to domestic abuse, one such solution being the creation of a domestic abuse hub in Peterborough. In addition, I also attended a meeting hosted by the Women's Health Centre in January 2012 that allowed potential partner agencies to discuss

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<sup>16</sup> Spencer, "It's All About Team Work," 19-20.

<sup>17</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 5-6.

<sup>18</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, 15, 48; Spencer, "It's All About Team Work," 22.

the concept of a hub, and the work that would need to be done, including their concerns, which helped me to narrow my research focus for identifying and outlining best practices.

In reviewing the relevant literature I drew upon a variety of sources, including literature related to collaboration in the non-profit sector and with government agencies, co-located multidisciplinary hub service structures in Canada & the United States, and identified challenges & best practices related to collaboration between service providers who work with woman abuse survivors. Where possible, I have drawn upon firsthand accounts from established hub organizations and networks, largely through the use of archived PowerPoint presentation slides, in order to include their lived experiences and opinions on what they believed made them successful. I have also attempted to include feminist discourses regarding collaboration and partnerships, although this is an area that may require further research.

## Collaboration

*A dance. Remember a time when you dance with another; the magic; the clumsy motions; a sense of fit or lack thereof; the angst; the intimacy; the miscommunication; the intricate steps; the moments of joy; whirling around; shared pleasure; embarrassment for toes trodden; connection; a process - an experience.*<sup>19</sup>

Much like an intricate dance, collaboration requires trust and communication. While it may be awkward and a bit painful at first, with practice and an established connection between partners, something beautiful may emerge. It is acknowledged that there are many variations on the meaning of collaboration, but for the purposes of this paper, the following definition from *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* will be used:

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<sup>19</sup> Elizabeth G. Brown, *The Dance of Many Partners: A Case Study of Interorganizational Collaboration in the Social Services Sector*. MSW thesis (Wilfrid Laurier University, 1997) Waterloo: Scholars Commons @ Laurier. Paper 156. <<http://scholars.wlu.ca/etd/156/>> 1.

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual accountability and authority for success; and sharing of resources and rewards.<sup>20</sup>

Durham's DRIVEN hub expands on the concept of collaboration with their belief that "no one agency can meet all the needs of a person dealing with intimate relationship violence. It takes a community to maximize the welfare and safety of each member".<sup>21</sup> While it must be acknowledged that each person involved in the partnership will bring their own history, biases and personal practices to the collaboration process<sup>22</sup>, there are evidenced-based best practices in the domestic abuse field to help facilitate this process, achieve outcome-oriented results for survivors, and work to prevent domestic abuse from occurring in the future.

## Challenges & Best Practices

Research shows that collaborative efforts often fail due to "unfulfilled expectations, conflicting assumptions, and threats to organizational turf".<sup>23</sup> However, there are also specific challenges that will likely be faced when collaborating using the hub service-delivery model, especially in the domestic abuse field. The remainder of this paper will examine challenges associated with creating a collaborative domestic abuse hub, including co-location, funding, professional differences and priorities, relationships, and communication, as well as evidenced-based best practices that can be useful in dealing with and surmounting such challenges.

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Mattessich, et al. *Collaboration: What Makes it Work*. (Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 2001) qtd. in Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 45.

<sup>22</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 59.

<sup>23</sup> Brown, *The Dance of Many Partners*, 12.



## Co-Location

One of the unique aspects of the hub service-delivery model is that it offers multidisciplinary services in one central location, often referred to as co-located services. The physicality of a hub helps to facilitate more effective service delivery as staff benefit from informal interactions that can lead to increased knowledge, better professional relationships, and the breaking down of silos; the ability to easily make referrals in person versus trying to connect and communicate via e-mail or telephone.<sup>24</sup> In addition, a centralized location that houses members of a crisis response team who are able to conference face-to-face and coordinate services would simplify the response process, and help to maintain women's safety in high risk situations.

