

Minister's Committee on Violence Against Women and Girls.

Making Newfoundland
and Labrador a safer place.



Introduction

On February 13, 2019, the Honourable Andrew Parsons, Minister of Justice and Public Safety and Attorney General, and the Honourable Carol Ann Haley, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, held the second meeting of the Minister's Committee on Violence Against Women and Girls. The committee is made up of a number of individuals who have experience and knowledge of issues surrounding violence against women and girls. This includes representatives from women's organizations, women with lived experience, Indigenous governments and organizations, Victim Services, RNC, RCMP, Adult Probation, Public Prosecutions, members of the legal community, community organizations, and officials from a number of government departments.

Over 60 committee members attended the daylong event with the goal of sharing information and exchanging ideas. The event provided a space to identify innovative strategies and solutions to end violence against women and girls in the province.

Background

The first committee meeting was held on December 8, 2017, at which time 56 members discussed the challenges and solutions needed to end violence against women and girls in Newfoundland and Labrador. Approximately 2,000 thoughts and ideas were exchanged and recorded. Education and Awareness, Restorative Justice, Re-victimization of Survivors, and Indigenous Communities were the top four topics discussed.

In early 2018, a Steering Committee was established, that has since met regularly, with the aim of reviewing the recommendations arising from the first meeting, as well as identifying actions that need to be taken to fulfill those recommendations. After reflecting on the work that has been done since 2017, a second committee meeting was planned and took place on February 13, 2019.

Overview of Results

The second committee meeting focused on three broad topics regarding efforts towards the prevention of violence against women and girls and the work of the committee, including:

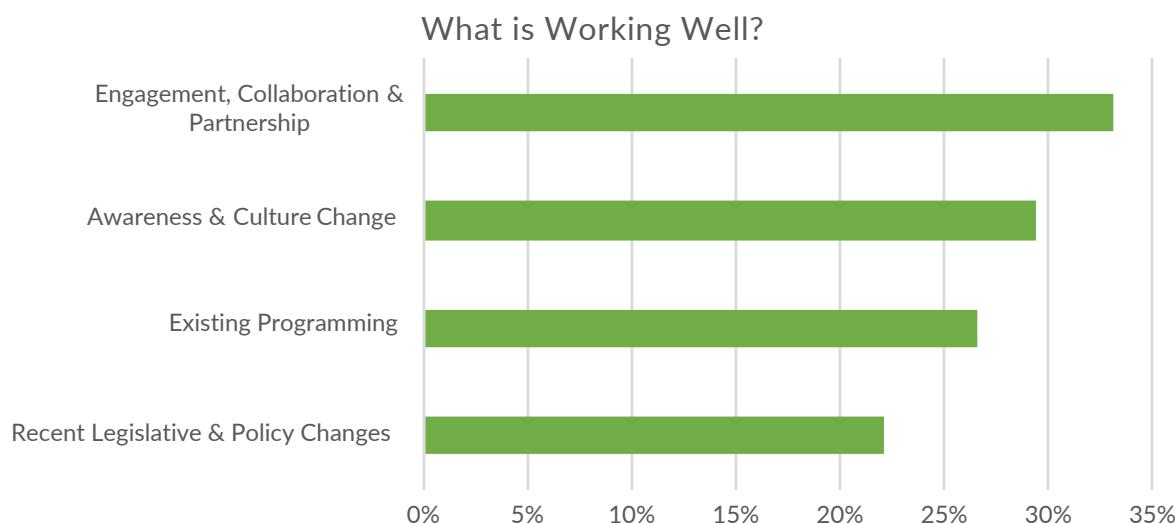
1. What is working well;
2. What is not working well; and
3. How stakeholders can work together to create solutions.

An analysis of the raw comments and ideas from members revealed several common themes. The following is a summary as identified by participants.

“What is Working Well?”

