

Group urges formal reviews of domestic killings

Plan aimed at preventing murders

BY STEPHANE MASSINON, CALGARY HERALD JUNE 11, 2010

The province is being urged to start formal reviews of domestic homicides to learn more about how they happen.

Two provinces, New Brunswick and British Columbia, have recently instituted domestic violence review committees, and Ontario has had one for years. But participants at the Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Conference in Calgary said Thursday they think Alberta -- and Calgary, with nine such murders in 2009 -- could gain much from studying these deaths more closely.

HomeFront executive director Kevin McNichol said Alberta's own death review committee would be "a wonderful addition" that would help bring together agencies working on domestic violence.

"Historically, our problem has always been that many of these cases are falling between the cracks. We hear this all the time," said McNichol, whose group advocates against domestic violence. "The only way you close up those cracks is by having relationships among a variety of stakeholders and partners that have a vested interest in addressing this issue."

He said a review committee differs from police investigations or fatality inquiries because those look more specifically at assigning blame. A review looks at how the violent relationship developed and looks for ways to improve the help available to those affected.

McNichol said even reviewing a few domestic homicides a year in Alberta could be revealing. He points to the 2009 homicides of the Louie children in their Calgary home. Their father is accused of killing his nine-and 13-year-old children and then trying to murder his wife.

"They were a fairly average family in almost all respects and then something changed. I'm sure there were people around that home (such as family, co-workers or counsellors) that may have had some inklings about what was happening. Those people have things to teach us, and that's what the death reviews are about," said McNichol.

Department of Justice spokesman David Dear said the province is considering the idea.

"It interests us, but beyond that, we're currently in the research stage," said Dear.

Staff Sgt. Patty McCallum of the Calgary Police Service's domestic conflict unit said the idea is worth looking at.

"It's looking at the victim, looking at the perpetrator, survivors, talking to family members and bringing in all the community agencies, police, medical examiner, coroner, to have a look at the death and how things could be done better and how to prevent it from happening in the future."

smassinon@theherald.canwest.com

© Copyright (c) The Calgary Herald