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B.C. Domestic Violence Plan Aims To Help Immigrant, Aboriginal, Refugee Women

CP | By The Canadian Press
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VICTORIA - The B.C. government is developing a domestic violence program that would include specific approaches to help aboriginal, immigrant, refugee and disabled women.

Children's Minister Stephanie Cadieux said Wednesday that various anti-violence groups were consulted as part of a three-year plan to provide new and enhanced services for vulnerable women and kids.

The 2008 murders of three children by their mentally father in Merritt, B.C., prompted the government to introduce the new action plan to tackle domestic violence.

A report by children's representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond found the children in the Merritt case, aged five to 10, could have been saved if B.C. had an effective domestic violence prevention program.

In response, the province established the Provincial Office of Domestic Violence in 2012 to co-ordinate government programs and develop the current comprehensive plan, Cadieux said.

At the time, she said 20,000 people would be trained to spot and respond to domestic violence.

On Wednesday, Cadieux said 18,000 people, including school personnel, police, and Children's Ministry staff have received the training.

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She said the government already spends \$70 million a year on prevention and intervention programs dealing with domestic violence, including transition houses and victim services.

"But the community has always said there's more work to be done, and we agree there's more work to be done," she said. "The \$5.5 million that we'll be adding is added to target specific areas of need within that plan."

She said the new program will consider ways to provide social housing and transportation for women and children in rural and remote communities.

Community groups will also provide input into intervention programs for perpetrators to hold them accountable as the number of domestic violence units is increased, Cadieux said. The Justice Ministry currently has four such units in Vancouver, New Westminster, Abbotsford and Victoria.

"They have committed to two more domestic violence units and there is funding allocated to the tune of \$1 million to help with the startup and implementation of more of those," she said. "The question of where they are and how many is still to be determined."

The first year of the plan will involve development of more prevention programs while existing public awareness campaigns, including

Erase Bullying, Together to Reduce Elder Abuse and Be More Than a Bystander are bolstered and the Justice Ministry continues to explore the possibility of domestic violence courts.

Shashi Assanand, executive director of Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multicultural Family Support Services, said the Provincial Office of Domestic Violence has made genuine efforts to consult with agencies that provide services to the most vulnerable people.

"This has given our agency the much-needed opportunity to share our learning and bring to the attention of the government the challenges immigrant and refugee women face when dealing with the social and the legal system."

Filed by Jesse Ferreras |