The first discussion question allowed participants to reflect on the work to date to end violence against women and girls in Newfoundland Labrador. Participants were asked, “What is Working Well?” The responses were categorized into four main themes:

- Engagement, Collaboration and Partnership (33 per cent)
- Awareness and Culture Change (29 per cent)
- Existing Programming (27 per cent)
- Recent Legislative and Policy Changes (22 per cent)



Engagement, Collaboration and Partnership

Of the responses, 33 per cent referred to matters related to Engagement, Collaboration and Partnership. These comments referenced work within government, as well as between government and the community. One participant noted, “There are good relationships with stakeholders, [I] think it’s great... The continued support from all stakeholders, looking forward to see what [is] coming up.” Similarly, another participant further elaborated that when working on initiatives, multiple government departments were often involved and working together; the participant stated, “Engaging with multiple departments. There are often multiple departments involved in supporting someone and preventing violence. Now we are seeing departments come together.” Participants specifically mentioned the work with and between schools, municipalities, police, the medical community, the Journey Project, End Homelessness, and mental health and addictions, as examples of positive engagement, collaboration and partnership.

Awareness and Culture Change

A total of 29 per cent of comments were in relation to the cultural shift regarding gender-based violence. Participants indicated that they perceived significant positive changes in the way society views violence and those who experience violence. Some attributed this to the #MeToo movement and the increased awareness that has resulted. Further, participants felt the increased visibility of survivors and their experiences as well as the decreased victim-blaming was positive. They also highlighted that the issue was no longer viewed as only a “women’s issue” and that men and boys were being engaged in the change. Respondents also expressed that they believe there is a notable shift within government, the RNC, and community stakeholders with respect to awareness.

Existing Programming

According to participants, there are a number of programs providing valuable support to survivors of violence. A number of comments (27 per cent) mentioned existing programs and organizations, including:

- Homelessness and Housing programs;
- Intimate Partner Violence Units;
- Mama Moments (Choices for Youth);
- Men’s Group at First Light St. John’s Friendship Centre;
- Restorative Justice;
- Stella’s Circle;
- The Journey Project;
- Transition Houses;
- Violence Prevention NL organizations; and
- Women’s Centres.

Participants recognized these programs for their efforts in “decreasing the revictimization of victims”, engaging men and boys, early interventions (including engaging with schools), and providing cultural support (including for Indigenous women in the criminal justice system). Overall, there were many positive comments made about ongoing programming, especially those programs offered by the community sector.

Recent Legislative and Policy Changes

Finally, participants also identified changes to legislation and policy as an area where efforts had been made towards ending gender-based violence. Nearly a quarter (22 per cent) of comments identified recent changes to legislation and policy in relation to gender-based violence. The term “momentum” was used multiple times to describe the succession of changes in this area. Participants stated, “new legislation and new amendments show the province is moving forward” and “there is a momentum and deep desire to see changes that keep people safe”. Specific changes mentioned included:

- Introduction of Domestic Violence Leave;
- Changes to the Residential Tenancies Act;
- Expansion of the definition of violence in the Family Violence Protection Act; and
- Efforts to make workplaces safer including through changes to Occupational Health and Safety regulations.

“There is a momentum and deep desire to see changes that keep people safe.”

Participant

Generally, participants perceived these changes as indicators of progress toward better supporting women and girls who have experienced, or are experiencing, violence.

“What is Not Working Well?”

Participants were then asked what they believed was not working well and to identify the challenges. The four most common themes identified were:

- More Education, Awareness and Training Needed (31 per cent)
- Lack of Services or Resources for Survivors of Violence (25 per cent)
- Responding to Survivors (24 per cent)
- Rural/Urban Approaches (15 per cent)

What is Not Working Well?



More Education, Awareness and Training Needed

Despite noting that there has been a marked improvement in awareness and cultural change, 31 per cent of comments reflected a need for further education, awareness and training. Participants expressed that changes to the education system were imperative in order to increase awareness about violence and violence prevention. As one participant stated, “education [is] so important to break the cycle of violence (i.e., physical, sexual, mental [violence])”. Participants suggested a number of areas to focus education initiatives, including; healthy relationships, consent [and] sex education; Indigenous cultures and values; and early education initiatives geared toward changing the attitudes of young children that includes having a “concrete plan” for the initiative.

