

# THE NIAGARA REGION

## Domestic Violence Report Card 2011/12

### *The System Matters*

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*with Barb Hotson, MSW (can)*



The Coalition  
to End Violence  
Against Women

## Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women Member Agencies

Bethlehem Housing and Support Services  
Centre de santé Communautaire  
Child Advocacy Centre Niagara  
Design for A New Tomorrow  
Family & Children's Services Niagara  
Family Counselling Centre  
Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre  
Fort Erie Multicultural Centre  
Fort Erie Native Friendship Centre  
Gillian's Place  
Interpreters Niagara-Hamilton  
Ministry of Community Safety & Correctional Services  
- St. Catharines Area Parole & Probation Services  
Niagara Chapter - Native Women Inc.  
Niagara Region Public Health  
Niagara Region Sexual Assault Centre  
Niagara Regional Housing  
Niagara Regional Native Centre  
Niagara Regional Police Service  
Port Cares  
Sexual Assault / Domestic Violence Treatment Program Niagara  
Victim Services Niagara  
Victim/Witness Assistance Program  
Welland Heritage Council and Multicultural Centre /  
Multicultural Network of Niagara Falls  
West Niagara Second Stage Housing & Counselling  
Women's Place of South Niagara Inc.  
YWCA Niagara Region

### EX-OFFICIO

Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration  
Ministry of Community and Social Services

### CONTACT

The Coalition to End Violence Against Women  
[www.CEVAW.com](http://www.CEVAW.com)

# The Coalition to End Violence Against Women

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW) is a collective voice of organizations from the Niagara Region that is working toward ending violence against women by raising public awareness, educating, sharing information, networking, and identifying and breaking down systemic barriers that perpetuate violence.

## VISION STATEMENT

To End Violence Against Women

## KNOWLEDGE AND RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Anne Armstrong, E.D. Gillian's Place, Chair

Elizabeth Zimmerman, E.D. YWCA

Ruthann Brown, E.D. Women's Place of South Niagara

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# Acknowledgments

*The author would like to acknowledge all of the participants who took their time to contribute to this document. A special and heart felt thanks to the 23 women who bravely met with the researcher(s) and shared their stories. These women provided the heart and soul to the material that is contained in this report. It is with deep gratitude and appreciation that we dedicate this work to them and all women whose stories mirror the ones you are about to read.*

Special thanks must also be given to the agencies from the Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW) for opening their doors and allowing their staff to participate in this project. We recognize that opening your doors involved vulnerability and the possibility that the feedback may not always be what you want to hear. Participating in this project is a testament to your dedication to working towards improving the lives of the families that you work with.

There is great admiration for the front line staff that participated in this project. Your work is of the utmost importance and we look to you every day to keep families safe. We should never forget how difficult your jobs are and how much dedication you have. Thank you for putting one foot in front of the other every day.

The researcher would like to acknowledge the support of the following; Anne Armstrong, Ruthann Brown, Elisabeth Zimmerman, John McLachlan, and Erin Snajdman-Griver, for their constant feedback, their editing, their patience, their vision, and dedication. To everyone who provided some feedback along the way, thank you.

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The inspiration of the title of this project is derived from Dr. Ed Gondolf. At a seminar attended by the researcher on June 17, 2012 Dr. Gondolf, in addressing the audience indicated that “the system matters” and we could not agree more.

CEVAW gratefully acknowledges funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ontario Women’s Directorate.

Finally, to my daughters — may we take care of this so that you do not have to. ■

Ian DeGeer, PhD (can)

# THE NIAGARA REGION

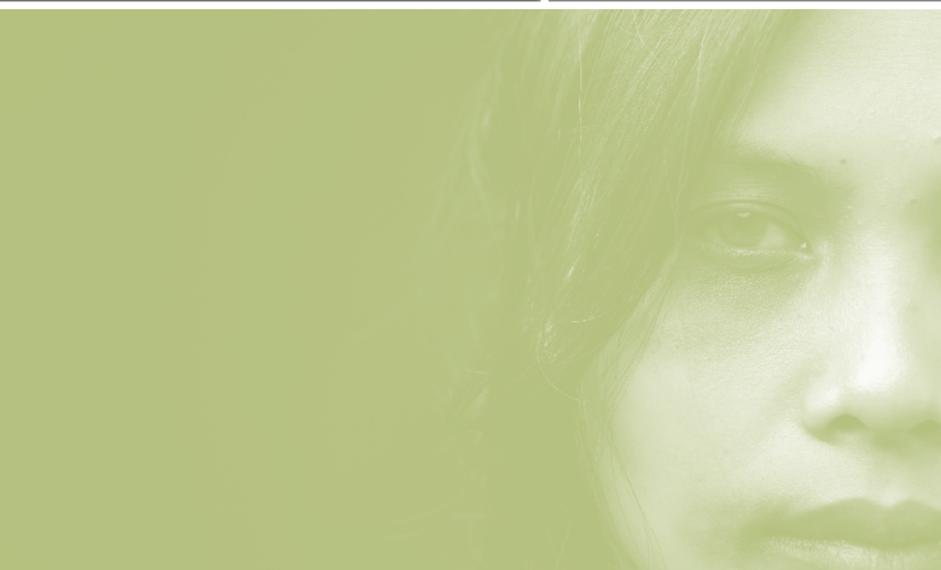
## Domestic Violence Report Card 2011/12

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# Executive Summary



*This is the second Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card. Work on this Report Card began in the summer of 2011 as part of the planning process of the Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW). Funding for this project was secured by CEVAW from the Ontario Women's Directorate and the Ministry of Community and Social Services.*

Members of CEVAW felt that it was timely and necessary to take on the creation of a second Domestic Violence Report Card. The main goals of this project were:

- To continue to develop an understanding of the issue of domestic violence within the Niagara Region
- To follow up on the previous findings associated with the 2009/2010 Report Card
- To evaluate the current response to domestic violence, highlighting the relative effectiveness of the system
- To continue to educate the public regarding the issue of domestic violence, the service providers working on the issue and the current responses and challenges associated with responding to domestic violence

interviews or a focus group and were asked to describe their experiences accessing domestic violence-related services. Given the number of participants the findings are not generalizable beyond this study to the larger population. It should be noted that many of the themes identified by service providers and service users are identified within the academic literature, thereby providing credibility to the data.

- One of the focuses of this study was the engagement of men who had abused their partners and to have them participate in interviews. Despite attending 6 Partner Assault Response groups and inviting over 80 men to participate, only three demonstrated an interest in participating and only one man was interviewed for this study. Therefore the findings are limited to the experiences of service providers and female participants who experienced abuse.

## Data Collection and Limitations

DATA FOR THIS PROJECT WAS GATHERED THROUGH THE FOLLOWING METHODOLOGIES:

1. Focus groups and interviews with domestic violence service providers
2. One focus group and interviews with domestic violence service users
3. Collection of agency-based statistics

THE FOLLOWING ARE POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS TO THE FINDINGS AS PRESENTED WITHIN THIS REPORT:

- This study utilized qualitative data collection methodologies to obtain information from service users and service providers. Twenty-three women took part in either

## Overview of Findings

### Statistics

Within this report we collected as many statistics as possible from agencies that deliver service to families where domestic violence is an issue. An entire section of the report is dedicated to presenting these findings in a manner that demonstrates the extent of service provision to families from across the Niagara Region. The statistics suggest that many agencies are experiencing the same amount of involvement regarding domestic violence over the last three years.

## Emerging Themes

Themes presented in this report include the following:

### COLLABORATION

This report found strong evidence of many collaborative practices within the Niagara Region. Specifically noted within this report is the impact of the partnership between Family and Children's Services and Gillian's Place in the development of the Domestic Violence Advocate. Other areas of collaboration include the High Risk Review Team and High Risk Probation Officers. This report highlights these collaborative practices and encourages the expansion of collaboration across the Niagara Region.

### CHILD WELFARE

Service users who participated in this report identified both strengths and challenges associated with the child welfare response to domestic violence. Some women found their worker very helpful and understanding of the issue. The most prominent theme that emerged from service users was of the fear that is associated with having child welfare services involved in their lives.

Child welfare service providers highlighted the challenges associated with the delivery of child protection service to families where domestic violence has occurred. Child welfare service providers highlighted the impact that the Domestic Violence Advocates have had on their practice and indicated a desire for increased collaborative efforts.

### NIAGARA REGIONAL POLICE SERVICE

One of the main themes that emerged from interviews with service users is that some of them chose not to call the police after experiencing domestic violence. Choosing not to contact the police was the result of the fear

associated with involvement of the police and the obligation of the police to contact other systems including child welfare. Service users identified a range of helpful and unhelpful practices when they had contact with the Niagara Regional Police Service.

### UNDERSTANDING RISK

This study examined the impact of the risk discourse on the provision of domestic violence related services. Risk was found to have a significant impact on service delivery, the conceptualization of the issue and the construction of individual identities. Many agencies across the Niagara Region utilize risk assessment tools and risk management strategies in response to domestic violence. The influence of the risk discourse is examined and explored within this report.

### LIVING IN RURAL NIAGARA

Living in Rural Niagara continues to present unique challenges for women who experience domestic violence. Service users from rural communities who participated in this study were less likely to report matters of domestic violence, less likely to access women's shelters and had greater difficulties accessing services. Additionally, service users talked at length about the impact of living in rural communities and experiencing domestic violence.

### COURT SYSTEMS

This report highlights the experiences of service users and service providers of the specialized Domestic Violence Courts in the Niagara Region. The impact of these courts is not clear and some service providers suggest that these courts are another opportunity for men to continue to abuse and control their victims. Service users suggested that they felt supported through the criminal court process as a result of services from the Victim Witness Assistance Program.

## ENGAGING MEN WHO ABUSE THEIR PARTNERS

The report identifies that men who abuse their partners continue to pose the greatest challenge to service providers. Engagement with these men occurs across sectors and between systems, requiring varying levels of collaboration and service provision. The Niagara Region has several service providers that specialize in managing the risk associated with men who have assaulted their partners including the High Risk Probation Officers and the Domestic Violence Unit of the Niagara Regional Police. This report suggests that there continues to be a gap in therapeutic service provision to these men.

## EXPERIENCES OF VIOLENCE

This report shares the experiences of violence of the women who participated in the study. Their stories present a disturbing picture of the kinds of violence that they experienced while in abusive relationships. Women discussed physical violence, emotional abuse, financial abuse, stalking and the consequences of the violence on their lives. Women also discussed the reasons why they stayed in these abusive relationships. ■

*“There’s just so many areas where you’re trying to problem solve or you’re trying to go through the systems and often our systems aren’t working really well.”*

*(DFNT Employee)*

# Introduction



*In 2008, the Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW) set out to produce a Domestic Violence Report Card for the Niagara Region. The goals of that project were modest. The hope was to begin to understand the issue of domestic violence better, provide statistical information in order to paint a picture of the 'extent' of the issue across the Region and to hear from service users and providers about their experiences either working on this issue or attempting to access domestic violence-related services.*

The result was a foundational document that began to highlight the successes and challenges associated with domestic violence service delivery in the Niagara Region. That report was entitled *Starting a Conversation, Building a Community* and was followed in 2010 by a Supplementary Report Card entitled *Continuing the Conversation...*

Given the response associated with the first two Report Card documents, CEVAW believed that there was merit in constructing another project in an effort to expand upon the initial findings and to explore areas that had not been previously considered. In 2011, initial conversations began about what the focus of this Report Card might be. Given the complexities associated with domestic violence and that almost every aspect of society is potentially affected by the occurrence of an incidence of domestic violence, an initial focus was difficult to discern.

There were several areas of focus that were determined to be appropriate 'jumping off' points from the last Report Card. The first Report Card contained experiences of women who were in shelter or who had admitted to shelter at some point in their experience; therefore it was decided that the second Report Card would attempt to understand the experiences of women who did not access women's shelters in the hopes of understanding their decision making process and experiences thereafter. It was also decided to continue to focus on understanding the

experiences of women who lived in rural communities. CEVAW had also highlighted an interest in examining the Court System and had commissioned a literature review related to Domestic Violence Courts (DVC) prior to this current Report Card. Appropriately one of the goals for this Report Card was to examine the experiences of individuals within the DVC. The researcher also indicated that there was merit in examining the influence of 'risk' across the Niagara Region and understanding how domestic violence services are shaped by ideas related to risk. Finally, in light of the absence of male voices in the previous report, this Report Card set out to continue to engage men who had abused their partners and have them talk about their experiences accessing services.

The Report Card that you are about to read is dramatically different than what was originally conceptualized. The themes identified above are contained in this Report Card, however the reader might be challenged to compare this document with the first. This is explained in a larger part due to the approach of this project. The first Report Card relied upon focus groups as the main method of data collection. This Report Card focused mainly on the use of individual interviews with women. After the first interview, it was apparent that women were revealing greater details about their lives as a result of being offered an individual interview. The extensive details related to their experiences of violence had not been expected. As such, this Report

Card contains significantly more details than the previous documents.

In collecting information from service providers, another strategy was employed to develop a more detailed understanding of the challenges associated with working on this issue. In the first Report Card, some community stakeholders/ service providers were not interviewed for various reasons. These stakeholders were intentionally sought out for inclusion in this report. The outcome is that the reader is afforded the opportunity to hear from front-line service providers about the challenges and realities of working on the issue of domestic violence.

Finally, this Report Card contains a deeper analysis of the qualitative data than the previous Report Card. The use of thematic analysis and deeper level analysis within the qualitative data has provided for the development of findings beyond the themes that were identified as being of interest at the outset of the project. This has led to a greater understanding of the experiences of service providers and service users within the Niagara Region.

The hopes for the Report Card also shifted during the course of the project. Initially, there was hope that this project would expand upon the previous work, offering a glimpse over time of a community working on this issue. This report accomplishes more than that. This Report Card is based largely on the narratives and stories of the participants (service users and service providers) and as such, it really begins to tell the story of those experiencing domestic violence and those working to end this issue. Many service providers contributed their time and talked openly about their work on this issue. Their narratives are of honesty, hard work and of courage to attempt to convey the challenges associated with working on this issue on a daily basis. These service providers often put in long hours, work evenings

and weekends to ensure the safety and well being of individuals within the Niagara Region. In their narratives you will hear their courage, commitment, challenges and dedication to ending domestic violence.

There are also voices and stories of victims in this report. There are parts of this report that echo the bravery of the women who shared their stories and the fragility of their lives as they often re-lived the experiences with the researchers. Their bravery, strength and courage are present in this document and are contained within their words, as you will see. They spoke openly, honestly and emotionally about the sometimes-brutal realities of their lives. We share a great deal of their direct quotes purposively so that the reader will understand the complexities associated with the lives of women who experience domestic violence. Without these realities, this report would not have the same meaning or relevance.

During the writing of this report it also became clear that there was an opportunity to engage in 'bigger picture' discussions, to elevate the discourse regarding the issue of domestic violence. As you will see the sections in the findings chapter are quite specific and perhaps disjointed from one another. From these sections it became apparent that the discussion section would have to 'tie' up the loose ends. It is hoped that the discussion section goes beyond the traditional convention of adding context, but rather attempts to engage the reader in considering how other aspects of society are shaping work on the issue of domestic violence. ■

# Methodology



*In keeping with the format of the first Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card, this report set out to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.*

## Quantitative Data

The quantitative data within this report represents the collection of agency statistics from the agencies that belong to the Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women. Agency members were invited to submit their annualized data to this project for representation. The quantitative data has been organized according to specific themes and common areas of service. These statistics are provided in order to assist with ‘painting’ a picture of the extent of the work being done on the issue of domestic violence in the Niagara Region. Some statistics also speak to the occurrence rates across the Region as well.

Qualitative data was gathered in order to give voice to both service users and service providers in an effort to tell the story of the experiences of those involved with this issue. This data was gathered through the use of individual interviews and focus groups. All participants signed an Informed Consent form (see Appendix A). The interviews and focus groups were conducted using a semi-structured interview sheet (see Appendix B). The interviews were conducted by the lead researcher and/or an MSW graduate student research assistant from the University of Windsor. Each interview (except three) was digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. The transcripts were read for accuracy and analyzed according to thematic occurrences.

## Qualitative Data

The second half of this report contains qualitative data that was gathered between September 2011 and May 2012. The qualitative data gathering process began with an interest in very specific themes. These included (but were not limited to):

- experiences with the criminal justice system (including police, crown attorneys, the court process and probation)
- experiences of individuals living in rural Niagara
- the influence of culture on receiving Domestic Violence related service
- experiences with the child welfare system
- experiences accessing services
- services for men

## Data Collection

### QUANTITATIVE DATA

The quantitative data included in this report was collected through submissions from member agencies of the Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW). Consistent with the previous Report Card, agency representatives from all CEVAW members were invited to submit annual statistics for inclusion in this report. Quantitative data was collected using annual reports generated by CEVAW agencies and other community service providers up until March 31, 2011. The data are presented here in the form in which they were received except for the shelter data and Partner Assault Response (PAR) program data that have been joined.

## QUALITATIVE DATA

Service users were sought out in two ways; individual participants could contact the lead researcher via email or telephone to indicate interest in participating in this project. The majority of service user participants were identified through the CEVAW network. Individual workers within individual agencies were made aware of the project and advised that potential participants could be referred to the lead researcher.

Interviews with service users took place between August 2011 and February 29, 2012. All participants signed an informed consent form and received a Tim Horton's gift certificate for their participation. All of the service users interviews were done on an individual basis except for one focus group that occurred as a result of the preference of a pre-existing support group.

In light of the previous challenges associated with the recruitment of male service users, the researcher and research assistant attended six separate Partner Assault Response Groups (PAR) to invite men to participate. The PAR groups were attended on week 16, which is the final night of the group, and the purpose of the study was explained. Attending the PAR group on week 16 was purposeful as these men would have been through 'the system' and could provide the greatest level of insight. Additionally, it was felt

that there would not be any opportunity for them to feel pressure to participate or consider that 'passing' PAR was dependent on their participation in this study. Potential participants were given a flyer with the email address and the telephone contact for the lead researcher. A flyer was also provided to the Domestic Violence High Risk Probation Officers for circulation among the men on their caseloads.

Interviews with community stakeholders were arranged through individual CEVAW agencies as well. Stakeholders were purposely sought out in order to shed light on specific aspects of practice (ie; focus groups with Family and Children's Service employees and shelter staff). In an effort to improve the understanding of this issue, specific groups that were not included in the previous report were given additional attention. Given the time constraints and budget limitations, larger systems such as the Health Care System and the School Boards were not included in this aspect of the study.

Each Stakeholder was provided with an Informed Consent Form that outlined the purpose of the project. The majority of Stakeholder interviews were conducted as focus groups in order to obtain the widest possible number of voices for this project.

## Analysis

No statistical analysis has been completed on the annual data contained in this report.

All of the qualitative interviews except for three were digitally recorded and transcribed by either the lead researcher or a qualified transcribing expert. One interview was deemed completely inaudible and therefore not transcribed. Copious and detailed notes were taken during the three interviews that were not recorded.

The goal of the analysis of the qualitative data was to understand the story that was being told about the issue of domestic violence in the Niagara Region; from the perspectives of the service users and the service providers (Community Stakeholders). The analysis was eclectic in nature due to the vast quantity of the data collected through the research period. Analysis of the qualitative data occurred on two specific levels; primary level and secondary level.

Primary level analysis involved reading all of the transcripts and locating aspects of specific themes that were set out as the main 'themes' of the research (see the list above). When a quotation was identified that fit under one of the initial objectives, it was coded and placed in a file. Once all of the transcripts had been read, all of the files that contained initial objectives were reviewed for consistency and readability. These files were then composed into chapters contained in this report.

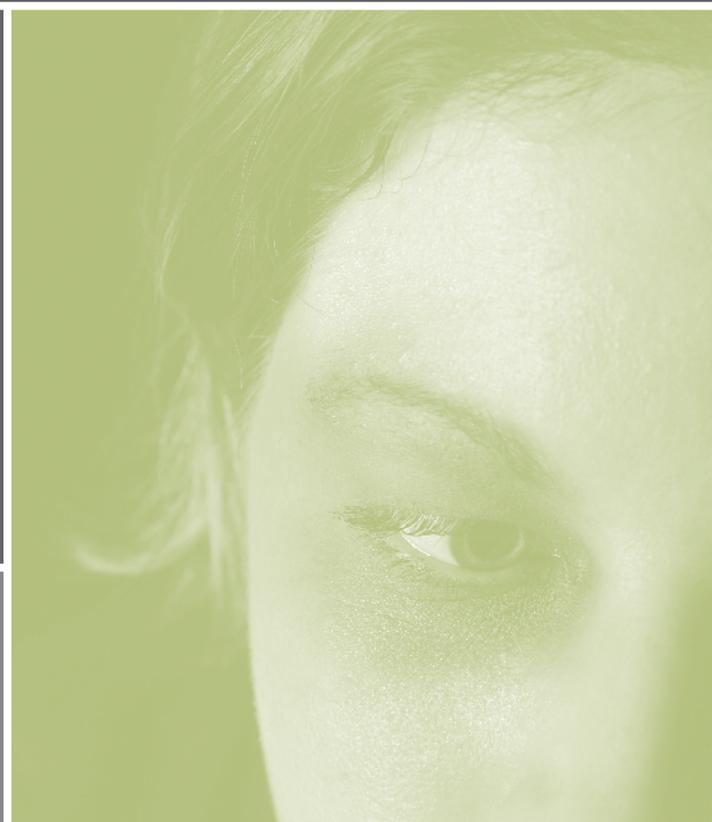
The Secondary level analysis involved examining the transcripts for additional meanings within the interviews of participants and stakeholders. After the initial reading of each transcript and the initial coding, each transcript was re-read for the possibilities of deeper meaning that might exist across interviews. This analysis is consistent with Grounded Theory that allows meaning to emerge from within the narratives of individual stories. These deeper narratives were then collected into files and these Secondary files were reviewed for accuracy and realistic meaning. In order for a Secondary level meaning to be included in this report, the substance of the meaning had to occur across interviews as a salient and important part of the discussion.

## Participants

The following are the participants to this study:

- 18 women participated in individual interviews
- 5 women participated in one focus group
- 3 men volunteered to participate – only one attended an interview
- 67 Community Stakeholders from across the Niagara Region representing the following:
  - o Family and Children's Services
  - o Gillian's Place
  - o Women's Place of South Niagara
  - o Probation and Parole Services
  - o Victim Witness Assistance Program
  - o Design For a New Tomorrow
  - o Crown Attorneys (North and South)
  - o Family Counselling Centre
  - o High Risk Review Team
  - o Detective Sergeant of the Domestic Violence Unit ■

# Statistics



# Niagara Regional Police Service

The Niagara Regional Police created a Specialized Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) in 2008. In this model a uniformed officer responds to the initial call and is responsible for determining arrest or not. The file is then assigned to the domestic violence unit in order to complete the investigation.

The DVU has undergone changes since it's inception and now consists of 8 Domestic Violence Investigators (DVI) assigned to the Eastern Region (Niagara Falls), 6 DVI assigned to the Western Region (St. Catharines and Grimsby) and 2 DVI assigned to the Central Region (Welland). In Fort Erie a detective sergeant is responsible for reviewing the domestic violence files.

**Table 1. NRPS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OCCURRENCE DATA (2006-2010)**

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total # of Domestic Violence calls responded to by Niagara Regional Police	3695	4797	6532	7061	6996
Total # of occurrences of charges or warrant sought	719	746	916	930	893
Number of occurrences where offences alleged by charges not laid	199	149	721	677	660
Number of occurrences where no offence was alleged	2777	3902	4895	5454	5443
TYPE OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VICTIM AND ACCUSED					
Female victim – male accused	657	662	823	850	765
Male victim – female accused	60	81	91	70	119
Number of occurrences where both parties were charged (dual charge)	5	14	8	20	19
Number of accused previously charged with DV (both genders)	175	75	352	286	352

In 2010 the Niagara Regional Police Service responded to 6996 domestic violence related calls. Of the 6996 calls 1553 of the calls involved an alleged domestic violence offence with 893 of these occurrences leading to charges or warrants.

Table 1 identifies that in 5443 of these calls there was no offence alleged and in 660 of these calls offences were alleged but charges were not laid. Charges or warrants were sought in 893 of the occurrences. Also noted in Table 1 are the victims of domestic violence with the numbers indicating the victims are predominately female.

The numbers remain consistent for 2008, 2009 and 2010 in each category except for male-female accused that shows an increase in reported numbers. The incidents of dual charges, where both parties were charged, also indicate an increase.

It is also important to note that the number of accused previously charged with Domestic Violence (both genders) stayed exactly the same for 2008 and 2010 with only a slight decrease in 2009. There was no report of a domestic violence related homicide in 2010.

Trends to note over the past five years include the gender of the victims. The number of male victims, female accused has risen consistently, (60 in 2006 to 119 in 2010).

# Probation and Parole

Probation Services are responsible for the supervision of individuals who are released on bail or sentenced to a term of probation. In the Niagara Region probation services has developed a model that utilizes specialized probation officers to supervise individuals who are on probation for a domestic violence related offence or for individuals who are flagged due to a history of domestic violence. This specialization allows for improved service delivery and has resulted in an increasingly consistent response from probation regarding the supervision of offenders who are flagged for domestic violence.

**Table 2. PROBATION YEAR-BY-YEAR STATISTICS OF OFFENDERS VS. OFFENDERS FLAGGED FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Year	Total Offenders Under Supervision	Offenders Under Supervision with DV Flag
2006	2764	787 (28.5%)
2007	2758	764 (27.7%)
2008	2882	754 (26.2%)
2009	Not available	
2010	Not available	
2011	2313	642 (27.8%)

The total offenders under supervision by probation and parole has decreased by 451 offenders from 2006 to 2011, however the percentage of offenders with a domestic violence flag remains consistent over the past 6 years. Unfortunately, the statistics for 2009 and 2010 were not available. In 2010 there were 640 new DV cases admitted into Niagara probation and parole services.

## Partner Assault Response Program

The Partner Assault Response Program (PAR) is a psycho-educational group for men who have been abusive to their partners. The PAR service providers in Niagara are funded for approximately 300 individuals per year. The majority of participants are court mandated to attend the PAR program as a condition of their probation. In the Niagara Region delivery of this program is shared between The Family Counselling Center (FCC) and Design For a New Tomorrow (DFNT). The PAR courses are offered in several community locations including Welland, St. Catharines, and Niagara Falls. As part of the service delivery of the PAR program each agency is required to make contact with the partners or victims of the men during the course of the group.

**Table 3. PARTNER ASSAULT RESPONSE PROGRAM FISCAL STATISTICS**

	2008-2009		2009-2010		2010-2011	
	FCC	DFNT	FCC	DFNT	FCC	DFNT
# of men referred	441	332	252	630	140	388
# of men accepted into group	101	149	157	138	129	261
# of men who completed group	85	120	99	84	68	184
# of partner contacts	261	116	246	160	246	110

Statistics for the PAR program are based on the program’s fiscal year. In 2008/2009, 250 men were accepted into the PAR program and 205 (82%) completed the program. In 2009/2010, 295 men were accepted into the program and 183 (62%) completed the program. In the year 2010/2011, 390 men were accepted into the program and 252 (65%) completed the program.

The 2009/2010 fiscal year saw the highest number of referrals to the program however the lowest number of program completions (63%). The 2010/2011 fiscal year had the lowest amount of referrals however had the highest number of men accepted into the program and the highest number of program completions 252 (65%).

As noted, there are two agencies that provide the PAR program and have historically shared administrative duties. It is possible that men who are referred to the PAR program have been counted twice (or more) within these statistics. As such any analysis should be viewed with caution. For example, the discrepancy between the agencies regarding the number of men referred in 2009/2010 is quite concerning and is most likely not accurate given that other years are roughly equal. It should also be noted that the statistics might not be accurate due to the overlap that occurs when groups start in one fiscal year and end in the next. As such they are not counted within the same fiscal year, causing inaccuracy.

Currently, Probation and Parole Services have taken on an increased administrative role in an attempt to streamline service delivery. It is anticipated that this might improve statistical reporting in the future.

As of May 13, 2011 there were waiting lists for PAR services in all three offices as follows:

<b>Table 4. WAITING LIST FOR PARTNER RESPONSE ASSAULT PROGRAM PER COMMUNITY</b>	
<b>Community</b>	<b>Waiting List</b>
<b>St. Catharines</b>	129
<b>Welland</b>	116
<b>Niagara Falls</b>	97
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>342</b>

## Caring Dad’s Program offered through the Family Counselling Centre

Caring Dad’s is a therapeutic intervention program for fathers who have abused their children or who have exposed their children to domestic violence. The focus of the group is to enhance the safety and well-being of children and their mothers by helping men engage in respectful, non-abusive co-parenting. The delivery of this program is provided by The Family Counselling Center. Referrals to this program can be self-referred or court directed as a result of a probation order or completed by other service providers such as FACS.

**Table 5. FAMILY COUNSELLING CENTRE CARING DADS STATISTICS**

	2009/10	2010/11
# of men referred	86	81
# of men accepted	51	39
# of men completed	19	22

Table 5 illustrates that 86 men were referred to Caring Dads in 2009/2010 with 81 referred in 2010/2011.

## Women and Children’s Programming

There are two programs offered by the Family Counselling Centre that are designed to address the impact of domestic violence on children. These child witness programs are entitled Side by Side and For Me and My Mom. In reporting these statistics, the Family Counselling Centre combines the totals of these two programs. In 2008/09 these programs served 265 women and 236 children. During 2009-2010 the Side by Side and For Me and My Mom programs helped 289 women and 188 children who have been exposed to domestic violence. During 2010-2011 the Side by Side and For Me and My Mom programs helped 204 women and 157 children who have been exposed to Domestic Violence.

Design For a New Tomorrow (DFNT) also provides counselling and support services to women who are victims of domestic violence. In the calendar year 2008 they served 681 women. In 2009/10 DFNT serviced 1109 women and ran 19 groups. This included the participation of 152 in-group and 957 women who received one to one counselling.

## Family and Children’s Services Niagara

Family and Children’s Services of Niagara (FACS Niagara) is the Children’s Aid Society for the Niagara Region and are mandated under the Child and Family Services Act to investigate allegations of child abuse. As part of their mandate they are obligated to respond to incidents of domestic violence. The initial response by FACS Niagara generates an investigation. If ongoing child protection concerns are determined in the investigation, the case remains open and the family will receive ongoing service from the agency. Table 5 presents the domestic violence data for 2007 to 2010 from FACS Niagara. FACS assigns primary and secondary reasons for involvement with families.

The total number of investigations completed by FACS Niagara from 2007 to 2010 has remained consistent, with the total average number of investigation over the four years being 3211. The percentage of domestic violence investigations where the primary reason for service has also remained consistent at 22% for all four years.

The total active caseload for ongoing service to families has increased each year (678 in 2007 to 910 in 2010) which is a 75% increase in active caseloads for ongoing service from 2006 to 2010. The number of active cases designated domestic violence has also increased by 39% from 2007 to 2010 (66 in 2006 to 168 in 2010).

FACS numbers are very similar to the national average and percentages often represented in the academic literature.

