



HOMEFRONT
STOP IT WHERE IT STARTS

On the HomeFront

Summer 2006



On her first trip to Australia, Alberta provincial court judge Sherry Van de Veen's presentation about the Calgary domestic violence court project was so well received she was asked to give it three more times.

"The information was of great interest to them, so much so that I was also asked to address the National Association of Australian Magistrates the day after my original presentation, and the Edith Cowan University Faculty of Law and Faculty of Psychiatry," she says. "I was also asked to meet with two law professors in New Zealand on my way home. There was that much interest."

Judge Van de Veen was invited to present a paper about the Calgary court

Keen international interest in Calgary's domestic violence court

at the Third International Conference on Therapeutic Jurisprudence in Perth, June 7-9, 2006. An international audience of about 300 people from diverse backgrounds attended the conference. "This conference had a multi-disciplinary aspect to it," says Judge Van de Veen. "All of the stakeholders were there: psychiatrists, psychologists, administrators of problem-solving courts, social workers, the police, Crown prosecutors, defence counsel and judges.

"Many people have followed our model and, internationally, the ideas we have here are being carried forward by a multitude of disciplines. HomeFront can be proud of the work it's doing.

"One of the things they all found extremely important were court-ordered reviews. That's a concept that our domestic violence court here has used very effectively to improve compliance with court orders. It's a great advantage to probation officers and treatment

people to say to an offender, 'This has to happen within a certain time.' It brings people back to court to see how they're doing. It monitors not only the offender but the system. It makes the system work the way it is supposed to and it gives offenders the structure they need to focus on what they are required to do under the order."

Back in Canada, Judge Van de Veen feels that more education about preventative or collaborative justice is needed right here at home at the law school level, in the medical area and in each of the stakeholder disciplines. "We all operate in these airtight containers which are wonderful as far as they go, but they don't address the overall issues. The changing roles of judges, the changing roles of defence, the changing roles of Crown prosecutors, of police and treatment agencies: all of these are part of an educational process that should be improved and expanded upon," she says. **HF**

Kevin McNichol new executive director at HomeFront

HomeFront's board of directors has announced that Kevin McNichol is the agency's new executive director effective July 21, 2006. He succeeds Bonnie Knox who retired in April. In making the announcement board co-chairs Bev Longstaff and Brian Felesky said, "We are proud to welcome Kevin to his new position. He brings a great deal of passion and commitment to HomeFront and to ending the cycle of domestic violence that affects too many people in our community."

Kevin has worked at the agency almost from its inception, serving originally as trainer and communications officer beginning in May 2000, and becoming court team manager in 2004. He is an articulate spokesperson for HomeFront and the collaborative justice/community response to domestic violence in Calgary and area. He is often invited to speak about HomeFront's success to diverse audiences across Canada. **HF**

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Escape from domestic violence almost insurmountable for many immigrant women

Immigrants from diverse cultures face enormous challenges when they trade the familiarity of their homeland for a new life in Canada. Even if home is at war within its borders, as is the case in Sudan, and there is relief over landing in a peaceful country, each new immigrant arrives with expectations about the new country—usually rosy—while carrying the imprint of his or her specific culture, a condition common to people everywhere.

Some immigrants come from cultures that do not educate their females and consider women to be property, something those living in most western cultures, when they hear of it, find intensely abusive. But if you are an immigrant woman from such a culture, one who accepts its customs because this is what you know, what happens when you are further abused by your spouse or other family members? What do you do in this situation, especially when your worldview is so different and knowledge about your new country is limited?

“The barriers immigrant women face are huge,” says Jana Smith, coordinator for the Calgary Coalition Against Family Violence. “Even if a woman somehow finds the courage to report the abuse, the roadblocks ahead can seem insurmountable. She thinks, ‘Who’s going to provide for me?’ She probably can’t get work in Canada, or if she does, it will be such a low paying job she won’t be able to provide for her family, if she’s even allowed to keep her children. She will probably lose them and everything else when

she leaves that family. It’s all lost. She has nothing. She may leave without a passport because her husband controls all the papers. She really has no status in Canada. That’s a huge problem for her. Many are in that position. They have to apply to gain immigrant status which can take months and years. Even her community may shun her.”