Deciding what agencies and organizations the hub will compose of may be difficult, as there is a wide array of service providers to consider. Take for example, the thirty-one member agencies of the Peterborough Domestic Abuse Network (PDAN), which includes an array of agencies including Aboriginal organizations, the police, health services, the Crown Attorney's office, victim's services, and women's services.<sup>25</sup> Ideally, the services provided will offer both short and long term service and support, such as "housing, income-support, educational/skills assessment, financial planning, job retraining and placement and long term individual and group counseling services".<sup>26</sup> It will not be possible for every possible domestic abuse related service provider to participate in the hub for a variety of reasons, the most obvious being the inability to free up staffing resources to move onsite, and so there is also the possibility of creating satellite

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<sup>24</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 66.

<sup>25</sup> Peterborough Domestic Abuse Network, "Peterborough Domestic Abuse Resource Guide" Peterborough, 2005, revised 2009. < <http://www.pdan.ca/pdf/ResourceGuide.pdf> > 20.

<sup>26</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 11.

locations via the use of web conferencing to connect partners to the main location of the hub.<sup>27</sup> As Peterborough consists of a mixed urban and rural setting it may make the most sense to have a domestic abuse hub within the center of the city, with the option to create satellite locations in the outlying rural counties. Ultimately, the process of deciding who will housed within the hub may be long, arduous task, with partner agencies' commitment wavering, but as the Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region declares, you only need to begin with two partners, and after that, the other pieces of the puzzle will begin to fall into place.<sup>28</sup>

In order to facilitate the collaborative process, the creation of a project director or coordinator position is highly recommended.<sup>29</sup> A coordinator can be beneficial in a multidisciplinary, collaborative setting in a multitude of ways: from managing tensions and actively dealing with challenges, to helping a shared vision come to fruition, managing the budget, project planning and assessment, helping build positive relationships, providing community outreach, asking the difficult questions, providing support, and promoting the domestic abuse hub in the community.<sup>30</sup> Due to the varied and important nature of a coordinator's job, the person who would be best fit the role would have the ability to be flexible and creative, have strong but varied facilitation skills, be comfortable dealing with conflict and asking the hard questions, be supportive and personable, and be committed to the overall vision

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<sup>27</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region, "Family Violence Team." PowerPoint Slides (September, 2008). Retrieved from the Children's Aids Society of Brant website: [http://casbrant.ca/files/upload/roundtable08/Day1/3\\_Agency\\_Updates/Section\\_3\\_-\\_Waterloo/OACAS\\_conference\\_2008.ppt](http://casbrant.ca/files/upload/roundtable08/Day1/3_Agency_Updates/Section_3_-_Waterloo/OACAS_conference_2008.ppt)> 32.

<sup>29</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 67; Janine Allo and Amber Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now: Project Leadership in Multi-System Change Efforts to Address the Co-Occurrence of Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment (Lesson's Learned from the Greenbook Project Directors)*. National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, (2009), 11.

<sup>30</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 67; Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 12-13.

of the hub.<sup>31</sup> All partners should play a part in defining the role of the coordinator, as without clear responsibilities the job could easily become overwhelming, and the coordinator “may become the sole leader, accountable to all but with little to no authority to make the necessary changes within a particular agency”.<sup>32</sup> On the whole, a coordinator can help manage the day-to-day issues that may arise from working alongside one another at a co-located site, while helping everyone to stay focused on the greater shared vision of the hub. However, the creation of a new, paid position can also lend itself to funding challenges.

## Funding

Funding is a common concern, whether one is creating a new collaborative initiative or not. One of the fears is that funding may not be available, or that there may be power inequalities between agencies due to funding.<sup>33</sup> It is inevitable that there will be a complex web of funding to navigate as partner agencies will be receiving funding from a variety of sources. One challenge of working in a multidisciplinary setting that may be overlooked in the planning process is that pay equity laws mandate that “pay is uniform across all programs among professionals providing services of equal value”.<sup>34</sup> While this could help to reduce fears of inequality between service providers, it may also cause an increase in funding needed to establish and maintain a domestic abuse hub. Funding, especially of the non-profit sector, can also be sporadic, and while a coordinator can help to find new sources of funding, there needs to be a contingency plan in place if one agency’s funding falls through, and tough decisions may have to be made.<sup>35</sup> A funding strategy and an anti-competition clause can also help reduce “competition through

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<sup>31</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 11-12.

<sup>32</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 63-64.