**Table 6. FACS NIAGARA DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DATA FOR 2007 TO 2010**

	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>INVESTIGATIONS</b>				
Total Investigations Opened – All Eligibility Codes	3159	3357	3262	3067
Investigations Opened with D.V. as Primary Reason	680	750	717	681
Investigation Opened with D.V. (Additional Reasons)	135	292	311	217
% of Total Investigations Opened with D.V. as Primary Reason	22%	22%	22%	22%
% of Total Investigations Opened with D.V. as Primary and other	26%	31%	32%	29%
<b>ONGOING SERVICES TO FAMILIES</b>				
Total Active Caseload to Ongoing Service (Dec. 31, 2010)	678	736	898	910
Cases Active to Ongoing with DV as Primary Reason for Service	66	125	165	168

## Shelters

There are two organizations that operate shelters for abused women in the Niagara Region. These are Gillian's Place in St. Catharines and Women's Place of South Niagara, which operates Nova House in Niagara Falls and Serenity Place in Welland. Between these two organizations collectively, there are 64 Ministry of Community and Social Services funded beds.

**Table 7. SHELTER STATISTICS - COMBINED TOTALS**

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Women Serviced in Shelter	334	313	543
Children Serviced in Shelter	144	197	209
Crisis Calls	4476	3897	4219
Legal Support, Advocacy and Outreach Clients	1347	1375	1762
Transitional Housing Support Clients Served	457	419	439
Women and Children Referred Elsewhere due to lack of space	183	88*	184**

\* Gillian's Place identified 96 women who were redirected in 2009/10 for reasons other than lack of space

\*\* Gillian's Place identified 109 women who were redirected in 2010/11 for reasons other than lack of space

The combined totals of women serviced in all three shelters has risen 62% from 2008/2009 to 2010/2011 with a 69% increase of children serviced in the shelter. The number of women serviced through legal support, advocacy, and outreach has increased by 79% during these same years. The number of women served by the transitional housing and support workers and the number of crisis

calls appears to have remained stable. In 2010/2011, 4219 crisis calls were answered in the shelters which is similar to the other years noted.

One of the most significant pieces of information from the shelter statistics is the number of women and children referred elsewhere due to a lack of space. In 2010/2011, 25% of the women seeking shelter had to be referred elsewhere. This is a consistent percentage from 2008 to 2011 with the majority of clients in St. Catharines being referred elsewhere. This information illustrates the consistent need for increased shelter spaces in the Niagara Region and supports the development of more shelter space for women and children.

## Transitional Housing and Support

Within the Niagara Region there are workers entitled Transitional Housing and Support Workers (THSW). The role of these workers is to assist abused women in transitioning to housing from either a women’s shelter or their own home. These workers are a significant source of support for women and their children. Several agencies such as West Niagara Second Stage Housing and Counselling for Abused Women and their Children and Bethlehem Projects Housing and Support Services and the women’s shelters employ Transitional Housing and Support Workers.

West Niagara Second Stage Housing and Counselling serves the communities of Smithville, Beamsville and Grimsby. They provide women who have experienced domestic violence with rent geared to income housing. The THSW worker will also assist the women in developing safety and housing plans, counselling, advocacy as well as referrals to other community services.

Similar to West Niagara Second Stage Housing and Counselling; Bethlehem Projects provides affordable housing and support services to women who have experienced domestic violence. Bethlehem Projects have services in the St. Catharines and Niagara Falls areas of the Niagara Region. Bethlehem Projects have two specially designated Transitional Housing Support Workers who work with women who have experienced domestic violence.

Table 8 reflects the number of women that both agencies have assisted in the fiscal years of 2008 to 2011.

Table 8. NIAGARA REGION SECOND STAGE AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING STATISTICS		
Year	West Niagara Second Stage Housing and Counselling for Abused Women and their Children	Bethlehem Projects Transitional Housing and Support (individual counselling)
2008/2009	150	128
2009/2010	111	112 (37)
2010/2011	112	135 (52)

# Niagara Regional Housing

Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) is the administrator of affordable housing in the Niagara Region. Applications for NRH are based on income. As part of the application process an individual can apply for Special Priority Status. Special Priority Status allows applicants to move ahead of other applicants on the housing wait list if the applicant has experienced an incident or series of incidents of abuse. Applicants can apply up to three months after they have left the abuser for Special Priority Status.

Table 9. NIAGARA REGIONAL HOUSING STATISTICS

	2009	2010
Number of households housed	723	668
Number of households with special priority status housed	151	174
Number of households waiting to be housed with special priority status	74	64
Total number of households waiting to be housed	4611	5543

While this data illustrates the overwhelming need for affordable housing in the Niagara Region it also illustrates how inadequate public housing is to address the needs of women and children given the lengthy wait list for service. Of the total number of households needing housing 4.9 % of them in 2009 and 4.3% of them in 2010 were flagged Special Priority Status.

## Interpreters Niagara-Hamilton

Interpreters Niagara-Hamilton provides interpretation services in over 25 languages. Their services include relay of messages, telephone and on-site interviews. In 2010 Interpreters Niagara-Hamilton spent 1293 hours and 30 minutes assisting social service agencies dealing with the issue of domestic violence through interpretation.

As a result of these hours 264 victims of domestic violence received service during this time. The top five languages requested for interpretation for domestic violence appointments were Spanish (237), Arabic (87), Portuguese (47), Czech (46) and Mandarin (42).

## Victim Services Niagara

Victim Services Niagara provides residents of Niagara with a wide range of emergency services. Two of the services they offer provide direct support to victims of domestic violence; The Domestic Violence Emergency Response System (DVERS) and Victim Quick Response Program (VQRP). In 2009 Victims Services Niagara assisted 155 victims of domestic violence through their victim assistance service program (VCARS).

The Domestic Violence Emergency Response System (DVERS) is a joint initiative of Niagara Victims Crisis Support Services, the Niagara Regional Police and ADT Canada. DVERS provides an alarm to victims of domestic violence in the Niagara Region who are at higher risk of danger due to domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking crimes. The alarm is monitored seven days a week, 24 hours a day. DVERS and the Supportlink Program had 29 active DVERS alarms and 5 Supportlink cell phones

out with victims of domestic violence in 2010. In 2010, 15 new clients received DVERS and the Supportlink program served four new clients.

The Victim Quick Response Program (VQRP) offers financial assistance to victims of violent crimes who lack financial resources. They provide assistance to deal with emergency expenses such as; repair of exterior doors, changing of residential locks, new cell phones, new landlines phones and counselling. In the fiscal year of 2009/2010 VQRP assisted 96 victims of domestic violence with emergency expenses and 68 victims in 2010/2011.

The Sexual Assault/ Domestic Violence Treatment Program is part of the Niagara Health System and is run out of the St. Catharines General Hospital. This regional program provides counselling and support services for men and women who have survived sexual assault and or domestic violence. In 2009/2010 this program saw five women for emergency services and provided 13 women with 74 counselling sessions. In 2010/2011 the program saw seven women with the Niagara Regional Police being involved with four of them. ■

# Emerging Themes



# Experiences of Violence

*Talking to women who have been victims of domestic violence reveals a considerable amount about their lives. The participants in this project talked about many different aspects of their lives during the course of their interviews. While the focus of our interviews was their experiences accessing services, seeking assistance or maneuvering through the system, many women talked at length about the abuse that they had experienced. It was in fact, difficult to separate their experiences accessing services from their experiences with violence. Their lives were intertwined with the violence, had been permanently altered as a result of the actions of others and many women bravely shared these stories as part of this project.*

There are many complexities to understanding domestic violence. One of the biggest challenges facing society is to understand what exactly is domestic violence? This section presents the ways in which women spoke about the abuse that they experienced while living in the Niagara Region. To provide context to their experiences, we have included the Power and Control Wheel as developed by staff at the Domestic Assault Intervention Program (DAIP) in Duluth Minnesota (see page 33, Figure 1). The experiences of women as related in this report, closely mirror those described in the Power and Control Wheel.

## Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is the category of domestic violence that is most readily identifiable by the general public. Women in our study spoke about being physically abused and experiencing varying levels of physical violence by their partners. Often these experiences and episodes were quite violent and quite graphic. For some women the physical abuse started early in their relationships as this participant identifies:

***I actually suspected before the wedding date even came. The day I knew was when I was eight months pregnant and he sent me sailing through the dining room. That's when I knew.***  
(female participant)

Contrary to the notion that domestic violence is a private matter that happens behind closed doors, women who contributed to this study experienced violence in very public spaces. One woman talked about experiencing the physical violence in one such public venue:

***...he beat me so severely in the driveway of my home, that even cars were stopping and screaming out to try to help me. But all I remember was that I'm lying on the ground and he's kicking repeatedly and all I could do was protect my head. But for you to get an idea of how severe that incident was, the stones in all of my earrings were literally smashed out***

***“That’s right.  
I now call it my life sentence.”***  
(female participant)

***of my earrings. There were no stones left in my earrings in my ears and handfuls of hair were torn out of my head.*** (female participant)

Research has shown that children are often present during the violence. Witnessing domestic violence has resulted in specific interventions and programs for children who live in homes where this violence occurs. As this woman describes, sometimes violence occurred in front of children who were compelled to intervene:

***There was an episode where he tried to asphyxiate me and it was . . . he had three children and I had my one child, and his little ten-year-old boys... I was very close to his children, his children are very good little kids... you know, whenever we tried to be a family, and it was his ten-year-old that ran in and basically saved my life, because I was already blacking out at that point already. He was choking me. But anyway, so it was the little boy that basically saved me.*** (female participant)

Physical violence also involved the destruction of property, a tactic used to instill fear in women and the following participants noted; ***“...he’d say that he wanted something. Then he’d come over and he’d be smashing like photos and stuff”*** (female participant) and;

***And, when I came home he was sitting in the driveway. Honest to God! Everything in the front of my house was completely destroyed. Every flower pot, the glass in the door in the house that I was renting . . . everything was smashed to smithereens and he was sitting in his car and literally frothing at the mouth.*** (female participant)

***“Breaking in at 2:00 in the morning and waking up with a knife at my throat.”*** (female participant)

There was also a sense of unpredictability associated with the levels of violence that the women described. As noted, the occurrence of violence transcended any one location, time frame or the involvement of others. At least one woman spoke of the fear associated with the lengths that her abusive partner would go:

***But then, of course, the situation transpired into stalking and harassment and this took place for at least a ten-month window, an eight-to-ten month window. It was a horrendous amount of time and it was very violent. Breaking in at 2:00 in the morning and waking up with a knife at my throat. You know, I don’t know where this person was hiding.*** (female participant)

## Emotional Abuse

Women in this study identified that they experienced emotional abuse far more often than any other form of domestic violence. This involved a variety of abusive behaviours including the use of control tactics, fear mongering and other ways in which women would be controlled. Many women that participated in this study discussed the ways in which their partners would emotionally abuse them. Many of them identified patterns of verbal abuse related to jealousy on behalf of their abusive partners. One woman indicated that this was how her violence started:

***And the violence started because he was insanely jealous and the violence started because he accused me... He would accuse me of having an affair with everybody around me. Why was I late from work? Because I was screwing somebody.*** (female participant)

Another women indicated that her partner would verbally abuse her in almost any setting. This included in front of a counsellor. She recalled this event during her interview:

***And he [the counsellor] said, in the span of a 25-minute window, he was dumbfounded at the quantity of verbal attacks that were done to me in the room, in the presence of the physician. You know, the name-calling, the putdowns... everything from “bitch” to “moron” and “loser” and “psycho”. I mean, every demeaning reference possible. And he [the counsellor] just ended the meeting. He said — This is not a fruitful experience.*** (female participant)

The identification of emotional abuse also included the use of threats of violence including threats to kill and threats to ruin the individual woman’s life by the abusive man. This was an unsettling experience for many of the women in the study because they could never be certain of the veracity of these threats. Many of the women took these threats very seriously. One woman recalled the threats associated with her abusive partner leaving the home:

***And the last two things he said before he left my home, he said — I give you my word, on my mother’s grave, I am going to destroy you. He said — I will do everything possible to destroy you. I will make you lose your job. I will make you lose your home. And he said — And so help me... he says — I’m going to kill you. And these are all the things that he promised for me. He did make me lose my job.*** (female participant)

Emotional abuse was also captured by a participant when she discussed the deceptive manner in which her abusive partner attempted to control her and keep her from going out with her friends. She indicated ***“It was always this twisted mind game of — Oh, I need you! Or — Oh, I forgot that so-and-so called. It was***

***always an excuse or reason, so for me, it was really difficult to see”*** (female participant). This behaviour limited her ability to go out, stay connected with family and friends and was an attempt to isolate her even further. This woman elaborated on the ways in which her ex-partner would control her behaviour by limiting her access to knowledge about her friends calling or advising her friend that she was unavailable:

***He’s trying to turn me against my friends and taking calls, I guess, now that... I didn’t know my friends would call. And — Oh she’s busy. She can’t talk to you right now. And I’d be up in the shower or something and he wouldn’t tell me the message. Or you know — No, she can’t go out with you this weekend.*** (female participant)

## Stalking

Many of the women who were part of this study spoke at length about being stalked by their previous partners, sometimes despite court orders to the contrary. Stalking behaviour led to significant fear on behalf of many of the women. For some women, the abusive man attempted to find out their whereabouts via the court:

***And then he wanted to know my work schedule, any changes to my work schedule. And I’m thinking — Well, he’s already stalking me and I’m going to give him my work schedule? So we went back before this judge again, the same judge and she said — Yes, give him your work schedule.*** (female participant)

For some women, they described that they always felt they were being watched or that they would see their abuser far too often for it to be chance. As one women described ***“And then everywhere I went, he’d be there”*** (female participant).

## Abuse related to financial matters

Another significant theme that arose when women spoke about their experiences with violence was the intersection that occurred between the violence and their financial lives. Many women felt controlled financially by their abusive partner. For some women their lives were limited to staying at home, being financially dependent on their partner. When they were permitted to work or seek employment, this was often done in a very controlled way, ***“I did work, occasionally. When I did, he’d drop me off at the door and picked me up there again. Yeah. He told me what I could and couldn’t wear to work”*** (female participant). One of the consequences of working was that women described that they were then responsible for not only working, but also to maintain the home, in fact working two jobs:

***The reality of it is, the times when I did work, I burned myself out so bad that I got to quit, because I’d work all day and then I’d have to come home and cook supper and listen to him bitch and look after our son and clean the house. Weekends, never got to go out and do anything pleasurable, because I was busy cooking for the upcoming week and doing all the cleaning...*** (female participant)

Child support was also identified as an additional factor that impacted the violence that they experienced by their abusive partner. For women in this study, the expectations related to child support and the obligations associated with it were ‘flash points of violence’ because they seemingly caused an escalation in the abusive behaviour by the man:

***The real hostility started after he was mandated to pay support payments for [child]. That’s when the real hostility very much started. It was because of the support payments that he had to pay.*** (female participant)

The abuse also continued after the couple had separated and child support was often identified as one of the ways in which men continued to control women. As one woman noted ***“The abuse continued after that, of course, because he was paying me support and reminding me on a daily basis what a burden I was to him, having to pay this money”*** (female participant).

The expectations related to child support and obligations associated with it were ‘flash points of violence.’

## Consequences of violence

Interviews with women who had experienced domestic violence revealed that there are a number of consequences for them as a result of the violence that they have experienced. For many women, the abuse led to a lack of confidence. They no longer believed in themselves or their abilities. Some women believed that they became mentally unstable as a result of experiencing violence over prolonged periods of time. For some women, the physical violence resulted in injuries, trauma and fear of being in relationships. One of the women who described one of her violent attacks during her interview, also described what happened when she went to work, just after being beaten by her ex-partner. She indicated that she had responsibilities at work that required her presence, however it also resulted in the following:

***I was a project manager for this installation and I had no other choice but to get myself to work. And throughout the day, whatever***

***kicks did make contact started to be noticeable and even though I had a hard hat on and protective glasses and my protective production-environment wear, you could still see the bruising coming out. You could see the bruising in my nose coming out. All the inside of my lip was all cut open so I was somewhat bleeding inside, but yet you couldn't really see the swelling until... as hours took place during the day, you could start noting all these little obvious injuries.*** (female participant)

This woman unfortunately lost her job as a result of the behaviours of her abusive ex-partner.

## Why they stay

One of the questions women who experience domestic violence often face is “Why did you stay?” Domestic violence is a very complex issue and the answer differs depending on the circumstances of the individual woman. Some of the participants in this study talked about the reasons why they did not initially leave their abusive partners. Some women did not leave because they feared the unknown, they were unsure how to access services or lack experience necessary to obtain employment. As one woman noted:

***I was scared of the unknown. I was, you know, afraid to be out by my... he kept me at home, so I didn't have work experience. So, I was afraid of being out on my own, with a child.*** (female participant)

Other women talked about the fact that they did not know that they were in an abusive relationship until they had been out of their relationship for a period of time. They indicated

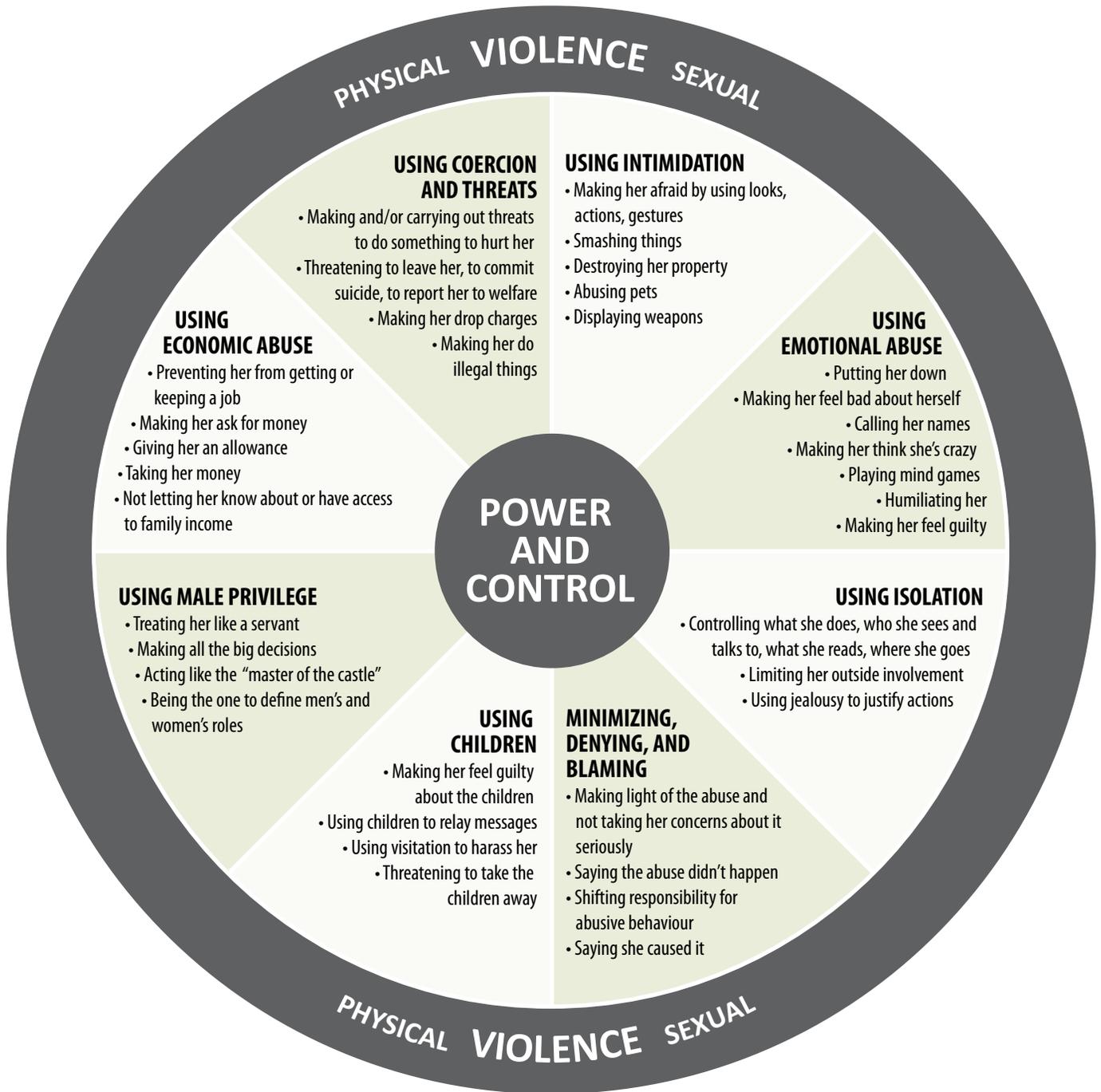
that being subsumed by the behaviours of their partner overshadowed the abuse as the following woman notes ***“it's kind of different when you're living in it. You don't really see the whole. But, when you step back and look at it, you think – Yeah”*** (female participant).

Finally, many women stay in their abusive relationships because they hope for something better. As the following woman indicated, everyday brought the prospect of change ***“You know, I never lost faith in all 30 years, that tomorrow morning I'm going to wake up and everything is going to be better. Every day I thought of that”*** (female participant). As women who participated in this study suggest, hope can be a powerful explanation of behaviour.

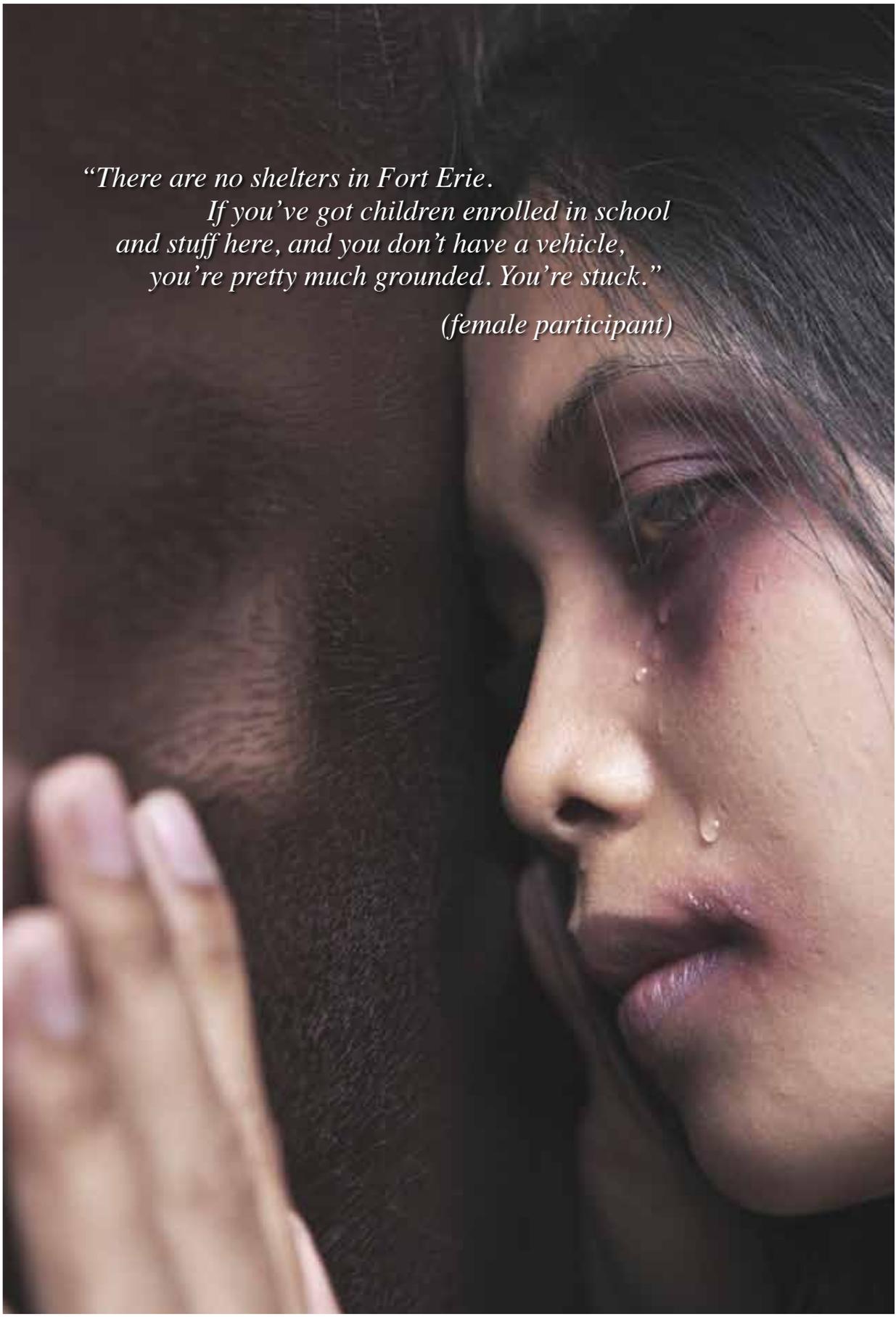
## Power and Control Wheel

The experiences of domestic violence described by the participants in this project are a stark reminder of the extensive nature of violence that they can experience. The Domestic Assault Intervention Program (DAIP) in Duluth Minnesota is credited with the creation of the Power and Control Wheel, a tool utilized to understand the experiences of women in domestic violence situations. For the benefit of the reader, it is recreated as Figure 1 on the following page. It is beneficial to consider the ways that the experiences of women from Niagara are mirrored in the Power and Control Wheel. ■

Figure 1: Power and Control Wheel



Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs. Power and Control Wheel. Retrieved from <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/>



*“There are no shelters in Fort Erie.*

*If you’ve got children enrolled in school  
and stuff here, and you don’t have a vehicle,  
you’re pretty much grounded. You’re stuck.”*

*(female participant)*

# Living in Rural Niagara

*The first Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card highlighted the challenges associated with the vast nature of the Niagara Region. The Niagara Region is comprised of many small communities and several larger urban centres. The first Report Card drew attention to the challenges associated with the rural nature of the Niagara Region and the issue of domestic violence. Those who reside in the more rural parts of the Region were found to struggle receiving services and often living in a rural community dictated to what extent victims disclosed being abused.*

This Report Card intentionally followed up on this theme with both participants and stakeholders in an attempt to discern if any improvements had been made and to expand the understanding of the experiences of those living in these communities and those who provide service in these smaller communities.

## Experiences of Participants

Participants who were interviewed for this Report Card continued to highlight the lack of services available within rural communities as being both a barrier to service and impediment to leaving abusive relationships. Women who participated in this report indicated that living in rural communities often meant that they felt alone and isolated. One woman described the sense of isolation in this manner ***“It’s a very small town so it’s very... it’s almost like we’re closed off from the rest of the world”*** (female participant).

There was general consensus among those participants who had experience living in a rural community that there is a lack of service for those who experience domestic violence. As one participant noted ***“It’s almost like we’re in Hicksville or something. You know what I mean? And it’s a very small town with limited services”*** (female participant). Another participant echoed the sentiment ***“So, we don’t have any local services like that [referring to DV specific services]. It’s all in the cities. We think that that’s something that definitely needs to change around here, definitely”*** (female participant).

In one community, members spoke about the lack of safe shelter space for abused women as being an impediment to leaving abusive relationships. Given the proximity of the current shelters to this community participants suggested that sometimes it is not practical to consider going to a shelter in another community regardless of the implications. As the following participant suggests, abused women have to consider not only their safety, but also the implications associated with going to a shelter in another community:

***One thing we do not have access to in Fort Erie, and I think that was a big part of me sticking around in my situation for as long as it was, is because I had no where to go. There are no shelters in Fort Erie. If you’ve got children enrolled in school and stuff here, and you don’t have a vehicle, you’re pretty much grounded. You’re stuck.*** (female participant)

***“So, we don’t have any local services like that (referring to DV specific services). It’s all in the cities. We think that that’s something that definitely needs to change around here, definitely.”*** (female participant)

Within these small communities several community agencies ‘parachute’ services in, being present within the community perhaps one or two days a week. Participants to this Report Card indicated that these services were integral to their recovery work and offered support that reduced the isolation. Participants reported that these services were important in assisting them in understanding the dynamics of their abusive situation as the following participant suggests:

***And if it hadn't have been for this group, I probably would have ended up back in that situation. No doubt I probably... because you know what, I wouldn't have had the knowledge or the strength or... you know.***  
(female participant)

Service provision within rural communities was also identified as being important in reducing the isolation that participants felt as victims of violence:

***Like, when I walked in here to the group and I seen some familiar faces, it just made me want to cry. It's like — Oh, my God! I'm not alone. Here there are people that I've worked with and everything else, and here they have these skeletons in their closets too.*** (female participant)

Many women indicated that they believed that they were treated in a very specific manner as a result of being related to individuals who might have a bad reputation or regular contact with the police.

The other theme that arose from interviews with participants about living in rural Niagara, was the perception by women that the way that they were treated was, in part, due to their familial

relations. Many women indicated that they believed that they were treated in a very specific manner as a result of being related to individuals who might have a bad reputation or regular contact with the police. As one participant noted, when living in smaller communities, your identity is something that partially dictates how you are treated:

***It means that there's just... you are who you are, in this town and people label you and you're not going to... depending on who you are, is how you're treated.*** (female participant).

As another participant indicated, she was often connected to the behaviours of her family:

***I mean, I have a brother that has a reputation in this town with them, and they he's kind of had it ... he's had his ups and downs. He's a good guy. I mean, he's my brother, right? And I think they treat you in association with who it is...*** (female participant)

As another participant indicated, she felt that in smaller communities individuals are judged by their association and family relations ***“Even if you didn't do it. If your family member did it, you are what your family is”*** (female participant).

Many of the women suggested that there were connections between the manner in which the police dealt with their family matters and who their family was. Several participants offered examples of the ways in which they believe the police were biased due to their familial relationships:

***... the police... it seemed like all they did was see my last name and right away they just jumped on it. You know what I mean? My last name is not the best when it comes to the police. It's not just me. It's not me in general. It's just my mom, my uncle... they created a bad name for the last name, like (interviewee's last name). Because one of my uncles right now, he's like wanted from Canada and the U.S. So, I mean, I am not my last name.*** (female participant)

Another participant also indicated that the police judged her based on the reputation of her brother. As she described what the police said to her; ***“Well, you know, we know your brother. Your brother is trouble. Maybe you’re trouble too”*** (female participant). Which impacted her experience of the police involvement ***“Yeah, who you’re associated with or who you’re related to has a big impact on how you’ll be treated. They label you right away...”*** (female participant). This sentiment was echoed by another participant in discussing her perception of the police response to her situation in a rural community; ***“They do. Absolutely, they associate you. So they know who I am, through him, and I think they associate with that’s how you can be treated. You’re that girl”*** (female participant).

Participants who had experience living in rural Niagara or smaller communities also discussed their perceptions related to the policing that occurred in these communities. They suggested that part of the culture of smaller communities includes the employment of police officers that were born and raised in these communities. As a result, their officers have pre-existing relations with individuals that can influence the response to the issue of domestic violence. As the following participant detailed her experiences it was not until officers from outside her community intervened that her partner was arrested:

***I think why [partner’s name] got away with it for so long is a lot of the guys he went to school with were police officers in [small community name], so it was almost like calling in a favour. But the cops that did come that night were not from [small community name]. They had no idea who he was, so...*** (female participant)

Another participant suggested that small communities have considerable work to do in understanding the dynamics associated with domestic violence. She indicated that the culture that exists in smaller communities is problematic in the following ways:

Stakeholders who contributed to this report agreed with the participants that within rural Niagara service provision is challenging, difficult and that families would benefit from increased services.

***I think it’s sad that it has to get to the point where women have to be horribly abused before the police will do anything. This isn’t like an “old boys club” where you know, where the women... like, times have changed in my opinion. There’s an attitude in this town where it’s the “old boys club”.*** (female participant)

## Stakeholders perspectives

Stakeholders who were interviewed as part of this project were also asked questions related to their experiences either working in rural communities in the Niagara Region or providing service to individuals living in these smaller communities. Many stakeholders identified that there were a number of barriers to either providing service in a smaller community or to individuals accessing services that exist outside of their community.