“They don’t want to bring out anything that would shine a negative light on their group even though we know domestic violence exists in all cultures.”

Those who work on the front lines of domestic violence know that stress within families contributes to the problem, and the hidden nature of the crime prevents the necessary intervention, treatment and healing. “The immigration process itself puts stresses on people,” says Jana. “They arrive without the family support or the community support they may be used to having.” The problem is compounded by others from the same cultural community living here who want to present a public face to Canadians that they are good people. “They don’t want to bring out anything that would shine a negative light on their group even though we know domestic violence exists in all cultures,” Jana says.

Lack of knowledge compounds the problem

“One overriding factor is lack of knowledge about the Canadian legal system, the justice system, how it works, and perceptions about the police. Some think the police are crooked; that they won’t believe them; that they can be bribed by the husband. And there’s

a lack of understanding about what the police are supposed to do and not do,” Jana says. Under these circumstances, false perceptions prevail. “They sometimes think police are going to come and rescue them from whatever is happening. Fix it. Make it better and then everything is going to be rosy after that.”

Greater education is needed for both sides. Training for police to increase their cultural awareness and knowledge about how to respond to

domestic violence calls from immigrant communities, and education for immigrant communities as to what the police are allowed to do and what they should do in these situations. “We need to teach people who are new here what their responsibilities are as well teaching them about their rights. We can’t shift all of the blame onto the shoulders of police. It’s always a two-way street.”

Education within cultural communities crucial, takes time

Beyond learning about rights and responsibilities, research studies looking at the reporting of domestic violence to police indicate significantly reduced numbers for women from ethno-cultural backgrounds. Some publications believe that many women do not report at all, which means that those inside these communities must begin to acknowledge the problem exists. One way to improve the situation is for their compatriots to learn how to respond to disclosures of domestic violence instead of turning a blind eye. Shunning people with

the hope of saving the community's public face isn't the answer, either. Once abuse is acknowledged, the next step is to learn about the resources available in Calgary to help families experiencing domestic conflict.

Even though a shift from taboo subject to compassionate involvement is necessary, it won't happen overnight. "Working with ethnically diverse communities takes time," Jana says. "When you look at studies on community development you find that it takes five years, five years to get something into a community and allow it to be established, recognized and accepted."

HomeFront and other agencies making inroads

With more than 100 language groups now based in predominantly English-speaking Calgary, how much impact can the local social service and religious communities have on immigrants coping with domestic abuse? Results are mixed.

Two members from HomeFront's domestic court caseworker team can communicate with complainants in Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Polish, and the team's assistant speaks both Mandarin and Cantonese. Beyond that, caseworkers call upon interpreters to assist. "I've needed interpreters who speak Korean, French, Arabic, Newar, Dinka and Russian," Liz says. Other languages requiring interpreters include Vietnamese, Italian, German and a number of African languages.

Agencies such as the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA), Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) and Calgary Immigrant Aid Society are focused on helping diverse communities each in its own way. Among the many services offered,

Calgary Immigrant Aid Society has a language bank, CIWA has a comprehensive domestic violence program and many first language counsellors, and CCIS has cultural liaisons from various communities who transfer information back and forth.

"They sometimes think the police are crooked; that they won't believe them; that they can be bribed by the husband."

More recently, requests have come to the Coalition from those seeking more information about domestic abuse. In July, the Coalition responded to the Hispanic community's appeal for knowledge. Coalition members spent the day sharing information and providing a panel that included Laura Craik from HomeFront. And with support from the Coalition, the Cambodian community is beginning to examine domestic violence in hopes of helping their members who are living in abusive relationships.