<sup>35</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 63-64.

contract” which can detract from the mandate of the hub, and cause further challenges for the collaborative process and organization’s relationships.<sup>36</sup>

While the hub service-delivery model can potentially save money in the future, it is not considered a money-saving endeavour, as funds will be needed to rent or build a location, as well as hire a coordinator. Fortunately, there is precedent for the Ministry of Attorney General providing funding for such projects, as has been the case in both the Waterloo Family Violence and Durham’s DRIVEN projects.<sup>37</sup> The Ontario Trillium Foundation has also provided seed money to several initiatives, including Peel, Toronto, Durham and Brantford.<sup>38</sup> Fundraising is another option to help finance community hubs. In the case of Waterloo, the lead agency, the Catholic Family Counselling Centre, assumes a large part of the cost for the co-located site, which is then “supplemented through individual rental agreements with on-site partners, negotiated in consideration of space requirements, the base budget of each partner, and the efficiencies realized as a result of co-location”.<sup>39</sup> As for other costs, partner agencies still pay their employee’s salary, benefits and transportation costs.<sup>40</sup> Lastly, there is also the possibility for a partner budget and in-kind contributions to supplement each agency’s individual budgets.

### **Professional Differences & Tensions**

Historically, tension has existed between the various service providers in the domestic abuse field, including the police, children’s aid societies, and woman’s organizations. These

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<sup>36</sup> Jennifer Mullet and Karen Jung, *Becoming a Collaborative Community: Reflecting on and Transforming our Work*, (British Columbia: Inter-agency Inquiry Group, 2002) 12; Gael B. Strack and Sgt. Robert Keetch "Are You Okay? Making a FJC Work, Keeping it Going and Getting Along." PowerPoint Slides. n.d. Retrieved Mar. 28, 2012 from Family Justice Center Alliance Resource Library: <<http://www.familyjusticecenter.org/Resources-New/resource-library.html>> 29.

<sup>37</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Rogers, “Family Court: The Gateway to a Violence-Free Life?”, 23-26.

<sup>39</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 15.

tensions are rooted in differences in philosophies and approaches to domestic abuse. For example, woman's organizations and child welfare agencies have clashed in the past due to differing, and sometimes conflicting, legislative and organizational mandates. Women's domestic abuse organizations focus primarily on ensuring the safety and empowerment of women, while child welfare agencies are mandated to protect the best interests of children above all else, which at times has led to accusations that child welfare is unable "to be sensitive to the needs of abused mothers".<sup>41</sup> These historical tensions are likely to resurface in collaborative attempts, and it is important to try to work through these issues as a group, and in a positive manner, but "as one advocate observed... 'Sometimes success is measured by everyone being willing to sit in the same room together' ".<sup>42</sup> Partners in the collaborative process should be able to respect that there will be professional differences, while acknowledging that everyone is united by a shared vision.<sup>43</sup> One strategy to facilitate this respect and understanding is to use a strength-based approach that recognizes the unique assets that each partner agency or organization brings to the collaborative process.<sup>44</sup> A Memorandum of Agreement between all partners, in addition to specific agreements, are an identified best practice for dealing with differing priorities while still working to achieve the desired outcome(s).<sup>45</sup> Generally, a Memorandum of Agreement "outlines [the] vision, purpose, principles, expectations of partner organizations and individuals and the various standards and procedures..."<sup>46</sup> These agreements

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<sup>41</sup> Kerry Moles, "Bridging the Divide Between Child Welfare and Domestic Violence Services: Deconstructing the Change Process," *Children and Youth Services Review* 30 (2008): 674.

