

The Importance of Coordination Initiatives as Foundations for Collaboration to Address Gender Based Violence

What is Coordination?

The idea that coordination is a key component to increasing women's safety and addressing gender based violence as a whole has a long history in both Canada and the United States. In 1980, the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) in Minnesota demonstrated that the legal response to domestic violence was ineffective because the many different systems working to address domestic violence operated separately and with differing goals. Recognition of the need for a coordinated response alone however, is not adequate to ensuring an effective response. Coordination must be intentional, with clearly defined and understood parameters and goals.

What is a coordinated response? Pence and Paymar who conducted the Duluth DAIP suggest that coordination is "an interagency effort to change the climate of tolerance toward battering¹ by institutionalizing practices and procedures which centralize safety and the notion of accountability in domestic assault cases." Coordination initiatives that are effective in improving safety facilitate and promote change in response structures, policies and practices in a way that requires these systems to collaborate and coordinate with others. Coordination initiatives that are particularly effective have a direct impact on both survivor safety and perpetrator accountability.

Coordination initiatives can also be defined more simply as cross sectoral groups working together collaboratively to increase safety and enhance the local response to gender based violence. Within a coordinated community response, all systems and community responders involved are aware of and utilize available support networks and resources to deal with gender based violence as well work toward identifying and fixing local and provincial systemic gaps that impede safety.

A Brief History of Coordination Initiatives in British Columbia and Canada

The current idea that coordination work is key to improving women's safety stems from a long history of feminist advocacy and leadership in Canada. In the 1970s and earlier, mainstream Canadian culture upheld an approach to violence against women that was victim blaming and defined violence as a private matter, one best dealt with outside the criminal justice system. Simultaneously, the 1970s saw the building of rape crisis centres and transition houses by grassroots feminists who recognized that violence against

¹ Please note this is US terminology

women was all too common and that this “behind closed doors” approach from police and the entire justice system was ineffective in keeping women safe or reducing risk.

Shifts began to occur in the 1980s that saw gender-based violence move from a private matter to a more public one that needed key systemic reforms including a coordinated response. One reform, led by Status of Women Canada, directed all levels of government to move toward an integrated response to what was then known as wife assault. The Federal Department of the Solicitor General also sent a directive to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police to encourage cooperation in charge approval in cases where assault was likely to have occurred and an ensuing national charging policy was adopted. At the same time, rape crisis centres and transition houses were quickly creating strong networks of victim support programs, often with the provision of justice-related support specific to violence in relationships, sexual assaults and child abuse.

A series of major catalysts in the efforts to increase enhanced coordination was unfortunately many deaths of women that were seen to occur, in part, because there had not been coordinated responses in those communities. The tragedy of the 1989 Montreal massacre in which 14 women were murdered was also a turning point in our country. The deaths of these women demonstrated a clear need for focus provincially and locally to the issue of violence against women; that the justice system alone could not adequately address the complicated issues. It began to be stated that all sectors needed to be at the table and above all, partnerships within the community were a necessity².

British Columbia policy and action in support of coordination was developing during this same time frame in the 1980s, with the Ministry of Attorney General putting forth the 1986 Wife Assault policy. The policy mandated a coordinated, integrated response to domestic violence by the justice system and child welfare partners. Local level action to ensure implementation of the Wife Assault policy spread across the province with core funding for a few local coordination initiatives put into place to guide implementation of the policy. The formation of many more local violence against women coordination initiatives began to take shape across BC as well as regional and provincial conferences for further development of our understanding of and commitment to cross sector coordination. The Wife Assault Policy was updated and renamed the Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy in 1993, along with a Framework Document to Guide Community Coordination to Stop Violence Against Women.

The VAWIR policy has been updated numerous times since, most recently in 2010 in response to the Lee/Park coroner’s inquest and the Representative for Children and Youth’s report on the death of Christian Lee. The policy speaks to best practices for justice and child welfare systems and mandates the implementation of integrated cross-agency policies and guidelines that promote an effective multi-agency, coordinated response to domestic violence. The goal of coordination is to minimize the risk of violence, heighten survivor safety and ensure appropriate offender management and accountability. However, there is a clear recognition in the policy that coordination efforts

² For more information on the History of Coordination in Canada and BC, go to <https://maytree.com/publications/community-coordination-improve-womens-safety/>

must include service providers from anti violence, health, housing and other social service sectors and that coordination response require a grounding in the experiences of women and those who work directly with survivors. The VAWIR policy thus mandates a coordinated, cross-sectoral response that prioritizes both individual safety and change across systems.

