

Voices from the Front Lines

Abridged Version

A report of

*The Middlesex County Coordinating Committee to
End Woman Abuse*

&

*The London Coordinating Committee to
End Woman Abuse*

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NOTE ON THE ABRIDGED VERSION

The full version of the report, *Voices from the Front Lines*, is available on the Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children website www.crvawc.ca. What follows is the Executive Summary, which provides context for understanding the particular problems facing rural Middlesex County outlined in the section entitled, The Rural Situation.

This document is intended to inform discussions between the Middlesex County Coordinating Committee and the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse on how to address the urban – rural divide and the resulting inequities.

“We place unrealistic expectations on women who have already been abused. They have a maximum stay of forty-two days in shelter. They have to get through three locked doors and bulletproof glass every time they enter or leave. They are homeless, without money and they are expected to move through in an average of twenty-one days when there is no housing. We expect that they can move out and function and thrive. It is a travesty that we contribute to the devastation of women’s souls. Their children are upset; everything is awful. We contribute; we don’t stand up and say women and children deserve better. We cannot continue to support this service delivery. Change the paradigm. If we continue to support this, how are men accountable for their behaviour, the stresses and the blame and the shame? This is what we do. We do this. We contribute to this. We are all creative and we need to try to figure out ways to make a patchwork quilt of support. We should be ranting more.”

“The difficulties are more severe here [in rural Middlesex County] than in London; there are always less options. Services have less money and less staff. For women, contact with others is very difficult. It’s hard to see past barriers of transportation and isolation, so women are shadowed by a sense of desperation.”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report is the result of interviews and focus groups conducted between August 2003 and September 2004. The purpose of the report is to examine gaps in service, especially as they pertain to the rural area of Middlesex County. I felt it would be important to contextualize the gaps in services in the rural areas of Middlesex County by examining these rural services against the background of those available in London, the urban centre of the county.

I interviewed most members of both the London and the Middlesex County Coordinating Committees to End Woman Abuse. I also interviewed other service providers and professionals whom respondents and my Advisory Committee suggested could be helpful. In total, I conducted sixty-four interviews and five focus groups. Every individual with whom I spoke has contributed something to this report. Individuals who wished to be named in the report and the organizations they represent are included in Appendix 1.

What is presented in the following pages is a snapshot of the movement to end violence against women in London and Middlesex County at a particular point in time. As the report has evolved, I have come to see it as a facilitated discussion between people who work with abused women and their children and/or men who abuse. The experts cited here work in different ways, in different settings, in different sectors and professions. I think that an exchange of perspectives and insights and ideas may be a fruitful way to improve our responses. We are all working for the safety of women and children. Much as I have tried to truly represent the voices of those with whom I spoke, I take final responsibility for the views and perspectives presented here.

Finding a Common Understanding of Woman Abuse

Do we all have the same definition of woman abuse? Do we all use the same theoretical framework for identifying and analyzing the effects of woman abuse? Because the respondents in this study work in such varied settings, it seemed important to find out if there is some common ground that we all stand on as we respond to those with experiences of woman abuse. My first thought was to ask respondents if they have a feminist understanding of woman abuse, but it soon became clear that “feminist” is itself a term that has different meanings for different people. Instead, I asked respondents if they use the Power and Control Wheel as a basis for understanding woman abuse.

The wheel is important because it defines woman abuse as an attempt to have power over and control of a woman. A few respondents, none of whom were members of the Coordinating Committees to End Woman Abuse, were not familiar with it. Most, but not all respondents, acknowledged using the power and control wheel as the basis of their understanding of woman abuse. And finally, there was a set of respondents that use the Power and Control Wheel along with other theoretical frameworks. An important critique did emerge about the Power and Control Wheel, highlighting the fact that it was developed and has been used with little attention to how racism, or for that matter

classism, homophobia, ableism or other forms of oppression intersect with the problem of violence against women.

Some respondents raised the concern that our definition of woman abuse is too narrow. Others spoke of the fragmentation of service that goes along with a narrow conception of woman abuse as intimate partner violence. The fact is that women who find themselves in relationships marked by intimate partner abuse often grew up in a violent home, or were emotionally neglected or sexually abused. For example, one counsellor reported that she is now seeing the daughters of women whom she counselled years earlier. A narrow definition of woman abuse obscures the connectedness of different forms of violence against women and ignores the fact that the roots of the problem may lie in childhood victimization. It also leads to the concentration of resources in efforts to deal with only one piece of an intersecting puzzle. Funding mandates were also mentioned as a factor making it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to respond holistically to violence against women.

Contextual Societal Challenges

There was a strong perception amongst respondents that we are dealing with an increasingly complex set of problems. Few respondents reported dealing with women whose only problem was woman abuse. Generally, there was a consensus that when woman abuse is an isolated problem and women have support and are financially independent, they are more able to leave and to stay out of abusive relationships. The trend described by many, however, is one of people with a range of interrelated problems and, at best, a piecemeal response to those problems.

Social service cuts, and parallel cutbacks in health and education, were identified as a major factor exacerbating these difficulties. Respondents spoke often of the problems posed by poverty and of the increasing marginalization of families who are living below the poverty line, a situation that has unquestionably been worsened by cutbacks. Some felt that epidemic rates of violence against women and an increasing number of child deaths have been fed by poverty. They called attention to the fact that abuse forces women and children to live in poverty, for lifetimes, and sometimes for generations.

Specifically policies governing the way Ontario Works is administered were identified as a grave problem. There were strong feelings that reductions to social assistance have really hurt people. Several respondents spoke of the damaging legacy of the Harris government. They were disturbed by a 'collective yawn' at the condition of the most vulnerable.

People with mental illness have also suffered terribly in these circumstances, and many of them are women. The lack of social supports has resulted in many people with mental illness being jailed. 25-35 percent of the prison population suffers from mental illness, leading Justice Edward Ormston, from the Mental Health Division Court, to remark, "Jail is the only place open to mentally ill people twenty-four hours day. Often the price of homelessness is jail."

Increasingly Complex Lives

There was a large degree of consensus among respondents that the situations they deal with are becoming more complex, and that intervention and resource needs have intensified. For the most part, there was strong agreement that the growing needs and the bigger and bigger crises facing abused women and their children, and sometimes the men who abuse them as well, are related to poverty and cutbacks.

Complex problems are stressful for those trying to address them, as well as for those experiencing them. Respondents frequently reported feeling overwhelmed and ill-equipped to deal with the situations they faced. Implicitly or explicitly, they also named the problem as being larger than any single organization and called attention to the need for a systemic response. These are not problems that will go away or even remain at a consistent level if inaction and inattention is our response. The misery and suffering of women and children will increase and the ensuing societal costs will intensify with each new generation born into hopelessness.

Dealing with problems of woman abuse, addictions and mental health in the criminal justice system is the most costly option of all. The situation demands a great deal more early intervention and prevention efforts.