Compassion and practical assistance more important than cultural knowledge

Jana thinks that those who provide services to people affected by abuse need to overcome the idea that they don't know enough about various cultures and the cultural aspects relating to domestic violence in those communities. "Recognize that what you are seeing is a woman in need of help. She's probably had to climb a mountain and back down just to cross the threshold to get to court. She's had to overcome many barriers within her own community and within her own culture. Recognize the steps she's making. It is not easy. It's way bigger than you and I can even imagine. The steps have been huge so give her the dignity to acknowledge where she's come from and work with her. Give her the respect she desires." **HF**

The following organizations belong to the Calgary Coalition Against Family Violence:

Awo-Taan Native Women's Shelter

Brenda Strafford Centre

Calgary Alliance for Promoting Harmonious Families

Calgary Catholic Immigration Society

Calgary Counselling Centre

Calgary Immigrant Aid Society

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

Calgary Legal Guidance

Calgary Centre for Newcomers

Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter

Canadian Red Cross

Catholic Family Services

Council of Sikh Organizations

Discovery House

Grace Women's Health Resources

Jewish Family Services of Calgary

Kerby Rotary Shelter for Seniors

Peer Support Services for Abused Women

Sunrise Community Link Resource Centre

Violence Information and Education Centre

Women in Need Society

Women's Centre of Calgary

Youville Women's Residence

YWCA Sheriff King Family Violence Prevention Centre



Voices of experience help New Brunswick stakeholders on threshold of new specialized domestic violence court program

The province of New Brunswick is on the verge of launching a specialized domestic violence justice/community program similar to HomeFront’s, in part based on several visits to Calgary during the past two years and consultations with HomeFront’s senior staff.

Then on June 1 about 70 people representing New Brunswick justice, law enforcement, advocates, treatment programs and a range of service providers heard first-hand how specialized domestic violence courts and the collaborative justice/community approach to a serious criminal problem are working in other parts of Canada.

Manitoba’s chief justice, Raymond Wyant, Judge Heino Lilles from the Yukon and Kevin McNichol, HomeFront’s executive director travelled to Fredericton and took turns presenting what they’ve learned about domestic violence courts. For the next hour they fielded audience questions. The speakers then joined New Brunswick’s chief judge, other justice officials and judicial representatives for a three-hour lunch and a further round of questions from their hosts. “We came to speak about our various processes,” says Kevin. “The idea was

to provide them with an opportunity to ask questions about the strengths, benefits and things to watch out for while they go forward with selecting a particular process that will meet their community’s needs.

“When you come together to collaborate on this kind of process you quickly realize that your worldview is not coming anywhere close to encompassing all that’s involved and all the players who are involved.”

“For the larger audience I chose to focus more on the experience we have had here in developing a domestic violence court. I really spoke to them about the unique opportunities and challenges they are going to face as they come together and collaborate as a community. In Calgary, I was forced to broaden my views on what’s involved in the justice system and what’s involved in providing social services systems. It was a surprising lesson. People thought they had the answers. When you come together to collaborate on this kind of a process you quickly realize that your worldview is not coming anywhere close to encompassing all that’s involved and all the players who are involved. That’s a really exciting challenge and the court becomes a physical manifestation of those challenges. They’ll have to work through them.”

The two judges were able to share with their peers that training and awareness about domestic violence are necessary. Such a major issue requires different responses from those traditionally held, for a number of reasons. For one,

domestic violence cases are unique and require a faster response if any change for the better is to occur

for the people involved. For another, the court is part of the community and if it doesn’t take its responses seriously, then the community won’t either.

“My responses to the judges’ questions came more from the community perspective, about the importance of messages coming from the bench,” says Kevin. “Our treatment organizations really see the difference when a judge lectures an accused after a sentence and admonishes that person to go and have a better life. When the judge tells the accused that this is an opportunity they are being provided and they need to take advantage of that opportunity, we see clients coming into treatment who are far more open and ready to do the needed personal work than when they are given a quick sentence and sent on their way.” **HF**



Sign up for Selinger Golf Tournament

The sixth annual Jerry P. Selinger Golf Tournament at the Earl Grey Golf Course is only weeks away. Come out and join the fun. The first group will tee off Sept. 18 at 1 p.m. Proceeds raised will go to HomeFront’s Jerry Selinger

Memorial Fund and to the Peter Lougheed Centre’s Pulmonary Hypertension Clinic. To register, make a donation or become a sponsor contact Andrea Palmer at Andrea.Palmer@calgaryhealthregion.ca. **HF**

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