Stakeholders who contributed to this report agreed with the participants that within rural Niagara service provision is challenging, difficult and that families would benefit from increased services. They recognized the importance of community-based programs that are easily accessible and that are consistently available to members of the community.

Overwhelmingly, stakeholders who participated in this report indicated that they felt that the number one barrier facing those living in rural Niagara was the issue of transportation.

Transportation was seen as limiting the ability of those living in rural communities to accessing resources. As one participant noted, ***“Yeah, connecting them to even services, most of them don’t have transportation, so how do they get to the programs?”*** (FACS employee).

As noted by participants, the inability to travel is very limiting for some families and abused women. One stakeholder described the transportation obstacle in this way ***“We get the same thing from Fort Erie callers. It might as well be a six-hour drive, it’s so large for them”*** (shelter staff). As another shelter staff member indicated, not having access to adequate transportation limits a woman’s ability to access service for herself and her children:

***Like we have people calling here, but then they don’t drive. Their kids go to school at Fort Erie, and their families or their support, so just thinking of being in Niagara Falls and they have everyone else in Fort Erie, most of the time, because you know, most of the time they just have to stay, instead of coming here.***  
(shelter staff)

***“I mean, the absence of enough programming and in the right place or in enough places, is an ongoing challenge.”*** (HRPO)

Another service provider from a counselling agency described the ‘rural’ dynamic in the following way:

***I’m thinking of the outreach areas. I’m at Smithville and Grimsby and what I find is that in the smaller communities, they are known to each other, they socialize together and everything. So, they’re more apt not to report it. They don’t want to stay in the same community if they are going to have some counselling. So, they tend to still keep it more to themselves or a secret, rather than seeking out assistance or help.*** (DFNT staff)

Counselling staff also confirmed that it was their experiences that many women report an ‘old-boys’ mentality in rural communities;

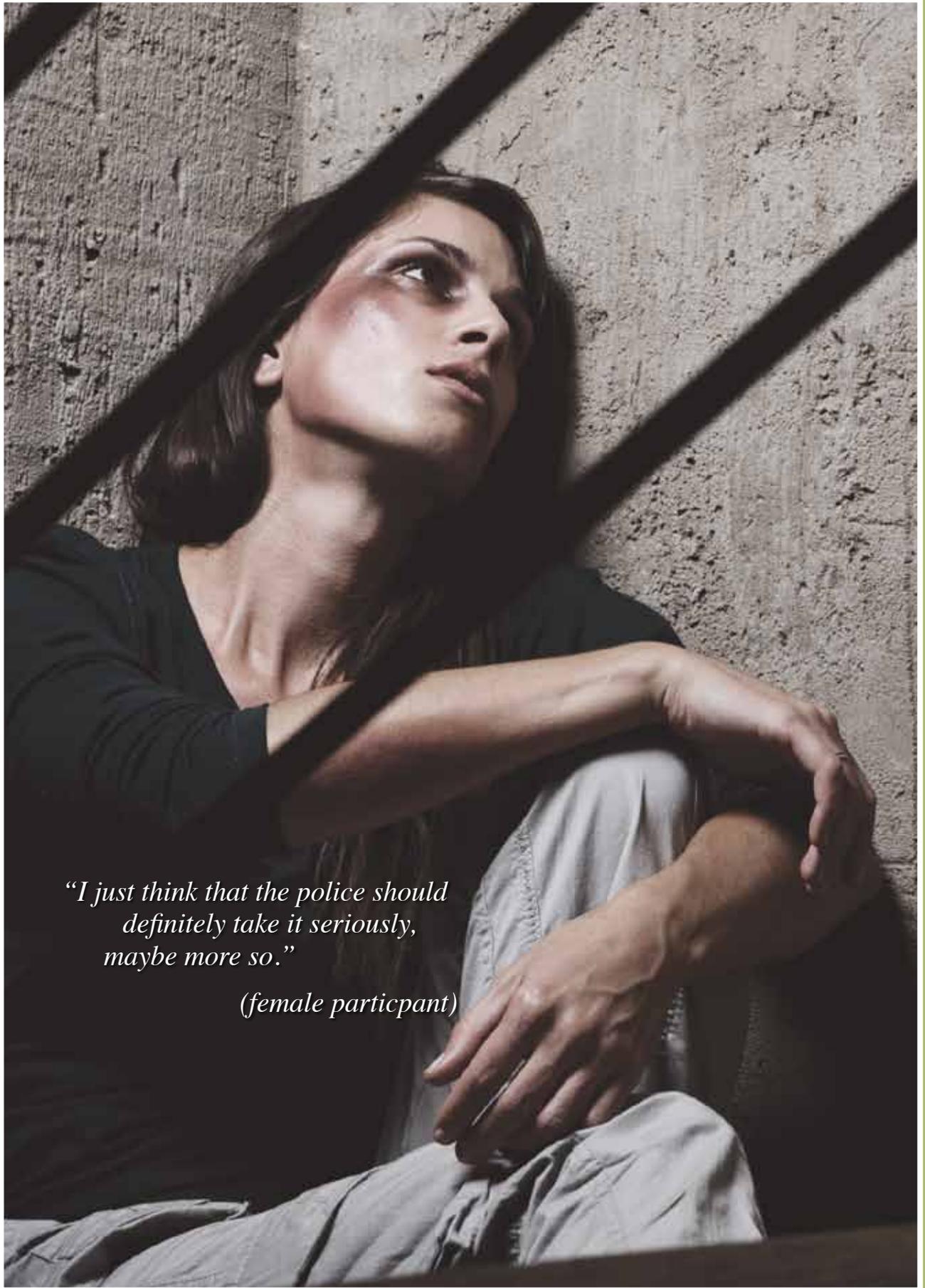
***That it’s like a gentleman’s club down there and you know, everybody’s... and my uncle is the detective and his cousin is... and they’re all kind of... Yeah, there’s a real reluctance on the part of those [name of community] gals, at all, because of the backlash that they’re afraid of from the police themselves.*** (DFNT staff)

High Risk Domestic Violence Probation Officers who participated in this report also indicated that they have begun to consider the manner in which service is delivered to individuals who live in smaller communities, but recognize that there are challenges to servicing individuals in those communities:

***I think there’s more of a challenge in Fort Erie. We did, in one case this year, have someone who was attending a healthy relations group at the Welland office and he was driving from Fort Erie... But again, transportation became such an issue and then it was a matter of — Okay, you know what? We really need to see him in Fort Erie. He’d made a little bit of progress and we just developed a different plan on how to handle him. So, he is being seen there. So the outskirts do pose some challenges, but overall the majority are seen in those specialized caseloads.***  
(HRPO)

The challenges associated with transportation and living in rural Niagara Region has had an unexpected consequence for Probation Services. High Risk Domestic Violence Probation Officers who participated in providing information to this report suggested that the lack of transportation between communities had begun to be a site of contention between themselves and individuals on probation. Individuals on probation who are unable to travel from a smaller community to a larger one to access service or to report to their probation officer are beginning to utilize the court system to address the challenges associated with transportation. As the following quote suggests, High Risk Probation Officers have to consider the rural nature of the Niagara Region now more than ever:

***The challenge is for areas like Fort Erie that have no means of getting into Welland. Then those clients will say — You know, I can't get to PAR. That is a challenge in regards to laying a breach charge and bringing it back to court. And they're saying to the judge — I can't get there and that's the reason. We've actually had cases where people are starting to apply for variations to have their PAR condition removed because of transportation reasons. And so, they're trying to... they're not being held up to fulfilling the program for a variety of reasons. But service provision... I mean, the absence of enough programming and in the right place or in enough places, is an ongoing challenge.***  
(HRPO) ■



*“I just think that the police should  
definitely take it seriously,  
maybe more so.”*

*(female participant)*

# Experiences with Niagara Regional Police Service

*The 2009/10 Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card highlighted some of the experiences women had when interacting with the Niagara Regional Police Service (NRP) regarding issues related to domestic violence. That report highlighted concerns related to the power differential that exists between the police and the people they serve and that often the power of the NRP can be quite influential, both in positive and negative ways. In the Niagara Region, every uniformed officer has received training on the issue of domestic violence. Additionally, the NRP has a Domestic Violence Unit that is comprised of detectives who are additionally trained and responsible for investigation of DV related matters.*

In the current study, as part of the effort to understand the experiences of women and men who accessed services, we wanted to understand further the experiences that people had with the NRP. Additionally, we asked Community Stakeholders about their experiences with the NRP and asked them to relate what their clients had told them about the process of involving the NRP in cases of domestic violence.

## Helpful Practices

Participants to our study spoke about the helpful things that the NRP uniformed NRP officers did while responding to the issue of domestic violence. Women who participated in this study indicated that one of the main things that NRP officers did that was helpful was going beyond merely responding to a report. This included practices telling women where they might get assistance and assure them of their safety:

***The police were so amazing. So I think they were the ones that referred me to Gillian's Place. They said to me — You may just want to talk to them here about what's going on and get legal advice. Anyway, so the police, I believe, gave me the information about Gillian's Place, so I was just so grateful. And they were amazing. And they would come and they said — We have his name on record. You know. And we have his car***

***on record. You just call us if you need any help. We're sending cruisers by sometimes just to check on your house. So they were incredible. Not one negative thing to say about that.***  
(female participant)

One participant also indicated that the NRP officer went beyond their role once the abusive partner had left the home to provide her with advice on remaining safe:

***And the police officer came back in the house and just said to me in the kitchen — I can't tell you this, but off the record, you need to change your locks immediately.*** (female participant)

One of the main things that NRP officers did that was helpful was going beyond merely responding to a report.

Helpful responses also involved NRP officers attending promptly to take a report, 'believing' what the woman said and responding in a way that validates the experience of the woman:

***I called the police when I got into work and just said — He's here again. You know — He's outside. I don't know if he's still there. I don't know if he's coming down. I'm by myself here. So they were great. They came down took the report. And then... I don't know if someone called me back, but I think at that point the Domestic Violence Detective got involved because there were so many close... And they called me and said — We're going to arrest him on two charges of criminal harassment.***  
(female participant)

This same woman also indicated that even after this experience her abusive partner continued to harass her and she once again reported to the NRP and experienced a helpful response:

Officers who were helpful kept issues of safety at the forefront of their response.

***I said — I just saw him. He was right in front of my house as I was pulling in and now I'm scared. Like, he's supposed to be scared by being on probation and knowing he can go back to jail. You know? He spent a couple days in jail already, and from what his family said, he didn't enjoy that, so he must be in a state of mind that he can't control his actions, which is concerning. So I called [Niagara Regional Police] and they came and they took the report and they went and arrested him again.*** (female participant)

Officers who were helpful kept issues of safety at the forefront of their response as the following woman suggested when her ex-partner wanted to retrieve personal belongings:

***The one time they were amazing. They came in and I don't know if I can... they weren't supposed to do this, but they were so good. They came in and they said — Listen, you're going to stay in the kitchen in here so he can't see you. He says he wants to get some stuff, so we're going to be here to escort him.***  
(female participant)

As noted, the NRP have specialized Detectives (DVI) who are responsible for investigating this matters once an arrest has been made. Few of the participants in this study talked about having any interactions with these detectives. Only one participant talked specifically about her experience with the DVI. Once again, the participant noted that besides merely taking a report, the detective provided her with information about where she might get support:

***Up until he came along, there were a number of incidents where police officers had come to the home to take reports and to stop violent behaviour and so on, and it was very unhealthy living for a very long time. His name, I believe, was [name of officer] or something like that. And he gave me the card for Design For a New Tomorrow, but he gave it to me in a situation where he said — Call these people and they'll be able to direct you on how you can get help.***  
(female participant)

Additionally, one community stakeholder indicated that the working relationship between her agency and the DVI is crucial in ensuring the safety of women and is very collaborative in nature:

***So I can easily find out that information and get to the bottom of it. Or, when charges really should have been laid and they haven't, then the DVI's will investigate it and look into it. So things run pretty smooth, I think, in [name of city] now it's not so bad.*** (Shelter staff)

## Women elect not to call the NRP

One of the main themes that came out of the interviews with women is that many of them were unprepared to call the police to report incidents of domestic violence. There are many different reasons why women decide not to contact the police. One of the main reasons that women in this study chose not to call was due to the fear associated with involving the police. For some women, the fear was the result of their perception that the NRP would not do anything and that reporting to the NRP would bring about the possibilities of reprisal by their partner:

***But, I was afraid to phone the police. My experience with calling the police was the same as what I hear. There's nothing we can do about it. Basically, until you're almost dead, there's nothing we can do about it. His response to me phoning the police could have been the end of my life. So I was afraid to even do something like that.*** (female participant)

This sentiment was echoed by another women who indicated; ***"No. I wouldn't call the police. Not in this town. Not in this... they haven't helped at all, with anything"*** (female participant).

Stakeholders have also heard from women the apparent futility of contacting the NRP and talked about it as part of this report:

***Most of the time, like this afternoon I had someone on the phone calling, so I was doing safety planning with her and like, you know — You call the police if he's following you and he's doing this. And she was like — The police don't do anything. And we hear that a lot. Like — The police don't do anything. I've called them. They came to my house. They say — You don't have any bruises and they didn't do a report and they didn't arrest him.*** (shelter staff)

However, there were times when Stakeholders would discuss that even within the NRP, two officers attending the same call would not agree on how to proceed:

One of the main reasons that women in this study chose not to call was due to the fear associated with involving the police.

***I had a client come in yesterday, she came in yesterday, so the night before, like around midnight, her husband was assaulting her and two police came. There were no marks on her and the one officer said — We're not going to lay charges. There's no evidence here. And the other officer who responded with him said — Oh, yes! We're charging this guy.*** (shelter staff)

For some women not calling the police is connected to the fear that they have about what will happen to their children or what other scrutiny they will come under as a result of reporting. As the following woman noted her fear was related to the uncertainty of the safety of her children:

***And unfortunately, I didn't call the police at that time, because I was afraid of what will happen, like with the children. I was afraid that the children might be taken away from me. Because, my husband had also threatened me in the past, that he'll take the children away to India.*** (female participant)

A more pervasive fear was associated with the knowledge that NRP involvement with families where DV had occurred and their were children would result in a referral to Family and Children's Services (FACS):

***I remember being in the back of the police car, when he was taking me to get the staples in my head and I remember begging that police officer — Please, please do not report this to FACS. Please, please don't report this to FACS. Because I knew what I was in for. He said — I'm sorry. That's the way it works.*** (female participant)

“Very inconsistent. Yeah, you can’t predict what it will be. I don’t know if other people have that experience but that’s been my experience. I wouldn’t be able to say it’s uniformly negative or uniformly positive.”  
(DFNT staff)

While not connected to the issue of domestic violence the following woman noted that on occasion, NRP officers would use FACS as a threat. The importance of this is that the experience of women with the NRP extends beyond just reporting issues of DV. Other interactions and engagements with the NRP in the past, shape the future behaviour of these women:

**No. Uh... the police have threatened me with FACS. This was an incident that happened, like between me and my mom just last spring. They threatened FACS if I didn’t give them a report against my mother.** (female participant)

The following woman also indicated that she would not contact NRP again either:

**For me it would be the immediate involvement of FACS, no matter what they’re called, and my assault had been August 20th of last year, last week FACS just closed my file.** (female participant).

Stakeholders also spoke about understanding why women might not call the NRP to report DV. As the following stakeholder suggests, there is something problematic with calling the NRP for help and ending up with a child protection file:

**But the issue too is like the police. Any time they go for a domestic call, right?... they report to FACS, because there’s kids, right? Any time a woman calls... and I don’t know if it’s every time,**

**but I think judging by my caseload it’s every time there’s kids involved and they can get a name or an address, they’re calling FACS. Anyway these women go... You’re going to call the police for safety. You’re going to call Gillian’s Place or one of the shelters for help. We’re the central people. If you call the police, okay — We’re going to come and maybe do something, maybe not. Oh, and by the way, we’re going to report this to FACS. Right? So, thanks for calling.** (FACS employee)

Women also indicated that involving the NRP in their family matters brought a lot of shame on them as women. The shame is something very deep for these women because often calling the NRP brought scrutiny towards their ‘mothering practices’ and made things very public. As the following woman indicated, when the NRP attended in response to her complaint she experienced a great deal of shame:

**...and that was only because he was actually out of the house at the time, and he had ripped the house apart and the police had told him — Stay at your parent’s place. And I had the one officer say — Well, can you at least give him the alarm clock, because he’s the only one that’s working. And I said — Really? And at the time, I had an infant son and I said — Well, how about this. I said — You stay home with my kids. You change diapers. You make meals. You do laundry. You do the cleaning. I said — I’ll sit on my fat ass and eat donuts all day. You wanna do that? And he was quite rude about it. But yeah, I was made to feel like — You know what, you should be ashamed that you made your husband feel like this. You should be ashamed that you kicked him out and you made him leave his house. And then... yeah, that’s how they make you feel. Well, you should be ashamed. And this poor guy goes out and works every day and he does this and... Oh, okay.** (female participant)

Another woman reported that the NRP involved her parents, which added to the publicity of the issue, and the shame as well:

***And the police would come, would not look for marks or anything on him. They would automatically say — Get your kids and get out. And they would bring my parents over and yeah, they made me feel ashamed. Like — Oh! This poor guy! He works and this and that and look what you're doing.*** (female participant)

## Understanding the issue

There was a perception amongst the women who participated in this report that the uniformed officers of the NRP that they had dealt with, did not really understand the complexities associated with the issue of domestic violence. Some women questioned whether or not the officers had received enough training:

***I don't think that they're trained at all. I think the ones down here are very inappropriate. I've had inappropriate things said in situations. I've been fighting with my husband, and I've had them ask me what our sex life is like.***  
(female participant)

Other women suggested that the NRP officers were not adequately trained to respond to women who are victims of domestic violence ***“These officers coming in, they have no idea how to deal with these women”*** (female participant).

Community stakeholders also questioned the need for increased training for NRP officers as part of being diligent in the production of a ‘case’:

***So, there's that whole piece where we really need training for those front-line officers that are going in, even in terms of the questions that they're asking and the report-writing that they're doing, so that when it goes to court something will happen.*** (DFNT staff)

The complexities of relationships where there is domestic violence was discussed as being a contributing factor to the perceived ‘poor response’ by the NRP at times. Often times, participants reported experiencing several incidents of violence that are minimized to the

police (or not reported) or women returned to their violent partners on different occasions. These kinds of incidents were topics within many interviews. For example the following woman had the police at her home several times, but she did not report violence, which led to potential consequences for her:

***But basically what happened is he had threatened me and the police came and then they left and then they came again and then he was going to ... one of the officers had said he was... I was going to be charged with Obstruction of Justice. I don't know how that came about. But, I was pretty disappointed.***  
(female participant)

There was a perception amongst the women who participated in this report that the uniformed officers of the NRP that they had dealt with, did not really understand the complexities associated with the issue of domestic violence.

Another woman acknowledged the possible double-standard that exists:

***I called them about being harassed by him and five police would show up and they'd be rude to me and then the next day if I would call him and say — Leave me alone!... he would call on me and the same cops would show up and threaten me.*** (female participant)

Community stakeholders also indicated that the NRP response can be understood partially due to not understanding the complexities associated with DV. As the following stakeholder indicated,

the nature of the relationships where DV occurs can be challenging for NRP officers to understand:

***I think... when I run into problems it's repeats, all the time. When you have women that are calling or police are getting called to an address numerous times, they tend to kind of sometimes get an attitude around that. And, especially if like the woman doesn't leave or they're telling her to go to the shelter and she doesn't...***  
(shelter staff)

This sentiment was echoed by another community stakeholder, ***"I think the police just get tired of going because either he comes back or she's allowed him to come back, and they just get tired of dealing with that"*** (DFNT staff).

## Inconsistent responses

During the course of interviewing participants for this report, the final theme that emerged regarding the NRP response was that of 'inconsistency'. Participants to this study were easily able to identify evidence of helpful and unhelpful responses by the NRP, but there was also a thread within the interviews, that women were never really sure what kind of response they were going to receive. For some women, they understood the response to be a function of the

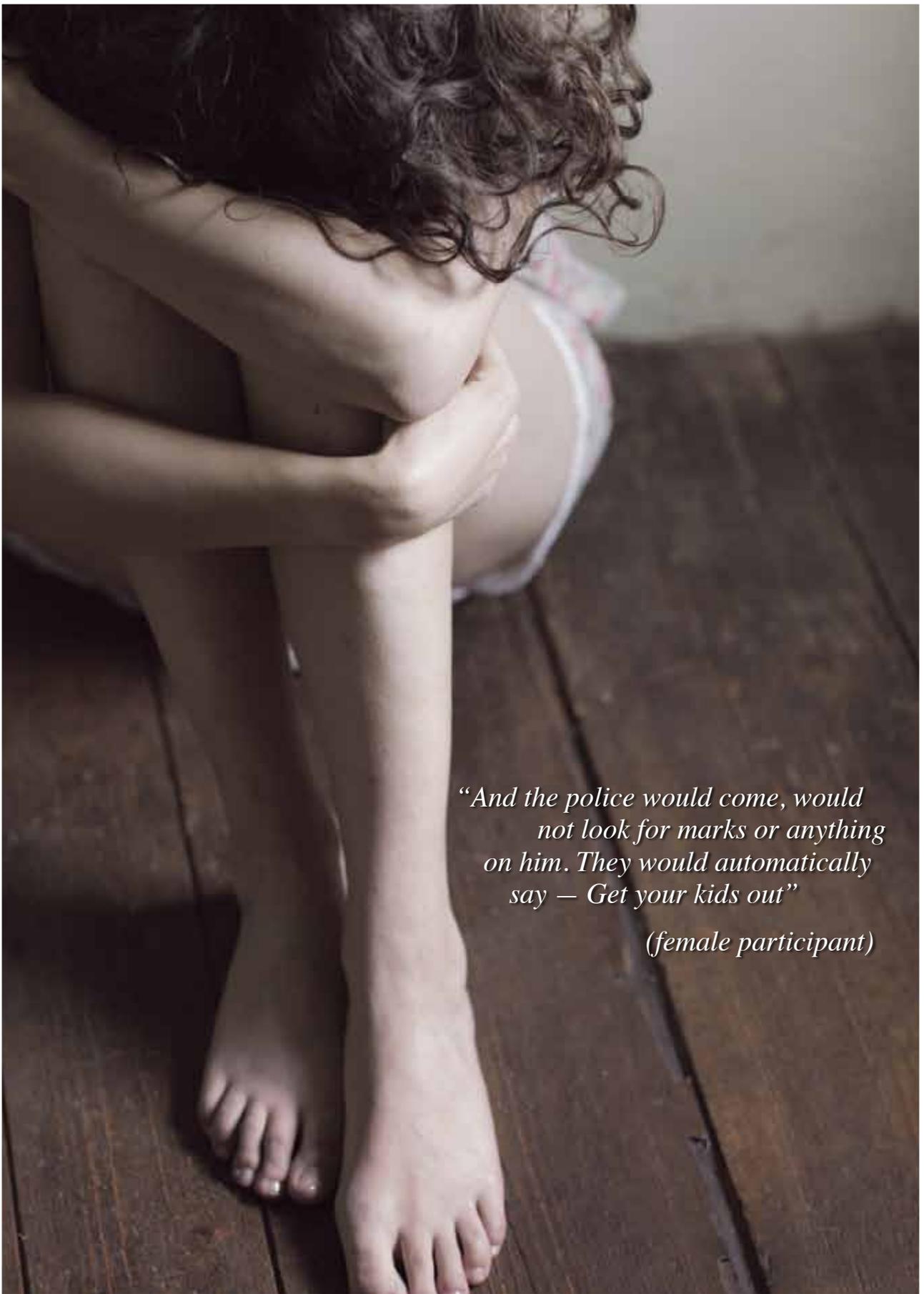
attending officer, ***"So it's been both good and bad. It just would depend on the police officer that you got"*** (female participant).

Community Stakeholders also suggested that there was an inconsistency in the response by the NRP.

***Very inconsistent. Yeah, you can't predict what it will be. I don't know if other people have that experience but that's been my experience. I wouldn't be able to say it's uniformly negative or uniformly positive. It's just a crapshoot.***  
(DFNT staff)

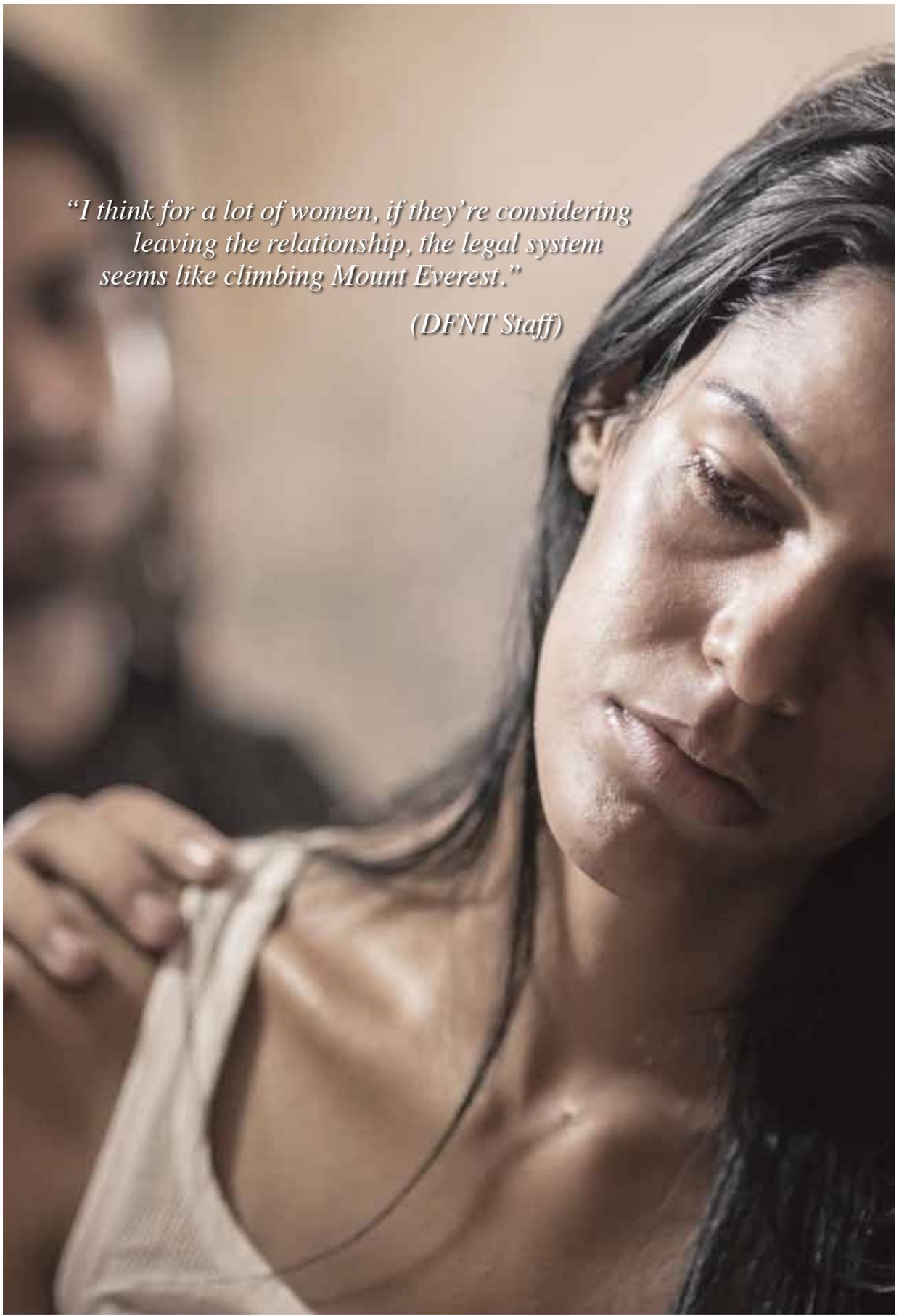
and

***I think the negative outweighs the positive... the experiences of women. But no, I agree with you because, you know, some women will come in and say — Yes they were absolutely wonderful and on top of things and they help me. And then we get, you know, the majority of women or other women coming in and saying they were abused. You know? Like - What are you doing? You should just go back to him. Well, how would you expect him to react?*** (DFNT staff) ■



*“And the police would come, would  
not look for marks or anything  
on him. They would automatically  
say – Get your kids out”*

*(female participant)*



*“I think for a lot of women, if they’re considering leaving the relationship, the legal system seems like climbing Mount Everest.”*

*(DFNT Staff)*

# Experiences within the Court Systems in Niagara

*The 2009/10 Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card highlighted that women faced many challenges when considering leaving abusive relationships. That report raised concerns about the experiences within the courts systems by women and their families. Families can come into contact with two main court systems in the Niagara Region, Family Court and Criminal Court. Each of these serves a specific role when considering the issue of domestic violence. The Niagara Region has two specialized Domestic Violence Courts (DVC) in St. Catharines and Welland. It is within these courts that the majority of domestic violence cases are heard. Upon the dissolution of relationships families can also enter into the Family Court system to resolve matters related to divorce and custody/access (related to children). This current report sought to understand the experiences of individuals as their lives intersected with each of these systems.*

While this report set out to examine the experiences of individuals in each of the court systems, one of the unanticipated outcomes was that many of the women who participated in this study did not actually report their matters to the police and therefore subsequently did not go through the court system. As such, we also asked community stakeholders to describe their experiences and the experiences of the women they work with of the court systems. The result is an interesting representation of both systems and the challenges associated with attempting to address the issue of domestic violence from a legal perspective.

## Family Court

Many of the participants to this report identified a number of challenges associated with proceeding through Family Court when there are concerns related to domestic violence. Many contributors to this report indicated that it took a long time to go through Family Court in an effort to attempt to resolve issues. As the following woman indicated, her process had been ongoing for a period of time with little or no end in sight,

***“I used up all the money on the lawyers trying to fight him. Not fight him, but trying to settle this, I should say, for a year and a half in court”***  
(female participant).

## EDUCATION OF COURT OFFICIALS

One of the main themes that emerged regarding the Family Court system was the need to educate court officials regarding the issue of domestic violence. Those who talked about the Family Court system suggested that there was a great need for improved knowledge. This included not only knowledge about the issue, but assurances that each court document was given consideration by the presiding judges. As the following woman indicated, the process is not deemed adequate if it appears that the officials have not read the prepared materials:

***And then we went before this judge who was terrible. She said that I should be ashamed of myself for restricting visitation. That they have a right to see their father. And, they were seeing him every other weekend and every Wednesday, just not overnights or... And she just basically yelled at me for an hour straight. She***

*hadn't read any of the paperwork. She didn't know I was in counselling. She didn't know he hadn't taken a parenting course that was recommended. She didn't know anything. She just... My lawyer said she's notorious for picking a side and then just beating down the side, which is unfortunate, because he came out of court feeling like he was right.*  
(female participant)

This participant indicated that another appearance before the same judge provided a similar outcome until she was in front of a different judge:

*We went back to court again and the same thing happened again, with this judge. She just didn't read any of the documents and then I think he filed a motion in July, and we went back to court again for this motion, and it was a different judge for a motion, and he had read the documents and he said that the visitation should stay as it stands and he wouldn't give him any extra time during the summer.*  
(female participant)

**“We need to change that whole Family Law system when there's domestic violence.”  
(FACS employee)**

Several of the community stakeholders also identified the need to ensure that Family Court judges are adequately educated on the issue of domestic violence:

*And, I just had a file recently, where this child was that anxious about going to her father's and the woman didn't have enough money or whatever, went to court for herself, went to bat for her child, and the judge said — You have proven to me that he's been abusive to you, but you have not proved that he's abusive to your*

*child. And I'm left going — Are you kidding me? Like — Do you not understand the impact? So, I think we need to educate lawyers. We need to educate judges. We need to change that whole Family Law system when there's domestic violence.* (FACS employee)

Another woman described how her lawyer prepared her to face a judge in an effort to make her settle during the middle of a case that contained domestic violence:

*I'm just glad that my lawyer knew her and she said to me before we even went in there — Her job is to make us settle. And she said — She's going to pick one of you and browbeat you until you cave and that's her way of trying to make you settle.* (female participant)

It is difficult to comprehend the impact that the behaviour of this judge would have on a woman who has been the victim of abuse. This kind of behaviour has the potential to re-abuse women who enter the Family Court system often recovering from injuries or who are re-traumatized as a result of seeing their abusive partner.