Layers Of Marginalization And Isolation

Isolation is both an effect of violence and a risk factor for experiencing violence. When women are marginalized and isolated for any reason, their risk of victimization increases. Isolation and marginalization occur for a variety of reasons, including language, cultural, racial identity, living in a rural area, poverty, physical or mental health problems, age, addictions, participation in the sex trade or being in conflict with the law. These women can be victimized through interpersonal violence, racism, social exclusion and/or extreme poverty.

Being aware of the multiple ways in which a woman can be marginalized helps us to recognize the structures that create such inequity. The Kitchen Table Project, a study of women in the mental health system that was coordinated locally, tells us that “eighty percent of participants spoke of either childhood abuse and/or violence in current relationships.” Those working in addiction services have noted a similar link. Despite a growing understanding that woman abuse is intricately linked to mental health problems and addictions in the lives of women, none of the sectors are fully prepared to deal with women whose lives are complicated by all of these factors

A study conducted by the Family Consultants of the London Police Force demonstrates that in the absence of appropriate support for people with mental health problems, they are criminalized, overwhelmingly for minor offenses. In light of this, a respondent explains that in closing down hospitals for the mentally ill, “We have trans-institutionalized. We have moved people from hospitals to jails.”

Many women who are homeless also have mental health problems and/or substance abuse problems. Some of them are involved in exchanging sex for food, shelter and

perhaps drugs. We can surmise from the research mentioned above and other similar studies that the vast majority of these women are dealing with past and/or current abuse experiences. Yet most of our services are not able to deal with the complex issues that these women present.

The First Nations women who participated in this study readily acknowledged that violence against women is a serious problem for them. These respondents situated violence against women in the broader context of colonization, a process that has had a devastating impact on First Nations peoples. Author and editor Kim Anderson further explains the link between residential schools and CAS involvement in the lives of First Nations people. First Nations respondents saw the solutions to woman abuse as being contingent upon addressing the gamut of social and health problems that racism and colonization has caused in their communities. And they clearly see real solutions as emerging from their own traditional cultural practices.

Respondents also spoke eloquently about the challenges of abused women who are new to Canada and about the barriers that they confront, both from their own communities and from our services. Although several respondents commented on the challenges in diversifying staff to better reflect the changing demographics of our community, this report does include the voices of racially and ethnically diverse people. Their insights are tremendously important to us and will continue to be as we plan to meet the emerging challenges of our community.

The Interdependence of Women and Children: Working Across Sectors

The fact that children's wellbeing is dependent upon the wellbeing of their parents and, in most cases, upon that of their mothers, is a simple truth that we can all too easily lose sight of in our institutional responses to woman abuse. Many respondents expressed concern that new legislation focusing on the potential harm of children witnessing abuse reinforces a separation between the interests of abused women and their children.

The dramatic increase in the number of children going into CAS care in our community has received a lot of attention recently. A major research study shows that woman abuse, poverty, maternal depression, impaired parenting capacity and intergenerational CAS involvement are major contributing factors to this problem. The Eligibility Spectrum is a decision making tool used by CAS workers that outlines how to assess for risk much more clearly than previously was the case. Nonetheless, some respondents questioned whose interests are served by a focus on risk assessment. They were concerned that risk assessment can be misused, especially by inexperienced workers.

The decision to move from a risk assessment model to a strengths-based model is provincial one, not a local one. Nonetheless, a critical step towards this shift is building a good collaborative working relationship between the child protection sector and the violence against women sector. This community has recognized that and has taken positive steps towards building and sustaining relationships. This can go a long way

towards helping abused women to care for and keep their children, but it cannot make up for the lack of services when they are needed, whether for the children or the mother. In contrast to the ambivalence and outright criticism the new legislation intended to deal with child witnesses of woman abuse has garnered from the VAW sector, the Community Group Treatment program is widely accepted and highly regarded. This model of intervention provides concurrent groups for children who have witnessed abuse and their mothers. This approach allows CAS and VAW workers to work closely together and to learn from each other. They pool resources and both deepen their understanding of woman abuse and child abuse.

While many respondents expressed their appreciation for this program, others did point out its limitations. It is not able to adequately address the needs of severely traumatized children who require individual attention. Because all of the available funding to assist child witnesses was poured into a single initiative, there are no resources to assist those children. This is yet another example of how we cannot design, “one size fits all” programs and expect them to adequately and effectively respond to the needs of an entire community.

The real challenge in the situation is for policy makers. We must find ways to address the roots of the interrelated problems we are seeing; children going into CAS care, woman abuse, poverty, mental health problems and intergenerational involvement with CAS. This means investing more in prevention and early intervention efforts.

Using The Law To Hold Abusers Accountable And Supporting Women Through The Criminal Justice System

In Canada historic reforms to improve a criminal justice response to intimate partner abuse have included a number of components: development and implementation of pro-charge and pro-prosecution policies; training programs for criminal justice professionals; support and advocacy for victims; court-mandated programs for batterers; and public education initiatives aimed at conveying the message that family violence is unacceptable.¹ Building on this foundation, Ontario introduced a comprehensive, province-wide Domestic Violence Justice Strategy in response to the May/Illes Inquest and the 1999 recommendations of the Joint Committee on Domestic Violence. On December 13, 2004, The McGuinty Government launched a new Action Plan on Domestic Violence. They describe it as a proactive plan that puts new emphasis on prevention and better community support for abused women and their children.

Although the pro-charging policies have resulted in some unintended negative consequences, the majority of intimate partner abuse victims nonetheless express strong support for the pro-charge policy. An intimate partner abuse victim needs to know that if she calls the police to report an incident of violence, the police will come and will, at a

¹ This discussion of the national context references the *Final Report of the Ad Hoc Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group Reviewing Spousal Abuse Policies and Legislation*, prepared for the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Justice. The full report is available at: <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/fm/reports/spousal.html>

minimum, stop the immediate incident of violence. The pro-charging policy promotes a strong and consistent first line of response by the criminal justice system that contributes to ensuring the safety and security of intimate partner abuse victims.

National research clearly documents some frustrations with the mandatory prosecution policy, by prosecutors, victims and the public alike. Some prosecutors express unhappiness about being expected to prosecute cases absent a cooperative victim/witness. Some victims do not want to support a prosecution against, or to testify against, a partner with whom they have reconciled. Locally, respondents generally recognized the mandatory charging policy as an important historical development that helped enormously to take woman abuse from the realm of the private out into the public. Yet some respondents voiced doubts, noting that it has some downsides as well. National research also shows that some victims are of the view that the criminal justice system still does not treat intimate partner abuse seriously enough, as reflected by the sentences imposed on intimate partner abusers. As well, members of the public often voice opposition to a process or policy that does not uniformly lead to the traditional criminal justice response, namely, incarceration.