<sup>42</sup> Sadusky, *Working Effectively with the Police*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Mullet, *Becoming a Collaborative Community*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Mullet, *Becoming a Collaborative Community*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 10.

should be updated annually to reflect the growth of the initiative and organizational relationships.<sup>47</sup>

Aside from each service organization having distinct priorities, many professions have their own governing bodies, such as the Law Society of Ontario, which holds its practitioners accountable to specific rules and codes of ethics.<sup>48</sup> While most of the professions do not have explicit codes of conduct for working in a multidisciplinary setting, the Law Society of Upper Canada (LSUC), recognizing the use of collaborative teams, has developed a specific code of conduct regarding responsibility in multidisciplinary practices. According to section 6.10 in the LSUC's professional rules of conduct, "a lawyer in a multi-discipline practice shall ensure that non-licensee partners and associates comply with these rules and all ethical principles that govern a lawyer..."<sup>49</sup> However, there are ways to circumnavigate some of these codes, such as having lawyers provide services without a legal fee, and working independently.<sup>50</sup> It will be important to investigate and stay up to date with each profession's governing societies, as it is likely that many others will begin to address professional conduct in multidisciplinary settings as they become more popular.

Finally, regardless of best intentions, individuals and organizations will enter into collaboration with their own assumptions and beliefs about the others that they will be working with. Professional stereotypes can be damaging, as they can impede the development of relationships.<sup>51</sup> A general lack of understanding of what each agency does can also create tension when assumptions inform beliefs, which can cause undesirable effects in the provision of

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<sup>47</sup> Strack and Sgt. Robert Keetch, "Are You Okay? Making a FJC Work," 28.

<sup>48</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 51.

<sup>49</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 55-56.

<sup>50</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 56

<sup>51</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 58.

services and when making referrals.<sup>52</sup> Exploring these assumptions in a risk free environment and shadowing one other to see how each profession provides services could prove beneficial in trying to overcome and deal with such issues and create empathy between partner agencies. Finally, the road to change as a result of collaboration may not be straightforward, or swift, as Allo and Ptak note that “the larger and more bureaucratic the system, the more time it takes to identify, understand, and begin to work through these differences”.<sup>53</sup>

## Police

One particular decision that has proven controversial in some jurisdictions is the decision to include police officers within the hub initiative. There are both possible advantages and disadvantages to consider when making such a decision. First, adding a police presence to the hub may act as a deterrent for marginalized populations who have a history of being suspicious of the police, such as Aboriginal and immigrant women.<sup>54</sup> A history of racism and abuse by police officers, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and the criminal justice system has prevented many Aboriginal women who experience abuse from seeking help.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, immigrant women may be distrustful of the police if they have been experienced oppression by police in their country of origin, or because they fear deportation.<sup>56</sup> Women who have experienced abuse may also be concerned that by getting the police involved their children will

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<sup>52</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 5-6.

<sup>53</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 63.

<sup>55</sup> *Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence*. Thunder Bay: Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989. 20 November 2011 < <http://www.oaith.ca/assets/files/Publications/Breaking-Free-Report.pdf> > 19.

<sup>56</sup> Sandra Wachholz and Baukje Miedema, "Risk, Fear, Harm: Immigrant Women's Perceptions of the 'Policing Solution' to Woman Abuse," *Crime, Law & Social Change*, 34 (2000): 309.

be taken away from their care.<sup>57</sup> In addition, women who have been dually charged may not seek service at a location where there is police presence for fear of further repercussions.<sup>58</sup>

However, there are also benefits to having the police work alongside other domestic abuse service providers, and the use of best-practices surrounding police's presence in the hub model can help address the aforementioned challenges and concerns. By including the police in a community-based domestic abuse hub, the police can strengthen existing partnerships. Working alongside other domestic abuse service providers could allow for a growth in the police's understanding of domestic abuse service providers' roles and vice versa, allowing for new perspectives and practices to develop. As Sadusky asserts, "organizational change comes from altering how people see their function in the criminal justice system and how they carry out the work assigned to them".<sup>59</sup> The criminal justice system is still a common part of the process for seeking help for domestic abuse, and while "arrest, standing alone, may not make a difference ... it has been most effective when it has been implemented as part of a comprehensive approach that also includes individual support and advocacy for women".<sup>60</sup>

If the police are to be involved in a collaborative service model (and it may well be noted that police officers and police-based victim services are present at both the Waterloo and Durham hub locations), then there are some specific best practices that can be used to help mitigate problems that might arise from their presence at the hub. First, a visual police presence can be kept to a minimum by having police officers wear plain clothes, drive unmarked cars (regardless of rank), and have little to no police paraphernalia (such as not carrying a gun). Such

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<sup>57</sup> Strack and Sgt. Robert Keetch, "Are You Okay? Making a FJC Work," 12.