### FAMILY COURT AS A TACTIC USED TO CONTROL

The Family Court system was also identified as a venue where abuse and control tactics are utilized by men towards their partners. Some of the women who participated in this study described situations where their abusive partner attempted to utilize the Family Court process to re-abuse them or control their lives even further. One woman described how horrifying the process was and how her abusive ex-partner used the Family Court setting as another venue to attempt to maintain control over her and the children:

*And he wasn't paying child support for the first year, year and a half until they ordered him to. So financially, things were difficult so [legal advocate] stepped in and helped. And she would also arrange police to be there and sit with me before we went into the courtroom, come into the courtroom and leave.* (female participant)

Another participant discussed how her ex-partner attempted to monitor her whereabouts by gaining information under the guise of being more involved in the lives of the children:

***He wanted this thing called First Right of Refusal, where if I can't... for four hours. So, if I can't look after the kids for four hours or more, he automatically would get them. And then he wanted to know my work schedule, any changes to my work schedule. And I'm thinking — Well, he's already stalking me and I'm going to give him my work schedule? So we went back before this judge again, the same judge and she said — Yes, give him your work schedule. He should have the kids when you're working. Same thing over... and just gave him more power.***  
(female participant)

## Specialized Domestic Violence Court

Specialized Domestic Violence Courts (DVC) are considered to exist under the umbrella of “problem solving courts” and have grown in popularity over the past twenty years (Tutty, Ursel & Douglas, 2008; Ursel, Tutty & Lemaistre, 2008). These specialized, problem-solving courts were generally constructed and designed to focus on specific social problems such as mental health, illegal narcotics (drug courts) or domestic violence. Individuals charged with a specific crime are typically funneled into one of the criminal justice ‘streams’ where they are prosecuted with other similar cases. In response to the issue of violence against women (VAW) specialized domestic violence courts gradually became an increasingly popular method for addressing this social issue. According to Tutty, Ursel and Douglas (2008) these courts developed for two reasons: to aid in the consolidation of criminal matters and to improve the overall response by the criminal justice system to protecting victims of domestic violence.

It is estimated that there are over 200 DV courts presently operating in the United States and over 100 DV courts operating in both England and

In response to the issue of violence against women (VAW) specialized domestic violence courts gradually became an increasingly popular method for addressing this social issue.

Canada (Labriola et al, 2009). Regardless of the quantity of these courts, their presence is marked by the dramatic differentiation in the provision of service and the model of service delivery that exists.

Despite the increasing popularity of these courts a lack of consistent identified goals exist regarding their purpose. Tutty, Ursel and Douglas (2008) suggest that the following three principles guide domestic violence courts within Canadian settings; early intervention for low risk offenders; vigorous prosecution of those charged with domestic violence; and a commitment to rehabilitation and treatment.

In Niagara there are two distinct Domestic Violence Courts located in St. Catharines and Welland. The DVC in St. Catharines services both St. Catharines and matters arising from Niagara Falls. The Welland DVC services ‘south’ Niagara excluding Fort Erie, which has its own court house, but not a specialized DVC. Since the 2009/10 Domestic Violence Report Card, there has been increasing interest from various community stakeholders regarding the relative effectiveness of these courts. The Ministry of the Attorney General has indicated that they do not maintain statistics related to these courts and as such their ‘effect’ is unknown.

As noted previously, there were few women who participated in this report that actually reported their abuse to the police and as such this study did not reveal any depth related to the experiences of women related to the Domestic

Women in this report indicated that they felt supported and kept up to date regarding the court matter.

Violence Court (DVC). However many community stakeholders spoke at length about their experiences and the experiences of their clients within the DVC.

### INCREASING SUPPORTS TO VICTIMS

One of the main themes that emerged from interviews with women and stakeholders is that the creation of the DVC has led to increased support to victims. Women in this report indicated that they felt supported and kept up to date regarding the court matter as the following two women indicate:

***Well, I didn't [go to the court proceedings]... because I was so busy with the kids I didn't go to any of the court processes. I don't think I was there at any of them, actually. I did write a couple of Victim Impact Statements. I wrote a couple of them. I don't know what happened in regards to them, and it's not like I didn't want to be involved, but it was always a matter of daycare for my kids and who was going to watch my children.*** (female participant)

***But everyone [at VWAP] was good. Like communication-wise I was notified of the court dates appropriately. You know? Everybody got in touch with me and worked well with me.*** (female participant)

This sentiment is echoed by community stakeholder who suggested that:

***...it has also then seemed to increase the client's participation in the system, because they can't easily drop charges and... you know, there's no***

***discretion by the police to not lay a charge and the discretion is obviously with the Crown.*** (VWAP employee)

However, despite the apparent improvement in supporting victims, there was concern raised that despite the presence of a dedicated Crown Attorney in St. Catharines, the volume of cases limits the ability to meet with each victim prior to trial day:

***And I don't know if it's an accessibility issue to the Crown. I know we have some struggles in the last little while around... because Niagara... Niagara Falls domestics are done here, and Welland are done in Welland. The DV Crown only has one day every other week for each of those areas to meet with clients, to get their input. Whereas St. Catharines, we have one day a week available. And, the numbers are basically equal, the number of cases for Niagara North, Niagara South. So I think part of it may be an accessibility issue and we may have to look at — How can we bump that up so they are more, the Crown's more available to meet with clients?*** (VWAP employee)

Crown Attorney's play a key role in the prosecution of these matters. In the previous Report Card, the rotation and duration of tenure in the DVC of Crown Attorney's in St. Catharines was highlighted to be an area for reconsideration. Despite the recommendation in the previous Report Card of extending the length of assignment within these courts to three years, the DV Crown Attorney is only currently assigned for one year. This is a slight increase from the previous length of six months.

Another challenge that has been highlighted by community stakeholders are the areas outside of the actual criminal court where the issue of DV is dealt with; primarily bail court and the accused's ability to plead to his charges. Currently in the Niagara Region there is no specialization within the Bail Court system regarding domestic violence. This remains one of the riskiest times for victims; when men are released from jail,

yet there remains nothing in place to formally examine the risk the individual poses on release.

During the course of conversations with stakeholders, the process of pleading to the charge came up. This involves the right of an accused to enter a plea to the charges at any time. For men who have charges involving DV, they can actually plead in a court in front of a judge and Crown Attorney that are not attached to the DVC. As a result, the nuances related to the issue of DV may be missed or not considered as fully as they might within the confines of the DVC.

### EXPERIENCES OF THOSE WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE DVC

In the absence of a number of participants who went through the criminal court process, stakeholders provided insight into their perceptions of individual experiences within the DVC. The general sentiment about the DVC process was that it is an overwhelming and frustrating process for women, despite the increased emphasis on support from community service providers. As the following quotations suggest, service providers from a variety of locations offered opinions on the experiences of their clients and the DVC:

***It's intimidating. It's confusing, like for someone who doesn't know how it works. Niagara South is... it's awful. It's the worst, because we don't have unified court.*** (FACS employee)

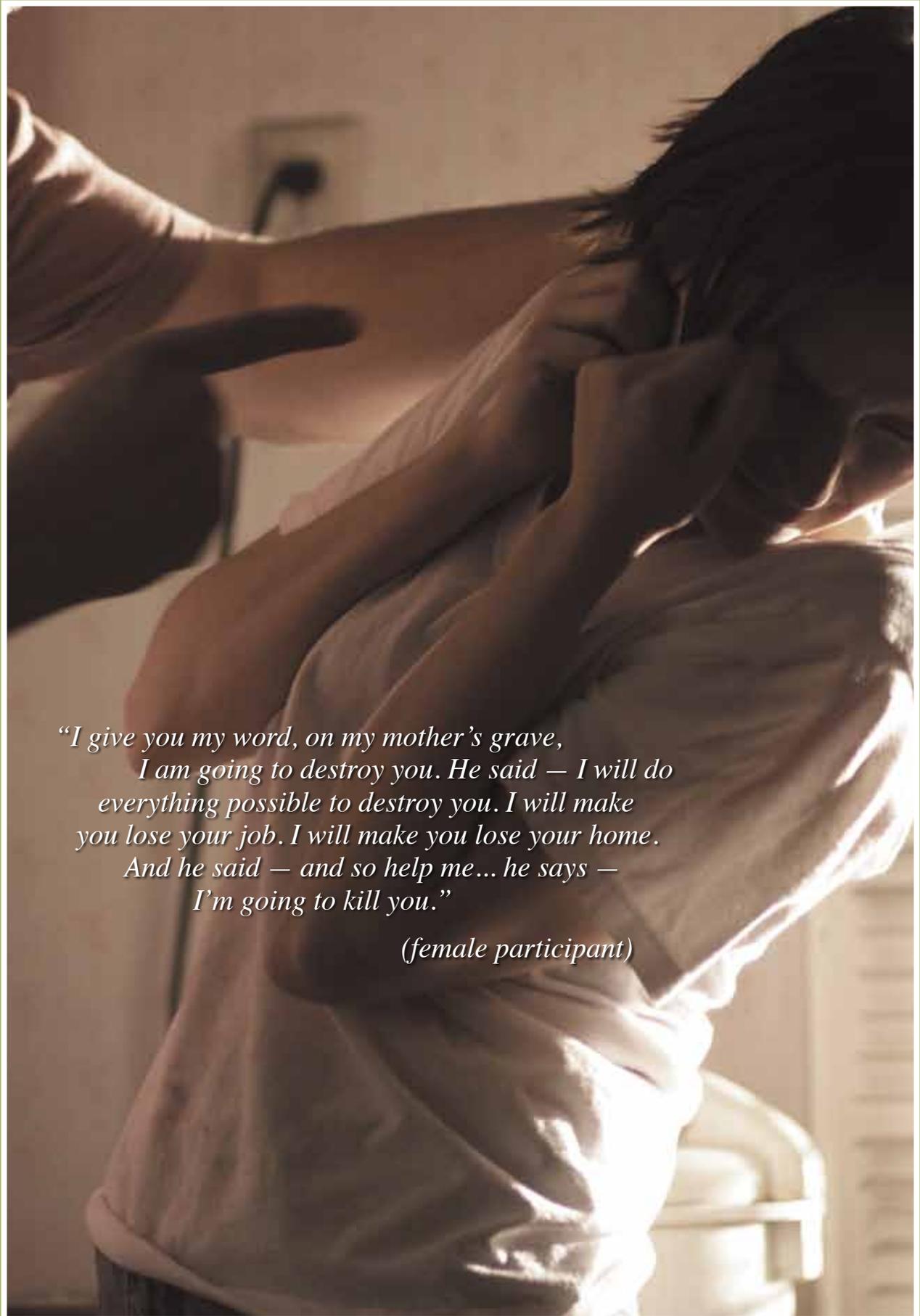
The DVC can be a place of disempowerment for women as well:

***They [women] have, I believe, a sense of... and I think it's accurate... of having no power or say in what's going to happen, even though we encourage them to provide input and the specialized domestic Crowns particularly listen to that. But, they don't have a whole lot of power, which is the nature of the system here, and I think that's particularly challenging for clients when they come through the system. I think the majority, my guess is that majority are quite frustrated with the system, particularly because it takes so long.*** (VWAP employee)

Finally, consideration must be given to the fact that the DVC is only one system that women leaving abusive situations must traverse. As this worker suggests, regardless of the system (DVC or otherwise) the challenges facing abused women are extensive:

***There's so many barriers whether it's... really, whatever you hit, whether it's police, housing, legal system, criminal, criminal system, the fear with your Crown interview, all that part of it, and then Family and Children Services are involved. There's just so many areas where you're trying to problem solve or you're trying to go through systems and often our systems aren't working really well. So, I think it's very hard for women.*** (DFNT employee) ■

The general sentiment about the DVC process was that it is an overwhelming and frustrating process for women, despite the increased emphasis on support from community service providers.



*“I give you my word, on my mother’s grave,  
I am going to destroy you. He said — I will do  
everything possible to destroy you. I will make  
you lose your job. I will make you lose your home.  
And he said — and so help me... he says —  
I’m going to kill you.”*

*(female participant)*

# Collaboration among Service Providers

*The delivery of an effective community-based response to violence against women is predicated on the importance of community service providers working together to provide seamless service to families experiencing domestic violence. The 2009/10 Report Card and the subsequent update in May 2010, highlighted the importance of community collaboration efforts and that there was substantive evidence of collaborative efforts within the Niagara Region. At that time, it was noted that there was a newly instituted collaborative effort between Gillian's Place and Family and Children's Services and the implementation of the Domestic Violence Advocate (DVA) position. Other collaborative projects included the High Risk Review Team (see section on HRRT for detailed examination) and the ongoing efforts at the Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women.*

Since the production of the last Report Card, there has been an ongoing emphasis on improving the collaborative processes that occur across the Niagara Region. These include the expansion of the DVA position to make those services available to FACS staff across the Niagara Region, and the increasingly formalized processes associated with the HRRT. Much of the discussion regarding collaboration occurred within the focus groups involving FACS employees, as such, this section contains a larger number of references by FACS employees than any other sector involved in this report. That does not mean that collaboration does not occur in other sectors (the High Risk Review Team is an example of collaboration with the Criminal Justice Sector). This section examines what community stakeholders revealed about the importance of collaboration in their work on DV.

## Expertise

Stakeholders who participated in this study indicated that one of the most important aspects associated with collaboration is the opportunity to access a level of expertise. This expertise could easily be ascribed to the number of years that a colleague has been working on the issue of violence against women or it could be the level of knowledge their colleague has due to formal

and/or informal training. The Niagara Region has many individuals who work within the VAW sector who have developed a deep understanding of the issues and are able to convey, collaboratively, methods for working on this issue. Collaboration is enhanced through accessing these 'experts' due to their knowledge or sometimes, their position in the field. As one High Risk Probation Officer (HRPO) indicated, one of the benefits of having dedicated probation officers working on the issue of DV is how much they know about each individual man's risk level:

***I think as well, you carry the highest risk DV guys, so when any of these officers are calling, the attention they have from police or from another agency is — Okay, this is high alert, because if these people are calling there's a reason that they're calling and it's got to do with imminent risk to a victim or the public. And so, that makes a difference. Through their connections and as they experience relationships growing, then they are very well-respected in the community for what they know and what they do and it makes a difference.***

(HRPO)

Another probation officer echoed this sentiment regarding the expertise and the need to collaborate in a timely manner:

For some workers collaboration with the DVA often results in deeper levels of engagement with women and better relationships as an end result.

***And the response time, I think, is quite a bit quicker. We act on things immediately. Like, if they fail to report or if there's a victim issue or any concerns. Like you mentioned about FACS or whatnot. We follow up much quicker than if it was a different type of client, because we know the risk and we're able to assess that and respond a little bit.*** (HRPO)

Another example of collaboration involving expertise can be seen in the role of the DVA at FACS. These two workers occupy a unique position in their ability to inform and influence the practices of front-line social workers. During the collection of data, there was a pattern that suggested that those workers who were able to access DVA's were more insightful regarding the issue of DV. Other workers talked more specifically about the impact that the DVA position has had on their work. For most workers, they have felt more informed about the dynamics associated with DV as a result of having access to the DVA's. For some workers collaboration with the DVA often results in deeper levels of engagement with women and better relationships as an end result:

***I get the DV to ask, you know, because they're going to be more open to someone else, than to me. So, the DV is the real link in these cases, because they're seen as more support, whereas they're not threatening, as we are. And if we can engage the DV, we're going to have a better relationship with this family. That's what I think.*** (FACS employee)

As the following FACS employee also suggests, the expertise of the DVA's is often useful in finding better ways to engage with mothers:

***I tend to contact them [DVA's] quite frequently because someone is already accessing services at Gillian's Place or at Nova House, or perhaps we've got some barriers that are standing in the way of that, and bringing the Domestic Violence Advocate out again was very helpful... And I've quite often called up [DVA's] and said — Hey, this is the situation... just for some ideas on what they can suggest on how we can approach the situation better.*** (FACS employee)

And finally, the following worker related the importance of collaborating with another community partner in order to improve safety:

***Some of the collaterals will provide assistance in implementing safety plans, like Gillian's Place. They're very effective at that, very effective, and they offer legal support through the agency.*** (FACS employee)

## It makes the job easier

One of the obvious benefits to collaboration is that it improves the ability of the individual worker, regardless of agency, to do their job. As a result of collaboration, workers are no longer operating in a 'silo' rather they are working with others towards common goals. In this way the work becomes easier according to stakeholders. As one High Risk Probation Officer (HRPO) summed, despite the extent of the work, collaboration has made her job easier for a number of reasons:

***But, even if you take the numbers out of the game, I think it's easier because of the connections that we've made, that it makes my job a lot easier, because the information flow and working together makes it a lot easier. Before you'd be scrambling for police reports or trying to get this person to help you or somebody at the court. Where now, it's that you've got all those connections. They call you half the time, so it's not you also trying to track them down. And vice versa. It just seems like it's a lot easier, because you're getting the information quicker to you. It's accessible. You have somebody else to run it past. All that sort***

***of thing has made it definitely easier. You're not just yourself anymore, I guess, trying to deal with it.*** (HRPO)

For some participants, collaborating with the Niagara Regional Police is part of improving their own safety while addressing issues with families:

***But the police are typically helpful, I've found, particularly if I'm having to go back into a situation and I'm meeting with them present, they're quite helpful and they are very protective of both the family and of us, as we're going in, which I've found helpful.*** (FACS employee)

Collaborative practices also provide the opportunity to ensure that clients are clear about what is happening in their lives when child welfare is involved:

***Nova House was very helpful and very supportive and was doing meetings and trying to get information across, because it wasn't really working out so great with just me and my client. It was a lot of repetitive questions, repetitive answers. It was a lot of working in circles and getting to the point where it was getting frustrating, even for myself, and I'm sure she was just as frustrated as I was... She wasn't understanding and there's only so many ways you can say certain things. So, having Nova House present at the meetings was really helpful, even just to help her calm down, when she would start to get frustrated and anxious herself.*** (FACS employee)

## Collaboration as a joining practice

One of the main aspects associated with collaborative practices is that it provides workers from different agencies the opportunity to meet with individual clients simultaneously. The benefit of this is two-fold; first the information received by both agencies is consistent and second, it reduces the number of meetings that clients have to attend.

The practice of jointly meeting with clients was identified by many stakeholders as important practices to consider and continue;

***Design [For a New Tomorrow] is helpful, particularly like they're welcome... and if the clients are open to it, you're allowed to go to sessions and stuff and sometimes it's even been... I've been asked by Design to please come in to a session with a mom, which again, very helpful for us and I think that it fostered a better working relationship with them as a community partner.*** (FACS employee)

Collaborative meetings are also an effective way of achieving accountability as the following stakeholder noted:

***And so, I started going in for the visit, the person that she'll [the DVA] visit, and I found that there was a lot of minimalization by the woman... Like, they didn't want to own up to it. So, by being there and present and talking as well, more came out. And so, it was like — Okay, we need to work on this, this, this and this instead of just that and a little bit of that. It became more in-depth.*** (FACS employee)

One of the main aspects associated with collaborative practices is that it provides workers from different agencies the opportunity to meet with individual clients simultaneously.

Collaboration can also be a method for seeking clarity and reassurance as the following quote from a shelter worker suggests:

***I have a really good relationship with our DVI [Domestic Violence Investigator – NRP] and I'm on the phone all the time. And sometimes...***

*because sometimes people don't understand the process and when they say — Well, he wasn't charged... maybe they don't understand the difference between "direct threats" and "indirect threats". So I can easily find out that information and get to the bottom of it. Or, when charges really should have been laid and they haven't, then the DVI's will investigate it and look into it.* (Shelter staff)

The co-locating of the DVA's within FACS has also had an impact on the collaborative process as the following exchange suggests:

Participant: *When they're here in the office, they're here. We talk to them. We run things past them because they're here. When they're not here...*

Interviewer: *A little bit more difficult?*

Participant: *Well, it's just... you don't think about it. I'll refer directly to Nova House or directly to Design. If she's not here it doesn't really occur to me.*

*"I think that the initiative they started, where we had some collaborative days with some of the shelter staff, was helpful, but it's a work in progress." (FACS employee)*

## Increased role clarity

Stakeholders suggested that one of the main benefits of increased collaboration has been increased understanding about the roles of individuals within specific agencies. Through the collaborative processes that occur, agency workers appear to be developing increased understanding about the role of partner agencies. This has the potential to improve service delivery and role clarity when working with families where domestic violence has occurred.

One of the most poignant examples of this is located within the FACS/Gillian's Place collaboration and the implementation of the DVA positions. Not only have the DVA's served as experts regarding this issue, they have also served as ambassadors of the shelters, educating FACS employees on the nuances of working in the shelter. In speaking with both FACS employees and shelter staff, we inquired as to the perceptions of the differences that the DVA position has made. As the following FACS employee states, this formalized collaboration has resulted in increased insight at both agencies:

*And, I think that's taken quite some time and having the DVA's, particularly with Nova House and Gillian's Place, I think that's really opened it up, that they have a better understanding of what goes on here. And, we have some more insight as to what goes on behind their doors.* (FACS employee)

As the following FACS employees suggests, collaboration with other agencies has led to them considering the extensive nature of the issues facing the families they work with:

*Yeah, but I have found that, say working with Hannah House, there's a lot more collaboration and they are very open, very open. Like, I want to talk to you. I want you to talk to me as service providers. And they're really incredible and it made things a lot more... I became aware of, unconsciously aware of, a lot more of what they do, rather than it's FACS, FACS, FACS. It's the environment and the feeling of what you get out of it as well.* (FACS employee)

Shelter staff also indicated that they had experienced a 'shift' in the approach of FACS employees that they attribute, in part, to the DVA and increased collaboration. Shelter workers indicated that the response by FACS employees is *"slowly changing"* and that *"it's gonna take a while"* but that *"As time goes by, some of them are 'better' with it"*. Shelter workers also indicated that they believed *"They [FACS workers] try to be more open minded"* and that *"they [FACS employees] are starting to get it more"* and that these shifts can be attributed to the increased emphasis on collaborative by all three agencies.

Another FACS employee indicated that more formal collaborative days between FACS and community partners have been helpful in building knowledge about the services other agencies

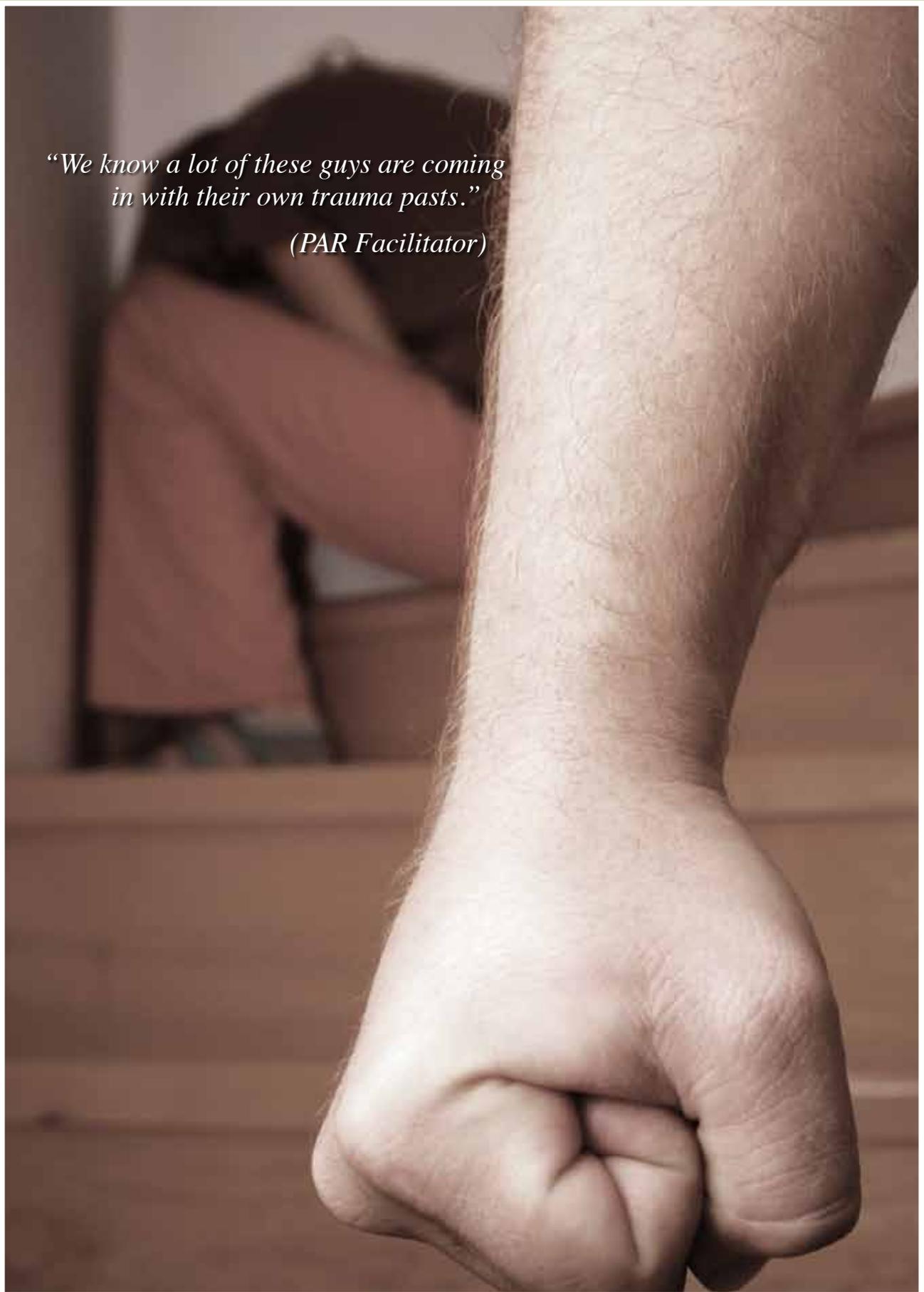
deliver *"I think that the initiative they started, where we had some collaborative days with some of the shelter staff, was helpful, but it's a work in progress."* (FACS employee).

Despite the apparent movement towards collaboration across sectors on this issue, collaboration remains in many respects in its infancy as the following worker suggests:

*And, I think we're starting to do that, but it's at a higher level. So on the floor, if you will, frontline workers aren't seeing the results or the change yet. Right? I think we're just at the beginning stages.* (FACS employee) ■

*“We know a lot of these guys are coming  
in with their own trauma pasts.”*

*(PAR Facilitator)*



# Engaging Men who have Abused Their Partners

*Despite the absence of male participants in this Report Card, many of the stakeholders and participants were able to talk about their experiences of either working with men who abuse or provide feedback regarding the experiences of men who utilized services related to domestic violence.*

## Who are these men?

Domestic violence does not solely exist within the confines of any one male demographic. Violence can occur by any man of any socio-economic status towards his partner. There are some who might believe that violence only occurs within lower class, marginalized families, however this is not the case. The reality is that domestic violence occurs across the socioeconomic continuum. What is interesting is that the majority of men who come into contact with services designed to address violence against women are reported to be from marginalized aspects of society. Interviews with facilitators of the Partner Assault Response (PAR) program and the High Risk Probation Officers revealed interesting characteristics about the men that they work with. When asked about who they are seeing in their programs, PAR facilitators indicated:

***I would say, low-income or even if they're not low-income, they're still working class. They're blue-collar guys. We've very little in the way of middle class professionals, like none that I have, very few that we've ever had. So, we're looking at guys that are... You know, and a few guys on OW [Ontario Works], ODSP [Ontario Disability Support Program].*** (PAR facilitator)

These men are described as working class, employed in either seasonal positions or construction. Some of them are reliant upon Ontario Works or disability payments (ODSP). The PAR facilitators indicated that age-wise, their groups can encompass a wide range of men, but they noted an interesting shift occurring in who is attending group:

***I think, probably we're seeing more of the middle-aged men, maybe a couple years back and I've noticed kind of an increase in more of the guys in their 20's and that tends to be more and more in the group, right? So, we're having more younger guys come on in.*** (PAR facilitator)

A similar pattern was noted by the High Risk Probation Officers (HRPO) in their description of the population of men that they worked with. They described a homogeneous group of men; ***"Well, I'd have to say the majority of mine are white males"*** (HRPO) and another indicated ***"Probably I may have like one offender that's from Cuba and I need an interpreter and there are some cultural differences that I notice that play into his offending behaviours. But the majority are white males."*** (HRPO). Their employment status was also described in a manner consistent with the PAR facilitators; ***"Yeah, occasionally employed...Yeah, I would say very few have good full-time employment history with one place, maybe a handful. But, that's my caseload, culturally-wise."*** (HRPO).

One of the interesting aspects of these individuals that emerged was descriptions of the background or personal histories of these men that might contribute to their propensity to engage in violence towards their partners. One of the most interesting results included suggestions that it was important to consider that many men who are violent often have their own traumatic histories that have not been dealt with. As one PAR facilitator indicated:

***We know a lot of these guys are coming in with maybe their own trauma past, lots of shame***

## Violence can occur by any man of any socio-economic status towards his partner.

***coming in, you know, with whatever experiences they've had in their childhood.*** (PAR facilitator)

Another reality of the lives of these men was that often their use of substances impeded their ability to engage in service or was debilitating in some respect. Often, men who presented with addictions issues are required to access addictions services prior to engaging in counselling to address domestic violence.

### What services are used?

Across all of the interviews that were conducted for this report, participants identified two main programs that they accessed or wished to access for men who had been violent in their relationships. The first is the Partner Assault Response Program and the second was a program run by the Family Counselling Centre entitled Caring Dads.

