



HOMEFRONT
STOP IT WHERE IT STARTS

On the HomeFront

HomeFront Model Lowering Re-offence Rates

“It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child,” says Kevin McNichol, executive director for HomeFront. “What is happening in Calgary through the coordinated community-justice response to domestic violence is a testament to that adage. The power of the collective to bring about positive social change is evidenced by the continuing success of the HomeFront model.”

New statistics suggest lower recidivism rates for offenders appearing in Calgary’s specialized domestic violence court.

Benchmark recidivism rates for other specialized responses to domestic violence run at 30% (Tolman, R.M. and Weisz, A., 1995). HomeFront’s baseline recidivism rate was 34%, dropping to 12% in 2004 and in 2006, dropping even further to 9%.

“The lower recidivism rate is giving us some breathing room to cope with an increased number of cases coming from Alberta’s burgeoning population,” stated McNichol. “We’re breaking even. We’re bailing water as fast as we can. The population boom is putting added pressure on all of our social services.”

HomeFront is a collective of systems and services sharing a common vision and goal, that of reducing domestic violence in Calgary. The work on the ground is made possible by the partnerships with



and collaborative work performed by: HomeFront Court Caseworkers, the Crown Prosecutors’ Office, The Calgary Police Service, Community Corrections (Probation), Calgary Legal Aid Society and the two treatment agencies involved with the initiative, Calgary Counselling Centre and YWCA Sheriff King Home.

The specialized court features a team of experts who work with the court with hopes to offer treatment focused resolutions in appropriate cases. As a result, 70 per cent of cases were resolved at the docket (first appearance) level in 2006. Cases resolved at this stage saw only a 12 per cent withdrawal rate compared to 45 per cent if the case proceeded to trial.

The most common reason for withdrawal of a case is the complainant failing to appear in court (35 per cent). This highlights the tumultuous nature of domestic violence, the one crime in which the accused often goes home with the victim.

In 2006, HomeFront’s four docket court caseworkers contacted 74 per cent of all the victims and made 22,632 collateral contacts on behalf of complainants. Trial court caseworkers successfully contacted 70 per cent of all trial case victims. 82 per cent of victims who attended trials had prior contact with a HomeFront caseworker. The number of complainants recanting their statements dropped in the specialized domestic violence court from 32 per cent to 10. **HF**

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Taking Action Against Elder Abuse

Abuse against citizens over the age of 65 has, in past years, become an unseen and dangerous problem, affecting nearly half of Canada's elderly population. The lack of a response to this problem has prompted various Alberta-based agencies, including HomeFront, to create the Action Group on Elder Abuse (AGEA).

The AGEA was established in January 2004 to help enhance and coordinate police and community response to elder abuse, a problem more common than most would think.

According to a 2005 Statistics Canada report, nearly four out of ten women over the age of 65 were victims of abuse. The number of abused elderly men is slightly lower, at 20 per cent.

Police and community services have no existent model which addresses elderly abuse and as such, the abuse is virtually hidden. Often, intervention occurs only after the abusive situation has escalated.

As Calgarians move into middle age, they are increasingly concerned with their parents and the treatment they receive yet are unaware of what steps to take to ensure their parent's safety. The AGEA meets once a month in hopes to remedy

the problem by increasing awareness, educating the public and support agencies as well as conducting research and enhancing existing services.

The AGEA is comprised of various groups concerned with the lack of response for this abuse. The Calgary Police Service, Family Services, Calgary Senior Services, Kirby Centre, Rotary Shelter and The Alliance to End Violence, among others, contribute to finding a solution to the dilemma.

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Wanda Clark, a HomeFront Court Caseworker, says that elder abuse can take many forms, and does not just manifest itself with violence.

“The elderly are easily targeted for financial abuse,” Clark said. “They are isolated and dependent on other people. It’s easy for the elderly to be exploited.”

As the elderly become more dependent

on their adult children, fewer agencies come into contact with them, making the possibility of intervention more difficult to obtain.

Even if a health worker discovers abuse, police only get involved if the abuse is of a physical nature.

Clark hopes AGEA's efforts will force elder abuse to go the way of child abuse in how it is treated by society and the police.

“Only decades ago, no one would interfere if a child was disciplined or abused at school or at home. Fortunately, the public's attitude about this issue has changed. We are working towards a similar change in attitude regarding abuse of the elderly.”

The AGEA Task Team is currently reviewing response models from across the country and in the United States. They hope to tailor preexisting intervention models to fit Calgary's unique needs. They are planning a workshop for next year, where guest speakers and researchers will offer their opinions on how to best end the abuse.

The Task Team hopes to have an intervention model in place by next year. **HF**

The Morley Reserve Initiative

HomeFront and several Calgary agencies collaborated earlier in the year to provide much needed domestic violence treatment to First Nation citizens on the Morley Reserve.

The program, called the Morley Initiative, was carried out by a partnership of HomeFront, the YWCA Sheriff King Home, and the Tsuu T'ina Nation Stoney Corrections Society. The initiative was funded by the Alberta Mental Health

Board and took place over two days the last weekend of May.