<sup>58</sup> Strack and Sgt. Robert Keetch, "Are You Okay? Making a FJC Work," 12.

<sup>59</sup> Jane Sadusky, *Working Effectively with the Police: A Guide for Battered Women's Advocates*, (Battered Women's Justice Project: 1994, revised 2001)

<[http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/articles/Working\\_Effectively\\_with\\_Police.pdf](http://www.bwjp.org/files/bwjp/articles/Working_Effectively_with_Police.pdf)> 5.

<sup>60</sup> Sadusky, *Working Effectively with the Police*, 12.



initiatives may assist in reducing undue attention and potential client’s fear surrounding a police presence.<sup>61</sup>

Overall, there are measures that can be taken so as to deal with potential concerns about police presence, and including police in a domestic abuse hub enables the enhancement of stronger relationships and greater understandings between the police and other domestic abuse service providers.

### Confidentiality

In the initial planning stages, “confidentiality concerns generate some of the most tensions”.<sup>62</sup> Fortunately, there are evidence-based best practices that can help quell these worries. The major concern around confidentiality in a multidisciplinary setting is that each profession has its own standards, rules, and obligations to report surrounding confidentiality and privacy.<sup>63</sup> For example, the police will likely need separate Internet servers from the other on-site agencies in order to preserve confidentiality.<sup>64</sup> In order to deal with various confidentiality concerns, the hub must develop its own procedures that “set standards that exceed the minimum ones set by professional bodies”.<sup>65</sup> Durham’s DRIVEN confidentiality procedures are looked to as an example that provides choices in maintaining confidentiality. As DRIVEN asserts, it is “a client’s right to direct their service and choose which agencies will and will not be involved...”<sup>66</sup> Best practices for confidentiality in a hub service-delivery model include a flexible consent form that allows the client to understand which service providers have a duty to report and to decide

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<sup>61</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 74.

<sup>62</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 71.

<sup>63</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 61.

<sup>64</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 74.

<sup>65</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 72.

<sup>66</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 45.

whom to disclose their information.<sup>67</sup> Another option is allowing clients to establish a “circle of care”, that includes service providers authorized to share information among one another.<sup>68</sup> Overall, confidentiality best practices respect the client’s right to choose any of the voluntary services they feel they need at the time, and to be informed regarding how their information will be used and privacy maintained.

### **Issues for Feminist Organizations**

While not all involved in the hub will consider themselves or their organization feminist, it can be argued that the hub service-delivery model *is* a feminist model. As Janet Finn writes, “a feminist approach to human services emphasizes empowerment, participatory decision making and acknowledgement of the interdependent worker-client environment”, all of which are present in the hub service-delivery model.<sup>69</sup> Collaboration can also be very beneficial to the feminist cause, as working together in solidarity can help create new allies, overcome barriers and marginalization, raise greater awareness of the need for gender equality, as well as provide the opportunity to build upon previous successes of the movement.<sup>70</sup> However, working in a multidisciplinary, collaborative setting may pose some unique concerns for feminist organizations.

First, it must be recognized that feminism is a vast ideology and internal conflict within the movement is also likely to carry over to fears and concerns in collaborative initiatives. For example, there is a fear of the issue of sexual assault being lost within the discourse of domestic

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<sup>67</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 72.

<sup>68</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 72.

<sup>69</sup> Janet Finn, “Burnout in the Human Services: A Feminist Perspective,” *Afflia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 5.4 (1990): 61, qtd in. Rebekkah Adams, *Glass Houses: Saving Feminist Anti-Violence Agencies from Self-Destruction*, (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2008) 18.