Domestic violence courts have been established to permit a focus on the special nature of woman abuse cases by court officials who have an understanding of the dynamics of the problem. Coordination within the justice process and beyond is supported through specially tailored court case management strategies. Systems or protocols have been developed to support New Crown Attorneys. London does not have a dedicated domestic violence courtroom, but rather employs a domestic violence process. There is a domestic violence team of crowns with specialized training. All crowns get specific domestic violence training, but the team has more. This team supervises all prosecution of domestic violence cases.

Abusive partner intervention and treatment programs are offered in most Canadian jurisdictions. All programs offer group counselling, sometimes supplemented by individual counselling and a specialized curriculum, generally based on the dynamics of power and control. In London Changing Ways has the responsibility for delivering group counselling to men who abuse their partners. The agency also has a Women's Contact Coordinator to work with the women whose partners are in the program.

Despite some difficulties, and though empirical studies are few, there is early evidence to suggest that risk assessments used in safety planning for victims of intimate partner violence may provide additional insights, help victims adopt new safety measures or help parties match safety planning to specific dangers. As part of Ontario's Domestic Violence Justice Strategy, police will be collecting data using a Domestic Violence Supplementary Report Form (DVSR), which includes a risk assessment component.

Auditing, monitoring and accountability mechanisms allow jurisdictions to assess the effectiveness of strategies and to ensure compliance. To track the progress of cases through the justice system and to assess the impact of program and process changes on an ongoing basis, a jurisdiction needs an integrated information system. The capacity of jurisdictions to track cases from the point of a call to police through sentence completion

is severely limited, as, for the most part, justice information systems do not link components (police, the Crown and Correctional Services).

There is increasing recognition that a coordinated response is required; one that integrates criminal justice, social service, mental health and community responses. The fact that this goal has been difficult to achieve is not surprising. For one thing, criminal justice institutions are asked to make links to social services agencies in domestic violence cases that they are not asked to make in other types of crimes. Traditionally, the overriding objective of the criminal justice system has been the detection and sanction of perpetrators of crime. Reforms that address empowerment and support of victims have challenged the legal system's culture, processes and priorities. The ambiguity of goals can cause difficulty at the operational level for police and the Crown. Nevertheless there is a solid base of relationships in this community that facilitates communication when tension occurs.

Policing within the geographic area of Middlesex County is a complicated affair. There are several services at work; the London Police Service is responsible for the City of London, the Strathroy-Caradoc Police Service is responsible for the town of Strathroy and Caradoc Township, and the Ontario Provincial Police are responsible for rural areas of Middlesex County.

The First Nations Reserves of Muncey and Chippewa and the settlement of Oneida have their own services. These services are not held accountable under the Police Service Act or the Adequacy Standards.

Inevitably there are inconsistencies in the organization of responses to woman abuse, in philosophies about woman abuse and in the experiences of both police and community members.

Clearly, London has been a leader in formulating and implementing effective criminal justice responses to woman abuse. This leadership has been widely recognized. But the intense learning process of the London Police Service has not been paralleled in the other services that work throughout Middlesex County. Cultural practices that discourage reporting are one reason why women may not report abuse. Fragmented policing with varying standards and accountability is another.

Still, several officers from smaller police services outside of London noted that there may be a definite advantage for women who report to them because the same officer will be able to follow their case through to resolution. As a result, they will get more individualized attention and have better access to immediate information about what is going on in their case.

No provisions for transportation for those living outside of the city have been built into the specialized domestic violence process and the Victim Witness Assistance Program, and this means that many men and women face significant challenges when they need to access them.

The result of this uneven development is, not surprisingly, an uneven response to woman abuse throughout Middlesex County.

Negotiating Custody and Access, Child Support Payments and Property Settlements

While much attention has been paid to the criminal response to woman abuse since the 1980s, the family law system and the potential pitfalls it holds for abused women have been largely ignored. The provision of legal aid for women leaving abusive relationships is at best inadequate. This lack of adequate legal aid funding in the family law system has had devastating repercussions for women needing legal assistance. This grossly inadequate legal support for abused women must be considered against the backdrop of an increasingly well organized father's rights movement determined to undermine women's legal rights.

London is home to two programs that assist people to deal with the family law system. In 1998, a local lawyer who had represented primarily women, many of whom were abused, changed the nature of her practice. She met with representatives of front line services to propose that she work on-site in shelters and other agencies that assist abused women to provide one on one legal advice on family matters.

The service provided encompasses more than straight legal information. The lawyer is aware of a lot of resources and makes whatever referrals might be most helpful. Feedback from women and from agencies indicates that this service is helpful because it's on-site, it deals with women's specific situations and information is kept confidential. This is a unique program that has not been replicated elsewhere. It has been carefully planned to address the significant gaps in service for women in the family law system. It has been informed by a sound knowledge of the dynamics of woman abuse. It deals with abused women empathetically and recognizes the significant structural barriers they face in the system. While it cannot make up for inadequate legal aid allocations and the difficult access to committed and qualified family law lawyers, it does offer women a significant degree of support in dealing with their legal situation when they separate from a controlling partner.

As well, there is the Family Law Information Centre, a province-wide program operating in London as well as several other cities. The Centre is a three-way partnership between the Attorney General's office, Legal Aid Ontario and the Family Court in London. It offers the services of the three partners within the physical space of the court-house.

The FLIC offers a range of services, including a free information session, entitled "Couples Apart, Parents Forever," two nights each month. The Mediation Service has a Mediation Referral Coordinator who is the first point of contact. She is part of a team that includes a social worker and Advice Counsel. She provides an outline of family law matters and she may interview someone to find out more about why they are there. She asks about woman abuse.

People can book mediations through the court-house office. There is a screening process for readiness to mediate that assesses emotional readiness, capacity, mental health and addictions and power imbalances. The aim is to assess if the two people can sit down together and work out a fair agreement. On-site mediation is for anyone who is in court that day and wants to mediate short-term issues.

Advocates for abused women have long had concerns about abused women entering into mediation. They point out that the power imbalance in the relationship can carry over into the mediation process, resulting in women being further controlled or placed in danger. The staff at FLIC were less ready to dismiss mediation as an option for abused women.

FLIC staff demonstrate an awareness and understanding of woman abuse. Where possible, they have adapted and modified processes to help ensure both identification of and safety for abused women. Although it was not designed to meet the needs of abused women, the FLIC program has made accommodations. Sensitive staff can provide valuable support to abused women, but mediation should be a choice. Women should not turn to mediation only because they have exceeded their legal aid hours and this is their only option.

Services under Stress

Abused women and their children, and even abusive men, are facing increasing degrees of stress in their lives. More people turn to helping agencies with complex problems. Respondents in this study identified sources of pressure. Some, such as funding difficulties and staff workloads, are intricately related. Diminishing and unstable core funding has moved agencies to apply for more grant funding. Increasingly, grant writing is becoming an important skill in the violence against women movement. As the demand for agencies to respond to more with less continues to grow, respondents see themselves reaching their limits.

