

WE REMEMBER:

**A report from the community for the inquest into the murders of
Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam**

**Prepared by Pamela Cross, with funding from the Canadian Women's Foundation
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This report is dedicated to those whose lives have been affected, directly or indirectly, by intimate partner violence, those who support and advocate for them, and the rural communities in which they have lived and, in some cases, died.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was born out of a history of community engagement related to the September 22, 2015, murders of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam. The community came together to mourn the deaths of these three women and to call for changes to prevent any such tragedy from occurring again in any community.

EVA Renfrew County, with funding from the Canadian Women's Foundation, instituted the process to hold community consultations in order to ensure that the voices of people from Renfrew County would be heard during the June 2022 inquest.

The methodology (pages 6 to 8) followed an informal community engaged research model to reach and hear from as many people as possible. The work was framed by an analysis of unique rural realities that affect both the experiences of and responses to intimate partner violence (pages 9 to 11) as well as the eight public policy questions that established the inquest's scope.

Participants had the opportunity to contribute their thoughts and ideas in response to two questions:

1. What was the impact of the murders on you? (pages 12 to 16)
2. What can be done to prevent similar tragedies in the future? (pages 17 to 21)

This report contains details about the personal impact of the murders on members of the community as well as many suggestions for systemic change, all of which are worthy of serious consideration. Of them, these perhaps warrant particular attention:

- Community agencies require adequate funding, with funding formulas that are not based strictly on population size
- Communities need to be educated on intimate partner violence, especially on what bystanders can do when they become aware of a situation of abuse
- Municipal community safety strategies should include intimate partner abuse
- Abusers who refuse to sign their terms of release should not be released
- Offenders who do not follow their terms of release should be returned to jail
- Everyone in the justice system needs ongoing education about intimate partner abuse

It is important to note that community-based agencies in this community, as in so many others, are exhausted and depleted after more than two years of serving highly vulnerable clients in the context of a global pandemic that has significantly increased the rate of intimate partner violence. Their staff and volunteers are dealing with unprecedented levels of burnout, even as expectations of them continue to grow. The fact that this state of affairs is not going to end overnight needs to be considered as the inquest process considers its response to the murders of Carol, Anastasia and Nathalie.

INTRODUCTION

While those who felt the impact of the murders of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam most profoundly were their families and friends, the entire community of Renfrew County was significantly affected.

In the days and weeks following the tragedy, people gathered both formally and informally to mourn the women's deaths, to ask one another why and how something so terrible could have happened in their community and to talk about what needed to change so nothing like this could ever happen again.

The commitment of the community to being part of that change was illustrated in the Community Impact Statement submitted by EVA (End Violence Against Women) Renfrew County (<http://evarenfrewcounty.com/>) to Basil Borutski's sentencing hearing on December 5th, 2017.

Written in close consultation with a wide cross-section of community members, including service providers, it read, in part:

"Today, we are a voice for the impact on our community. . . We are here to speak to the impact that these acts of intimate partner femicide have had on our community as well as to give a voice to our most vulnerable and silenced community members . . . For ALL of us the time is NOW to ensure that the lived realities of survivors of male violence and the voices of these 3 women's lives taken from us are heard and responded to. There has to be change."

Given this history, it is not surprising that, once the inquest was announced, the community once again wanted to find a way for the jury to hear its voices and insights. This led EVA Renfrew County to seek and obtain funding from the Canadian Women's Foundation (<https://canadianwomen.org/>) to:

"engage people in Renfrew County in consultations prior to the inquest into the murders of 3 women on September 25, 2015. This project will ensure the voices of Renfrew County people are heard. Especially because of the length of time between the murders and the inquest, it is important to bring people back together to reflect on what happened, the role of the community, how communities can take steps to prevent such a tragedy in the future and the many ways in which ongoing misogyny can create a breeding ground for serious acts of gender-based violence, including murder."

This report is the outcome of those consultations.

METHODOLOGY

The community consultation process was led by Pamela Cross, a feminist lawyer with a long history of work on the issue of gender-based violence and the law, who has worked with women's organizations in Renfrew County and other Ontario rural communities for many years. She worked closely with EVA Renfrew County throughout this process.