<sup>70</sup> Sarah Fotheringham, *Identifying Potential for Collaboration: Comparing and Contrasting the Service Delivery Needs of Clients of Women's Shelters with Clients of Sexual Assault Centres in Alberta*, Final Report (Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres & Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, 2006) 7, 13.

abuse and the provision of services.<sup>71</sup> By using “domestic abuse” to encompass all forms of gendered violence, the situation of women who are not assaulted by their partners, but “by other family members, acquaintances, co-workers, clients, and people in positions of authority” is hidden.<sup>72</sup> While there may be arguments over the decision of what terminology to use, Rebekkah Adams warns that the struggle over language “is often semantics” and that while analyzing the power and assumptions embedded in language and changing language to reflect its true meaning can be valuable, it is also important to recognize that this can be detrimental to the cause, and isolate you from potential supporters.<sup>73</sup> Overall, attempts should be made to create a general understanding of feminism and agreement on terms, but it is also important not to let debates about language derail the creation of a domestic abuse hub in its infancy.

### **Deciding On Who the Hub Will Serve**

Another controversial decision will likely come out of discussions of the following question: “Who will be eligible for service at the centre [or hub]?”<sup>74</sup> The research notes that in collaborative domestic abuse projects there is a “perceived pressure for feminist organizations to adopt a ‘gender neutral’ approach to the issue of violence against women, resulting in the loss of gender-specific services”.<sup>75</sup> There will be varying and likely strong opinions on whether or not to offer services to men who either perpetuate or experience abuse. The question may then become, “How can we provide gender-inclusive services without adopting a ‘gender neutral’ approach to the issue of violence against women?”<sup>76</sup> It is important to have these conversations in a risk-free

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<sup>71</sup> Fotheringham, *Identifying Potential for Collaboration*, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Adams, *Glass Houses*, 81.

<sup>73</sup> Adams, *Glass Houses*, 82- 83.

<sup>74</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 18.

environment so partners can express their hopes and fears in providing such services.<sup>77</sup> One method of dealing with such conflict in a collaborative manner has been used in the United States, which is to “[establish] a foundation about when it is appropriate to work with men who use violence and when it is not appropriate”.<sup>78</sup>

Adams also recommends moving past a “victim-only mandate” which requires staff to screen “who is being victimized and tossing out the person who is being abusive”.<sup>79</sup> This could act as a deterrent to seeking help, because “... if women are not treated as whole packages, good, bad and ugly, the service is not helping them, as they have to keep parts hidden or be dishonest to themselves or to the agency in order to access service”.<sup>80</sup>

Ultimately, these decisions will take up a significant time in the planning stages of a domestic abuse hub, as they are complex and important issues that need serious consideration from all involved. The next section on relationships will also provide some strategies for dealing with differing priorities and differences while fostering positive working relationships.

## Relationships

In the collaborative process there is often a heavy focus on the outcomes that can be achieved by working together, but “if relationships and results are not held in equal regard...” than the work needed to actually achieve such results can easily be forgotten.<sup>81</sup> One of the biggest challenges is the establishment of positive interpersonal and organizational relationships, although doing so can bring about the greatest rewards. This focus on relationship building has to

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<sup>77</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 32.

<sup>78</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 32.

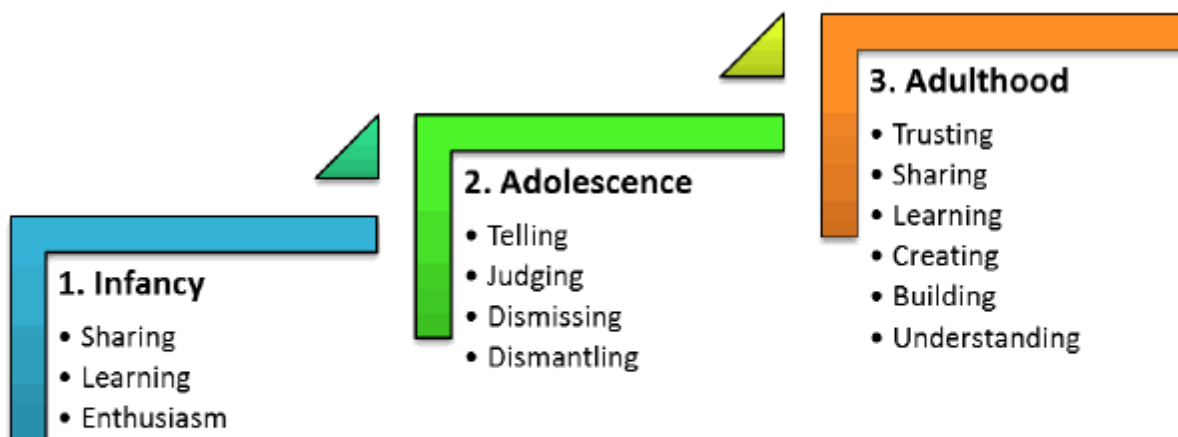
<sup>79</sup> Adams, *Glass Houses*, 79.