Respondents discussed the impact of working without sufficient resources, with increased workloads, more complexities and more administrative responsibilities. Some even voiced concern about being able to maintain their quality of service.

Those who work with abused women and children face pain and violence. Sometimes they absorb this, resulting in vicarious trauma. While there is still some resistance to acknowledging vicarious trauma, organizations are increasingly developing strategies to deal with it.

Accomplishments and Steps Forward

The Violence Against Women sector has met many challenges and has continued to find creative and innovative ways of working. Respondents reported many things they were proud of, including having developed a compassionate leadership and having kept the problems of societal violence and women abuse in the public eye by encouraging discussion and dialogue. The outcome has been more positive and effective community responses to woman abuse. Women in crisis now have a much better referral network they can turn to, including anonymous help lines and more recent innovations such as

Shelternet. Respondents also pointed to positive systemic changes, such as the availability of Public Health Nurses to work in shelters, the OPP decision to have a Domestic Violence Coordinator, courses on domestic violence that Ontario Crown Attorneys must now take, the stalking law, outreach programs that visit high schools and the RUCS Protocol in the mental health sector.

The Growth and Development of a Movement

Unquestionably, the violence against women sector has become more professional since its inception in the mid-70s. In the comments of respondents, I uncovered both a dialogue and a debate around what we are gaining and what we are losing in this shift. There was a feeling that funders have helped to drive the move to professionalize by requiring the hiring of professionals. A number of respondents expressed concerns about professionalization. Respondents saw professionalization, and the accompanying bureaucratization, as having a significant impact on the way services have developed, and they sometimes voiced concern that this trend is silencing and excluding those who have experience and a great deal of commitment in the movement to end violence against women. Nonetheless, respondents report that there is a mix of people who have entered the sector on their professional qualifications and those who have been trained through experience. In the final analysis, whether or not they see it as a positive trend, respondents agree that the delivery of violence against women services is being professionalized. There are still important discussions to be had around this potentially sensitive issue.

Given the degree to which funders drive the professionalization of woman abuse services, it would be a sensible investment on their part to provide adequate allocations to organizations for the professional development of their staff. The violence against women sector will benefit from dialogue about what kind of training and professional development is most needed and an examination of current initiatives. Those planning, delivering and evaluating training and professional development opportunities need to pay careful attention to what is being taught to ensure that everyone who is working in the sector has a foundational knowledge of woman abuse and its effects.

Working Towards Cultural Diversity and Inclusivity

Respondents spoke about a variety of challenges organizations face in structuring services to become more diverse and inclusive.

A feminist analysis of woman abuse points out the fact of gender inequality and its devastating effects. It is an analysis that questions and challenges cultural norms of how power is distributed. Inevitably, it is an analysis that will meet with resistance. The work of coalition building requires compromise and searching for common ground. The LCCEWA has been enormously successful in marking common ground with the mainstream institutions of Canadian society. As Canadian society diversifies, the challenge is to continue seeking common ground with individuals and organizations new to Canada.

Organizations are recognizing the need to diversify their staff and to provide services to the diversity of communities that make up our society. Across Languages has been working with violence against women services for many years to provide ethical and confidential interpreting. Across Languages is an important bridge between violence against women services and diverse communities. Domestic violence training is provided to all interpreters whether they expect to do this work or not.

In 1992, the Multicultural Committee was formed as a subcommittee of the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse. Now disbanded, this committee represented a significant effort to build bridges with a variety of culturally and ethnically diverse communities. Members of the committee got training from agencies, learned about their visions and missions and met staff, volunteers and clients. Respondents who had participated in the Multicultural Committee spoke of being situated between the often-divergent views of women's anti-violence agencies and newcomer communities.

Many respondents spoke of the difficulty of getting caught between conflicting value systems. It is essential not only to acknowledge that we are working with sometimes-conflicting value systems, but also to respect the right of others to have values that conflict with ours. This calls for respect in the face of disagreement. Openness and a willingness to learn and be flexible will be immeasurably helpful in promoting dialogue. One respondent noted how bridging cultural values could lead to designing services differently. Respondents discussed the fact that even in developing culturally sensitive services a diversity of approaches is needed and that we cannot assume that the needs of each community will be the same.

The Muslim Family Safety Project is engaged in work to promote dialogue and collaboration between the Muslim Community and main stream services to address violence against women and children. The project has made encouraging progress and has experienced a great deal of support from multiple locations in the community. It is an example of how we can work to bridge cultural differences.

Community Resource Centres

Although they are often absent from the tables where violence against women is discussed, Community Centres offer a variety of supports to abused women. As one respondent said of the programs at a Community Centre, "All services relate in some way to abused women."

These Centres offer programming for women and their children. They do some parent-child programs. They organize community outings and meet people in informal ways. They may also meet with women on an individual basis for help with anything from toilet training to making connections in the community. Relationship building is an important part of the work of Community Centres.

A respondent from one Community Centre listed the following programs, "We have a Well Baby and Well Child Clinic, parent-child literacy, a drop-in for breakfast, a pre-school that requires registration, but not an intake process; we have three hundred and

fifty kids in an after school program. We have a volunteer program. There is a Youth Worker that does recreational activities with teenagers. They have decorated their own space. The Youth Worker will do individual counselling as needed. We run a young moms' group. We have beginning level ESL classes, a clothing exchange, baby food bank, employment centre and computers. We can help with other basic needs, emergency food kits, THAW, health access vouchers for something like Tylenol. We have a Family Support Worker who works one-on-one with women; many are single moms. Many have relationship issues; most have OW problems, furniture problems. We have a collective kitchen and groups for women, senior women, parenting groups. We provide information and referral."

The work of Community Centres is very complimentary to the work of the Violence Against Women sector, "This work is addressing violence of the social isolation and Post-Traumatic Stress. It is a community development approach that builds trust, builds relationships. It teaches people to identify their problems and the sources of their problems and what they can begin to do about them. It brings people together and offers them a chance to give to the community, as well as to receive from the community."

Working Towards An Integrated Approach

Both the London and the Middlesex County Coordinating Committees to End Woman Abuse exist to promote better collaboration between organizations that work with abused women and children and abusive men. They understand the value of good communication and cooperation and spend considerable time and expend considerable resources attempting to improve that. Respondents described a multitude of creative partnerships that are at work in our community. Refer to page 110.

As policy makers and funding bodies play such a large role in the way work and responsibilities are divided, it is essential that they consult with those who are delivering services.

The Rural Context

Respondents acknowledged that women in the county have a much harder time accessing services than those in London. Representatives of some agencies and institutions acknowledged that they cannot offer the same range of services in Middlesex County as they do in London. Others noted that they provide the same range of services, but not the same depth. It was pointed out that sometimes limitations are dictated by funders because, "There is an assumption that it costs the same to deliver services in the city and the county, but in fact it costs more to work in the county."