(<https://pamelacross.ca/>)

Accessibility

In order to ensure maximum accessibility, safety and comfort for participants, two types of consultations were held:

- i. In person, through four community meetings held in late April and early May throughout the County, in Killaloe, Cobden, Pembroke and Eganville and at different times of the day/evening
- ii. Online, for those who did not wish to engage publicly in the discussion or who, for other reasons, were not able to attend the in-person meetings.

To enhance safety, participants in both types of consultation were told that their names and identifying information would not be included in the written report. At the in-person consultations, emotional support people were available for those who needed them.

Promotion

The consultations were promoted widely, using a variety of tools:

- i. Announcements were emailed to 241 community organizations, service organizations and faith institutions as well as to 27 municipal, provincial and federal political officials
- ii. A media release was emailed to 41 media outlets: community, regional, provincial and national
- iii. The consultant was interviewed by radio stations and newspapers in the community
- iv. The consultations were promoted regularly on social media, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram
- v. Information was posted on the EVA and Women's Sexual Assault Centre's website
- vi. Paid advertisements were placed in community newspapers and on the radio

Discussion themes

The community consultations explored two general themes, with discussion focused within the framework set by the general scope of the inquest:

- What was the impact of the murders – at the time and since – on members of the community?
- What can be done, including at the community level, to prevent similar tragedies in the future?

It should be noted that in both the written consultation submissions and at the in-person meetings, people had many comments that ranged well beyond these two questions.

Tools to collect information

Several tools were used to collect information and data:

- Facilitated discussion at the community meetings, with detailed content captured by two notetakers
- Graffiti wall and ideas boxes at the community meetings, for those not comfortable speaking in public
- Relevant previously written reports and papers shared by community members
- Written input through a designated page on the EVA and WSAC websites

In addition, a number of participants in the in-person consultations provided further thoughts in writing.

Number and demographics of participants

By May 10, 2022, 22 personal written submissions from survivors of gender-based violence, community workers and concerned citizens were received.

A total of 25 people -- survivors of gender-based violence, concerned citizens, community workers, violence against women (VAW) workers, justice system workers and community media -- attended the in-person meetings.

It should be noted that many people brought multiple voices to the table. For example, professionals shared thoughts about events from their perspective as parents as well as from their professional perspective. Survivors who were also professionals working in the field shared both perspectives. Like so much of life in a rural community, who people are is not as compartmentalized as it can be in urban settings, and this was reflected in what people shared during the consultation process.

Review and analysis process

When the two consultation processes were completed, the consultant assembled, reviewed and analyzed all input prior to writing this report. That input included:

- Notes from the community meetings
- Comments written on the graffiti wall (none)
- Notes placed in the ideas box (none)
- Written input through the websites
- Other information and documents provided through the consultation process, which included:
 - “Serving Victims of Violence in Rural Communities: Challenges and Best Practices,” Deborah Kasdorff and Barbara Erb, 2010, revised 2019
 - “Eastern Ontario Rural Forums Report,” about a series of femicide forums held in three rural counties in eastern Ontario in 2016
 - “Realities in Renfrew County: violence against women and girls, a rural lens,” a 2016 presentation made by JoAnne Brooks, Centre Director, Women’s Sexual Assault Centre of Renfrew County to the Provincial Roundtable on Violence Against Women

- “Going the Distance: Supporting Rural and Remote Survivors with Family Law Issues,” Pamela Cross and Paula Wansbrough, Luke’s Place, 2016
<https://lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Going-the-Distance-August-2016.pdf>
- “Gender-Based Violence in Rural, Remote and Northern Communities,” The Learning Network, May 2021 https://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-35/index.html

Challenges

We encountered some challenges with the community consultation process:

- The length of time – almost seven years -- between the murders and the inquest means some people have “moved on” from the tragedies and/or did not want to be reminded of them
- COVID-19 and the public health protocols associated with it meant we were not able to hold the in-person consultations as early as would have been ideal
- Ongoing concern about COVID affected some people’s willingness to attend events, even by late April/early May
- The lack of a public transportation system coupled with the size of the county may have prevented some people from attending the consultations
- While we provided an online alternative, trust in the internet as well as its availability are limited in this rural community
- Among those who participated, there was a low level of understanding of the purpose of the inquest coupled with cynicism and a lack of belief that the inquest would result in meaningful change. This may have led others not to participate at all
- Some of those who participated spoke of family members, friends and/or colleagues who were survivors of intimate partner violence and who did not participate because of ongoing fears about their past or present abuser, being too embarrassed to talk about their experiences in front of other people and being afraid that their privacy would not be respected.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

Renfrew County is a big place. Covering more than 7,000 square kilometres, it is larger than the province of Prince Edward Island. Spread over that distance are 106,000 people, which is about 14 people per square kilometre. (If you take out the small urban centres of Pembroke, Petawawa, Arnprior and Renfrew, that density drops dramatically.)

Compare that to the city of Toronto: 630 square kilometres, 6 million people, 9,500 per square kilometre. The implications of the differences between living in a place where there are only 13 other living souls within a square kilometre compared to 9,499 other folks within that same space are staggering, especially for women trying to manage an abusive partner or former partner.

Many people have lived in Renfrew County for generations; others have moved here to escape big city life. As one participant, a community worker, wrote:

“Most of us choose to live in quiet rural places.”

Reports cited above, and from which the information below was gathered, have noted common realities for victims and survivors of gender-based violence who live in rural communities, many of which were articulated by participants in the consultation process, in the specific context of Renfrew County.

Prevalence of gender-based violence

The rate of police-reported intimate partner violence against women in rural, remote and northern communities is 75% higher than it is for women in urban communities.

Distance

Whether it’s a question of going to the grocery store or church, getting children to school, participating in recreational activities or trying to escape an abuser, distance is an issue for anyone living in a rural community. It’s hard to flee when there is nowhere close at hand that’s safe; be that a neighbour, a police station, a hospital or even a public place like a library or a store.

Transportation

Like most rural communities, there is no public transportation in Renfrew County. Anyone who does not have access to a car or enough money to pay for a cab can feel very trapped, very quickly, especially if their safety is at risk.

As one violence against women (VAW) worker said in “Going the Distance:”

“If you’re stuck on a farm or even in small areas, you don’t have a car and you don’t have any way to get to these places to get the help that you need . . . you’re stuck.”

Employment

Work, especially permanent, full-time jobs that pay well, are at a premium in rural communities, meaning many individuals and families make do on limited or seasonal incomes or live in poverty year-round. Lack of employment/income can make it difficult for a woman to safely leave an abuser.

Communication systems

Internet and cell service is inconsistently available, unreliable and expensive in rural communities, including Renfrew County. This can pose safety risks for a woman who needs to call for help as well as increase her feelings of isolation if she wants the support provided by a chat with a friend or family member.

The postal service also presents challenges. Whether mail is delivered or has to be picked up, often the same person sorts and distributes it, giving them a good eye into the private business of people in the community.

Isolation/Lack of privacy

Flip sides of the same coin, women in rural communities must deal with both isolation and a lack of privacy. With no close neighbours to turn to or notice when a problem arises, a woman who is being abused by her partner is at greater risk of suffering serious injuries. She can't get to help quickly if she needs it. She also doesn't can't just drop in for a quick visit with a neighbour or stop into the library for a chat, which can increase her sense of loneliness, isolation and despair.

A survivor described it like this in "Going the Distance:"

"You just feel like you're totally lost in the middle of nowhere . . . that's probably why they move you there in the first place, because of the isolation factor, and they can get away with more and they can control what you do and where you go, if you're stuck there."

At the same time, people in small communities know one another's business. People will notice a bruised face, a change in a woman's routine, her car parked outside the police station or courthouse.

This lack of anonymity/privacy can limit a woman's ability to reach out for help or information and to make plans to leave. There's just no place to hide.