<sup>80</sup> Adams, *Glass Houses*, 80.

<sup>81</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 8.

occur right from the initial planning stages, as it is a crucial factor in the success or failure of collaborative initiatives.

Change, even when it is welcomed, can be uncomfortable and difficult, and resistance is to be expected.<sup>82</sup> Collaborative relationships go through various periods of growth, with great enthusiasm in the initial stages, but a challenging, transitional period once the grace or honeymoon period ends (see Figure 1).<sup>83</sup>



**Figure 1: Stages of VAW Service Providers' Relationship Development**  
(adapted from Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region, "Family Violence Team", 28-30).

Challenges to creating positive working relationships are often focused around a lack of flexibility and a real or perceived inequality in commitment, as well as power.<sup>84</sup> Time-pressures can cause strain on relationships as it hampers the ability of all organizations to be flexible and creative in service provision.<sup>85</sup> A perceived (or real) lack of participation and commitment, or conversely, an "over-valuing of one agency at the expense of the other(s)" can also cause internal

<sup>82</sup> Brown, *The Dance of Many Partners*, 15.

<sup>83</sup> Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region, "Family Violence Team," 28-30.

<sup>84</sup> Mullet, *Becoming a Collaborative Community*, 25, 27.

<sup>85</sup> Mullet, *Becoming a Collaborative Community*, 24.

strife which can affect all working relationships.<sup>86</sup> Even if an organization is not being “over-valued”, its size and perceived power can still greatly affect collaboration, and thus, the forming of relationships. Various sources noted that larger organizations had more power than smaller ones, were more formal (and hierarchical) and less flexible, which led to smaller organizations feeling frustrated and lost in the bureaucratic structure.<sup>87</sup>

Fortunately, there are a multitude of best practices to foster positive healthy relationships, which is especially important due to the nature of the work involved in the domestic abuse field. In working together to try to end violence against women and create a culture that has more positive relationships, the work must begin on an organizational and interpersonal level while collaborating, so as to act as a model for the community.

Having a high level of respect for and understanding of each other is paramount. It is unlikely that all partners will always be in agreeance, or even like each other, but there can still be respect for one another and the collaborative process.<sup>88</sup> One highly recommended way to foster such respect and understanding is to have regular cross-training sessions. Such sessions help create relationships as it allows each profession to share their lived experiences, knowledge, and evidenced-based findings.<sup>89</sup> Cross-trainings can also help to break down silos and can act as a space where discussions of practices and constructive criticism can take place.<sup>90</sup> Regular cross-training sessions can prove informative for keeping all partners up to date, while allowing for the creation of sustainable relationships. By understanding each other’s professions more

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<sup>86</sup> Mullet, *Becoming a Collaborative Community*, 25.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, *The Dance of Many Partners*, 85; Mullet, *Becoming a Collaborative Community*, 27.

<sup>88</sup> Strack and Sgt. Robert Keetch, "Are You Okay? Making a FJC Work," 38.

<sup>89</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 70-71.

<sup>90</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 71.

thoroughly, the hub can run more smoothly, as it increases the likelihood of services being promoted by partners to the clients they serve.<sup>91</sup>

In order to deal with potential challenges to the creation and maintenance of positive relationships such as power imbalances and a lack of commitment, clear roles and expectations should be established, upon which professional relationships can then be built upon.<sup>92</sup> Discussions and reflections about professional boundaries, and each members “sphere of influence” can also be useful to challenge assumptions and work through issues that may impede relationships.<sup>93</sup> Finally, relationships issues and conflicts are one of the ever-present challenges of collaborating, and as such, should be prioritized accordingly.