Each community has a different mix of funding and services. A lot of services in Middlesex County are primarily related to the five employment resource centres funded by Human Resources and Skill Development Canada. Efforts are being made to take services farther out into the county, but the fact remains that there are certain pockets in county where people are struggling. Parkhill, Ailsa Craig, Lucan, Glencoe, Mount Brydes, Melborne, Poplar Hill, Thedford, Arcona, Watford, Wardsville and Newbury were all named as areas that are under-serviced.

Problems with transportation were a recurrent theme in discussions with people from the county. Some women would prefer to come to London for confidentiality reasons. Others have to come to London because services are not available elsewhere in the county. For those without transportation, getting into London or getting to another part of the county is a problem, leaving them with restricted options or, sometimes, no options at all. For the most part, each agency is trying to deal with its transportation problems in isolation and is using internal resources when they are available. The Children's Aid Society has had to provide transportation for children to their Community Group Treatment Program. Their experience helps to illustrate some of the challenges in organizing transportation in rural Middlesex County. They are not just financial.

A transportation committee to address transportation issues in Strathroy and surrounding communities, called 'The Driving Force,' was set up in 2001. It is looking at models in other areas to see if something can be set up in Middlesex. Any new initiatives will be for those associated with HRSDC, leaving the majority of abused women and their children still without transportation.

In principle, residents of Middlesex County have the same access to policing and justice services as those in London. In practice, however, there are differences, beginning with services for victims of crime. Transportation is again named as the major barrier for women in the county needing to access the Victim Witness Assistance Program. There are no allocated funds to assist someone from county to get there.

Many women in the rural focus group voiced concern over police response to woman abuse. As noted above there are several Police Services that are responsible for various parts of Middlesex County. Some initiatives are underway to improve the response to woman abuse. For example, there was a local decision to have an OPP Domestic Violence Coordinator in Middlesex County. Although a positive development, the downside is that it doesn't promote the development of expertise for dealing with domestic violence in other officers. Efforts are being made to develop this expertise in other officers, beginning with one on each platoon.

Women who have to work out custody and access agreements and/or obtain support payments from abusive ex-partners are at a definite disadvantage in Middlesex County. There are no lawyers working in the county outside of London that take legal aid clients for family issues.

While mandatory child protection services may be readily available, awareness of and access to more innovative programming such as the Community Group Treatment Program for children who have witnessed violence and their mothers is more restricted in remote areas. As well, there are no supervised access points for parents whose children are in CAS care, posing a serious obstacle for parents trying to maintain a relationship with their children and for children who want to continue seeing a parent from whom they have been separated.

Several respondents expressed concern over restricted access to women's shelters in Middlesex County. As with many other services, the shelter intended to serve county residents is located in Strathroy. Women's Rural Resource Centre will help women get to their shelter in Strathroy, but that does not solve all of the problems that women will continue to face in living far from home with no transportation.

At the same time that shelter workers at the Women's Rural Resource Centre face extra challenges in assisting the women they serve, they must work with fewer resources and diminished opportunities to access better resources. A lack of resources makes providing necessary training difficult. The situation leaves that shelter with a long list of services that they would like to be able to provide but cannot and complicates efforts to provide twenty-four-hour services.

Unfortunately, there is little to report on childcare services in Middlesex County. Respondents summed up the situation very succinctly; there are none. This lack of childcare services was named by women who have experienced abuse and respondents alike as one of the most significant barriers women face in leaving and staying out of abusive relationships.

Counselling was another area of difficulty. Agencies that do provide counselling are limited to short term counselling. This is adequate for some women, but not for others. And with the scant resources available to them, they are not able to provide advocacy for housing and legal services. Often a woman cannot fully benefit from counselling until these needs have been adequately met. Respondents also noted a lack of therapists in private practice and psychiatrists who are sensitive to violence against women. And even when the counselling services exist, women face the recurring problems of finding transportation and protecting confidentiality.

Housing, as mentioned above, is a serious problem. There is a lack of housing in rural areas, including emergency housing. This restricts people's opportunities to stay in Strathroy or other communities in Middlesex County. Affordable housing is critical to a woman's ability to stay out of an abusive relationship. Many times a woman will not even consider leaving if she knows in advance that she will not be able to obtain housing. This is an area that requires immediate attention from all levels of government.

Respondents affirmed that cuts to social services have impacted clients tremendously. They noted that people get trapped in a desperate struggle just to survive. Changes to Ontario Works, such as the imposition of a mandatory work, have also posed complications for women. Ontario Works has not responded to these concerns and is leaving many people, but especially abused women, extremely vulnerable economically. For a woman who identifies herself as leaving an abusive relationship, some barriers to accessing OW may be removed, but OW does not screen for woman abuse in Middlesex County.

Currently, education is also a real barrier to women's ability to lead lives free from violence. Educational opportunities in rural communities are quite limited. Women need

services to enable them to safely upgrade their education. A woman's level of education plays an important role in her ability to sustain herself and her family and to live free from an abusive relationship.

Confidentiality, as has been mentioned, is a serious concern for women in county. Women can't trust that their confidentiality will be respected because they often know people who are working in the services, and when clients do understand that their confidentiality will be respected, they fear that they will be seen by a neighbour. Even group counselling is difficult to deliver because of close community connections and a reluctance to meet people who are known in counselling. This can leave women with the feeling that there is no one to go to if they are being abused. Working to broadly educate communities that it is abusers who must be held accountable for their violent behaviour may help to alleviate women's unwillingness to be identified as someone who has experienced woman abuse.

Other areas of difficulty raised by respondents included the scarcity of group supports, a problem that is compounded by a lack of safe spaces where confidentiality can be preserved to run groups, poor health care services, a lack of services for youth and young women in particular, a lack of services for abusive men and a lack of services for the small Portuguese and Mennonite communities.

There was also some discussion of the more traditional values that one encounters in county and the role the churches can play in reinforcing them. Respondents were, however, careful to point out that a religion or spirituality that in any way condones abuse is a bastardization of religion and spirituality. It was also noted that attitudes towards women are evolving, along with the role of the church. Still, respondents counselled care and balance in approaching rural communities.

Currently, there are five Multi-Service Centres in Middlesex County, funded primarily through HRSDC. The intent of these Centres is to allow someone to come in and access several different services and agencies. Several of these Centres are already involved in addressing woman abuse. These multipurpose centres are one model of service delivery. Because they can provide infrastructure support, they can be a cost-effective way of bringing a greater range of services to various parts of the county. Many respondents pointed out, however, that this sort of model cannot be considered a panacea for the problems of availability of and accessibility to woman abuse services in Middlesex County.

Whatever model is implemented to address these issues, there was consensus that there is a need to improve transportation and childcare and that resources to meet these needs can't come from within existing agency budgets.