Access to services

Not surprisingly, because of low population density, there are fewer services in rural communities than in urban centres. In Renfrew County, there is just one shelter for abused women. A woman may not want to go there because she lives too far away and doesn't have a car or because someone she knows or who knows her partner works there. There are just four OPP detachments spread across the County. There are not enough lawyers, especially family law lawyers, and even fewer who accept legal aid certificates.

Farm care and animals

Women living on farms face additional challenges. They likely work side by side with the abuser, creating ongoing risks of harm. Often, the woman is the one who pays the bills and keeps track of the farm business. If she wants to leave, she may be concerned that the farm will fall into disrepair or the books will not be properly kept. She will have concerns about the safety and well-being of farm animals, especially if the abuser has threatened to harm them as a way of trying to keep her from leaving. The farm may be the only family asset and her sole source of income; leaving the relationship could jeopardize her employment and economic status. She may have an intense emotional connection to the land, which keeps her in the relationship even if it is not safe.

Safety

Of course, safety for women and children living in or fleeing relationships in which they are being abused is interwoven with all of these rural realities. In addition to the safety issues already discussed, there are three other serious considerations.

- i. Guns are more prevalent in rural homes than in homes in urban areas. They have legitimate uses such as hunting to provide the family with meat and killing pests and varmints in the barn or yard, but they are also used by abusers to terrify and coercively control their partner. While only 12% of femicides in urban areas involve the use of a firearm, the rate in rural communities is more than double that, at 29%.

A survivor said this in “Going the Distance:”

“One day he told me I was going to be a hunting accident. We were up in the bush, 40 miles away, with the two children, the gun and all those bullets.”

- ii. The combination of spotty communication systems and long distances between police detachments and women’s homes means police response time can be slow; too slow for a woman being threatened or physically attacked by a partner who knows he has lots of time to do what he wants to do and get away before the police show up.
- iii. Because of small populations, there are many overlaps in people’s relationships with one another; something that is much less common in urban settings. Someone who provides services to survivors of intimate partner violence may attend the same religious institution as the person who is perpetrating that violence. Someone working for a social service agency assisting a perpetrator may also volunteer with or be related to a worker at a VAW organization. A service provider may coach a kids’ soccer team with a perpetrator or survivor. These community-based intersections mean some professionals have dual relationships with both victims/survivors and perpetrators, which can create emotional confusion and distress when crises arise.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE MURDERS ON YOU?

Responses and discussions related to this question were rich, personal, and reflected the ongoing impacts that many in the community continue to feel as a result of the murders of Carol, Anastasia and Nathalie in 2015.

People in Renfrew County remember where they were and what they were doing on September 22, 2015, just as many of us remember the details of September 11, 2001. Those memories do not seem to have faded, even after the passage of almost seven years.

The major impacts described by consultation participants provide a glimpse at the pulse of the community on the day of and in the days following the three femicides. While they are set out here by theme, they also overlap with one another. For example, sometimes one impact (re-traumatization) led to another (anger or helplessness). For this reason, it is important to consider the impacts collectively rather than singularly.

It was striking how quickly participants returned to the intensity of the emotional reactions they had on the day of the murders. At times, it was as though the murders had just occurred, rather than being almost seven years in the past.

People know one another

For many, the specific impacts of the murders were intensified because they knew the people involved.

Many knew at least one of the victims through friendship, because they worked together, were neighbours or provided services to them.

Some knew the perpetrator because they were neighbours, provided services to him or were generally aware of him in the community.

Some had connections with both the perpetrator and at least one of the victims. One such participant who, in the course of her job, worked with both the perpetrator and his victims, described her emotional reaction to the murders as “complicated.”

As one participant, a member of the community, said:

“It was so personal and such a shock.”

Re-traumatization

Based on both written and in-person submissions, it is clear that the most common impact of the murders for those who participated was re-traumatization. Whether they were a survivor or a service provider -- or both -- people spoke eloquently about how the events of that day triggered and brought back memories of their own past abuse or that of others.