The Morley Initiative included 15 members of the Morley band who had been charged with domestic violence and referred by the courts to seek specialized treatment and counselling. The Initiative is the first of its kind and may serve as a benchmark for future domestic violence treatment programs.

20 people were referred to the Initiative by the courts and of the 15 who participated, 14 completed both sessions. The number is much higher than usual and exceeded HomeFront's expectations.

Event organizers modelled the program after the interactive group setting used by the YWCA Sheriff King Home for similar domestic violence treatment. The structure allowed participants to talk

with referees and counsellors. Violence information and anger management training were also provided to participants in the workshop portion of the weekend.

Many participants left the Initiative feeling satisfied and thankful that they had found a venue in which they could talk about childhood experiences. Studies have shown that participants of workshop styled treatment programs are less likely to re-offend than those taking part in traditional programs.

Prior attempts at domestic violence treatment on reserves were not received as well as hoped because many aboriginal bands are mistrustful of outsiders. The Morley Initiative sought to remedy this problem by using aboriginal caseworkers who spoke the Morley language. The elders, who hold a position of great respect within the tribe, also participated in the Initiative, lending it a legitimacy other treatment programs have lacked.



HomeFront also provided transportation for the participants. Usually, participants are forced to find their own transportation from the Reserve and into the city.

Monica Onespot of the Tsuu T'ina Nation Stoney Corrections Society says the participants "seemed to process the skills they learned" and recognized that treatment is "not just important for their home, but for the entire community."

The organizers of the pilot strived to create an atmosphere of encouragement and understanding, where participants

felt comfortable instead of coerced. Domestic violence on First Nations reserves is widespread and, due to the remote location of the reserves and the cultural gap that exists between service providers and aboriginals, often left untreated. Lack of employment, resources, and education make domestic violence 5 to 8 times more likely on First Nation reserves than anywhere else. Onespot said two thirds of the Tsuu T'ina's probation files are domestic violence related.

Forensic Assessment Outpatient Services (FAOS) hopes to conduct a follow up on the Morley Reserve in the fall when they will offer more support for the men and attempt to strengthen the connection made during the spring. Following the encouraging feedback, HomeFront and its partners are discussing plans for another initiative later this year. **HF**

Upcoming HomeFront Events

The 7th Annual Jerry P. Selinger Invitational Tournament will be held at the Earl Grey Golf Club on Monday September 17, 2007. HomeFront gratefully acknowledges this year's sponsors who make the event possible:

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The 2007 Selinger Awards Luncheon is scheduled for Friday, November 16, 2007 at the Westin Calgary. This is the only event of its kind in Calgary to recognize and honour the dedication and excellence of frontline workers and volunteers in the domestic violence sector.

The focus for the awards is on the individual, not the organization for which they work or volunteer. Awards are presented in the Justice/Law Enforcement, Community Frontline Worker, Community Frontline Volunteer and Community Volunteer Builder categories. The awards granted in the Justice/Law Enforcement and Community Frontline Worker categories include a bursary of up to \$2,000 for professional development opportunities. The deadline for submission of nominations is September 7th.

To find out how to become involved, please contact Isabel Piggott at 206-2100 ext. 222; or email: isabel@homefrontcalgary.com. **HF**

HomeFront is funded by

Alberta Children's Services, Alberta Mental Health Board, The Calgary Foundation, City of Calgary Crime Prevention Investment Plan, Community Incentive Fund, The Prairieaction Foundation, United Way of Calgary and Area and the Victims of Crime Fund

Police Officers Performing Above and Beyond the Call of Duty

HomeFront and the Calgary Police Service have joined forces to create a program geared toward positively impacting the perspective of police officers towards domestic violence.

The joint initiative, called the Hi-Five 10-11 Volunteer Program, hopes that by recognizing officers for positive investigative actions during domestic violence calls, attitudes of dismay and futility in regards to domestic violence may change.

“A lot of first responders are frustrated,” said Kevin McNichol, executive director at HomeFront. “A lot of the time, they’re going back to the same houses over and over again.”

Police receive approximately 13,000 domestic violence calls a year, making household conflict the second most reported crime. However, only 3,000

of the calls end with charges being laid. One quarter (27 per cent) of all domestic violence complaints involve repeat calls for police intervention.

Due to the seemingly endless cycle of domestic violence, police officers feel they cannot make a difference and oftentimes feel limited when responding to a call.

The Hi-Five program hopes to identify cases where officers perform above and beyond the call of duty and reward them by documenting their exceptional service in their personnel file. These commendations assist in building morale as well as potential career aspirations.

“If they invest more, they can prevent murders,” said McNichol on the consequences of police efforts toward domestic abuse. Police are limited in their resources and carry a heavy

work load responding to domestic calls. Follow through is critical when investigating domestic violence. Officers have the ability to prevent a victim from potentially becoming seriously injured or, in worst case scenario, being murdered.

The Hi-Five program is staffed by volunteers who review cases and reward police on one of six determinates of good police behaviour. Over 20 investigations have been highlighted to date and officers have expressed their appreciation of the time and recognition provided.

Without the strong partnership between HomeFront and the Calgary Police Service and the commitment of dedicated volunteers, this initiative would not be possible. As a team, we continue to make a difference in the area of domestic violence. **HF**



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