The idea of having a coordinating service offering free and confidential transportation and childcare for clients of all social service agencies was raised. It could function with a network of volunteer drivers, who are reimbursed only for their costs. It would require a

central number to call in order to arrange for a ride and childcare if needed. This sort of solution calls for funding in order to sustain it.

Other ideas included making funds available to women so that they can access buses or cabs to get to services or providing funds to the staff of agencies so that they can meet women in safe places that are also accessible to the women they are seeing.

Addressing the Imbalances of Service in London and Rural Middlesex County

A primary goal of this report was to examine the inequities in service provision that exist between London and the surrounding rural areas of Middlesex County. The section focusing on 'The Rural Context' does that. That section also contains the seeds of many ideas for beginning to address those inequities. But before we can begin to effectively work towards improving access to service for abused women and their children in the rural areas, a fundamental shift must take place. London-based service providers and decision makers, who control many of the available resources and who control the flow of those resources, must accept responsibility for serving all of Middlesex County. The current structures reinforce the geographic isolation of rural-based services and the urban-rural divide.

What Do Women Who Have Experienced Violence Think?

Two focus groups were held, one with women who had accessed services through an agency in London and one with women who had accessed service through Women's Rural Resource Centre in Strathroy. Women were invited to talk about what they saw as gaps in service, based on their own experiences. Refer to page 147 of the full report, available at www.crvawc.ca.

What to Do? Recommendations

In putting these ideas together, I have thought about the theory that we make better decisions collectively than we do individually. The richness of perspective evident throughout this report makes it clear why that would be true. Still collective decision making is a challenging process. Finding a respectful balance of power in our decision making processes will make it easier to speak to one another and to listen to one another.

As the author of this report, I have just two recommendations;

1. Be conscious of power and try to use it respectfully when you are involved in decision making processes.
2. Keep talking to each other. You have many creative and insightful ideas and a wealth of experience to compliment them.

This report contains thoughts and observations as they were presented to me. The recommendations below are summarized. The full texts from which I drew these recommendations are included in the body of the report. There is a clear consensus that we have to work with each other. The report contains information about how we are doing that and how we might do that in new ways. These are ideas and experiences that

ought to give shape to discussions, inform decisions and prompt new processes. Some of these recommendations are within the purview of those who sit at the tables of the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse and the Middlesex County Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse. Others are not, but may be brought forward to appropriate policy makers. Not all of the answers are in the recommendations. Many fine analyses and suggestions for moving forward are contained in the thoughts and observations presented throughout this report.

I have divided recommendations into categories, with some hesitation because the categories cross over. The boundaries of our work are fluid.

Education

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Allocate funding to support the implementation of the Safe Schools Act. Fully fund violence prevention work in all Boards of Education across the Province. Stop expecting Boards of Education to fund violence prevention initiatives from existing budgets.
- Support female-centred education, put books written and published by women in classrooms.

Recommendations for the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario

- Provide mandatory education on teaching violence prevention at the Teacher College level, which includes teaching on how to create a relationship with students to talk about violence and healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- Provide education to teachers about how witnessing and/or experiencing violence impacts learning.
- Conduct a longitudinal research study to evaluate the effectiveness of providing graduating teachers with education on violence prevention and the effects of witnessing and/or experiencing violence on learning.

Recommendations for the Thames Valley District School Board, Educators and Community-Based Organizations

- Ensure that violence prevention education starts with children as soon as they enter school and continues until they graduate.
- Continue to foster coordinated partnerships between community-based services and the Education sector to create multidimensional strategies for learning about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Integrate this learning

into the classroom and the school culture, through translating it into educational experiences.

- Work with youth rather than kicking them out of school. Explore alternatives such as family-group conferencing that bring together the victim, the perpetrators and the families to try to come to some sort of resolution and reparation. If having the family present is not feasible or not helpful, try having peers present as peers are often involved in making changes.
- Eliminate barriers for homeless kids in a shelter or trying to live independently after a shelter to get into school. If they can't go to school, the chances that they will end up in prison increase dramatically.
- Teach knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours about healthy relationships and understanding violence in relationships through various modalities of learning. Offer multidimensional ways of learning to support integration and internalization of the messages. Use value driven, holistic approaches that engage students both cognitively and emotionally
- Make sensitizing students on the issue of sexual harassment part of the curriculum design.
- Develop more violence prevention programs that meet curriculum needs. Provide scripted programs and introduce a language for the teacher delivering the programs.
- Encourage girls to get a good education. Work to counter socialization, especially that which occurs through the media, to sexualize girls and women.
- Spend time, effort and money in prevention work and on offender treatment work.
- Provide education to abused women about healthy and unhealthy relationships. Help them to identify abuse and to learn about their right to live a life free from violence.

Women and Their Children

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and the London City Council

- Provide more daycare in both informal and formal settings.
- Establish storefront daycare centres, where mothers can leave their children for short periods of time and get a break for a nominal fee.

- Provide more opportunities for women to interact with each other and other kids. Give mothers access to good parenting role models. Let them learn by interacting with others who have good parenting skills.
- Provide more opportunities for women who experience abuse to engage in recreational and leisure activities, to counter their sense of being trapped in an economic and social space where they see no alternatives to being in an abusive relationship.
- Provide more opportunities for children whose mothers have been abused, especially those that have low incomes, to engage in extracurricular activities.
- Increase the available support and respite for families in crisis that can't keep their families together.
- Provide supportive transitional housing for women who have experienced abuse where they have access to health care, counselling, life skills training, employment retraining, continuing education, childcare, addictions counselling and parenting programs.
- Provide adequate financial supports to women who have experienced abuse. The women who are most successful at getting out of abusive situations have support systems and financial resources.

Youth

Recommendation for the Government of Ontario

- Address the gap in services for fourteen to sixteen-year-olds. Either establish services for this age group or lower the age of intake for existing services.

Alternative Service Delivery

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Consult with the community to examine and explore how to deliver services effectively and cost-effectively. Ask; what would work best in this community?
- Have more transitional support workers working in shelters. Offer women options other than extending their stays in shelters by providing advocacy and assistance in navigating all the systems they must deal with when they leave shelter.

- Provide support to abused men through transitional support workers, offering referral and consultation with other community services where appropriate.
- Help families to deal with stress by offering more free and inexpensive community-based recreational programs. This can help to alleviate the isolation that exacerbates the problem of violence against women and children.
- Create more community-based programs for the development of healthy families. Develop preventative programs to help families before they get into crisis.
- Support women's economic autonomy and independence.

Recommendations for Community Based Organizations

- Make services more accessible by setting them up in easy to reach locations and by sending workers out into the community more, rather than always expecting those in need of service to come into an office.
- Work with a harm reduction approach. Offer the same advocacy and support to abused women who do not want to come into shelter. This is particularly important for newcomer women and other women such as lesbians who tend not to use shelter services.
- Engage men in this work to end violence against women and children. Give men an opportunity to reach out to other men to help to keep women safe.
- Think about our services and how we deliver them. Possibilities include; an on-site woman abuse advocate in every community neighbourhood centre, childcare on site at all services, programs that are not stigmatizing, a woman abuse advocate in every library.
- Work with the people that surround abused women. Most abused women's primary support and information comes from friends and families.
- Build capacity in churches and faith based groups to support abused women.
- Build community as well as agencies.
- Provide ongoing support through mentoring. Identify opportunities to meet people where they are at and offer them role models.