“In the days after, I was still in shock, vicariously traumatized, and for several months after the incident, I was leery of unplanned visitors to my office.” (VAW worker)

“I live with this dark cloud over my head since 1992 that reappears and triggers yet another major PTSD episode which gets harder and harder to cope with or rein in. Every time, it’s the same thing. Go into hiding or be followed by law enforcement until he finds me or another target to obsess on and violate.” (survivor)

“My father [had] held a loaded shotgun in my mouth when I was six.” (survivor and VAW worker)

One participant, a survivor, said that she became hypervigilant as a result of the murders: locking and double locking her doors and windows and keeping curtains closed. Her startle reflex increased: she lives close to a shooting range and had never paid attention to the sound of gunshots before September 22, 2015, but for many months after the murders, she was highly distressed by and had a physical reaction to that sound.

Fear

Many people talked about the fear they felt on September 22, 2015, and in the days, weeks, months and even years afterwards.

“I became afraid. I [had] lived with a fairly healthy dose of invincibility, and I became afraid and had to work through that.” (justice system worker)

“I wasn’t just thinking of myself but the people I worked with at the office. I went home quickly and made sure all my windows were locked. . . My brain was in trauma mode as I took a hammer to keep with me. How that would have protected me or those around me, I have no idea. . . . I worried all day about anyone who may not have been a target but got in his way.” (VAW worker who had assisted a prior partner of the perpetrator)

“I had much anxiety [that day] for my partner and was concerned for her safety. I continually live with the anxiety of the dangers of my partner’s career. This results in added stress in our home.” (community member, partner of justice system worker)

Other participants shared similar stories of fear and panic. People wondered if they were safe, and worried about those who may not have been notified about the situation. Some talked about having generalized fear because the information they received was vague, inconsistent and lacking in detail.

A few participants talked about how they had always felt safe living in a rural community, but that this event made them afraid. For some, that fear has not yet gone away.

A participant who works in the justice system talked about being in the Pembroke courthouse on September 22, 2015, which was locked down early in the day. She said the people in

authority, who usually knew what was going on, had little information. Their uncertainty and fear fueled hers.

A VAW worker said that intimate partner violence homicides are usually announced with language such as “There is no danger for members of the public.” That was not the case this time and, as a result,:

“I felt like I was in the middle of the danger that day.”

Anger

According to consultation participants, there is still a lot of anger in Renfrew County: about the murders themselves, the lack of accurate information that day, inadequate community supports in the following days and weeks, gender-based violence and, more generally, what they perceive to be inadequate systemic responses to IPV and inadequate resources for community organizations working with victims/survivors and perpetrators of gender-based violence.

“None of these women did anything wrong. They followed the rules. No matter what you do it isn’t enough.” (neighbour of one victim)

“[There is a] naïve impression by victims that their rights matter.” (VAW worker)

“There was no follow up from my employer or manager checking in with me to see if I was okay. There was no group debrief through [my employer] to ensure we were still able to effectively deliver support to victims of violence.” (VAW worker)

“We were never given a break. . . . Always seen as competent, no one really asked how we were doing.” (justice system worker)

One participant expressed anger at a justice system that allowed one person to cause so much harm to so many people – the women he killed, their families and friends, the broader community and his own family. Another said they were angry because they don’t feel that the systems that might have been able to prevent this tragedy have acknowledged where they could have done better.

The lack of reliable and complete information on the day of the murders has become a source of anger and frustration for many people.

“Even though we had emergency protocols in place, we were not informed as to our level of danger. . . . This resulted in a complete lack of confidence in the level of security I felt for students.” (school teacher)

People reported receiving different, and at times contradictory, information from different sources. Community services were inundated with calls from frightened and concerned

members of the public and had little or no reliable information to give them. Some community and VAW workers said they received more information from social media and people outside the County than from official information sources in the community.

People were frightened, but also felt they were in the dark about what was actually going on. They were confused: Should they lock down? Go home? Stay away from windows and doors? Pick their child up from school? Cancel planned events and activities?