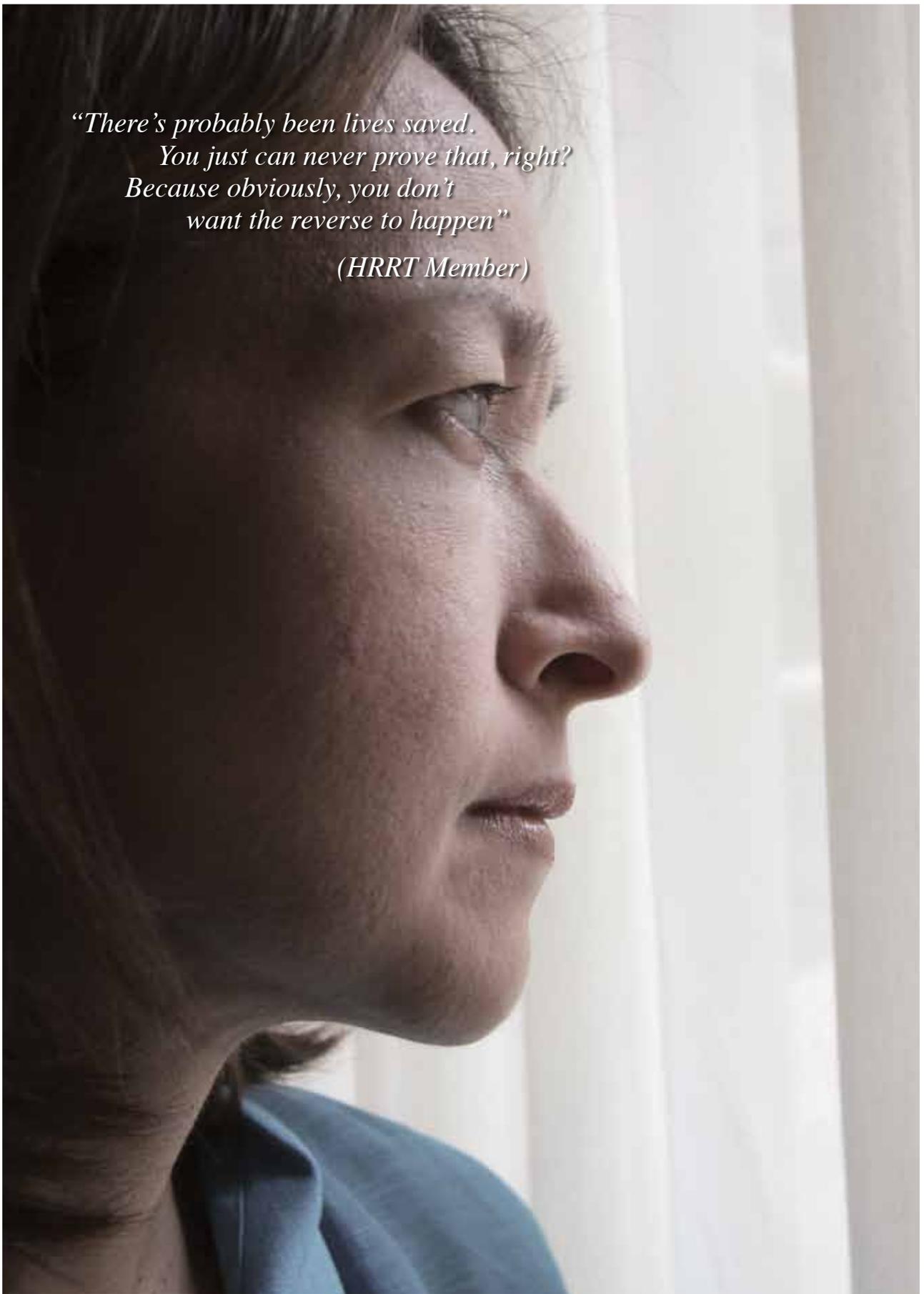
The Partner Assault Response Program is part of the Ministry of the Attorney General's response to domestic violence. Men are primarily mandated to attend this program as part of their probation order. In the Niagara Region, there are two agencies that deliver this program. One of the identified issues from the previous Report Card was the waitlist that existed for the PAR program that prevented many men from accessing the service. High Risk Probation Officers identified that, while the waitlist had decreased, there remained significant concerns about their ability to access this service. Over the past two years, one significant shift that has occurred is that the probation officers are now

more involved in the scheduling of assessment appointments for the men on their caseloads. This shift was the result of the need to improve the delivery of service and ensure that the most appropriate referrals were being made. The High Risk Probation Officers indicated that this new referral method allowed them the opportunity to prioritize men accordingly. The probation officers also indicated that they continue to use a pre-PAR treatment group entitled Healthy Relationship and other modalities to supplement their work with men:

***Well, we use our Ministry-designated pre-PAR program, as well, the Healthy Relationships Program, which is a six-session educational group. We can also use those one-on-one with our clients, which some of us do use, because, for example in [city name] you don't necessarily have a group room to run them. Well, we do now, but we didn't' for the longest time. So, we might use them one-on-one, because most of our guys are likely pre-contemplative and might not even get accepted into PAR. And then we refer them to PAR. And there is a challenge with the PAR waiting list and things like that.*** (HRPO)

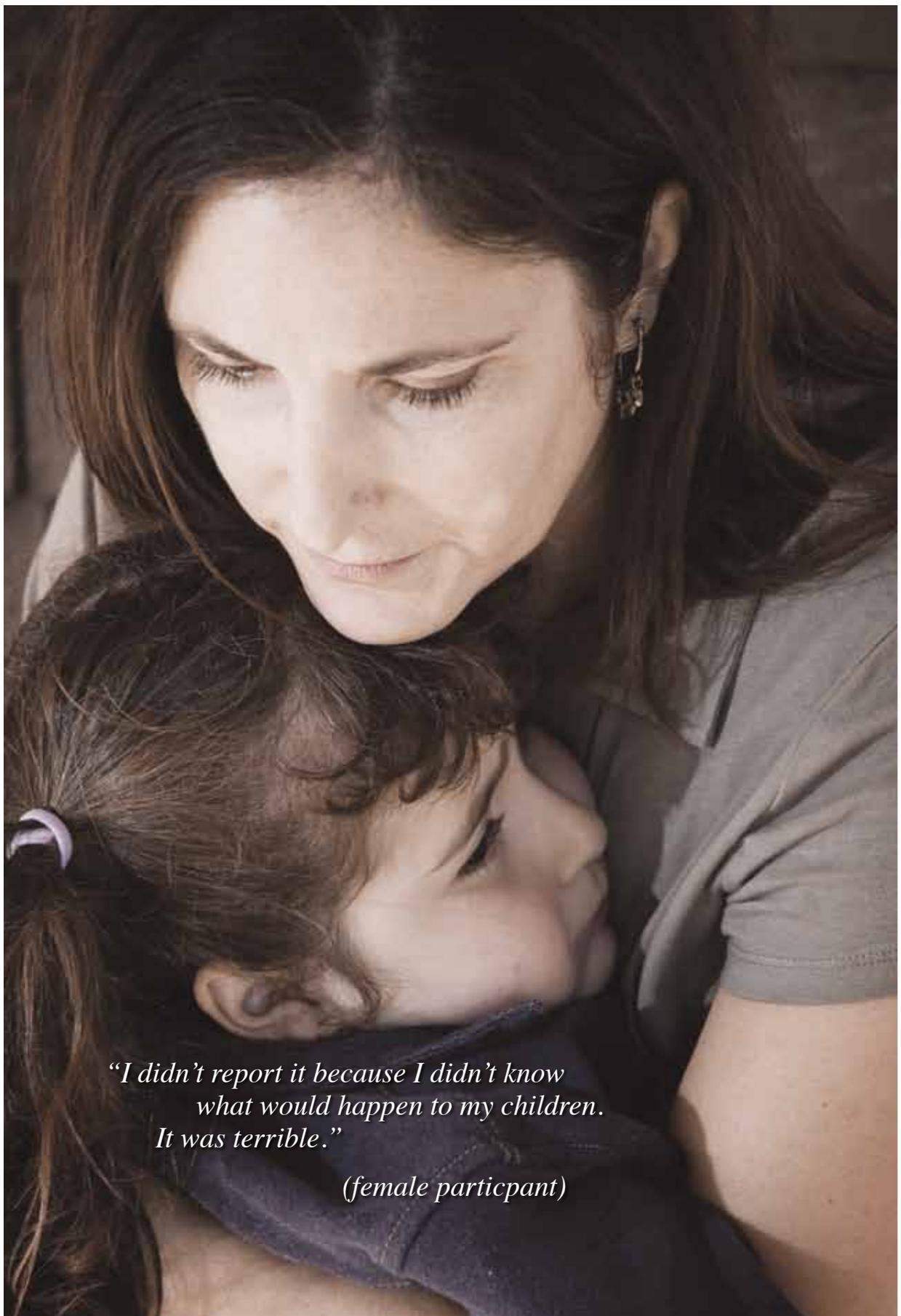
The mandated nature of the PAR program continues to be a challenge, especially for child welfare workers at FACS who are continually looking for services for these men. As the following worker describes the challenges associated with their work:

***Well, and I think the other problem that we see is that the PARS program is only for men who have been charged. So, if the man hasn't been charged, the only options we have out there... sending them to Pathways to Peace for anger management, which is not domestic violence-focused, or telling them to go to Caring Dads, which is good for us, because there is a focus on parenting but I don't think there's as much of a focus on the relationship and the dynamics there.*** (FACS employee) ■



*“There’s probably been lives saved.  
You just can never prove that, right?  
Because obviously, you don’t  
want the reverse to happen”*

*(HRRT Member)*



*“I didn’t report it because I didn’t know  
what would happen to my children.  
It was terrible.”*

*(female participant)*

# Participant Experiences of Family and Children Services (FACS)

*Systems of child welfare are responsible for assessing and investigating allegations of child abuse. Exposure to domestic violence falls under the purview of child welfare authorities in Ontario. In Niagara, Family and Children's Services (FACS) is the child welfare agency charged with this responsibility. In the previous Domestic Violence Report Card participants highlighted the challenges associated with being involved with FACS due to the occurrence of domestic violence. In the current study, we sought to examine these experiences deeper and attempt to understand what it is like to encounter systems of child welfare in cases when domestic violence has occurred.*

## Fear of FACS

Participants involved with this project discussed a variety of experiences associated with their involvement with FACS. Fear was the most prominent feeling that was associated with the involvement of FACS. Many participants related that the fear that they felt about FACS involvement was the result of the power associated with FACS' ability to remove children from their care.

Several women indicated that they had not reported the abuse because of the inherent fear associated with FACS. As the following woman indicates, she did not report the abuse for fear of not knowing what would happen to her children: ***It was never reported, no. Because I had just moved to Niagara and I didn't report it, because I didn't know what would happen to my children. It was terrible.*** (female participant).

Women who participated in this study reported being nervous about having FACS workers in their home or in their lives.

Participants highlighted the power associated with the child welfare system through their description of the actions of the front-line FACS workers. Power was reinforced through the interaction with FACS workers as the following woman noted:

***They were very... not very nice with me. They wanted to put their foot down and make sure that I knew that they meant business, that if I had any thoughts in my head at all, of returning to that household with my child, that I would never see him again. They wanted to make sure I knew that.*** (female participant)

As the following woman noted, she began to disclose to her family physician about the ongoing nature of the violence in her home and realized out of fear that she could lose her child:

***I'm being responsible and I'm being cautious of her environment, but yet she'll be taken from me if these incidents continue. So at that point I said nothing ever again, because I wasn't going to risk losing my child. You know? And, I knew full well that I was a responsible parent. Of course, this is why I brought to light my concerns, but yet, they would have backfired on me had I continued to persist. So that stopped me "dead in my tracks". I said — No, I'm not going to say anymore to the doctor.*** (female participant)

This fear of the power associated with FACS involvement does not appear to diminish over time. Many women who had longer term involvement with FACS suggested that while their relationship with their worker had improved, the power dynamics were always lurking in the back of their mind as the following suggests;

***“I finally got a good worker, but, you know, I’m still scared everyday that someone can just come in my home and do whatever they want to my life, but I can’t do or say anything.”*** (female participant).

This same woman went on to suggest that the power is difficult to contextualize, but always there; ***“Like, we talk sometimes. You know... I can’t explain it. I’m still terrified...”*** (female participant). Another participant recognized that despite the fact that her file is closed, FACS might return at anytime, suggesting that women live in fear of FACS well after their involvement:

***Like, she may have come and dropped that letter off [closing letter] last week, but I’ll have that file the rest of my life, and all it takes is one phone call to open that back up again.*** (female participant).

Front-line workers are often described as advocates on behalf of women.

## FACS as a support

Despite the fear associated with being involved with FACS, some of the women who participated in this study indicated that there were some benefits that they could derive from the presence of FACS in their lives. This included utilizing FACS in order to access summer programming for the children and to assist with the procurement of necessities such as beds for children.

FACS also appears to reduce the isolation that is often part of the lives of women who leave abusive relationships. Front-line workers are often described as advocates on behalf of women. FACS workers also have the ability to occupy a unique place in the lives of women

who experience abuse, as they are able to see the history of the woman and understand her needs. As the following woman indicated, her FACS worker is an important support to her; ***“Well, she’s on my side. She’s supporting me, because she knows a lot of the things that I’ve gone through and what I’ve overcome in my life.”*** (female participant). She goes on to indicate that she has continued to utilize FACS as a support in her life:

***Well, they were going to [close the file], but I asked them to keep it open, for support, like because literally, like I said, I have no one. So, I was using them for supports to help me out with my children, keeping them and plus myself on the right side, on the right track.*** (female participant).

## Poor communication

One of the themes that emerged during the analysis of the interviews with women who participated in this study was the manner in which FACS Niagara often communicated with women during the investigations. For some women, the idea of FACS being involved can be so overwhelming, that they may not understand why they are involved. The following women had left her partner and discharged from shelter when FACS became involved:

Interviewer: ***So why did they say they had to come see you?***

Female Participant: ***Maybe because abuse was involved. I don’t know. Maybe they might have been checking to see if father was going to be involved. I think actually that question come up, whether or not he was going to have access to them.***

Second interviewer: ***Did they explain anything to you about why they were coming or provide you with any information?***

Female Participant: ***Just to check out the place, was what I took it as. It didn’t last very long. It was like... I think she right away could sense***

***that, yeah, I had it set up nice and the kids were comfortable. I think she saw both of them [the children] and as long as my ex wasn't involved, things were probably good.***

For this woman, the intrusion into her life by a powerful social service agency was confusing and lacked clarity regarding the purpose.

Systems of child welfare are required to notify all parties in a child welfare matter of the outcome. This notification typically takes place in a variety of ways including face-to-face meetings, phone calls or letters. Many of the women in this study who were involved with child welfare indicated that they often found out about the outcome of the investigation via letter as opposed to a personal discussion about the issue. Women who experience domestic violence often look to systems of child welfare for assistance in ending the violence and being told the outcome via letter or phone has the potential to dehumanize the process for them. One woman in the study indicated that she had contacted FACS to report concerns that her ex-husband was drinking and driving while he had the children on visitation. This woman was interviewed as part of this study and subsequently submitted an email submission regarding her experience:

***Mother receives a letter in the mail from FACS confirming in writing that they have received "information that the children's father is consuming alcohol and then operating a motor vehicle with children in it." The letter states that they have made the decision that "they do not feel that this is a serious matter that needs to be investigated" and are "closing the file".*** (email submission from female participant)

Another participant received notification via letter of the outcome of her investigation; ***"I got a letter from them saying that they were not going to charge him and that they were going to drop the investigation."*** (female participant).

One woman described a very challenging experience with many examples of poor communication by her worker. It began when she received a letter advising that the first

For some women, the idea of FACS being involved can be so overwhelming, that they may not understand why they are involved.

investigation was being closed; ***"I just... it was okay until I got a letter stating that she was... about 'there's no intent to harm' and it just seemed like nothing came of it."*** (female participant). During the second investigation, a similar pattern emerged ***"When I received this letter I called to say— Well, what happens if he does it again? And she no longer worked there."*** (female participant). For this woman, her file stayed open for a prolonged period of time and it was her assumption that the worker was waiting to see if the father was participating in counselling. Unfortunately she has subsequently learned that there were other reasons:

***We just received... my lawyer just got the file from Children's Aid and she says in the file that he recommended that I take the girls to counselling, and that was one of the reasons they left the file open. But, she never mentioned that to me. She didn't tell me about children's groups, which I did look into, but she never told me that that was one of the reasons the file was... I was under the impression the file would be left open because they were waiting to see if he hit her again.*** (female participant)

For this woman, she felt misled by the actions of the worker and had a false sense of security as a result of her involvement with child welfare.

The experience of the women in this study suggest that FACS workers are not routinely holding men accountable, nor are they pursuing interventions that would enhance their ability to hold men accountable.

## Work with the men

Women who participated in this study felt that it was important for child welfare to engage men more as opposed to paying such close attention to them. Women reported that they hoped that FACS would spend more time ensuring that the man who had been abusive would receive service in order to change his behaviour. As the following woman suggests, despite her recognition that she needed counselling, she had hoped that FACS would ensure that her partner would also be made to attend counselling:

***The thing about this whole thing with FACS that was disappointing to me, was although they felt I needed counselling because of drinking, because of the history of what had happened to me as a child and what have you, nobody wanted [male partner] to do any counselling. Nobody felt — You know what? Maybe [male partner] should do counselling.***  
(female participant)

As the following woman reports, she hoped that the file remaining open meant that her ex-partner was receiving service and that FACS was monitoring his progress:

***The case was left open for quite a while and I assumed she [FACS worker] was waiting to see if he was taking a parenting course. And then I received this letter from her saying that the file had been closed and if there were other issues, to call. And that was it.*** (female participant)

Another participant discussed at length her own history and involvement with FACS. She also discussed that she felt that the FACS workers had missed the fact that he had been abusive and failed to send him to counselling for his behaviour. She noted that while it was clear that she needed assistance, her perception of FACS was that the worker failed to consider all of the risks in the family:

***Because, at times I felt like they had [male partner] on a pedestal and I was just down there, and I was just a terrible mom. I had the breakdown. I had the problem with drinking. Okay, [name]'s the abusive one, but oh, well! He's great with the kids and he's not a threat to the kids. He's not drinking. He's not doing this. He's the perfect one. Many times, actually, when I felt like, that. You know? Because, nothing had been done and no one was saying — Well, you should get the counselling too, which he should have been getting counselling, in my opinion anyways, to help... regardless of whether or not we were going to be together. Like, you know, for his future, if he was going to be involved with the kids, whether he was to get involved with someone else and be abusive. You know? But finally, the counselling did come into place. Unfortunately it took another episode of assault. So, could it have been prevented? Maybe. I don't know. But again, FACS, maybe that's not their job.*** (female participant)

Finally, the following is an example received via email of how one woman looked to FACS Niagara to intervene with men who abuse and the unfortunate outcome:

***Mother calls FACS to ask that they, at the very least, speak to the father about drinking and driving while caring for the children. FACS refuses to speak with him about the incident(s). Instead FACS suggests that the mother teach the 10 yr old & 7 yr old, "how to look for signs that their father has consumed too much alcohol" each weekend and then tell them to refuse to get in the car with their father if they think he has had too much to drink. The mother reminds the FACS worker of the children's ages and asks if she feels that putting this kind of responsibility***

***on the children each week is the best solution. The mother reminds the FACS worker that their father has anger management issues and that their safety/well being would be at risk if they were to defy him by not getting in the vehicle with him. This did not change her answer, but she went on to make the suggestion below.... The FACS worker then suggests that if the mother is concerned that she “discuss this issue with the father or approach him during exchanges to smell his breath”. When the worker is reminded that it is a domestic abuse situation with a no contact Court Order, and that the alcohol consumption is not taking place close to the exchange times, she does not change her position and restates that it does not warrant an investigation and that she is closing the file.*** (email submission female participant)

During her in-person interview, this participant indicated the ramifications associated with dealing with a system that she felt was unresponsive to the safety of her children:

***I guess the main thing was when I lost faith that they were going to help me. I knew what the court system was like. It was my word against his word. It was emotional abuse so there wasn't anything physical.*** (female participant)

Despite their ability to intervene and utilize various venues to hold men accountable, the experience of the women in this study suggest that FACS workers are not routinely holding men accountable, nor are they pursuing interventions that would enhance their ability to hold men accountable.

## Custody and Access: whose business is it?

One of the challenges facing front-line workers at FACS are issues related to custody and access. These situations exist along a continuum from parent's inability to get along, to the use of children to abuse and control their former partner. Custody and access issues represent the intersection between Family Court and child protective services. Often families who are

involved with Family Court may also be part of the child welfare system. Family and Children's Services is often faced with the challenge of determining which of these reported issues truly falls under their child protection mandate. Women in our study spoke in some detail about their experience when faced with issues related to custody and access. Many of these women indicated that they sought assistance from FACS because they truly believed that their children's safety was threatened as a result of the visitation process. Many of these women also felt that FACS was unprepared to become involved in their matters due to the Family Court procedures that were also occurring.

Custody and access issues represent the intersection between Family Court and child protective services.

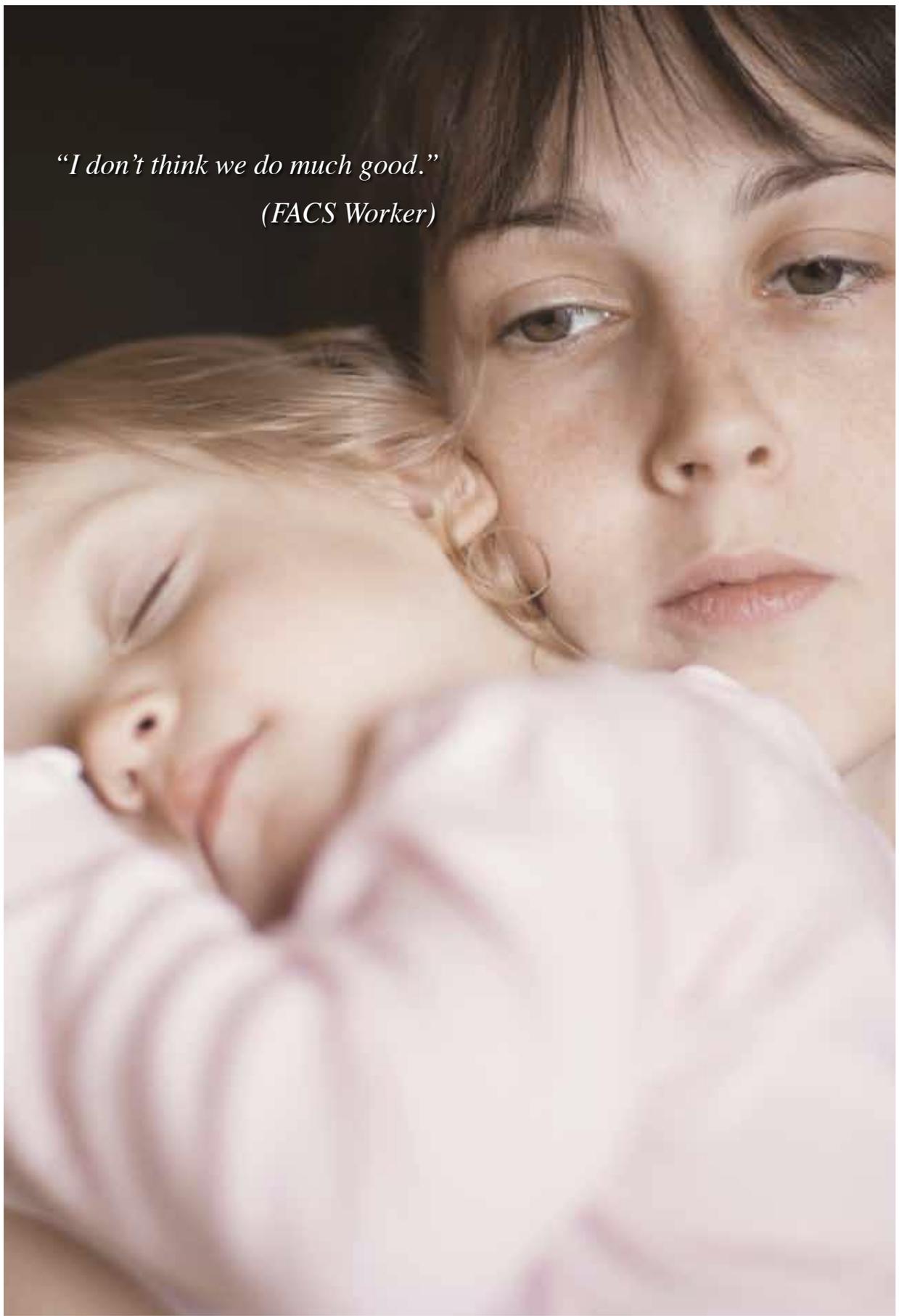
As the following woman suggests, she felt that FACS was unprepared to become involved:

***I almost felt like after the couple of times that we had contact with them [FACS Niagara], that then all of a sudden we were placed in this category of two people that can't get along. You know, it's not that serious. It's not physical. And I think, because the one time I reacted and didn't send the kids myself... like, I had custody, I think part of it was too — Oh, she's the mum. She can go fight it out of court. She can take care of it. We're not worried about the kids, because she will make the good choices for them that will keep them safe.*** (female participant)

Many of the participants indicated that these custody and access related incidents were in fact attempts by their ex-partner to continue to exert control over her and the children. Their fear was genuine and they felt abandoned by the system that was supposed to protect children. ■

*"I don't think we do much good."*

*(FACS Worker)*



# Child Welfare: Perspectives from Family and Children's Services Niagara

*Over the past 30 years, systems of child welfare have increasingly become involved in responding to issues of domestic violence (DV). Much of this response was predicated, at least initially, on the ideas that children who are exposed to domestic violence are at great risk of being emotionally harmed (Appel & Holden, 1998; Casanueva, Foshee, & Barth, 2005). Research into this issue has demonstrated that the presence of children in a home where domestic violence occurs is a very complex and complicated issue. It is now generally accepted that children who are exposed to domestic violence can suffer detrimental effects in their lives. Childhood exposure to domestic violence is often broadly defined as including hearing violence, seeing violence and becoming victims themselves.*

As systems of child welfare attempted to respond to this issue, they met with increasing criticism from other social service providers, most notably women's shelter workers and members of the women's movement more generally. These criticisms were often related to the failure of systems of child welfare to adequately understand the dynamics and complexities associated with this issue. More specifically, systems of child welfare were held to account for re-victimizing women who had allegedly failed in their capacities as a parent to ensure the safety of the children (D'Cruz, 2002; Magen, 1999; Nixon, Tutty, Weaver-Dunlop, & Walsh, 2007; Strega, Fleet, Brown, Dominelli, Callahan, & Walmsley, 2008). Women who were victims of domestic violence became the focus of the child welfare interventions as opposed to the men who perpetrated the violence. Research has revealed that men are often left out of the child welfare intervention and child protection workers routinely fail to consider men either as risks or assets within the family system (Scourfield, 2003; Strega et al., 2008). Men are merely ghosts in the eyes of child welfare (Strega et al., 2008).

One of the most significant shifts within the field of child welfare regarding DV has been the movement to include DV within the legislative

mandate of child welfare authorities. Exposure to DV has been introduced into child welfare legislation within several jurisdictions in North America and some European countries (Alaggia, Jenney, Mazzuca, & Redmond, 2007; Kantor & Little, 2003; Nixon et al., 2007). Despite the inclusion of DV in child welfare legislation, there are very few consistencies in the manner in which policies and legislation were utilized (Nixon et al., 2007). Some settings have introduced mandatory reporting and have included exposure to violence against women in child welfare legislation, while others have created provisions limiting the responsibility for professionals to report. For example, in Alaska, domestic violence and sexual assault workers do not have to report incidences of child exposure if they believe the child is not in current danger (Nixon et al., 2007). While there is no consistency regarding the use of legislation, there appears to be a trend within systems of child welfare to develop a mandate for intervention in situations of DV. This trend may prove to be problematic as other jurisdictions found that the inclusion of exposure to DV in child welfare legislation resulted in unmanageable caseloads and resulted in the rescinding of the legislation (Edleson & Gassman-Pines, 2006; Jaffe, Crooks & Wolfe, 2003; Kantor & Little, 2003).

Despite the inclusion of DV in child welfare legislation, **there are very few consistencies** in the manner in which policies and legislation were utilized.

In the initial Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card, it was suggested that systems of child welfare in Niagara, Family and Children's Services (FACS), should consider the manner in which they responded to families where domestic violence was an issue. Participants to the first report card indicated that they had great concern related to the inability of FACS to adequately respond to this issue and the potential for abuses of power to occur. During this same period of time, FACS Niagara entered into a partnership with Gillian's Place to provide Domestic Violence Advocates (DVA) within FACS. This project involved the placement of a DVA within FACS for the purposes of consultation and the streaming of services to women. It was initially hoped that this position would increase the knowledge of frontline staff regarding domestic violence.

Given the legacy of systems of child welfare and the concerns raised in the previous Report Card, it was prudent to offer frontline FACS employees the opportunity to relate their experiences working on this issue. As stakeholders within the Niagara Region FACS employees are one aspect of the community response to domestic violence yet, their presence and power have the potential to have far reaching implications in the lives of families. This section focuses on how frontline FACS employees discussed their perceived role with families where domestic violence has occurred.

## Impact of the collaboration between the shelters and FACS

The DVA was initially only available to intake workers in the St. Catharines office and gradually introduced to the other offices. They are now available agency wide to any child protection worker. During the course of conducting focus groups with FACS staff it was apparent that those workers who had the longest period of access to the DVA's talked differently about this issue. They presented as being more reflexive of their practice regarding DV than their colleagues who had not had early access to the DVA's. These workers utilized a more critical lens to describe the practices of FACS in cases involving DV. They also demonstrated more insight about the dynamics related to DV and were more inclined to talk about their practices involving collaboration and engagement with all members of the family than those child protection workers who had not had early access to the DVA's.

## Defining the issue

One of the challenges facing systems of child welfare is the manner in which domestic violence is classified or identified. The complexities associated with domestic violence requires an understanding of the various aspects of the issue and the development of some commonalities in the ways in which it is defined as part of a child welfare intervention. This study found that there was not a consistent defined response by FACS employees about what actually constitutes domestic violence that would mandate their involvement. There was not agreement as to what should be opened for intervention by FACS when considering domestic violence as one worker stated ***"But when one parent is fearful of another parent, it should not be opened as a 331 [Eligibility code for adult conflict]"*** (FACS employee).

In contrast, some workers indicated that they felt that their colleagues were too quick to identify DV ***"Yeah, and that's a hard piece too, is that some people put... you know, when you***

*click your little clicky box, “domestic violence”, like some people will go — Oh, well there’s a verbal conflict, so it’s domestic violence”* (FACS employee), whereas others suggest that the very presence of verbal conflict was enough to warrant FACS involvement. The reality is that FACS deals with a continuum of DV cases as the following worker noted:

*We have some files where they open, because of dad being charged for uttering threats. And then you have others where they are quite violent, and have violent history outside of their relationships as well.* (FACS employee)

As the following worker notes, workers are seeking clarity when attempting to define the issue they are intervening upon:

*So sometimes we’ll code our files having “adult conflict”, when it’s maybe not as clear as something we would also call “domestic violence” and that’s exactly why I was asking. Right?* (FACS employee)

And finally there was a general agreement that the agency has been working on developing the knowledge related to this issue for staff:

*I think though, that we, probably over the last five or six years, we’ve definitely increased our understanding of domestic violence and broadened our definition to include a lot more than physical violence.* (FACS employee)

These findings suggest that there is not agreement amongst front-line child protection workers at FACS about what constitutes DV and perhaps a lack of understanding of the complexities of the issue.

## Who is our client?

The academic literature and the critique of the child welfare response to domestic violence is primarily concerned with how the child welfare mandate is interpreted and the focus on the safety and well-being of the child supersedes practices that might include empowering the

mother to develop safety plans that keep both her and her children safe. Frontline FACS employees spoke at length about their perceptions of who their client is and how that impacted their work with mothers who had been victimized. The majority of FACS workers identified that their client was the child as the following worker noted, *“...then ultimately what it comes down to, we’re a child protection agency and our number-one client, at the end of the day, is still the child.”* (FACS employee).