Community Centres

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario and the Government of the City of London

- Reinststate core funding for Community Resource Centres.
- Ensure that programs that break the isolation for women and other vulnerable members of the community are supported in the current City of London plans to expand Community Centres. Every neighbourhood should have a neighbourhood centre. The City has a Master Plan that is focused on recreation. It looks at providing large physical structures, but overlooks the needs of the most marginalized.
- Assist Community Centres to meet the rising costs of programming. They help to build capacity in neighbourhoods and in people, especially where poverty is a big problem.

Aboriginal Communities

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, the Government of the City of London and Community-Based Organizations

- Let aboriginal people take the lead in aboriginal communities. Remember the words of *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*; “The rebalancing of political and economic power between Aboriginal nations and other Canadian governments represents the core of the hundreds of recommendations contained in this report. Unless accompanied by a rebalancing of power, no progress can be made on other fronts without perpetuating the status quo. The effects of the past will not be undone overnight.”²
- Explore the possibility of training and supporting a first response team of community volunteers to respond to woman abuse on reserves.
- Use At^ˆlohsa to facilitate of a process between trusted community members and local police services to develop community protocols.
- Provide Police Services with cultural training about Aboriginal peoples, their values and their history.
- Support Aboriginal communities in their efforts to help their members resolve grief. Much rage results from limited or no accountability for intergenerational trauma.

² *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* , (Volume 5 - Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment. 1 - Laying the Foundations of a Renewed Relationship 1. A New Beginning http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/skml_e.html)

Diverse Communities

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and Community-Based Organizations

- Provide support to new immigrants to adapt to new cultural norms. Immigrant families often have new roles in Canada. They have to deal with unfamiliar customs. Men and women need support to adapt.
- Don't make newcomers fit the program. Adapt models to meet the needs of other communities. Plan culturally specific programs. Work within belief systems and cultural norms. It could be something as simple as choosing a time that fits into community routines.
- Build the cost of interpreting into our services. Follow the lead of big companies that think the cost of interpreting should be built into the cost of their products.
- Research the situation of newcomers in London.
- Engage people that know the community. The value of immigrants working with immigrants is that they have the background understanding of cultural issues.
- Set up fun groups that can serve many purposes; that can break isolation. Let women talk while they are baking, it's not always necessary to tackle the issue directly.
- Make use of available community resources like MAROC, whose mandate is to increase access to social services in London to members of diverse and minority communities. They will help to develop policies and work plans. They can help with the change process, with tools, videos, models for policies. They can help you to evaluate where you are at.

Coordination

Recommendations for Community-Based Organizations

- Reach out in ways that encourage people to work together to ensure that everyone is safe.
- Review the membership of the LCCEWA. Our community has grown and changed since it was established. Community agencies like Glen Cairn and LUSO didn't exist. John Howard was never invited to be part of LCCEWA. Sometimes non-members have felt excluded from information sessions and committees.

- Encourage connections and networking with a range of community groups. Community work is meant to supplement emergency services. We have narrowed the definition of abuse and the definition of service for abused women.
- Develop intercultural relationships and understanding. There are a lot of cultural groups that don't have an agency but have a leader that could be at the table.
- Look at how do we put theory into practice. Sit together and do actual case reviews, from CAS, VAW, police and the Crown. Perhaps also have consumers sitting at the table.
- Go back to what we know works; women talking to each other and really listening. Don't lose what we've learned.
- Continue to collaborate. Think beyond outcomes and pathologizing.
- Create separate community protocols for woman abuse and sexual violence. There is some overlap, but we are not always dealing with the same problems.
- Cross appoint representatives to the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse and the Early Years Council. This could facilitate a reporting relationship that lets each sector know what's important for the other group to know about.
- Cultivate relationships with leaders of agencies that have a mandate that goes beyond addressing violence against women and the LCCEWA. A team of direct and indirect services representatives enriches learning.

Longer Term Supports

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Invest five or six years of good services into women who are sexually abused as children. Help them get them education, retraining and sustained counselling. Sexual abuse is a complex problem and it is intergenerational. A therapist reported seeing the daughters of women who she counselled for sexual abuse. Child abuse destroys the foundation of everything. It takes two generations to heal. After they have been to counselling, many women need life skills and parenting support.
- Understand that women abuse and child abuse are not separate issues. Women often leave when children are abused. It may be a couple of years after a woman leaves that she uncovers her own abuse.

- Invest in an integrated three to five year plan to support women to leave abusive relationships. Conduct a longitudinal research study to follow these women. Show that it will work.
- Provide long term program funding. Women who have been abused have deep-standing issues that will take a long time to address. We can't meet real needs with projects with short-term outcomes.

Income Support

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Give women help with basic needs and provide social support. Economics are the biggest challenge. If women have their heat turned off and they are at the food bank and they can't get any more food, all the counselling in the world won't help. They may have to get back into an abusive relationship to get the basics. They become very embittered. They feel hopeless.
- Eliminate the claw-back of the national child tax benefit for women receiving assistance through Ontario Works.
- Recognize that ex-spouses who have been abusive partners may not pay support payments to women on Ontario Works. Ex-spouses should make payments directly to Ontario Works so that women are not penalized if payments are not made.
- Ensure that we are not reinforcing the idea that people living in poverty can't expect much. Return calls promptly, tell women what they are eligible for.

Housing

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and the Government of the City of London

- Provide geared-to-income housing that is not ghettoized. Affordable and safe places for women and their children to live just don't exist. A lack of affordable housing, especially for women who aren't educated and who don't have jobs push women into the sex industry or into criminal activity in order to survive.
- Provide more Second Stage Housing so that stays can be extended. For many women a year is not long enough. It's not time to settle legal and custody issues, to find affordable housing near good schools for their kids. One woman recently moved out of Second Stage after three years. It turned out to be the best thing she could have done. When she left she was ready to go and her kids were ready. She was forty. A supportive dentist

gave her new teeth and she was able to smile. She had her face smashed in so many times and had received such poor health care because she was low income that she had no teeth left. She has a severely disabled child in his twenties. She had programs that had to be set up for him; he went from youth to adult programs. When he left, he was actually saying words. She would have ended up back in shelter if she had left sooner. There's a woman that needed the service a little longer. A provider asserts; "I would love to be able to house the senior women we have until they leave this earth."

Recommendations for Community-Based Organizations

- Tell women they should be picky about their housing. Some women have been told, 'Beggars can't be choosers.' They deserve safe affordable housing near green space and good schools for their kids.