Several people talked about their anger at feeling silenced at the time because people in the justice system told them if they talked to one another that could have a negative impact on the trial. These people feel that, because of this, they did not get the support they needed in the weeks following the murders. As one participant, a community member, said:

“The system asked the community to stop talking about it. What did we lose in terms of forward movement by being quiet and not seizing the opportunity?”

Helplessness/despair

For some consultation participants, the events of September 22, 2015, reinforced feelings of helplessness and despair about women’s safety generally.

“You just knew if something was going to happen, it was going to happen.” (survivor, speaking about the isolation of living in a rural location)

“It affects how you look at life and relationships . . . how you continue to raise your daughters.” (justice system worker)

“An incredible feeling of helplessness. When is it going to stop and can we ever make it stop? How many women have to die. Does anyone really care? I don’t think a tragedy like this ever leaves you.” (justice system worker)

“As a father of two daughters and two granddaughters, I am concerned with the community my girls are living in.” (community member)

Participants wrote and spoke about how the murders woke them up to the vulnerability of all women in rural communities; places many of them had previously felt safe.

A community worker talked about a girls’ empowerment group she runs, which includes discussions about healthy relationships. In the first session she ran after the murders, girls expressed feelings of helplessness about the kinds of relationships they might find themselves in. As one girl put it, when discussing conflict in relationships:

“Sometimes you argue, and sometimes they kill you.”

Guilt

Just as survivors of gender-based violence often feel guilt for not being able to stop the abuser's actions, so some participants in the consultations expressed feelings of guilt for not being able to prevent the murders.

"Was there something I could have done?" (neighbour of one of the victims)

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT SIMILAR TRAGEDIES IN THE FUTURE?

Many suggestions for systemic change were offered during the community consultations. Some ideas were general; others were very specific. Some came from people with firsthand professional experience working inside the systems for which they proposed changes. Some came from people who had turned to those services for help and found them lacking in one way or another. Some came from community members who had observed system failures in other people's experiences of them. Not everyone agreed on every suggestion, but a number had unanimous interest or support.

Here are the responses to this question, organized by theme.

Communication/information sharing

Consultation participants had suggestions about communication in a community that lacks consistent and reliable cell and internet access:

- Expand and upgrade full cell service across the region so the victim/survivor can safely live, work and travel anywhere she wants to (justice system worker)

The issue of ongoing communication and information sharing related to intimate partner violence situations was of considerable concern to consultation participants. The following suggestions for systemic changes were offered:

- Improve communication between probation officers and victims/survivors so victim/survivor is fully informed about the offender's whereabouts, any conditions or limitations on his movement or activities and what she should do in the event of a breach by the offender, so she can understand the potential impact on her because of his presence in the community and make necessary safety plans (justice system worker)
- Strengthen interjurisdictional communication (community member)

Many consultation participants expressed concerns about how information was shared on the day of the murders. As noted above, the lack of detailed information coupled with inconsistencies in what people heard from different sources, created confusion, fear and, in some cases, panic across the County. Participants made the following suggestions for changes to communications systems during an ongoing crisis:

- Use an Amber Alert type of system to share information, so people know the information is reliable, consistent and accurate (community members, VAW workers, survivors)
- Focus on safety when deciding what information to share and with whom (VAW worker)

Policing

A number of participants offered suggestions for systemic change to how the police service handles intimate partner abuse:

- Expand and better publicize the Ontario Provincial Police Victim Specialist program (VAW worker)

- Require police to use a trauma-informed lens when investigating IPV; in particular, an understanding of why many victims/survivors recant or don't cooperate with a criminal investigation (VAW worker, survivors, justice system worker)
- Implement a system of community policing involving formal police services as well as others in the community to allow "providers to build relationships, both to gain trust as well as to have consistency when dealing with those 'known to police.'" (community member)
- Take what has been learned during the pandemic about remote working and apply it to policing so police can be located throughout the County rather than grouped just at the four detachments (community member)
- Develop and implement crisis management training for all police officers (VAW worker, community member)
- Create system so transfer of responsibility of a case from local police to others is well coordinated and case management continues to take advantage of expertise of local officers (community member)