Although we currently do not have a parallel Sexual Assault policy in the province of British Columbia, we have seen decades of work by local sexual assault coordination initiatives, providing response and other services post-sexual assault as well as working toward better coordination and collaborative response within the systems and communities. These coordination initiatives continue to thrive across BC despite the lack of specific policy or funding for this work, with many successes to increases safety, ensuring gaps and problems are addressed using a cross-sector team approach to planning and change.

Evidence for the Importance of Coordination

The need for a coordinated response to gender based violence within all systems and at the individual level is supported empirically by Canadian and international research and coroners' inquests. For example, dating back as far as the 1996 Inquest into the murder of Rajwar Gakhal and 8 family members by Mark Chaal in Vernon, BC, numerous Coroners' Inquests have found three key components missing from the response that may have prevented homicide from occurring:

- collaboration and coordination
- risk identification and assessment
- access to specialized services.

There is a direct correlation between effective coordinated responses and survivor safety: the more coordinated the response, the greater the greater safer of the survivor. Studies have specifically shown that pro-arrest policies coordinated with other criminal justice system responses resulted in fewer re-assaults on the survivor. And safety is even further enhanced with the inclusion of other systems such as health, child welfare and social services in coordinated responses. Thus, coordination between systems has a direct trickledown effect to both survivor safety and perpetrator accountability. This is reinforced by the fact that Interagency Case Assessment Teams, a coordinated response to highest risk domestic violence, has not seen a domestic homicide for any survivor involved in a formalized ICAT. Moreover, a study (Kinney & Lau, 2018) on the work of ICATs in the province showed consensus that ICATs are a more effective response to domestic violence than traditional, uncoordinated criminal justice and community initiatives.

Research also shows that coordination initiatives can facilitate feelings of empowerment and support to survivors. Women who are accessing services know when services are working well; they also know when services are fragmented and feel unsafe or victim blaming.

Examples of Coordination Initiatives in the Province

There are a number of different coordination initiatives that address the overarching issue of violence against women/gender based violence.

Violence Against Women in Relationship (VAWIR) coordination initiatives are open membership groups that include service providers who work with survivors of domestic violence, those who work with domestic violence offenders as well as those who provide related services. These can include but are not limited to Anti-violence organizations, sexual assault centres, community-based victim assistance programs, transition houses, Indigenous organizations, RCMP, Crown Counsel, Health/Mental Health, offender services and Probation Services, to name a few.

VAWIRs identify and address service gaps and safety needs using a strategic planning model. Networking, training and agency/service information sharing is part of a typical agenda, but information about specific cases is not shared. There are often subcommittees, one of which may be an Interagency Case Assessment Team (ICAT). It may be important to note that the Ending Violence Association of BC's (EVA BC) Community Coordination for Women's Safety (CCWS) can provide training and support for BC's VAWIRs.

An ICAT is a partnership of local agencies, including police, anti-violence, child welfare, health, social service, and other agencies. These teams meet for the sole purpose of reviewing suspected highest risk case of domestic violence with a goal of increasing safety and preventing lethality. This is achieved through collaboratively identifying risk, legally and ethically sharing risk-related information and reaching agreement regarding the risk level. ICATs do not have open membership. And if any systemic issues are identified through the ICAT, they are passed on to the VAWIR Committee and EVA BC's CCWS program to be included in a solutions management process. CCWS also trains and supports ICATs across BC.

Sexual Assault coordination initiatives can be diverse in nature as well. Some communities have Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART). These teams can be grassroots in nature, with highly trained volunteers providing support to survivors attending hospitals for health care and forensics after a sexual assault. Other SARTs can be more formalized and include health care professionals such as Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners and other community professionals and organizations that work with sexual assault survivors. Other communities have sexual assault coordination initiatives designed to both provide response and other services post-sexual assault as well as work toward better coordination and collaborative response within the systems and community.