While a number of these comments referred to potential changes within the K-12 education system (including changes to the curriculum), participants also pointed to opportunities to educate professionals who interact with women and girls who experience violence, as well as raising public awareness more generally. Participants discussed a need for training opportunities for professionals such as trauma-informed training. Respondents specifically mentioned professionals such as:

- Health care workers (including family doctors);
- Judges and lawyers;
- Staff within the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development;
- Staff of non-profit organizations, including shelters; and
- Teachers.

“Education is so important to break the cycle of violence.”

Participant

In regards to public awareness, participants felt that more efforts were required in the areas of engaging men and boys, bystanders, and toxic masculinity.

Lack of Available Services or Resources

Another theme (to which 25 per cent of comments refer) was the lack of services and resources available for individuals experiencing violence. According to participants, more programs are required for populations particularly vulnerable to violence, including:

- Youth;
- Trans and non-binary individuals;
- Persons living in Labrador and rural areas; and
- Persons with mental health concerns.

Respondents felt there were still gaps in the system, specifically with respect to emergency protection and collaboration between service providers. Participants identified a number of focus areas where they believed resources and services are needed including the courts or judicial system, transportation, early intervention, and health care (including Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners and mental health programs).

Responding to Survivors

In 24 per cent of comments, participants discussed providing appropriate responses to survivors of violence. According to participants, responding appropriately to survivors of violence results in decreased revictimization and earlier intervention. According to participants, these responses could include:

- Using appropriate and trauma-informed language;
- Responding without delay when support is requested; and
- Providing support within the court system (especially before, during and after testifying).

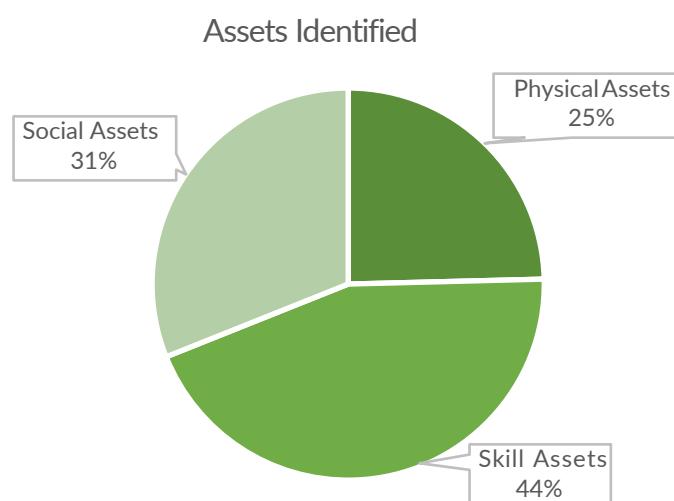
While these supportive measures are necessary in every program, participants identified the court, criminal justice system and health care system (including mental health) as areas where they felt trauma-informed responses would be particularly vital.

Rural/Urban Approaches

In comments made by participants, some felt there was an “inequity of resources throughout the province” and “discrepancies around regional supports.” Approximately, 15 per cent of participants believed that services available in St. John’s were not necessarily available in other regions of the province. Many of these participants felt that services should be comparable throughout the province and further “outreach and access to services in rural [areas]” is needed. In particular residents of regions in Labrador expressed experiencing delays and lack of access to important services.

Asset Mapping and Action Identification

To guide the discussion cycles for the remainder of the day, participants were asked to identify a number of assets (physical, social, skill and capital) to help develop concrete solutions in addressing violence against women and girls in Newfoundland and Labrador.



The majority of assets identified by the group were skill assets (44 per cent), followed by social assets (31 per cent) and physical assets (25 per cent). Participants then grouped these assets to create unique actions. The participants were asked to work in groups and identify actions related to addressing violence against women and girls. The actions were recorded by note-takers in the group and submitted. In total, 114 actions were recorded. The following highlight some of the actions, which include suggestions and a combination of concrete solutions and possible community partnerships, in no particular order:

Education and Awareness

Participants identified actions with respect to potential education and awareness initiatives that could take place by utilizing assets and resources that already exist among stakeholders, community, and committee members. These included the development of programs, training sessions, and new curriculum all in reference to ending violence against women and girls. The following is a list of actions, as submitted by participants:

Develop a program to assist individuals in transition housing access legal information programs. For example, a phone seminar to help individuals receive the required documentation to navigate the justice system.
Support opportunities, programs and training delivered by frontline staff at women's centres.
Develop healthy relationships curriculum for pre-school and K-12 environments.
Develop mandatory curriculum around sexual health, consent, healthy relationships and toxic masculinity that is evidence-based and trauma-informed that is adequately resourced (leave time for professional development and training), with input from community experts.
Create a training program for social workers using a small grant with a focus on cultural sensitivity using Indigenous knowledge with the support of a presenter/facilitator and use the social work network for distribution.
Two day gathering: "Sharing our stories - caring for ourselves": <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work within networks to identify attendees; skills facilitators• Provide a caring and safe environment with available supports• Goal – share with government ("What We've Heard") to advise policy.

Culturally Appropriate Responses

Participants referenced multiple actions in support of building culturally appropriate responses in consultation with Indigenous groups and organizations. These actions included using the already existing expertise of Indigenous people and organizations to help facilitate and lead programming, training and policy changes. The following are action items respecting culturally appropriate responses, as submitted by participants:

Create culturally appropriate support opportunities (e.g. peer support groups) developed and delivered by Indigenous groups from women's centres.
Develop culturally sensitive training for frontline employees in the justice system in partnership with Indigenous groups and women's centres.
Provide funding to the YWCA's Collective (young women and non-binary youth 18-30) to create a youth advisory committee to develop the best way to communicate Indigenous knowledge to this age group. Information would be obtained from Indigenous knowledge and intimate partner violence.
Implement meaningful changes to policy which create culturally sensitive environments for people accessing services, including training for government/agency staff, and physical spaces which reflect and value different cultures.
Encourage the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to consult multicultural groups when developing culturally sensitive curriculum materials.

Integrated and Holistic Approach

A number of action items reflected the importance of an integrated and holistic approach when working towards ending gender-based violence in the province. Participants shared actions that utilized existing assets to encourage the creation of training sessions, system navigator programs, roundtable discussions, and more. Below are some of the action items, as submitted by participants:

Develop and implement a shared space initiative/model that houses supports/services for survivors, that is advocacy focused, with education programs. • Hire a survivor of violence liaison support individual
Hold a daylong session for individuals with lived experience to inform the navigation/coordination of the system.
Implement an integrated client services model at women's centres to provide access to multiple services rather than re-directing clients to another or multiple venues for services.
Introduce land-based programming that integrates counselling and advocacy skill empowerment across generations that is integrated in our education system.
Create a roundtable to discuss specific issues of violence to improve services and coordination.
Implement a justice system navigator program. For example, a volunteer program could see an Elder present throughout the criminal justice process.

Innovative Approach

Several actions discussed by committee members included innovative programs to end violence against women and girls. These actions propose the expansion of existing programs and the development of new programs and training opportunities. Below is a list of some of the actions, as submitted by participants:

Build capacity to expand the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program across the province. Capital funding to provide education to nurses through a provincial coordinator.
Alternatives to talk therapy: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equestrian therapy;• Canine therapy; and• Art therapy.
Implement a training program for police and Crown attorneys on the benefits of restorative justice.
Implement more realistic training for service providers who work on the frontlines to help victims. The training will be more useful if it is based on a true story.
Develop (in partnership with appropriate organizations) a sexual assault support/treatment (victim) group, as well as a treatment group for perpetrators.
Develop partnerships between existing programs such as in Friendship Centres and Victim Services to provide culturally appropriate relevant victim support such as navigation.

Next Steps

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is reviewing the challenges and actions identified at the second meeting of the Minister's Committee on Violence Against Women and Girls held on February 13, 2019. Further details related to the progress and efforts of the committee will be made available throughout 2019-20 as the Steering Committee meets.

Minister's Committee on Violence Against Women and Girls
c/o Policy and Strategic Planning Division
Justice and Public Safety and the Office for the Status of Women
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6
VAWG@gov.nl.ca