Legal systems

While the situations leading to the 2015 murders were primarily connected to criminal law, some consultation participants had experiences involving family law, so suggestions for change to both systems were offered:

- Create legal systems that are fully trauma-informed (VAW worker)
- Adapt procedures in both criminal and family court to make victims/survivors feel safe; in particular, when they have to testify (survivors, VAW workers)
- Require lawyers and judges in both systems to receive ongoing education about intimate partner abuse, particularly coercive control, that would also include information about how to bring a trauma-informed approach to their work (everyone)
- Revise the framework of high-risk tables so frontline workers outside the justice system (ie VAW workers) can participate as full members (VAW worker)
- Make training for sureties mandatory so they understand their responsibilities and the consequences of not executing them (justice system worker)
- Increase access to affordable legal representation and/or legal aid certificates for victims/survivors involved with family court proceedings (VAW worker)

The laws

Two areas for possible law reform were raised during the consultations:

- Develop a protocol similar to Saskatchewan's *Interpersonal Violence Disclosure Protocol*, known as Clare's Law, which authorizes a police service to disclose certain risk-related information to a current or former intimate partner in cases where such information can assist them in making informed decisions about their safety and relationship. (<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/justice-crime-and-the-law/victims-of-crime-and-abuse/clares-law>) (survivors, VAW workers)

- Criminalize coercive controlling behaviour in the context of intimate partner relationships, to create an additional tool for law enforcement to use when intervening in a case of intimate partner violence.
(<https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/432/JUST/Reports/RP11257780/justrp09/justrp09-e.pdf>) (VAW workers, justice system workers, survivors)

Safety

The safety of victims/survivors was raised by many consultation participants, who offered a number of suggestions for systemic changes. These ideas were focused on both preventing further acts of homicide and the importance of safety in terms of the quality of the victim's/survivor's daily life:

- Ensure timely notification to victims/survivors when offender is being released (everyone)
- Stop release of offenders who decline to sign their probation orders/conditions of release (everyone)
- Ensure probation orders are provided to victims/survivors (everyone)
- Hold offenders accountable and re-arrest them if they do not follow the conditions of their release (everyone)
- Implement electronic monitoring of those charged with intimate partner abuse offences (survivors, VAW workers; some disagreement about effectiveness of EM)
- Update risk assessment tools such as ODARA and DVSR so they fully encompass all possible risk factors (justice system worker)
- Co-train VAW workers with police about risk assessment (VAW worker)
- Ensure that perpetrator involvement in programming such as PAR does not put victim/survivor at risk; for example, if programming is located close to victim's/survivor's home or workplace (community member)
- Create a registry for repeat domestic abuse offenders (community member)
- Give restraining order legislation more teeth and ensure orders are enforced (survivor)

The issue of guns elicited a range of responses:

- *"There are just too many guns around."* (community worker)
- *"If someone wants a gun, they will find a way to get one."* (community member)
- *"People who want to kill can weaponize anything."* (community worker)
- Change legislation to include an automatic lifelong firearms possession prohibition for anyone made the subject of a restraining order (community member)
- Regulate gun shows better (community worker)
- Aggressively enforce laws and rules related to gun storage and disposal to make it more difficult for a gun to fall into the wrong hands (community member)

Systems accountability

In one way or another, all consultation participants spoke (or wrote) to the importance of systems being accountable: to themselves, to other systems and, perhaps most of all, to the

communities they are intended to serve. Suggestions for systemic change to increase system accountability were wide-ranging:

- Improve connections among and between systems dealing with intimate partner violence to increase consistency and reduce how often women have to tell their stories (survivor, community member)
- Ensure systems do not place responsibility on women for their own safety (everyone)
- Increase systems transparency so community knows what those systems are doing (community member)
- Enhance funding for support services, including legal services, for community members, parties and witnesses leading up to, during and after an inquest (community member)
- Make implementation of inquest recommendations mandatory (everyone)

Resources

There was much concern at the in-person consultations as well as in the written submissions about the need for better resourcing of community services. Participants generally acknowledged that funding for community-based GBV organizations is neither adequate nor secure.