Third Party Reporting (TPR) coordination also exists. Since the 1980s in British Columbia, several local anti-violence services collaborated with police partners to implement a process for adult survivors (19 and over) to access support and to report details of a sexual assault to police anonymously. These promising local collaborative practices were developed into a provincial "Third Party Reporting" protocol in 2008 by the EVA BC's

CCWS program. CCWS supports communities to develop local interagency protocols and to implement and maintain the TPR protocol. The BC TPR Protocol is guided by a provincial TPR Work Team comprised of CCWS, EVA BC, BC Association of Chiefs of Police, RCMP “E” Division, Vancouver Police Department Sex Crimes Unit, BC Association of Municipal Chiefs of Police, and BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

Why are Coordination Initiatives Effective?

Coordination initiatives enhance survivor safety and perpetrator accountability in numerous ways. First, coordination committees help identify and bring together all key players in a community linked to gender-based violence. This identifies and acknowledges the existing work in a community, breaking the isolation and silo effect that so often exists in communities, while also mitigating duplication of effort and services. It also helps build relationships that can bridge gaps between service providers and systems who work from differing lenses and mandates. This promotes understanding and knowledge about both the capacity and limitations that each community partner faces, allowing realistic safety measures to be developed. Moreover, improved knowledge of resources, mandates and processes that committee members have facilitates a survivor being well-informed of options and limitations to guide her choices. Coordination initiatives promote diversity and mutual respect amongst partners, prioritizing survivor-centred service that puts enhancing safety and perpetrator accountability at the core of all coordination efforts.

Coordination initiatives also provide the opportunity for players at the table to analyze their response/service from the point of view of women’s safety which encompasses learning to define what “safety” means through the lens of women with lived experience, thereby broadening their perspective of safety beyond their own professional lens. Such coordination initiatives may also be a catalyst for learning about marginalized groups and the gaps that directly impact these groups as well as other organizations that may typically not be seen as anti-violence organizations or working with survivors. This can result in advocacy from members of a professional community to make substantive changes to their policy or practice including new processes, agreements or protocols for more consistent and supportive responses to survivors and increased accountability for perpetrators. This can also contribute to heightening safety in areas where access to services may be limited or to increasing services to marginalized groups by heightening accessibility through new initiatives, services, protocols and increased knowledge of how to appropriately provide service to individuals from marginalized groups.

Coordination initiatives are effectiveness as well because arguably they are still a grassroots, survivor-centred approach that utilizes local community strengths. Coordination initiatives typically have a number of formalized documents that provide structure for the initiative. Examples of these documents include Memorandums of Understanding; Mission, Value and Purpose Statements; Best Practice Protocols; Consent Forms; New Member packages; Membership Roles and Responsibilities and other documents that structure the initiative. As well, documents pertaining to

confidentiality and privacy are integral to these initiatives. A key concern in the anti-violence sector is ensuring client privacy rights and a client's right to decision-making/self-determination. One essential component of formalized coordination initiatives is the integration of privacy legislation into the core documents of the initiative. These formalized documents and structure helps focus the work of the initiative but also help create the conditions for more seamless service for survivors. They also facilitate procedures for follow-up and follow through that ensures survivors do not fall through the cracks once any one community service is accessed.

Creating this formalized structure can be time consuming, however, working through this process as an initiative can be valuable to working through difference, finding common ground and setting a clear stage for the role and work of the committee. It helps to clarify mandates, roles and responsibilities and ensures a consistent understanding of the initiative's goals. It can also provide guidance and support when external challenges such as community pressure arise. This formalized structure, including Memorandums of Understanding between partners, can also promote continuity within systems that have high staff turnover. Documentation also creates an ongoing history of the initiative that can be shared with new members or organizations who may not recognize the role or value of the initiative.

Partnerships created within coordination initiatives can also help service providers lend credibility to other partners and organizations that the survivor may be hesitant to access. Being able to speak to a survivor about the trusting relationship you have with another organization may help create trust for the survivor. Professional connections also tend to increase access for survivors. Furthermore, coordinated responses can decrease the stress and potential for re-traumatization a survivor may experience by minimizing the number of times a survivor has to tell her story and by having a point person from the coordination initiative that gives the survivor updates and direction on things such as a safety plan or risk management plan from an ICAT.

Coordination initiatives are also effective because they directly lead to major systemic changes. For example, ideas stemming from local coordination initiatives have resulted in the creation of Interagency Case Assessment Teams; the Third Party Report Protocol as well as numerous innovative sexual assault protocols between anti-violence organizations, hospitals and RCMP. Coordination initiatives have also led to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction's Persons Fleeing Abuse Policy and local initiatives for animal care for women fleeing abuse, to name a few.