## Communication

Communication also plays an important role in the success of collaborative initiatives, as it can help create unity through a sense of understanding of goals and tasks to be completed, or it can lead to conflict when communication is not clear or consistent. In addition, in collaborating with other domestic abuse service providers, language and terminology may create some issues. Each profession has its own organizational culture and professional jargon, which may make effective communication across professional lines difficult.<sup>94</sup> Even when agencies use the same terminology, for example “risk and safety”, there may be different understandings of such

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<sup>91</sup> Family Violence Project of Waterloo, "Working Together to Make a Difference," PowerPoint Slides. n.d. Retrieved from the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women and Children's website: <http://www.crvawc.ca/documents/Family%20Violence%20Project%20Waterloo%20Region.pdf> > 7.

<sup>92</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 71.

<sup>93</sup> Jacobs and Jacobs, *Multidisciplinary Paths to Family Justice*, 71; Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 16.

<sup>94</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 6.

concepts.<sup>95</sup> It is recommended that the language and terminology used is defined clearly, jargon-free, and “connected to the realities of families” (or the main population being served).<sup>96</sup>

Formal and informal methods of communicating need to be established so that communication is open and frequent.<sup>97</sup> This can be done in a variety of ways, many of which are creative. On a formal level, there can be “daily notes, weekly emails, monthly newsletters, [and] monthly community partners meeting...” and on a more informal level, “monthly brown bag [lunches], walk the floors ... monthly open houses”.<sup>98</sup> Clear communication can potentially help to decrease conflict by keeping everyone informed, and establishing trust and respect.

In addition to more structured forms of communication, there also needs to be the creation of safe spaces where discussions can occur in a risk-free environment. As Allo and Ptak argue, there needs to be mechanisms used to share risk and build trust, especially in conversations that carry a lot of assumptions or bring out people’s passions.<sup>99</sup> A facilitator may be useful, so that discussions do not deteriorate into system bashing, but are meaningful and productive.<sup>100</sup> Sometimes this can simply mean reframing a question from ‘what has the response been to this issue?’ (which focuses on systemic and organizational failures) to ‘what are the needs of this specific population’ and how can they be met through our work?<sup>101</sup> Other strategies including having a backgrounder prepared to create context and present facts that can create the foundation of the discussion, in addition to setting rules for discussion.<sup>102</sup> Partners also need to be able to need to listen to each other, and as one staff member of a collaborative project said, recognize that “we do not have all the right answers, and to always be open to another point of

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<sup>95</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 6.

<sup>96</sup> Brown, *The Dance of Many Partners*, 15, 28; Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 6.

<sup>97</sup> Brown, *The Dance of Many Partners*, 14.

<sup>98</sup> Strack and Sgt. Robert Keetch, "Are You Okay? Making a FJC Work," 35-36.

<sup>99</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 31.

<sup>100</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 6.

<sup>101</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 34.

<sup>102</sup> Allo and Ptak, *If I Knew Then What I Know Now*, 31.



view”.<sup>103</sup> Ultimately, communication lies at the foundation of relationships and having clear strategies for communicating effectively will likely increase the success of a collaborative hub initiative by being transparent and helping to build respect, trust, and understanding.

## Summary

As I have illustrated, although there are many challenges to collaborating in a multidisciplinary, co-located setting, there are also many advantages to both service providers and the populations they serve. This report is not meant to discourage, but rather, provide perspectives into the challenges that may be faced when attempting to create a domestic abuse hub, and identify strategies that could be helpful in dealing with these issues. While researching evidence-based best practices is useful for informing action and policies, these recommendations cannot be seen as the only way to collaborate in a hub service-delivery model, nor can they be seen as guaranteeing success. As stressed throughout this report, localized approaches to domestic abuse are the most successful initiatives, as what has been proven to work in Waterloo, Durham, or Peel may not necessarily fit the needs of Peterborough’s population. In going forward, it will be important to proactively address issues related co-location, funding, professional differences and tensions, relationships, and communication. To conclude, I leave you with the words of a woman abuse survivor: "*Do it. Make it happen. There are more reasons to do it than not*".<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Spencer, “It’s All About Team Work,” 23.

<sup>104</sup> Collective Wisdom Consulting, *Collaborative Service Delivery Site For Victims of Partner Abuse*, 3.

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