There was recognition from some workers that this narrow focus impacted on the mothers as well despite an understanding that the needs of a mother are important as the following worker suggests:

*I think too, when you think about the adult client, we think of it as the mom, but there are times where really, our client is ultimately the child. And you know, when you’re getting into a situation, whether it’s domestic violence, certainly you try to help the mom and work with her, but ultimately her needs aren’t going to come before those children’s needs, for safety. And so, that’s where sometimes it feels like we’re punishing the victim for the situation.* (FACS employee)

There was not a consistent defined response by FACS employees about what actually constitutes domestic violence that would mandate their involvement.

The challenges associated with such a predicament were not lost on some of the workers who participated in these focus groups:

*It’s a strange paradigm to put that kind of responsibility on the non-offending parent, but typically the mother is the non-offending*

**parent and typically the mother is the victim to the domestic violence or the adult conflict. Unfortunately, that's who the child usually remains with and that's who it has to fall on.** (FACS employee)

Some workers understood the need to include mothers in the safety planning process regardless of the identification of child as primary client. **“Yes, child-focused, but mom needs to be okay in order to make sure that the kids are okay”** (FACS employee). This sentiment was not one that was heard very often during the conversations with front-line workers at FACS.

## Power, control and the legacy of mother-blaming

FACS employees talked openly about their roles with families where domestic violence occurs and offered insights into their understanding of the impact of FACS in the lives of families where domestic violence has occurred. There was a general acknowledgment that the power and authority associated with the system of child welfare placed them in positions to make decisions that potentially re-victimize women. As one worker noted, the presence of child welfare is very powerful; **“Our presence does that [induces fear], just walking in the door and that reputation that we have and the stigma with us, and when they've already been through so much, is re-victimizing them”** (FACS employee). As another worker noted, regardless of the approach, the knowledge of the power associated with FACS can be a challenge:

There was a general acknowledgment that the power and authority associated with the system of child welfare placed them in positions to make decisions that potentially re-victimize women.

**Well, there's that power imbalance, right? Between the Children's Aid Society worker and the client. You can be as nice and as supportive as you want to be and at the end of the day you're the one who has the power to take their children.** (FACS employee)

Some workers discussed that they believed that the practices associated with FACS were abusive in nature and that they were, in essence, re-victimizing the mother who had been abused; **“Sometimes it feels like we're abusive. Like we go to the shelter and women are like — I've done the right thing. I've left. I'm not going back. I'm doing this and you're here”** (FACS employee). As another worker stated, FACS behaviours can mirror those of an abusive partner; **“...you know, he's abused her. Right now we're abusing her. We're telling her what to do and where to go and no matter how nice we are, if you don't keep your kids safe, we will”** (FACS employee). As one other worker indicated the dynamics of domestic violence dictates the child welfare response:

**It's a strange paradigm to put that kind of responsibility on the non-offending parent, but typically the mother is the non-offending parent and typically the mother is the victim to the domestic violence or the adult conflict. Unfortunately, that's who the child usually remains with and that's who it has to fall on.** (FACS employee)

FACS workers who participated in this study articulated that there continued to be expectations that mothers would keep their children safe from being exposed to domestic violence regardless of the risk to themselves. Participants easily identified the kinds of things that they expect mothers to do:

**That she'll react appropriately to the situation.** (FACS employee)

**That she understands the risk associated with the behaviours of her partner and that that presents a situation that she has to be able to respond to.** (FACS employee)

***That she'll call the police.*** (FACS employee)

***That she won't allow someone in the home that could hurt her.*** (FACS employee)

***Identifying other behaviours that may exhibit in front of this child and mom won't let dad have the child that weekend, because dad is drunk or high or angry and she'll refuse access for whatever. She would be acting protectively, in the best interests of the child.*** (FACS employee)

The consequence of focusing on the mother is that the father is absent from the case-planning process. Working with men is covered more broadly in another section of this report in greater detail. However, frontline FACS workers were cognizant that they are failing to engage men to the extent that they engage mothers as the following workers suggest; ***"We put all the responsibility on her, to keep her children safe and we don't intervene effectively with the guy with the problem"*** (FACS employee). Another worker framed the discussion in terms of whether or not the actual issue is being formally addressed by FACS:

***Yeah, let's fix the victim. Exactly. Fix the victim and send the dad off to go abuse more families, because we're not pouring those kinds of resources into fixing the guy who's throwing the ball in the first place.*** (FACS employee)

For some women, the implications of not keeping their children safe, as defined by FACS, results in additional interventions and potentially the removal of the children from her care; ***"Sometimes we say to the mom — Because you've let him back in the home, we're removing the children. And, that looks like you're punishing the victim for being a victim"*** (FACS employee).

File closures by FACS workers where domestic violence is involved is often associated with the behaviours of the mother, not improved behaviours by the father or assaultive partner as the following worker noted:

File closures by FACS workers where domestic violence is involved is often associated with the behaviours of the mother, not improved behaviours by the father or assaultive partner.

***That the mother has demonstrated regular change and the child is visible in the community, that she is accessing professional support, has some family supports and that's now become her norm or daily routine, so that the risk is reduced.*** (FACS employee)

According to FACS child welfare workers, the use of power and control and 'abusive' practices that the workers talked about in the focus groups have resulted in a negative reputation in the Niagara Region regarding these kinds of files. These repercussions are felt across the Region:

***So, when one woman has had a bad experience, and her kids have been apprehended for failure to protect, that gets sent through our little community, that we're not really here to help you. We're here to take the kids, because you don't know how to make them safe.*** (FACS employee)

As another worker noted while the threat of the loss of the children is often very palpable, families often do not consider the support that a FACS worker might offer to them:

***I think the apprehension piece is a big thing, for not just domestic violence openings, but for most openings, that people are scared that we're going to get called and all of a sudden, as soon as we're called, their kids are gone. I think people ... that's the first place they go to in their minds when they hear that FACS is going to come see me, my kid is going to be gone when they get here or when they find out that this is***

**going on. That's their immediate thought. Not that, you know, we might help support them to have their kids stay with them or improve a situation that's going on or whatever, problem solve. It's the first thought that we're coming and we're taking them away.** (FACS employee)

## We might make things worse...

One of the most interesting findings that were revealed through interviews with FACS employees was that they understood that their involvement might have a detrimental impact on the lives of women and their children experiencing domestic violence. Often FACS involvement includes the forced separation of the family that might place the mother and children at additional risk, including the risk of financial hardship. The impact can be quite extensive as the following worker noted:

**And a few moms have told me that FACS made the situation worse, after they became involved. Because see, once the father is out of the house, moms have told me — You know, he used to support me financially and he's gone now. And I have seen moms struggling, especially if they don't have other supports in place, you know, extra family or friends.** (FACS employee)

Several other workers noted that the occurrence of a visit to the family home was enough to start arguments between the adults, placing all parties at risk of future interventions. Often these

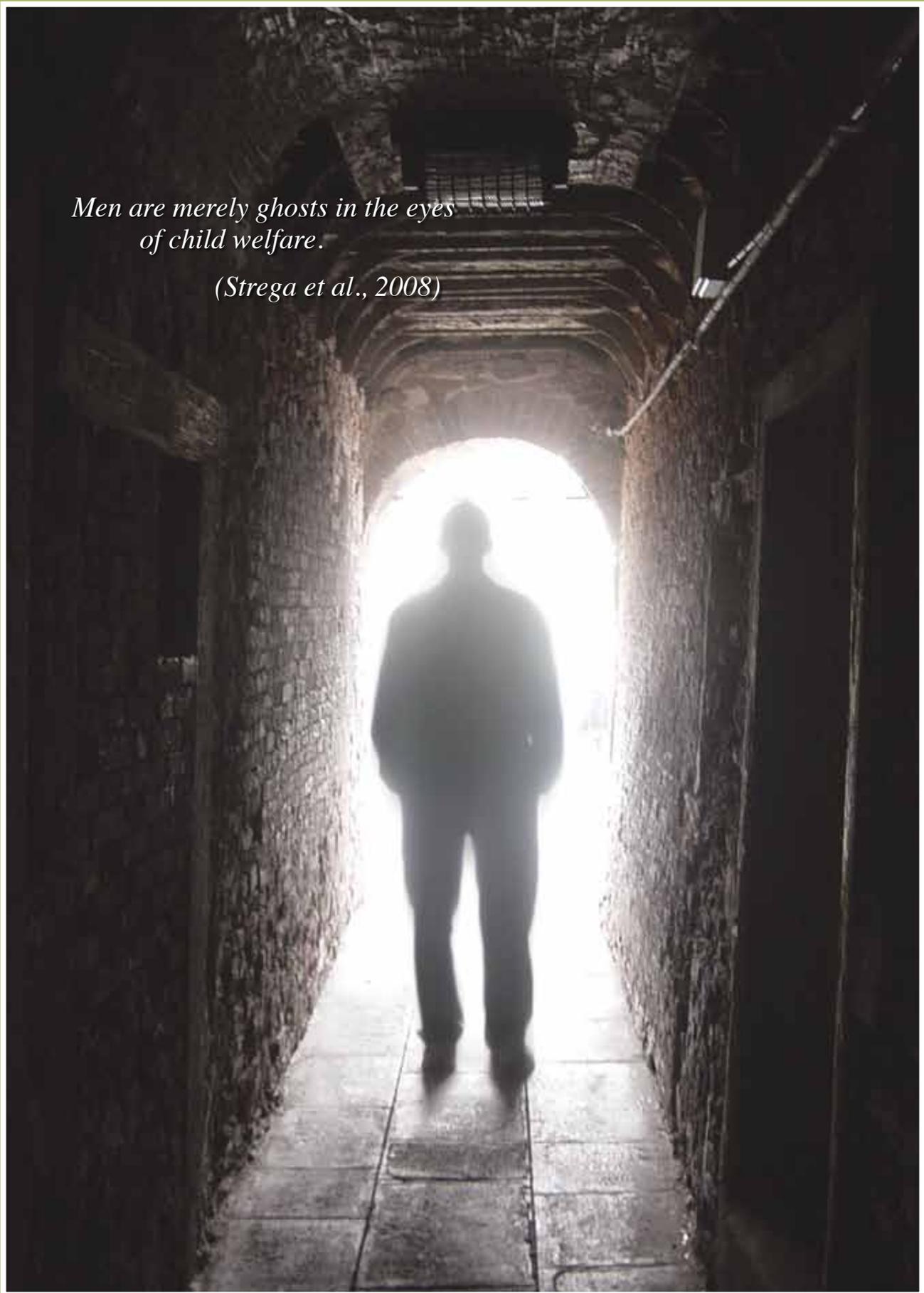
arguments take the form of an 'interrogation' by the man of the woman. : **"I've heard it makes the arguments worse because we come and visit..."** (FACS employee), **"and then it starts an argument. Well, FACS was here today! What did you tell them?"** (FACS employee).

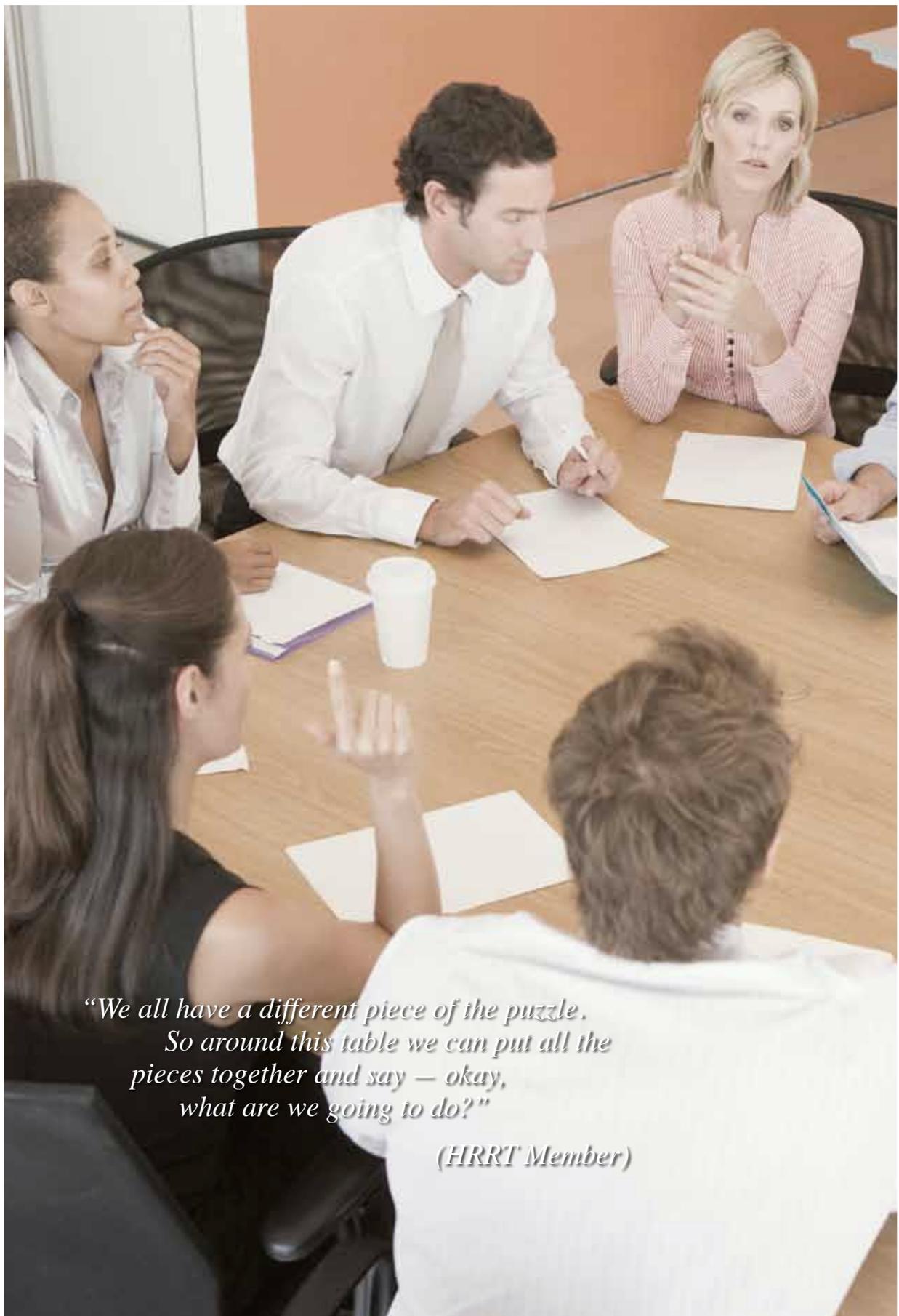
Despite the progress associated with the introduction of the DVA position and the knowledge that is added to the agency as a result, FACS employees appear to continue to struggle with their role in cases where DV has occurred. While legislatively, they can be clear about who is their client and when they need to be more intrusive, they also acknowledge the complexities associated with this issue and in many ways are rendered either abusive or ineffective. An interview with a Senior Director at FACS about the response to DV led to an admission that there is still much work to do. A worker in one of our focus groups echoed this sentiment:

**We're not really making a difference in these cases. Either we come in when they're already connected with sheltering, doing what they need to do and go — Yeah, you'd better do that! Or, we come in when they're not doing it and kind of scare them into doing something that doesn't end up working in the long-term anyway. Like, we don't really do much that's really useful.** (FACS employee) ■

*Men are merely ghosts in the eyes  
of child welfare.*

*(Strega et al., 2008)*





*“We all have a different piece of the puzzle.  
So around this table we can put all the  
pieces together and say – okay,  
what are we going to do?”*

*(FIRRT Member)*

# High Risk Review Team

*The 2010, Supplementary Report “Continuing the Conversation...” introduced the High Risk Review Team (HRRT) as an innovation in practice within the Niagara Region. This team was implemented in an effort to coordinate services and responses to those individuals who committed domestic violence related offences and present with the highest levels of risk in the Niagara Region. At that time, the team was still forming and working on its terms of reference. The development of the team was mandated in part by the Ministry of the Attorney General who required each Region to develop and implement such a committee. This report set out to understand the HRRT better and to seek experiences of those who might have had contact with it and those who routinely sit as members as part of the committee.*

The implementation of the High Risk Review Team has not been without some controversy and challenges. Many communities across Ontario have struggled to find a way to balance input from non-Criminal Justice partners such as women’s shelters and agencies. Some communities have women’s shelter partners who sit as part of the Review team and other communities do not. The Niagara HRRT is comprised entirely of Criminal Justice Partners including, Niagara Regional Police, Probation and Parole Services, Victim Witness Assistance Program. Additionally, Family and Children’s Services has a representative who sits at the table when matters involve children. The committee had also retained the services of a lawyer from a local women’s shelter to provide an additional perspective however as of June 2012 the lawyer no longer sat at the HRRT. At present the decision has been made to not provide a seat for a community partner from the women’s shelters at the HRRT. It should also be noted that Crown Attorney’s from Welland and Niagara are both standing members of this committee but do not attend meetings.

The HRRT meets every second Friday to discuss specifics related to individuals who have been referred to the team. According to members of the HRRT, anyone can refer an individual for review. Prior to review by the team, the individual and his circumstances are reviewed

and an overall risk rating is determined utilizing a standardized assessment tool. Once it is determined that the individual meets the threshold for the team, his case is brought forward for discussion. Typically, these individuals are on probation and are repeat offenders. Once an individual is referred to the HRRT, the matter remains active for a period of one year.

After the individual is reviewed a number of ‘Action’ items might occur designed to lower the level of risk associated with the individual. These might include increasing the frequency of reporting, increased attendance or ‘bed checks’ by the Niagara Regional Police. In discussing the outcomes of the meetings, the following HRRT member summed what actually occurs as a result of the meetings:

Many communities across Ontario have struggled to find a way to balance input from non-Criminal Justice partners such as women’s shelters and agencies.

**Well, we put together a plan. I mean, the whole thing is to try to put together a plan to manage the offender and keep the victim safe and that's our... And, sometimes it's hard for each of us individually, to put together a plan, right? Because, we all have a different piece of the puzzle. So around this table we can put all the pieces together and say — Okay, what are we going to do?** (HRRT member)

Additionally, the HRRT is another venue where collaboration is being actualized as the following suggests:

**As a result of meeting here, then we were able to have a community case conference, including the victim, to outline all of the players that are involved, as sort of a team approach, as opposed to every agency functioning independently, and really assist them, again, from a victim's perspective as to who they're dealing with. And, they're getting all the information all at the same time.** (HRRT member)

I think it's a wonderful program because I'm seeing that all the pertinent parties in the community are involved in exchanging information.

There is little documentation completed by the HRRT and no outcome studies have been completed at this time, although as one member stated:

**I think you justify every week, when we sit around this table and we say — Geeh! I didn't know this piece or Probation didn't know this or with the help of police or FACS or Probation... they're now able to do something maybe they couldn't do before or vice versa or whatever. So, we find that and you're able to help and**

**manage. There's probably been lives saved. You just can never prove that, right? Because obviously, you don't want the reverse to happen. So, I think we justify ourselves every week that we sit here and there's always something that we can do to better manage the case, right?** (HRRT member)

## Experiences of other community partners

The HRRT is a fairly small group of important professionals attempting to case manage some of the riskiest members of the community. Given the parameters of their membership, not many other community members had much experience with the team. However, discussions with FACS employees revealed many perceptions related to the HRRT. Currently a Director of Service from FACS sits on the HRRT. FACS employees are natural feedback conduits for the HRRT as they often have overlapping high-risk individuals on their caseloads as well.

The experiences reported by FACS employees related to the HRRT were mixed in nature. Some workers were able to identify what the HRRT is:

**It's a multi-disciplinary team, community team, and what they do is they look at men who are viewed to be high-risk offenders and are a significant risk to the community. We have some people at the agency who sit on that, but there's Probation and Parole on that. There's the NRP. There are lots of other community agencies who sit on that Team.** (FACS employee)

Many workers spoke of positive experiences and the importance of the HRRT in developing case plans and improving safety as the following workers suggest:

**I've been involved with the High-Risk Review Team in previous files that I've had, two I believe. I think it's a wonderful program because I'm seeing that all the pertinent parties in the community are involved in exchanging information. It's huge... to keep us informed.**

***I know the police are involved and shelters are involved. We're involved. A number of people on different levels of staff within the agency are involved.*** (FACS employee)

And,

***I had a good experience like [name of FACS employee] did too. I've never sat in on a meeting. They send me the meeting minutes though. I've spoken to people on the Team. They've been helpful to find information. They've worked with me. If they needed anything from me they ask.*** (FACS employee)

Despite this positive feedback, there were also FACS employees who expressed that they were unaware of the HRRT, were unsure how to refer to it or were displeased with not being invited to the meetings and the brevity of the summary of discussion that they received:

***When I was a worker I wasn't invited to those meetings and that would be hugely helpful. And when I received the minutes as a worker or a supervisor, generally speaking they're a point form and they're about five lines. And not what I expect, because I was hoping absolutely to use the information to inform my family safety plan.*** (FACS employee)

***Just a few lines and so that information from the meetings, no, it has not been helpful for the safety plan. They are extremely brief. It doesn't give a comprehensive view of who was at the table and which community partner recommends what. That would be helpful.*** (FACS employee)

Some workers also suggested that it was not clear what made an individual 'high risk'. Given that FACS operates with their own risk assessment tools, it was unclear how risk was being constructed by the HRRT and how that differs from the risk that FACS utilizes:

***I think just not even knowing what meets the threshold for becoming a referral to the High-Risk Review Team, because I've had dads who***

Given that FACS operates with their own risk assessment tools, it was unclear how risk was being constructed by the HRRT and how that differs from the risk that FACS utilizes.

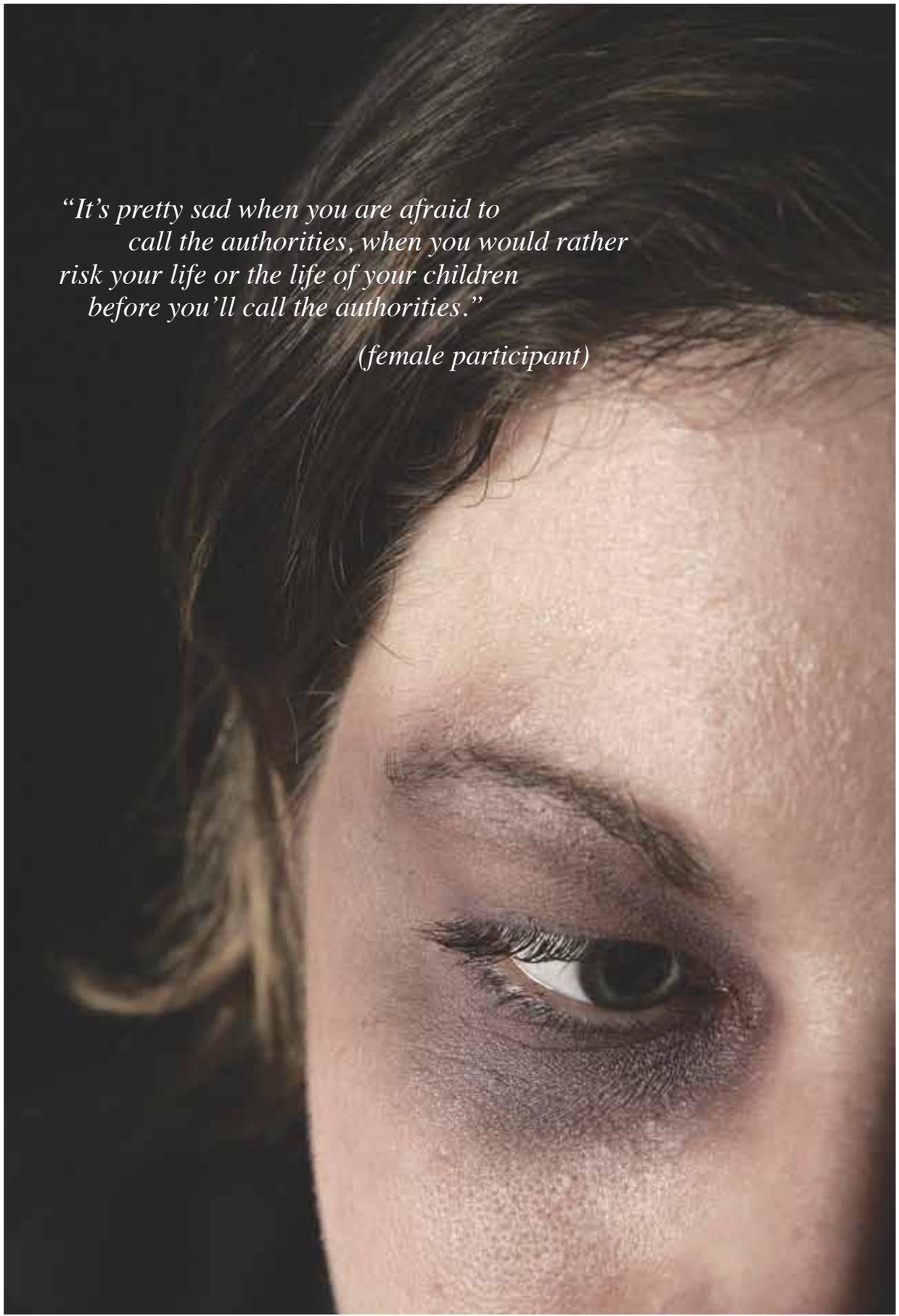
***assault against his partner with his 10-month-old present, crawling around mom's legs while he's choking her on the ground. And I would think that would be high-risk, because he's got numerous past charges as a young offender and then as an adult as well... assault against other women, assault against this woman, and that's not referred to the High-Risk Review Team or at least if it was, I had no knowledge of it.*** (FACS employee)

The following worker also is challenged when asked about what would warrant review at the HRRT and how they would refer:

***I've got a lot of files that are high-risk, under the risk assessment, but they're not going to this High-Risk Review Team, because, we could be the only agency involved with them.*** (FACS employee)

Finally, the following worker summarizes the sentiment of many other workers in describing the presence of HRRT in Niagara:

***Only heard of them mentioned as like "figments of my imagination" it feels like, and have no idea how I would refer to them or what is even involved. Because, them, to me is like working in the shadows type of term. I don't even know who "they" or "them" is, in terms of this team.*** (FACS employee) ■

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, focusing on her right eye and forehead. Her hair is dark and slightly wavy. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of her skin and the intensity of her gaze. The background is dark, making her features stand out.

*“It’s pretty sad when you are afraid to  
call the authorities, when you would rather  
risk your life or the life of your children  
before you’ll call the authorities.”*

*(female participant)*

# Understanding Risk

*One of the aspects of focus for this project was the examination of the influence and impact of risk on the response to domestic violence in the Niagara Region. Risk has become part of the day-to-day operationalization of services by many agencies in the region. The notion of risk, the use of risk assessment and the use of risk reduction or risk management strategies are pervasive within the fields of Criminal Justice and Child Welfare. But the ideas related to risk also extend into the VAW sector where service providers often speak to women, children and victims in terms of their likelihood of being 'at risk'. In many respects, risk has replaced terms such as danger and safety and is utilized to hold individuals to account for their behaviour (Douglas, 1992).*

Interviews with participants and stakeholders revealed that risk is a very nuanced and complex idea that is not easily explained without reference to some sort of risk assessment tool or risk factor; those factors that either increase an individual's risk of doing something or which increase the potential for harm to occur to an individual. The nature of risk within governmental service agencies is dictated primarily through the use of risk-based thinking in conjunction with tools designed to guide, inform and prescribed courses of action related to individuals (Miller & Rose, 2008). Individual identities are often constructed through the completion of risk assessment tools that dictate their level of risk. However, this is not always simply the easiest and most accurate method for understanding an individual. As one participant employed in a local women's shelter indicated *"it seems so cut and dry, but it's not in real life"* (VAW sector employee).

## High Risk Probation Officers

The previous Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card highlighted and applauded the development and implementation of the High Risk Probation Officers (HRPO). Given the complexities associated with this issue the High Risk Probation Officer position offers a level of specialization that improves the understanding and response to domestic violence. The High Risk Probation Officers utilize risk throughout their

involvement with individual men. This process begins with the initial assessment of the risk level of the individual man and the determination of their 'high risk' status. Upon initial reporting to the Probation Office, individuals are assessed for their level of risk. Each Probation Office utilizes a Five Question, Yes/No survey for each individual to determine their risk level. One Probation Officer described the rationale for this initial assessment:

***Well, we didn't want to make it too lengthy, because the point was that we wanted it used as soon as they walked through the door. We didn't want this to be something that was going to be used two or three weeks later when it ends on the Probation Officer's desk and you get all the background information of when they were born to why they're here today, type of thing.*** (HRPO)

This initial survey is intended to give a snapshot of the individual's risk level and to assist in determining the requirements for supervision by the Probation Office.

This brief screening form is the culmination of the experiences of those working on the High Risk probation team. As one Probation Officer noted ***"I think even from just the get-go, the screening, the fact that we have a screening form right away that it's more information-gathering. It's heightened sensitive and vigilance to what exactly that we're looking for"*** (HRPO).

Higher risk individuals receive more intensive interventions, while lower risk individuals have less stringent reporting requirements.

This brief survey includes questions to determine previous assessment as high risk, offense history, attempted strangulation of the victim, presence of threats and use of drugs and/or alcohol.

Once the individual has been initially screened, a determination is made as to their status in relation to risk. Either they are high risk domestic violence offenders or they are not. If they are deemed high risk, they are assigned to one of the Domestic Violence High Risk Probation Officers.

On a daily basis the High Risk Probation Officers and their colleagues rely upon the Level of Supervision Inventory (LSI), Ontario Revised, in order to determine how often they are to be meeting with individuals on their caseload. The LSI was explained as:

*...a specific tool designed to do exactly that, to measure risk. So, there are eight categories and then it gives you additional information to be looking in regards to behaviours and mental health concerns. And, then it's scored and that puts us in a range of... very low, low, medium, high and very-high risk. And, it is an indicator of what is our potential risk for future re-offending.* (HRPO)

In this way, the assessment of the level of risk begins to follow individuals from their initial presentation at the probation office into their relationship with their probation officer where it guides decision-making regarding service provision and reporting criteria. The LSI is one of the ways individuals are constructed as a set of risk factors and it is those risk factors, not necessarily the individual that determines various

aspects of the probation experience, including reporting requirements.

Regardless of the use of the LSI, the High Risk Probation Officers indicated that it does not take into consideration the complexities associated with domestic violence. As such, High Risk Probation Officers utilize other risk assessment tools in order to assist them in their monitoring of individuals who have been deemed high risk domestic violence offenders. High Risk Probation Officers are also trained in the use of the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment Tool (ODARA). One High Risk Probation Officer described it this way:

*The ODARA is 13 questions that we use to predict risk, again. So, some of the questions... and, it is a fairly quick and easy checklist, although sometimes we do need to gather additional information that's not in our file, but might be in police records or from speaking with the victim or a family member. Some of the questions are — If the victim was pregnant at the time of the offense? If the offender has had a history of non-compliance with court orders, previous domestic violence? If the offender has more than one child? If there are victim-safety issues and barriers to her leaving? So those are some of the questions on there. And then it calculates a score and gives us, basically, the "medium" or "high" kind of thing, and we use that as well, in addition to the LSI, because the LSI is not domestic-violence focused and doesn't necessarily use any of those similar questions, in the LSI.* (HRPO)

The ODARA predicts the probability that an individual will reoffend within the next five years. This ability to predict the probability of reoffending allows HRPO's to tailor their service delivery and response to the individual. Higher risk individuals receive more intensive interventions, while lower risk individuals have less stringent reporting requirements. The use of the ODARA also allows the HRPO's to communicate with potential victims and enhance safety planning where necessary.