Three Levels of Coordination

Coordination initiatives work towards systemic change on three levels:

Individual: An enquiry on behalf of a survivor about policy or practice, carried out by a community responder, in collaboration with an individual system responder to improve the quality or flow of the response that the survivor receives.

Local: Enquiry done within the system about policy or practice, by the system responder into the reason for the problem affecting the survivor and possible changes needed to improve an overall response at the local level. Group enquiry and strategic planning is done at a local coordination initiative to analyse whether this problem requires influence at a higher level of authority to improve policy or practice, or whether this can be achieved at the local level.

Provincial: When gaps in policy, procedures or practice which are affecting survivors' safety cannot be addressed at the local level, group enquiry must result in recommendations to a higher level of authority for further analysis and change.

CCWS' Role in the Three Levels of Coordination

Community Coordination for Women's Safety supports communities to increase safety from gender based violence within this three-tiered change model in the following ways:

Individual Supports: Community Development

To promote the development of and coordination among cross sectoral partnerships, CCWS supports individuals in communities across the province who are endeavouring to improve the safety response for a survivor of gender based violence. CCWS provides phone and email support to community based resources and system representatives in all communities in BC, as well as web-based resources and intersectoral cross-regional teleconference discussion groups on topics raised from service providers around the province. CCWS is able to connect responders to others in the province who are addressing the same issues and have found a model for improved coordination.

Local: Community Development ~ workshops, training, intersectoral issues analysis, strategic planning

Because coordination initiatives include members from many different sectors with differing mandates, roles and responsibilities, one challenge can be effective collaboration which typically requires the implementation of appropriate and intentional coordination tools. The goal of the community development component is to assist these communities in working together more efficiently and effectively, as well as to assist communities seeking to develop new coordination initiatives.

CCWS Regional Coordinators work with communities, providing information, tools and support for team building, conflict resolution, decision making and intersectoral issues analysis and strategic planning.

The Program's community development work also supports and is supported by the development of tools such as resources and backgrounders on legal/policy issues.

Provincial: Intersectoral Solutions Management

The CCWS Provincial Working Group represents a critical component of the program: the cross sectoral group is in place to discuss problematic policy and program implementation issues and create solutions to these issues. Members include a broad range of system and community-based sectors working effectively within a solutions-based model.

By creating the opportunity for discussion and analysis across disciplines and agencies, the Working Group meetings provide a forum for actively resolving systemic issues that have been raised across the province at the local level. Recommendations and strategies developed by the Working Group are brought forward through the various sectors represented at the table including relevant federal and provincial government ministries, police/RCMP and provincial non-profit organizations.

Discussion papers and backgrounders prepared by the Legal Analyst help to inform and structure Working Group meetings. The focus is on bringing forward issues that have been identified by Regional Coordinators as being of particular concern to rural and isolated communities and marginalized groups within those communities.

Working Group members also provide technical expertise regarding regional or local practice and legal or policy-related questions. This information is being used by Program staff to help communities or regions effectively resolve local or regional issues.

CCWS Resources for Communities and Coordination Initiatives

CCWS supports the work of communities and coordination initiatives through the creation of numerous Coordination Initiative resources. Many of our resources can be found on our website (www.endingviolence.org) including:

Step by Steps: Tools for Developing a Coordinated Response to Violence Against Women (2011): <http://endingviolence.org/publications/step-step-tools-developing-coordinated-response-violence-women/>

Building Partnerships to End Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Rural and Isolated Communities (2006):<http://endingviolence.org/publications/building-partnerships-to-end-violence-against-women/>

Interagency Case Assessment Team (ICAT) information: <http://endingviolence.org/prevention-programs/ccws-program/interagency-case-assessment-teams-icats/>

ICAT Research Project, Summary of Results, June 2018: <http://endingviolence.org/publications/icat-research-project-summary-of-results-june-2018/>

Third Party Reporting (TPR) information: <http://endingviolence.org/prevention-programs/ccws-program/third-party-reporting-tpr/>

Community Safety Planning in Indigenous Communities, March 2018: <http://endingviolence.org/publications/community-safety-planning-in-indigenous-communities-march-2018/>

In Custody No Contact Orders, March 2018: <http://endingviolence.org/publications/in-custody-no-contact-orders-march-2018/>

If you are unable to find a resource, or would like to connect with us about the work of CCWS, please contact us at ccws@endingviolence.org or 604 633-2506 ext. 15.