The following suggestions for systemic change were made:

- Ensure adequate funding for all community services, whether they support victims/survivors or abusers. Currently, some rely on donations to keep their doors open. It is difficult to retain good staff with insecure funding leading to part-time or contract work or a reliance on volunteers

“Often, agencies are in competition for funding resources.” (justice system worker)

- Revise funding models to reflect the unique issues of rural communities; for example, the amount of funding should not be wholly determined by population size (VAW worker)
- Establish funding for specialized supports for those working in rural areas given the unique challenges they face (justice system worker)
- Extend VQRP+ (Victim Quick Response Program) resources so victims/survivors can receive counselling for up to one year following the completion of the criminal trial (worker in the criminal justice system)
- Fund more community-based mental health services

Community engagement/accountability

Participants in the consultations did not shy away from acknowledging that, while primary responsibility for responding to and preventing intimate partner violence/femicide rests and should continue to rest with political, legal and other systems, the community also needs to play an active role. People genuinely want to find ways to end the silence that still surrounds intimate partner violence.

“To survive you have to live in a community that takes responsibility for your safety.”
(Community member)

“You can have the best or the worst safety plan in the world and it isn’t going to matter a great deal in the end. What is going to help keep you alive is someone keeping an eye on your abuser. And I don’t mean police, probation and counselling services, although all of them have a role. I mean the community – friends, neighbours, employers. . . . It was the guys who had no one that always concerned me the most. The guys whose family had turned their back on them, who were unemployed and living in poverty. Add in mental health, addictions and you’ve got a powder keg, sitting and festering and feeling angry and hard done by. . . . Bystander intervention has to be taken to a whole new level.” (justice system worker)

Suggestions for change were:

- Implement bystander education so people know what to do when they become aware of a situation of intimate partner violence (VAW worker)
- Create opportunities and venues for community members to have open conversations about intimate partner violence/femicide (community member)
- Increase community education about intimate partner violence, especially related to identifying red flags, breaking down myths (everyone)
- Use schools as a distribution system for children to bring information home about intimate partner violence as is currently done for issues like recycling and fire safety (community member)
- Develop models of intervention at the community level before the situation escalates and police/criminal law involvement is required (community member)
- Create a community of care model so all victims/survivors know where they can turn for support/help (community member)
- Create a Neighbourhood Watch program for intimate partner violence (community member)
- Ensure resources and information are available at every community event (community member)
- Offer regular community information sessions on signs of intimate partner violence and safety protocols (community member)
- Make intimate partner safety part of every municipality’s community safety strategy (community member)

CONCLUSION

I have lived most of my life in medium-sized urban centres but, over the past 20 years, my work has often brought me to Renfrew County and other rural parts of Ontario. Many times, I have been invited to share my expertise. Always, I have left feeling that those who invited me were the real experts.

My knowledge has grown immeasurably because of these opportunities to learn from people who live where long distances, no public transportation, limited cell and internet services, isolation, a lack of privacy, the presence of guns and a lack of services shape both experiences of and responses to intimate partner violence.

I've learned about the barriers and challenges in rural communities – for victims/survivors as well as for their friends and families, those who provide services to them and the whole community.

I have also seen resilience, strength, courage and wisdom in those people as they live with, escape from and work to respond to and, ultimately, eradicate, intimate partner violence.

The inquest will hear from many experts who have important knowledge to share. The community consultation process and this report capture a different kind of expertise: expertise that comes from living in a rural community where, on September 22, 2015, intimate partner violence took its worst form -- homicide --- three times in one morning.

During the consultation process, I had a unique opportunity to hear insights that are simply not available to those of us who were not here in the years, months and weeks leading up to September 22nd, during that long and terrible day, and in the weeks, months and years that followed it.

Those who participated in the consultations did so despite their doubts about whether the inquest would lead to meaningful change. They did so despite the pain and re-traumatization it caused them. They did so because, despite their ongoing grief, anger and shame that something this terrible could happen where they live, they want to be part of building the solution.