Given the extent of the assessments of supervision that are associated with high risk DV offenders, it is clear that risk plays an important part in guiding the work of the High Risk Probation Officers. This extends to their work with victims of DV. In these cases, the High Risk Probation Officers suggested that they would be more likely to have increased contact with the victims:

***You know, we might call the victim once a month or more often even, as needed, whereas maybe in a non-domestic situation that wouldn't necessarily be the case. It might be one time, at the beginning of the Probation order and encourage them to call you if they have any concerns. We keep fairly regular rapport and follow-up with the victims and current partners.*** (HRPO)

However, risk is also considered in relation to the behaviours of the victim as well. Victims are often considered to be 'at-risk' to experience future episodes of violence and part of the role of the High Risk Probation Officer is to work with victims in order to improve their safety.

The High Risk Probation Officers also consider the risk that is often presented by the behaviours associated by victims when they desire to have contact with the offender. In cases of domestic violence, victims can sign a Revocable Consent, which allows them to have contact with the offender when stipulations might exist that prevent that from occurring. This is often considered in the context of facilitating visitation with children. However, for the High Risk Probation Officers, the signing of a Revocable Consent is often a flag for a risk factor requiring intervention or collaboration with community partners. As one High Risk Probation Officer pointed out, this is not always a clear-cut decision:

***If they sign a Revocable Consent and they return to the home, for me, I notice that being a high risk factor. But if some of them sign a Consent, like you said, to have contact with the purpose of co-parenting or something, and sometimes it has nothing to do with planning to***

***reconcile with the partner, in which case it's not necessarily any difference in risk, really.*** (HRPO)

## Child Welfare and Risk

In contrast to the High Risk Probation Officers, front-line child welfare staff at FACS Niagara talked about the various meanings of risk that influences their work. FACS Niagara, as with all child welfare agencies in Ontario, is tasked with ensuring the safety and well being of children who might be 'at risk'. In many ways, FACS Niagara deals with risk on a daily basis as a central function within their job. Their tasks often include the identification and assessment of risk and the development of plans to reduce the risk to children.

There was not a unified ideology about risk revealed during the interviews with FACS staff. Some FACS staff struggled to discuss the idea of risk and consistently identify what would place a child at risk in cases of domestic violence. As one worker noted ***"But anyway, you know what, I don't know how we define "risk" here"*** (FACS employee). When asked about how risk is defined at FACS another worker highlighted that cases of domestic violence are not like other risk-oriented cases:

**For the High Risk Probation Officers, the signing of a Revocable Consent is often a flag for a risk factor requiring intervention or collaboration with community partners.**

***Well, domestic violence is looked at completely differently. It's not a typical neglect case or abuse.... not.... I don't mean "typical". I mean it doesn't fit into any of those boxes, really, the little checked ones.*** (FACS employee)

Interviews with FACS staff revealed layers of challenge when considering their role in families where domestic violence occurs. Generally, there was agreement that when discussing who was considered 'at-risk', workers referred to children as being vulnerable and being in need of protection, although consideration was given to the idea that child safety is achieved through parental safety. Some FACS staff identified reducing the risk of harm to the mother in order to improve child safety.

Child welfare staff at FACS Niagara also indicated that there were very specific aspects of domestic violence cases that increased the perceived level of risk, making these files, 'high risk'. One of the main reasons that systems of child welfare have become involved with families where domestic violence has occurred is due to the potential for harm to be caused to the children. As one front-line worker noted, this remains a primary reason for FACS Niagara involvement in this issue:

***I think too, in certain situations, there's a higher risk of a child being injured or hurt, because you have something becoming physical and the child gets in the way or tries to protect mom or protect dad, then there's that chance of them getting hurt in the midst of everything happening.*** (FACS employee)

In many ways, FACS Niagara deals with risk on a daily basis as a central function within their job.

Additionally, front-line workers identified the complexities associated with these cases that made them high risk. These included ***"When there's babies and domestic violence, that's even worse. But yeah it's babies and domestic violence that keep you up at night"*** (FACS employee). As other front-line staff noted the

age of the child and the presence of substance use, increased the levels of concern; ***"Baby, drug use and domestic violence. That's the worst."*** (FACS employee), ***"Especially when we have domestic violence and we have alcohol or drugs"*** (FACS employee) and ***"If there's substance use involved, that's going to up the risk"*** (FACS employee). Workers spoke of the intersection of factors that contributed to the occurrence of domestic violence. What they identified was that those children who are the youngest and most fragile are often exposed to multiple factors including domestic violence and it is the co-occurrence of these risk factors that place the children at higher levels of risk.

## Women and Risk

Interviews with female participants revealed an additional theme related to risk that requires consideration. Some of these women who were mothers talked about the ways in which they created safety for their children in the absence of the involvement of service providers. The women talked about the steps that they took in order to reduce the risk of harm to their children without the assistance of service providers. This is important because often mothers who are victims of domestic violence encounter agencies and workers who dictate the steps they should take in order to ensure the safety and well being of their children. Reducing risk is often informed from outside the family, yet these women indicated that they were already taking steps to address the issue of risk.

For some women, reducing risk involved very concrete behaviours in relation to their abuser. For example, one woman, whose partner owned a trucking company was responsible for booking his trips. As she describes, safety and risk reduction was achieved through innovative thinking:

***I would send him on long trips so that I don't see him... On longer trips. That's how I was able to coordinate and get out of the house, when he was in the States. So that's why I had time to plan things and make my move, when he went***

***out to the States and I was able to move my things and the kids and everything to the shelter.***  
(female participant)

Another woman explained how she moved out of her abusive relationship and out of the home of her in-laws where she was staying in order to keep her children safe:

***But then I started moving everything to my parents' house. And then I started making plans to go there, because I couldn't reach my husband and now they [extended family] don't want me. It's like — Okay, now I'll just go to my parents' house. That's when I started thinking. I didn't tell anyone of my intentions. So I started planning that way and so on. And I didn't let anyone know. And then, in November, I finally left.*** (female participant).

For other women, managing risk often meant addressing their abuser's behaviours in order to make a point and to reinforce their 'protective stance' regarding the children. As the following woman indicated as she confronted her partner about the presence of drugs in her home:

***... And how dare you bring crack cocaine into my house, where what-if? Like, because I picked up his clothes and if it would have dropped, fallen under somewhere... like, my youngest one would have thought it was a piece of candy and put it right in his mouth.*** (female participant)

Establishing her displeasure with her partner's behaviour was the way in which this woman demonstrated her protective capacities and her ability to address the risks in her life.

Sometimes women were quite frank that managing risk often meant staying with their offender and not engaging in service. For some women, engaging in services such as the police or child welfare were seen as riskier endeavours than remaining with their abusive partner. As the following woman describes:

For some women, engaging in services such as the police or child welfare were seen as riskier endeavours than remaining with their abusive partner.

***It's pretty sad when you are afraid to call the authorities, when you would rather risk your life or the life of your children before you'll call the authorities. I think that's a terrible thing. I mean, these are people that, you know, you should trust. You should be able to call. They're supposed to help you save your life, and you'd rather take that chance and staying with a horrible abuser and risk your life rather than call?*** (female participant)

In many ways the women who participated in this study were aware of the safety issues in their lives and were actively working on reducing risks without the assistance of service providers. Given this finding, it might be useful for many service providers, especially those in positions of power and authority to reconsider their methods of engagement with women who have experienced abuse and engage them in the problem solving process further. ■

# Discussion



*The preceding chapters outlined the major findings associated with the current Report Card. On their own, they paint a somewhat disjointed picture of the extent of the issue, the challenges experienced by service users and the response to the issue of domestic violence in the Niagara Region. In order to fully understand the data associated with this report, this section is intended to draw out some of the overarching themes across the data.*

## The prevalence of domestic violence in the Niagara Region

One of the intentions of the Report Card process was to collect domestic violence related statistics from agencies from across the Niagara Region and put them into one place to enable easy access for readers and citizens. This also allows for a discussion about the prevalence of this issue and the ability to highlight trends as they occur over time.

One of the main trends is that many statistics provided by agencies suggest a leveling off of reported occurrences. The Niagara Regional Police (NRP) is responding to approximately the same amount of DV related calls every year. The NRP numbers suggest that women remain the primary victims of DV, while dual charges have increased in the last year that statistics were provided.

One of the main concerns related to the NRP statistics is the increase observed in the number of arrests where the victim is identified as male and the accused is identified as female. Since 2006 the number of females arrested under this category has gone from 60 to 119 in 2010/11. This kind of increase has not been observed in the parallel category that captures the male-accused/female victim scenario. There are many possible explanations of such an increase. Regardless, the main concern related to this report is the increasing number of arrests of women in situations of domestic violence that

might indicate the absence of a gendered response by the NRP. Clarification of these statistics and associated practices are certainly warranted.

The percentage of individuals on probation with a DV flag remains consistent and FACS Niagara caseloads contain approximately the same amount of domestic violence identified families over the last three years.

The statistics provided by the women's shelters suggest that the most recent year saw a dramatic increase in the number of women and children admitted to shelter while the number of crisis calls responded to remain very high, comparable to other years. Statistics from other services to women across the Niagara Region have remained similar to previous years.

It is important to understand that these statistics include only those incidents of domestic violence that are responded to by public service agencies. They do not include the day-to-day episodes of abuse that women often face when living with an abusive man. Recent statistics reported within the media have suggested that the Niagara Region has one of the lowest per capita rates of domestic violence in the country. Statistics Canada bases their information on data collected from the General Social Sciences Survey and from Police data. The problem is that much of this data is self-reported and it may well be the fact that many women do not report the violence that they experience. During the interviews with

women for this report, they revealed that there were often many episodes of violence that they endured prior to seeking help from outside of the family home. This leveling off of numbers suggests that a greater amount of public awareness might be necessary in order to reach those women living in silence and fear.

## Influence of systems

During one interview with community stakeholders, an individual front-line worker suggested the following:

***There's so many barriers whether it's... really, whatever you hit, whether it's police, housing, legal system, criminal, criminal system, the fear with your Crown interview, all that part of it, and then Family and Children Services are involved. There's just so many areas where you're trying to problem solve or you're trying to go through systems and often our systems aren't working really well. So, I think it's very hard for women.*** (DFNT staff)

The greatest challenge for many women who are living in an **abusive situation** is not necessarily leaving... it is the many complex systems that must be navigated.

In speaking with women and service providers from across the Niagara Region it became evident that the greatest challenge for many women who are living in an abusive situation is not necessarily leaving (although there are many challenges to that as well) it is the many

complex systems that must be navigated. For some women, the complexities of these systems are unknown until they are confronted with the reality of them during the contemplation process, during the process of leaving or after, during the 'life begins again' phase.

Within the Niagara Region there are some systemic practices that are in place that potentially create impediments to women seeking assistance regarding domestic violence. The interviews with women who participated were filled with stories of fear. These fears often related to systems that they knew they would encounter or had encountered along their journey. One of the clearest examples of this was the stories that women told about their fears of very specific systems; the police and FACS. For many, especially those residing in rural communities, their distrust of the police stemmed from many issues associated with living in small communities. There was also a sense that the police failed to understand the issue of domestic violence and would therefore not be helpful. Perhaps the most fearful aspect of the police was the perception that they were 'required' to report to FACS if children were present or part of the family constellation where DV had occurred.

This same scenario was reported during the conversations with shelter workers. They acknowledged that one of the practices during the telephone/screening/intake process was to inform women of the obligation to report to FACS if children were exposed to DV. Some of the participants to this report openly suggested that women were no longer calling shelters because they were aware of the consequences. One of the long-standing practices that were acknowledged by shelter participants from Women's Place of South Niagara was that of 'faxing to FACS'. This is the practice whereby shelter staff are required to send a child protection report to FACS upon admission of a woman with children to the shelter. Once

again, this has the potential of involving FACS in the life of a woman attempting to leave an abusive situation.

There are several concerns about reporting to FACS simply as a result of the presence of DV. While there are legal obligations under the Child and Family Service Act requires the mandatory reporting by a community professional when they suspect a child is in need of protection; these practices may be indicative of agency-based risk management practices. Reporting to FACS, in some ways, abdicates responsibility of the reporting agency and leaves the determination to FACS. It also typically results in increased scrutiny and focus being placed on the mothering practices as opposed to engaging the male in accountability-based discussions designed to reduce violence.

Determination as to whether or not exposure to domestic violence is a reportable child protection issue is an ongoing debate that has taken place in many communities across Canada and deserves additional discussion in Niagara. For example, is it possible to conceptualize the admission of a woman to a shelter as a protective practice? Thereby not requiring a child protection response, unless the focus of the intervention is specifically set on the individual male and his behaviour. These kinds of institutional conversations have the ability to dramatically shift the paradigm of practice with families and are worthy of consideration by agencies in the Niagara Region.

There were other systems that participants identified as posing challenges to women who are victims of DV. In particular the court systems were once again identified as requiring closer scrutiny. Participants to this report suggest that there have been positive benefits to the Domestic Violence Court (DVC) within the Criminal Justice System. In particular, participants noted that victims are kept well informed by the processes associated with the DVC

Through the use of delay tactics and having the ability to intimidate women, men often use Family Courts to instill fear and maintain control over their victims.

improving the levels of support that they receive while going through this process. Unfortunately, the DVC is also a system that men attempt to control through adjournments and 'judge shopping' in an effort to wear down the victim and increase the likelihood that she will not testify.

The DVC is only one aspect of the criminal process where the issue of domestic violence was raised. Participants also identified the lack of specialization within the Bail Courts as a significant issue in appropriately responding to this issue. Releasing individuals on Bail who have DV related charges are an incredibly risky enterprise for the victim, placing her at risk if the appropriate safeguards are not in place. The absence of specialization within the Bail court system in Niagara remains concerning because it is unclear what strategies are being utilized to assess for either lethality and/or safety upon the release of the individual. The absence of specialization within the Bail court system was also identified in the previous Report Card.

Similar findings were associated with the Family Court system. The Family Court system was identified as another venue used by men to attempt to control their ex-partner. Through the use of delay tactics and having the ability to intimidate women, men often use Family Courts to instill fear and maintain control over their victims. Stakeholders reported that women they work with often suffer panic attacks as a result of

Despite the collaborative efforts put forth, organizational culture remains an identified obstacle to effective service provision and partnerships.

attending Family Court and seeing their abuser. In this way Family Court operate as a venue within the system that re-traumatizes women.

## Collaboration

The hallmark of an effective community-based response to domestic violence is centered on the construction and maintenance of collaborative efforts between individual agencies, service providers and front-line staff. In the Niagara Region, there continues to be a strong emphasis on the development of these collaborative measures in an effort to improve and enhance the response to domestic violence. During the course of this research, many service providers and service users spoke about the importance of collaboration.

One of the greatest improvements in the collaborative process was found to exist in the project between FACS Niagara and Gillian's Place with the integration of the Domestic Violence Advocates into the FACS agency setting. The development of the DVA position took a bit of time and access was initially limited to specific aspects of the child protection process. The DVA is now available to any child protection worker across the agency.

During the interviews with front-line FACS employees and other community stakeholders, the impact of the presence of the DVA was apparent. FACS workers who had early

and often contact with the DVA spoke more openly about the need for collaborative efforts, and appeared to have a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with domestic violence. More interestingly, those workers who had early exposure to the DVA's were more reflexive of their own work, suggesting that they understood that systems of child welfare were not always very good at responding to this issue. They could cite systems related issues, mandate issues and institutional challenges as impediments to their practice with families where domestic violence had occurred. This reflexive ability is important in developing growth and improving practices within FACS and in the delivery to families by front-line child welfare workers.

Community stakeholders also noted a difference in the manner in which many FACS employees were approaching the issue of domestic violence. Most notably, those participants from women's shelters offered encouraging words when speaking about FACS. There was a general sense that while FACS had made improvements on their response to this issue, there was room for improving the collaborative processes.

While the collaborative processes appear to be improving, it is important to note that programs such as the DVA's are not nearly enough to sustain the momentum that has been gained by FACS and the shelters. Some community stakeholders from the shelters acknowledged the importance of combined training days that occurred in 2008/09 as ways to improve relations between staff and break down stereotypes. These kinds of efforts could go a long way to maintaining the gains that have been made.

The FACS/Gillian's Place collaboration is consistent with the larger movement across North America to develop CAS/VAW collaborative practices. Findings from the literature suggest that these efforts are worth establishing and

improve service to families. One of the most prominent outcomes associated with collaborative models has been the increased training of child welfare staff on the issue of violence against women (Malik, Ward & Janczewski, 2008). Research has found that the use of collaborative models has resulted in improved screening for the presence of domestic violence, and the implementation of protocols and procedures to guide practice within child welfare settings (Banks et al., 2009; Banks, Landsverk, & Wang 2008). The introduction of collaborative models has also resulted in earlier identification of domestic violence by child welfare agencies (Malik, Ward, & Janczewski, 2008) and streamlined VAW service provision to women who are victims of domestic violence (Shepherd & Pence, 1999).

The differences between systems of child welfare and the VAW sector create challenges to successful collaboration. Differences include their priorities (child safety vs. woman safety), initiation of service (non-voluntary vs. voluntary), levels of control (coercion vs. self-determination) and organizational structure (bureaucracy vs. grassroots) (Featherstone & Trinder, 1997; Fleck-Henderson, 2000; Humphreys, 2007). Despite the collaborative efforts put forth, organizational culture remains an identified obstacle to effective service provision and partnerships (Banks, Dutch & Wang, 2008). Malik, Ward & Janczewski (2008) report that despite collaboration there has been little progress in the development of joint policies where violence against women and child maltreatment exists and continued tensions between child welfare agencies and VAW agencies appear to impede service delivery to children.

The DVA collaboration project was evaluated in 2010 to determine the overall impact that it was having and the experiences of both staff and service users. One of the major findings of that

evaluation was the correlation between families where DV occurs and there is FACS involvement and the presence of children under the age of two. These findings have allowed FACS to tailor their responses to these families and provide insight into the constellation of these families. Future evaluations are encouraged in order to continually assess the impact of this program.

Collaboration continues to be strong within the Criminal Justice System (CJS) in Niagara as well. The implementation of the High Risk Review Team (HRRT) was cited in the previous Supplementary Report in 2010. At that time, the HRRT was in the early stages of development. Currently, the HRRT meets every other week for the purposes of improving the safety of women and children in the Niagara Region. This team consists of primarily CJS service providers from probation, police, Victim Witness Program, FACS (when necessary). While Crown Attorney's are members of this team, they rarely attend. The uniqueness of this team is that many of the individuals involved have long-standing professional relationships and have collaborated on many other projects in the Niagara Region. As such, they report that there have not been the 'growing pains' that are often associated with new projects.

Interviews with PAR facilitators suggest that one of the gaps in the provision of service is any sort of collaborative efforts between the service agencies that deliver PAR.

High Risk Review Teams have been established in many regions in Ontario and taking on various forms depending on the needs of the community. Their existence is almost intuitive given the dynamics associated with domestic violence and the complexities related to the kinds of violence that is perpetrated against women. Given their importance, it was surprising that the HRRT does not keep any sort of statistics or tracks the outcomes of their work. There is currently no funding attached to these teams and it makes logical sense to compile outcome related data should available funding opportunities arise.

Risk currently influences and shapes much of the response to domestic violence across the Niagara Region.

The HRRT model emphasizes the collaborative process when considering the safety and well being of women and children. As noted, FACS Niagara has a representative on this team when child protection issues might be discussed. The representative is currently a Service Director. During the course of talking to front-line FACS employees it was apparent that service to families could be improved by having the individual caseworker attend as opposed to a higher-level executive. This would serve two purposes, first it would involve the front-line staff, highlighting and emphasizing their role as case manager and collaborative stakeholder, and it also could serve to shift FACS away from the traditional 'top down' approach allowing staff to engage in leadership roles. It would also demystify the HRRT for some staff who openly

acknowledged that they were unaware of the HRRT process and only found out about the HRRT when they heard that their file was being reviewed.

Another area that is continually in progress is the collaborative efforts between Probation Services and the providers of the Partner Assault Response (PAR) program. The 2009/10 Report Card highlighted the challenges associated with the referral process and the waitlist associated with the PAR program. Since that time, and due in part to the need and requirement to improve service delivery and accountability, the intake/referral process to the individual agencies has been centralized within Probation Services. Individual High Risk Probation Officers (HRPO) direct who gets referred to the agencies. This has allowed them to ensure that men whose probation orders are shorter in nature are referred sooner, bypassing the waitlist. In conversation with the HRPO's they indicated that having the ability to control who they refer has improved the process to some degree. They were also quick to add that this new model has added to their workload substantially.

It is unclear if this new service delivery model has improved the overall service to men who are mandated to the PAR program. Anecdotal data suggests that men are getting into the program in a more efficient manner, but there is no evidence that this has improved the attendance rate of men to the initial assessment interviews or overall completion rates between 50-70%. Regardless of the current outcomes associated with PAR, the current funding allocation for this program in the Niagara Region fails to offer enough spots for all of the potential participants in any one year. As such, it is likely that there will continue to be extensive wait lists associated with the PAR program in Niagara and men who abuse their partners will continue to be under serviced.

It is difficult to ascertain what the collaborative process between PAR service providers and HRPO's looks like. Interviews with PAR facilitators suggest that one of the gaps in the provision of service is any sort of collaborative efforts between the service agencies that deliver PAR. Given the importance of the work being done within the PAR setting and the variations of models that exist to deliver that material, a collaborative process that encourages the sharing of knowledge, clinical practices and resources between the PAR service providers would improve the overall community-based response to this issue.

## The Importance of Risk

One of the main findings from this study was the influence that the use of 'risk' has on each of the systems working on the issue of domestic violence. Risk currently influences and shapes much of the response to domestic violence across the Niagara Region. However, as noted in the findings section risk is constructed differentially depending on the setting in which it is used. Risk within the Criminal Justice System (CJS) is potentially different than the risk used within systems of child welfare or in the shelter system. This has the potential for shaping different and possibly conflicting responses to this issue, resulting in potentially different experiences for families.

Risk has become pervasive when working on the issue of domestic violence. It is a way of talking about safety and/or harm and is an excellent example of how institutional discourses influence the individual service provider response to DV. The way the risk discourse is utilized is also an expression of power. As such it is important to understand how discourses shape the conceptualization of the issue of domestic violence and the individuals who interact with the system.

Once labeled by those within positions of power, it is difficult for an individual to shift or re-construct their identity through another discourse.

Discourses, or methods of communication can be located within many levels of society and are generally considered as "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements, and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events" (Burr, 1995, p. 48). Things that individuals say or write may be considered discourses, and the meaning that is attached to them is often dependent upon the discursive context in which they arise. While language often is the primary vehicle for the dissemination of discourses, Burr (1995) suggests that the creation and maintenance of discourses is a complex process and that "words or sentences do not of themselves belong to any particular discourse; in fact the meaning of what we say rather depends upon the discursive context, the general conceptual framework in which our words are embedded" (p. 50). Discourses are easily located within policy and procedure manuals, assessment tools and recording packages that are utilized by social service agencies. Domestic violence related work is often guided by risk assessment tools that serve as conceptual frameworks for front-line staff, shaping their perceptions of the families or individuals they are working with.

Discourses are quite useful in understanding the development of individual identities. Interaction with social services or domestic violence related agencies contribute to the construction of an individual's identity. For instance, when

This construction of her as 'risky' may ignore the complexities associated with relationships where domestic violence has occurred.

considering domestic violence discourses related to age, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, educational background and risk all contribute to the creation of an individual's identity. As Burr (1995) notes, "our identity therefore originates not from inside the person, but from the social realm" (p. 53).

Discourses emerge through various institutions and social processes, and while they are often a product of relations of power they may also reflect and reproduce social relations (Lupton & Barclay, 1997). Individuals encounter various discourses throughout their lives and derive meaning from these encounters that influences their identity and their participation in society. These discourses "are intimately tied to the structures and practices that are lived out in society from day to day, and it is in the interest of relatively powerful groups that some discourses and not others receive the stamp of 'truth'" (Burr, 1995, p. 55). Discourses are therefore integral to understanding the process of social organization and legitimacy within society. The advancement of specific discourses by powerful groups within society leads to the creation of dominant discourses that in turn leads to these discourses being considered as 'truth.' For example, the construction of an individual as being 'high-risk' has the potential to lead to a number of interventions that are specific to the label 'high-risk'. Once labeled by those within positions of power, it is difficult for an individual to shift or re-construct their identity through another discourse. An excellent

example is a mother who chooses to return to her abusive husband after being abused. Child welfare authorities might label her as placing her children 'at risk' as a result. Over time, if she is not perceived as being protective, she might be constructed as a 'risky' parent due to her choice to remain with an abusive individual. This construction of her as 'risky' may ignore the complexities associated with relationships where domestic violence has occurred.

Findings from current participants suggest that risk is utilized with great frequency across sectors. The presence of High Risk Probation Officers, the High Risk Review Team (HRRT) and the reliance upon risk management and risk based thinking in child welfare are all indicators of the risk discourse in action. There are many challenges to relying upon risk. As noted, there is not a uniform definition that is employed when talking about risk across agencies and systems. Risk in the CJS may not be the same as risk in child welfare or in the shelters. Feedback regarding the HRRT had to do with a general failure to understand how an individual is labeled 'high-risk'. Members of the community indicated a great desire to understand the use of risk by HRRT to a greater detail. Education regarding the role of risk (ie; risk tools utilized by the team, methods of assessment, etc.) could play a significant role in improving the overall perception of the HRRT in the Niagara Region.

Risk theory has been incorporated into the field of child welfare over the last 40 years. Risk is embedded in the legislative context that defines the regulations and responsibilities for the delivery of child welfare services in many North American jurisdictions (Swift & Callahan, 2009). In these systems, risk is treated as real, measureable, calculable, and predictable and is used to justify involvement with families (Ferguson, 1997; Swift & Callahan, 2009). Emphasis on the detection and management of risk by child welfare authorities has led to increased reliance on risk assessment tools

to standardize practice and improve public accountability of child welfare agencies (Anglin, 2002; Krane & Davies, 2000; Parton, Thorpe & Wattam, 1997).

Risk is used to justify interventions by front-line child welfare social workers and to assign blame in families (Douglas, 1992, Parton, 1998, 1999). Child welfare interventions require the construction of individuals based on the identification of risk factors. Individuals are evaluated in relation to their ability to understand and assume responsibility for the risks identified by child welfare authorities. Through the investigative process, these expert systems routinely construct 'cases' and create knowledge and evidence about social 'hazards' (Ferguson, 1997).

The implementation of risk assessment means that front-line child welfare social workers are no longer professional clinical practitioners who dispense clinical advice. Rather, their role is associated primarily with case management and their primary responsibility is the assessment and management of risk (Parton, 1998, 1999). In cases of violence against women, the risk discourse has reinforced the notion of the 'mother as protective parent'. Child protection workers are now more than ever engaged in a process of detecting, blaming and rehabilitating 'risky' mothers (Davies & Krane, 2006). Child protection workers are charged with identifying those mothers who might pose a risk to their children and 'transforming' them into protective parents. To ensure the safety of the child, child welfare professionals are required to ascertain the ability of the 'non-offending' parent to reduce the exposure of children to future violence (Davies & Krane, 2006; Humphreys, 1999; Magen, 1999; Scourfield, 2003; Strega et al., 2009). Historically, mothers of children repeatedly exposed to situations where violence against women occurred were constructed as 'bad' mothers who neglected the needs of their children (Swift, 1995). In situations where

violence has occurred, a mother's failure to act (by removing herself and her children from the home, or kicking the abuser out) leads to a re-construction of the mother as something other than a victim, possibly a failed parent (Scourfield, 2003).

Risk discourse and the use of risk assessment tools have resulted in a revised construction of these mothers. Mothers who fail to act in a protective manner are constructed as 'risky' parents. 'Bad mothers' are constructed through the collection of risk factors that need to be managed (Brown, 2006). If children are repeatedly exposed to VAW, child welfare social workers may determine that the mother's behaviour poses a risk to her children. In the terms of risk discourse, mothers are considered to be the protective parent; failing in that obligation means they have placed their child 'at risk.'

Child welfare does not appear to purposefully engage with men in general, and fathers in particular, either as risks or assets.

In contrast to the intense focus on mothers and the mothering process, fathers are generally not included in the interventions by child welfare authorities (Brown et al., 2009; Edleson, 1998; Milner, 2004; O'Hagan, 1997; Strega, 2006). As Daniel and Taylor (1999) note, "child welfare does not appear to purposefully engage with men in general, and fathers in particular, either as risks or assets" (p. 210). Risk discourse and the use of risk assessment tools validate the

involvement of child welfare authorities with families where violence against women has

occurred. This in turn provides the opportunity for child welfare authorities to intervene and engage the man regarding his violence and to begin to work on a risk reduction plan. However, as several authors note, the risk rating reinforces a fixation on the relative dangerousness of men (Walker, 2010) and sustains the prevalent construction of ‘men as threat’ (Scourfield, 2003), or as ‘ghosts’ (Brown et al., 2009; Strega, 2006) thereby limiting their involvement in the child welfare process.

The Family Court System is another venue where men attempt to control and abuse their ex-partner, either by dragging matters out over time or using the children as pawns.

While the use of risk is likely the result of individual agency and/or government mandate, there exists a secondary use of risk for agencies that relates to risk management and the prioritization of the interests of the agency over the employee. Risk management strategies are now the primary ideology guiding the management of many social service agencies. This emphasis on risk management arose from the increased public scrutiny that many public sector agencies have undergone over the past 20 years. These risk management strategies are designed to protect individual agencies while emphasizing the need for accountability. Risk management can be defined as “an effort to identify, assess and reduce where appropriate, risks to patients, visitors, staff and organizational assets” (Gambrill & Shlonsky, 2001, p. 80). As a

protective practice, risk management involves “identifying practices or activities that could potentially lead to legal liability” (Gambrill & Shlonsky, 2001, p. 80). This protectionist notion enables agencies to take steps to avoid issues related to liability.

The utilization of risk management strategies has resulted in risk-related decisions being embedded in organizational and institutional self-interests (Power, 2007). The assessment of risk is no longer solely focused on the families — the agencies themselves are now assessing the potential risk to the agency and government. Risk management is a method of protecting the interests of the agency and the system in the face of increased public criticism and of demonstrating that they are functioning in a way that appears reasonable due to the fear of institutional sanctions (Power, 2007).

The challenge that many agencies now face is that the risk discourse has led to increased standardization in practice and has detracted from allowing individual front-line practitioners to engage with families where domestic violence is an issue. There is a danger that risk has resulted in an increased standardized response to a very personal and socially constructed issue. For agencies working on this issue there may not be any shift away from risk, risk assessment and risk management strategies in the near future. However, in an effort to continually improve service, it is important to reflect on the institutional language associated with this issue and offer staff opportunities to reflect on their practice, highlighting the manner in which risk discourse has shaped their thinking about this issue.

## The challenge of engaging men

Over the course of the last three years, almost all of the interviews conducted for both this Report Card and the 2009/10 Report Card revealed

interest in understanding the current levels of engagement with men who abuse their partners. Working with men who abuse their partners is a challenging process that requires dedication and a deep understanding of the complexities of why men abuse. Considering the extent of the issue within the Niagara Region, the absence of male participation in both of these reports is indicative of how difficult it is to get men to openly talk about their violence. In order to truly understand this issue, it is important to understand the engagement of men throughout the process, from the arrival of the police to a call, to the engagement that occurs through service providers within the Partner Assault Response Program.

Understanding the police response to this issue is not necessarily easy. One of the areas that this Report Card sought to understand was the experience of women who did not access the shelter system. These women tended to reside in rural Niagara but were also less likely to report the violence they experienced to the police. As such, they did not provide great detail or improve the understanding of what it is like when police arrive to deal with matters of domestic violence. Women did indicate that they did not report to the police because they feared that the police would not do anything. Those who did have experiences with the police suggested that more training was required in order to improve the response by front-line uniformed officers.

The Niagara Regional Police Service is responding to approximately the same number of DV related calls year after year. These calls are only one aspect of their job and there is little doubt that more training would improve their knowledge about the issue. One statistic that is worth noting is the number of dual charges that are laid (man and woman being charged at the same time). While these numbers remain low, 2010 saw an increase, which might be indicative of officers not understanding the gendered nature of this issue.

One of the bright spots in the Niagara Region remains the implementation and the use of High Risk Domestic Violence Probation Officers (HRPO).

The court systems are another area that has been identified where it is difficult to work with men. Participants to this report suggested that the Family Court System is another venue where men attempt to control and abuse their ex-partner, either by dragging matters out over time or using the children as pawns. Within the criminal court, the absence of specialization provides opportunities for abusive men to circumvent accountability, delay the process or maneuver themselves into more favourable outcomes.

One of the bright spots in the Niagara Region remains the implementation and the use of High Risk Domestic Violence Probation Officers (HRPO). The HRPO's were previously highlighted for their specialization and the manner in which they are able to work with men who are on probation for domestic violence. This team has remained stable and there appears to be a commitment to ensure their presence in the Niagara Region. They have continued to advance their knowledge base and practice and are an integral part of the response to domestic violence in the Niagara Region.

Participants in this study provided mixed feedback regarding the FACS response to men who are abusive. Over the past 20 years, as the impact of domestic violence on children has been established, systems of child welfare have struggled with engaging men who abuse their partners. Instead they have focused on mothering practices and ensuring the

‘protective capacities’ of the mother instead of the violent-free behaviours of the father. The current collaborative model that relies upon the Domestic Violence Advocate (DVA) has improved the knowledge base within FACS employees, but has not necessarily translated into improved engagement with fathers who abuse their partners. The DVA focus is woman-specific and therefore is not intended to engage men. While there are apparent gains associated with the DVA collaboration, a similar detailed programmed designed to enhance FACS Niagara’s engagement with men would be seen as a significantly progressive step on this issue.

## The importance of relationships

Domestic violence is a unique kind of violence. It necessarily involves two people who know each other as opposed to a more generalized violence that might occur between two strangers. With generalized violence there is a high probability that the two parties may never see each other again. In situations of domestic violence there are many factors that might bring the two parties into contact after the violence has occurred. These include children, property and the desire to remain in a relationship despite the violence. Domestic violence is relational; the violence is about power and control, but occurs within the context of a pre-existing relationship. The relational nature of this issue is important to understand because it explains, in part, why it is so difficult to respond to.

Responding to domestic violence also requires relationships between service providers. This Report Card continued to find evidence related to the development and maintenance of important working relationships between service providers across the Niagara Region. Many of the projects that have been highlighted in this report are extensions of working relationships between service providers.

Relationships require work in order to build trust and accountability. The Niagara Region benefits from the fact that many of the service providers working on this issue have been in the field for a number of years and sit on many of the same committees. One area that was not as evident was the presence of opportunities for networking across agencies or common places that offer opportunities for dialogue between service providers outside of case specific matters. Sustaining and improving relationships between service providers might occur through the development of opportunities such as ‘lunch and learns’ hosted by individual agencies that provide an opportunity to network and to share practices and knowledge between service providers. ■

## Women's Experience with the Niagara System

In an effort to capture the experiences of women and to give additional meaning to this project, the Knowledge and Research Committee of CEVAW worked with the research to develop the graphic on the following page. Figure 2 presents Women's Experience with the System. This diagram represents a summation of all the experiences of all the women who participated in this project. The centre of the diagram recreates the Power and Control Wheel designed at Duluth. It is recreated in this diagram to demonstrate that issues of power and control exist beyond their intimate relationships and extend to their experiences of the systems that they encounter when dealing with domestic violence. It is also added here to assist the reader in understanding the layers of complexity that exist when considering a woman's experience of domestic violence. This wheel reveals that through discussing their experiences, women highlighted the power and control that existed in their intimate relationships, but they also revealed the systemic ways that the system may recreate the experience of powerlessness and a loss of control for women. Throughout this study, there was occasional referencing to the impact that the domestic violence had on children and as such, we placed them outside of the main circle in order to not lose sight of the importance of considering them as well.

## Men's Interaction with the Niagara System

In the same way that a wheel was utilized to demonstrate the experiences of women, it is possible to conceptualize Men's Interaction with the System as a wheel in Figure 3 on page 103. Despite the fact that only one man took part in this study, many women and service providers spoke about their perceptions of how men interacted with the system. As such, this circle represents the experiences of 'others', not the direct voiced experiences of men. Nonetheless, there is merit in considering the ways that their partners and professionals from within the Niagara Region describe men's interaction with the system. The centre circle contains the words "accountability" and "risk". We believe that these are the current guiding principles of the system when considering men who commit domestic violence. The outer circle is the interaction of the men as described by women and service providers. It is important to note that the sections entitled 'Housing' and 'Income' are blank. This is a result of simply not knowing what happens to the housing situation or the income of men who commit domestic violence. Once again children are in their own circle outside of the main circle to remind the reader that children are impacted by the violence behaviours of their fathers.

**CHILDREN**

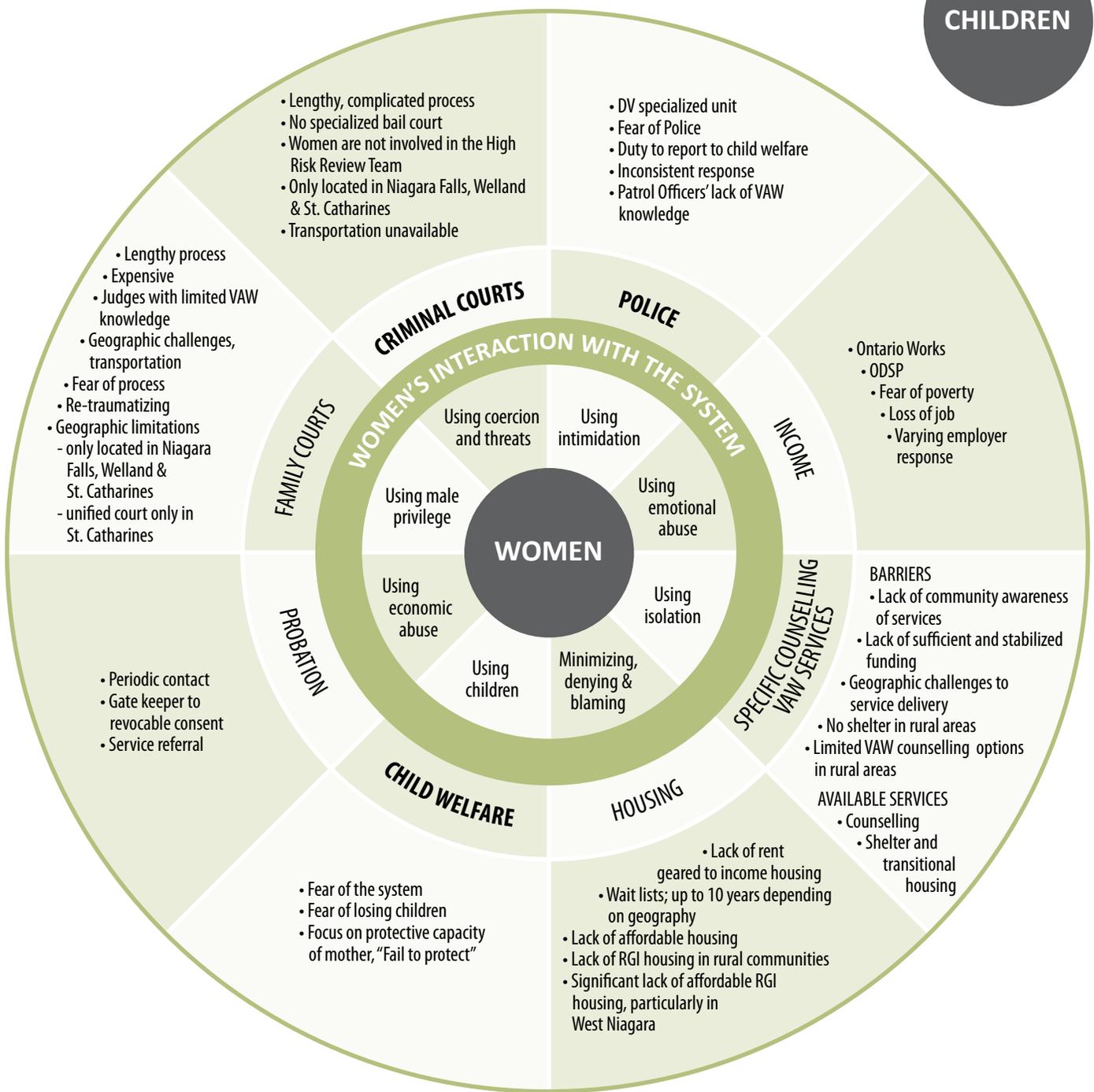


Figure 2: Women's Experience with the Niagara System

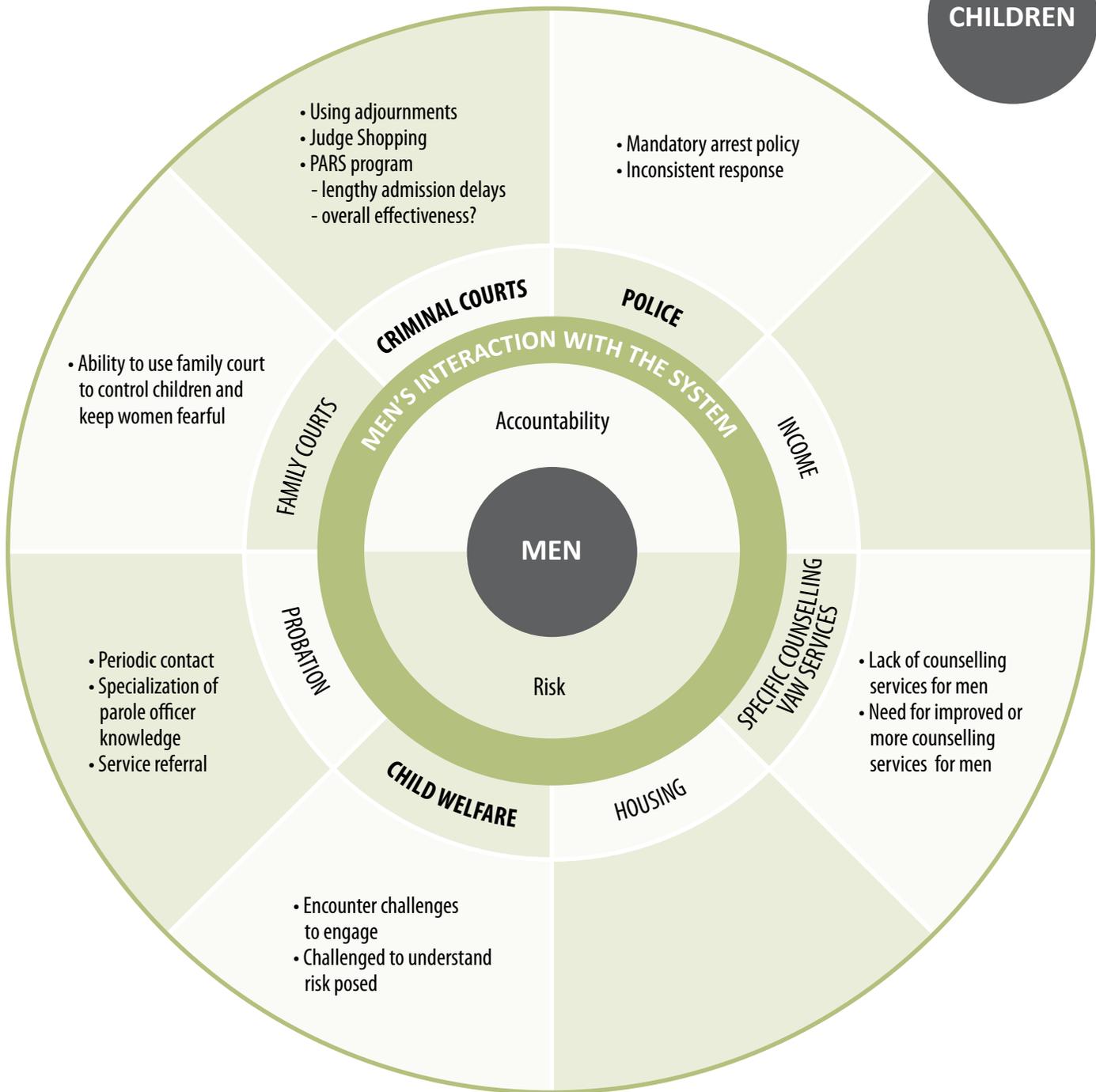


Figure 3: Men's Interaction with the Niagara System

# The Hope Wheel

At the outset of this project, it was unclear what the lasting message of this report would be to the Niagara Community. The response of the first DV Report Card had inspired many people to work on this project in the hope of creating significant and meaningful change. During the discussions about the findings, the Knowledge and Research Committee of the Niagara Region Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW) believed that it was necessary to provide a path or a roadmap for improvement. As such, we have drafted recommendations, however in keeping with the use of 'wheels' in this project, we also developed The Hope Wheel (see page 105, Figure 4). The Hope Wheel is designed to speak to the ways in which we hope to see services and experiences in the future.

*We offer it to the Niagara community with the hope that you will take up the task of continually working to improve 'the system'.*

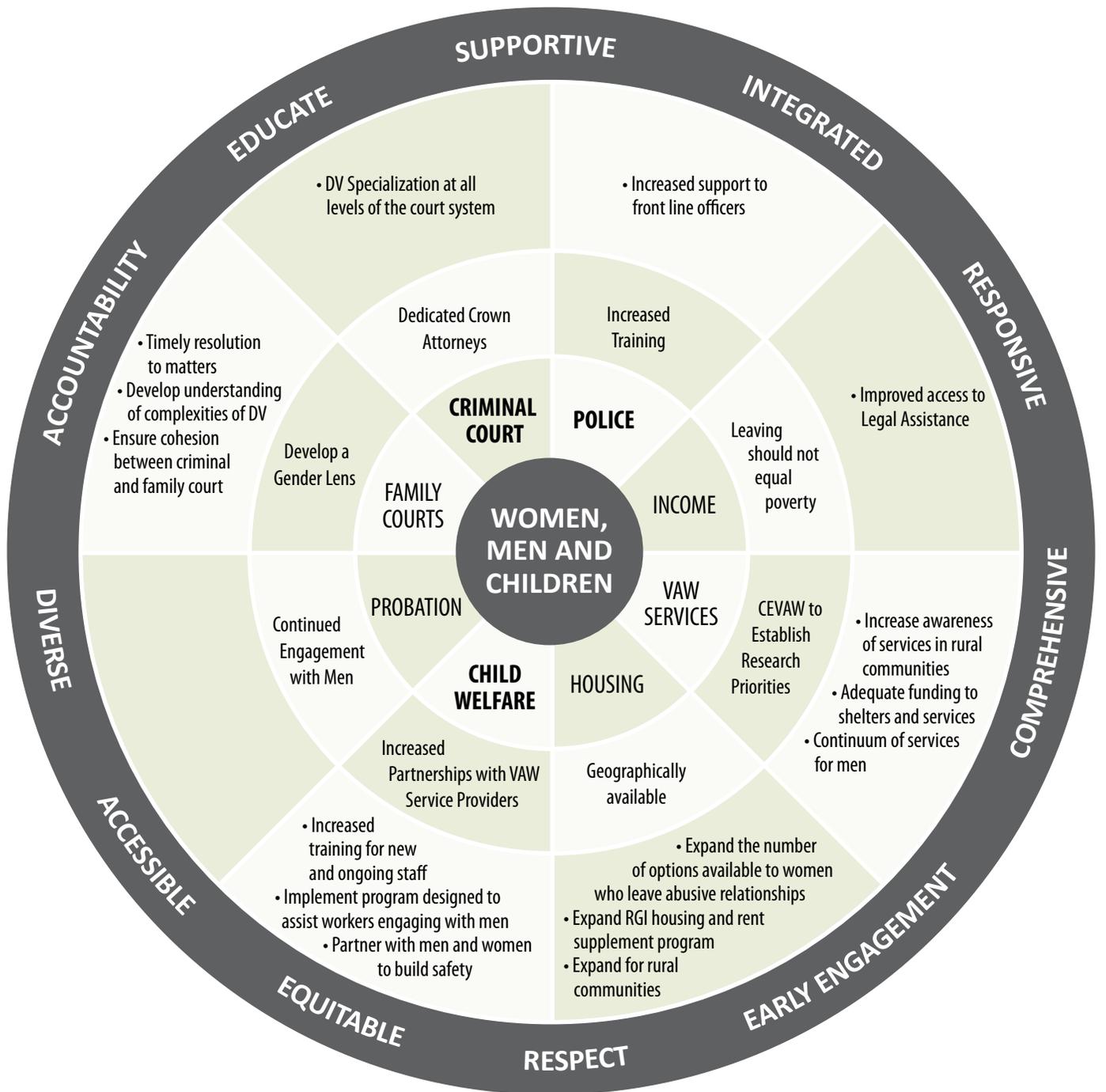


Figure 4: The Hope Wheel

# Recommendations



## Regarding the increase in the arrests of women as accused in cases of domestic violence by Niagara Regional Police Service:

**1** It is recommended that the Niagara Regional Police Service conduct a review of their current procedures and training to ensure that all officers have adequate Domestic Violence Training.

**2** It is recommended that the Niagara Regional Police Service ensure that their Domestic Violence Unit is adequately and appropriately staffed in order to support front line officers responding to incidents of domestic violence.

## Regarding the response by Family and Children's Service Niagara to domestic violence:

**1** It is recommended that FACS Niagara develop and implement a program designed to improve front-line child protection staff in engaging men who abuse their partners. It is recommended that this service parallel the current Domestic Violence Advocate (DVA) program, making an individual specialist available for consultation.

**2** It is recommended that FACS Niagara expand the DVA program to include at least one DVA in each of the three offices.

**3** It is recommended that FACS Niagara ensure that representation at community partnerships (eg. High Risk Review Team) provides for opportunities for front-line staff.

**4** It is recommended that FACS Niagara undertake annual evaluations of all Domestic Violence related programs currently being offered and that front-line service staff are offered the opportunity to provide feedback regarding the appropriateness of the services.

## Regarding the High Risk Review Team:

- 1** It is recommended that the HRRT provide information/training sessions to all CEVAW partners with emphasis being placed on ensuring FACS staff have an opportunity to attend and learn about the program and process for referral.
- 2** It is recommended that the HRRT examine their current composition and consider ways of including input and feedback from other professionals from within the community (ie: women's shelters and counselling agencies).
- 3** It is recommended that the HRRT finalize its Terms of Reference and share them with community partners.
- 4** It is recommended that the HRRT select and utilize one Risk Assessment tool for the purposes of assessing individuals under review.

## Regarding the Domestic Violence Court

- 1** It is recommended that the length of tenure of the Crown Attorney assigned to the Domestic Violence Court in St. Catharines be extended from 1 year to 3 years in duration.
- 2** It is recommended that the Ministry of the Attorney General develop and implement a specialized Domestic Violence Bail Court in the Niagara Region.
- 3** It is recommended that the Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women undertake a mixed-methods study related to the Domestic Violence courts in the Niagara Region. This study should incorporate not only the voices of service users (victims and accused) but should also examine case data over a specified period of time.

## Regarding the engagement of men who abuse:

- 1** It is recommended that both agencies that provide the Partner Assault Response Program consider the merits of providing service in Fort Erie.
- 2** It is recommended that the agencies that provide the Partner Assault Response Program implement quarterly collaborative meetings in an effort to share ideas and improve service to men.
- 3** It is recommended that the Office of the Crown Attorney and the Ministry of the Attorney General ensure that the Crown Attorneys who are dedicated to the Domestic Violence Court have the appropriate resources required to conduct thorough assessments regarding the treatment needs of offenders.
- 4** It is recommended that the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Partner Assault Response (PAR) Program service providers ensure that all men who are referred to the PAR Program are offered an assessment within 30 days of receiving the referral.
- 5** It is recommended that Partner Assault Response Program service providers offer a continuum of services to domestic violence offenders including pre-treatment services (group readiness). This should also include offering individual pre-treatment services where necessary.
- 6** It is recommended that FACS Niagara develop and implement a program designed to improve front-line child protection staff in engaging men who abuse their partners. It is recommended that this service parallel the current DVA program, making an individual specialist available for consultation.
- 7** It is recommended that FACS Niagara ensure that all of their front-line child protection staff have the opportunity to attend training on working with men who abuse. This training should include clinical approaches to working with this population. FACS Niagara is encouraged to collaborate with both PAR providers in the development and implementation of this training.
- 8** It is recommended that CEVAW undertake a mixed methods study regarding the experiences of men who abuse their partners in the Niagara Region. This study should include qualitative interviews with men as well as statistical data related to PAR completion and recidivism. Additional consideration should be given to including the experiences of the partners of the men in the study.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PREVIOUS REPORT CARD: Follow-up

In the original Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card 2009/10 several recommendations were created in response to the findings. In completing the current Report Card it was appropriate to revisit the original recommendations and highlight their status. We chose to use four outcomes as status markers 'Achieved', 'Not Achieved', 'In Progress' and 'Unknown'.

For a recommendation to be 'Achieved' there must be measureable evidence of completion. 'Not Achieved' is utilized to highlight those recommendations where concrete outcomes were not met. 'In-Progress' suggests that work has begun but not been completed on a recommendation. 'Unknown' is utilized when information was not available or obtained prior to the completion of this report. Here those findings are presented once again with the current status.

The Knowledge and Research Committee of the Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women is aware that the current economic climate has impacted the priorities of the current government that has shaped the work being done on original recommendations. It is also important to note that upon reflection, some of the original recommendations were perhaps too complex to be completed in a short period of time and that CEVAW does not have the staff to continually monitor the status of the original recommendations.



# Arising from the Legal System

**1** That the Government of Ontario re-establish a court house in Niagara Falls and shall ensure that this court house contains a court that is dedicated to the issue of domestic violence.

**Status: Not Achieved**

**2** That the court systems in the Niagara Region establish a Bail Safety program designed to improve the level of specialization on the issue of domestic violence at bail proceedings.

**Status: Not Achieved**

**3** That the Crown Attorney in the St. Catharines Court House shall dedicate at least one Crown Attorney to the Domestic Violence Court for a period of time not shorter than three years. It is further recommended that any additional Crown Attorneys that are dedicated to the Domestic Violence Court in St. Catharines be assigned for a time period no longer than three years.

**Status: In Progress. It is noteworthy that the period of time has been lengthened from six months to one year in duration.**

**4** The Judges assigned to the Domestic Violence Courts regularly attend and participate in the workings of the Domestic Violence Court Advisory Committee.

**Status: Not Achieved**

**5** That the Government of Ontario dedicates appropriate services to the St. Catharines Domestic Violence Court.

**Status: Not Achieved**

**6** That the Law Association of Niagara recruit lawyers from outside of the Welland and St. Catharines areas who would be willing to undergo domestic violence training and avail themselves to assist victims for domestic violence by accepting legal aid certificates.

**Status: Unknown**

**7** The Law Society of Upper Canada endeavour to establish domestic violence specialization training in all law schools in Ontario.

**Status: Unknown**

# Arising from Working with Domestic Violence Offenders

**1** That the Niagara Regional Police Service establish stable and permanent funding to the Domestic Violence Unit. This funding should be adequate enough to afford each community in the Niagara Region to be offered the same service that is currently offered in St. Catharines.

**Status: In Progress.** As noted, there appears to be a shift towards centralizing the DVU which would remove them from a community-based policing model. This shift has already been felt in some communities where pre-existing relationships are no longer occurring due to centralization of the DVI's. There has not been any expansion in Fort Erie.

**2** That the Office of the Crown Attorney and the Ministry of the Attorney General ensure that the Crown Attorneys who are dedicated to the Domestic Violence Court have the appropriate resources required to conduct thorough assessments regarding the treatment needs of offenders.

**Status: Not Achieved**

**3** That the Office of the Crown Attorney and Probation Services collaborate to create an increased understanding regarding the formulation of probation conditions for domestic violence offenders.

**Status: In Progress**

**4** That the Partner Assault Response (PAR) Program service providers ensure that all men who are referred to the PAR program are offered an assessment within 30 days of receiving the referral.

**Status: In Progress**

**5** Partner Assault Response Program service providers offer a continuum of services to domestic violence offenders including pre-treatment services (group readiness). This shall also include offering individual pre-treatment services where necessary.

**Status: In Progress**

**6** Partner Assault Response Program service providers routinely hold collaborative meetings with the probation officers who monitor the high risk domestic violence offenders. The purpose of these meetings shall be to increase feedback and to continually discuss the development and improvement of service to domestic violence offenders.

**Status: In Progress.** The High Risk Review Team has begun to serve this function.

# Arising from the Community Collaboration

**1** The Niagara Region shall develop and implement a comprehensive transportation strategy that provides for public transportation across the region. This strategy should be designed to improve the accessibility between cities and communities in the Niagara Region.

**Status: In Progress**

**2** The Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW) will develop a domestic violence training module that can be made available to community agencies for the purposes of education of staff.

**Status: In Progress**

**3** The Ministry of Community and Social Services will ensure that training to agencies regarding domestic violence is appropriately funded.

**Status: Not Achieved**

# Arising from the issue of Housing

**1** The Ontario government increase the number of affordable housing units available within the Niagara Region. These affordable units should be distributed across the region in consultation with the regional politicians and advocates.

**Status: Not Achieved**

**2** The Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) establish and maintain adequate funding to women's shelters (including Second Stage Housing) that currently exist within the Niagara Region. Where appropriate it is further recommended that shelters in the Niagara Region be afforded additional bed allocation with the necessary and requisite funding being provided.

**Status: Not Achieved. Both Women's Shelters have been subject to the two year funding freeze (March 25, 2010 to March 31, 2012) prescribed under the Public Sector Compensation Restraint to Protect Public Services Act, 2010.**

**3** The Niagara Region, in conjunction with the Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW) and the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) undertake a needs assessment regarding the feasibility of the creation of an additional woman's shelter in the Niagara Region.

**Status: Not Achieved**

# Appendices and References



# Appendix A: Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card 2010/11

## Informed Consent

I agree to participate in the Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card 2010/11. I understand that the purpose of this study is develop an understanding of how the Niagara Region is responding to the issue of domestic violence and learning about the experiences of individuals who have been involved in a domestic violence situation. I agree to meet one-on-one with a researcher for an interview or in a focus group to discuss my perspective on the response to domestic violence in the Niagara Region. I understand that the interview will be approximately 1 ½ to 2 hours in length.

I understand that I may find it difficult to talk about my experiences/perspectives of domestic violence but that every effort will be made to minimize and limit this discomfort. I understand that I may not benefit directly from this study however, my insights will benefit research in this area.

I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed but for confidentiality my name and other identifying information will be removed so that my identity will not be known. All data collected will be stored in a secured location and destroyed once the study is completed, the report is publicized and the possibility of publishing new articles from the data is exhausted.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may decline to participate without penalty. If I withdraw from the study before data collection is completed my data will be destroyed. I also understand that I have the right to omit any question(s) I choose. I understand that my confidentiality will be respected unless required by law. This legal obligation includes a number of circumstances, such as suspected child abuse, expression of suicidal ideas, where research documents are ordered to be produced by a court of law and where researchers are obliged to report to the appropriate authorities.

If I have any questions about the study or experience any adverse effects as a result of participating, I may contact Ian DeGeer at 905-920-0573 or Anne Armstrong, 905-684-4000 extension 224.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

# Appendix B: Interview Schedule for Service Users (Men/Women)

## Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in an interview for the Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card Project. This interview should take about 1-1.5 hours. Your responses are confidential and you have had time to review and sign the Informed Consent Form. Should you wish to stop at any time, please let me know and I will turn off the recorder.

All of the interviews are recorded and the transcripts of these interviews are property of the Niagara Coalition to End Violence Against Women (CEVAW). Your answers are confidential and your name or revealing information will not be used in our report.

## Experience with the Legal system

I would like to ask you about your experience with the legal system. Here we use the legal system to include the police, the criminal court system, the bail court system, probation, child welfare services.

1. Which of the above-mentioned services were you involved with?
2. What was your experience with the police? How did the police come to be involved in your life? How did they treat you and/or your partner?
3. (if involved with court system) Do you believe that your matter was handled in the court system in a timely manner? (how long did it take for the matter to go from charges being laid to resolution?)
4. What was your experience like within the criminal court system? (for victims: Do you feel you received the support that you required to go through the criminal process? For offenders; did you feel you were given an opportunity to understand the process? Was your voice heard in the courtroom? Do you think the outcome was fair? (for victims: Did you have an opportunity to access support services as you went through this process?)
5. (if identifies probation) Can you tell me about your relationship with your probation officer? How often do you see your probation officer? In what ways is he/she helpful? Do you think you received the services you required from your probation officer (did they make referrals etc).
6. (if identifies child welfare). How did child welfare (CAS) come to be involved in your life? What was your experience like dealing with CAS? In what ways was the CAS helpful (or not)? (what sorts of services did they provide? What did they offer your family?) How long was FACS involved in your family's life? (if closed file) what were the reasons for closing the file? (if still open) What things do they expect you to do in order for them to be finished? Would you call them again if you required assistance?

## Experience accessing service

1. I would like to ask you about your experience accessing domestic violence related services in the Niagara Region. Can you tell me which agencies you have been involved with? How did you come to be in contact with these agencies? (referral sources). Can you tell me about your experience receiving service for the issue of domestic violence in the Niagara Region?
2. In what ways did the agencies you mentioned work together, (or not)? (Probe: what was the most helpful thing these agencies did for you?; were you satisfied with the way the agencies worked together? What things do you wish they had done, but did not do?)
3. Did you have to wait for service? If yes, how long?
4. Would you seek service from any of these agencies again? (why/why not)

What advice would you give another individual who is going through the same sort of thing that you are?

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*Once you see a pattern, you cannot unsee it...*

Over the past 15 years, Ian has been on a journey to understand why domestic violence continues to be a social issue in our society. His entry point into this issue has been facilitating groups for men who abuse their partners. Over the past 12 years he has worked with men to help reduce violence in their relationships. His innovative program development has resulted in consultations with both the RCMP and the National Offender Management Service in England about working with men who are violent. His work has taken him to international conferences in New York City and Montreal, Quebec.

## About the Author: Ian DeGeer, PhD (can)

The life of Ian DeGeer has been full of obstacles similar to those faced by thousands of men everyday. Raised in a mid-size city, in a home where violence was one of the norms and taught to embody the very masculine identities that trouble our society, he understands that he was fast-tracked for failure in his relationships. However, through knowledge building, hard work, perseverance and a desire to be different he began to challenge all the things he thought he should be.

Ian has also worked in child welfare in both Ontario and British Columbia and continues to research and examine how systems of child welfare respond to the issue of violence against women.

Ian is currently a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. His current research, the Niagara Region Domestic Violence Report Card, is an award winning examination of the Niagara Region's community-based response to violence against women.



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