Work

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Let people receiving Ontario Disability Support Payments or Ontario Works work for a few hours a week to supplement their income. People feel that they want to contribute. There are many people who can't do full time work. They are employable part-time or employable with a support person, but they could never work forty hours a week. Some of them are also trying to raise children. Give encouragement and room to earn small amounts of money and let them keep it. It would help people with their self-esteem. They would model working for their kids. All or nothing doesn't work.
- Recognize abuse as a barrier to work. Provide employment-related supports, skill development and advocacy and training for women who have experienced abuse. Provide sensitivity training to the staff of employment agencies.

Health Care

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Provide primary health care in shelters for women. Perhaps set up a residency rotation or nurse practitioner through the Intercommunity Health Centre. This could serve all the shelters collectively. A nurse practitioner could accompany the public health nurse from the Family Abuse Prevention Project.
- Provide primary health care via nurse practitioners in Community Centres. There are two groups of women; those in shelters and those in the

community. Those in the community are more vulnerable. They are not connected.

- Give women in shelters drug benefits, access to birth control and vouchers for non-prescription drugs for things like Tylenol, cough medicine and calamine lotion.
- Maintain drug cards and bus passes for women even through Ontario Works overpayments.

Mental Health

Recommendation for the Government of Ontario

- Put a woman abuse specialist on mental health teams in the hospital.

Recommendations for Community-Based Organizations

- Work closely with mental health agencies. Make efforts to provide services for women through one agency. Either have staff come to one agency or provide transportation money when needed.
- Continue to work with the mental health and addictions sectors to understand the links to woman abuse.
- Provide education on trauma to all these sectors. The gap is not sector-specific, and general training would save money. The resources to develop this training do exist within the community.

Training

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Create a bar admission course on domestic violence and child sexual abuse. There is some place for woman abuse training in law school, but many law graduates do not do criminal law or family law. It may be useful to provide a universal course. It would be an overview at best. It may also help potential lawyers to decide whether or not they are prepared to deal with woman abuse.
- Provide diversity training to all Police Services to enable them to respond appropriately to diverse cultures.
- Reinstate funding for joint training between the Children's Aid Society and the Violence Against Women sector. Child protection workers are social workers first. This training helps to reinforce the values of the work. It fosters cooperation, making it easier to work together to meet needs of

women and children. Participation should be determined community by community.

Recommendations for Community-Based Organizations

- Provide woman abuse training for maintenance staff and property managers at London Housing.
- Provide woman abuse training with staff from LEADS Employment and Training Centre.
- Recognize that there is a huge variance in the comfort levels of many service providers and the specialists. Assist all workers to the point where they are comfortable hearing disclosures and making a referral.
- Address the tension between wanting to train other professionals and the tendency to want to claim exclusive expertise through open dialogue.

Funding

Recommendations for the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario and the Government of the City of London and all funding agencies

- Women are connected to the federal, provincial and municipal governments. All levels of government must play a role in providing support. The issue belongs to everyone.
- Recognize that there are some things that will not pay for themselves in the short term, but that we must do them anyway for the social good. Begin to think about and plan for long term change that will slowly ease the financial burden of caring for people who have been left marginalized and powerless and that will reduce the societal costs that result from violence, poverty and social exclusion.
- Create more flexibility around funding mandates. For example, HRSDC funds employment training, without recognizing that needs are more fluid. Avoid a compartmentalization of service delivery.
- Provide core funding for programs in Community Centres. They are helping women to lead healthier lives. They provide a wide range of care and emotional support. Currently much of this work is project-funded.
- Make the conditions and expectations for grant funding more realistic. Allow applicants to work for modest outcomes, recognizing that social change is a complex and time consuming process. This will help to level the playing field for smaller organizations that are competing with larger organizations that are able to make bigger claims for change. Make

allowance for reasonable administrative costs. Do not impose unrealistic expectations of sustainability and volunteer involvement after grants end.

- Recognize that even when partnerships can provide opportunities for low-cost programming, the overhead costs of providing space for running the programs remains.
- Fund easy-to-get small grants to develop collaborative relationships. Allow for the administrative expenses of building collaborative relationships. Recognize the added expenses for rural and small agencies.
- Return to the recommendations of the legal aid review of a few years ago. It was determined that we need to keep the certificate model, but we are moving more towards clinic models. Technically the clinic could represent the abuser and the abused, and the women may not go there if they think there is a chance their partner could go there. It would be a conflict of interest to serve both.

Recommendation for Community-Based Organizations

- Learn from private sector institutions without violating the integrity of the work to prevent, stop and end violence against women and children.

Government

Recommendations for the Government of Ontario

- Explore options for organizing how funding flows to the violence against women sector. Consolidating everything dealing with woman abuse in one ministry is one possibility. Creating an inter-ministerial committee, not necessarily at the highest level, but including those that are involved in the work is another. A better structure for internal communication is needed.
- Seek out opportunities for more coordination at the ministerial level. Ministries, including the Ministry of the Attorney General, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and the Ontario Women's Directorate have different perspectives on service delivery.
- Focus on the gendered nature of violence. When we use the concept of 'victim,' we don't recognize that the majority of clients in the majority of programs for victims are women abused in relationships. Continue efforts to understand woman abuse from a feminist perspective.
- Consult with agencies, especially small agencies and those working in rural areas, before flowing new funding to ensure that services will be organized in ways that will optimally meet the needs of the community.

Recommendations for the Government of the City of London

- Cities have a lot to do with meeting the needs of the population. In many cities around the world, people don't need transportation. There are small shops for shopping, not malls. Some newcomer seniors have never been to the mall. Plan new development in ways that promote self sufficient neighbourhoods.

Decision Making

Recommendations for all who work to prevent, stop and end violence against women and children

- Clarify and understand the values we are working with. Revisit them occasionally.
- Don't let the challenges conquer and divide us in this work.
- Move forward with real interest and real caring. Everything is slow. Start with what we have.
- Move forward in innovative ways, without replicating what has always been done. Meet the challenge of keeping the gains and the accomplishments and discard what doesn't work. Let go of what doesn't serve human need. Set the tone of the work, don't be in reactive mode.
- Get time and space away from crisis management for reflection and to think and talk about planning.
- Look at multiple strategies to recover the caring capacity of our society. Currently the number of people needing services outstrips the number of caregiver hours available.
- Remember where we have come from and what has been accomplished and what is still left to do.

THE RURAL SITUATION

“The difficulties are more severe here than in London; there are always less options. Services have less money and less staff. For women, contact with others is very difficult. It’s hard to see past barriers of transportation and isolation, so women are shadowed by a sense of desperation.”

Values and Attitudes

Respondents often noted that rural culture adheres to more traditional family values;

There are more traditional gender roles and there is more stigma attached to disclosing. Outlying communities are more conservative.

Women face attitudes that you must stay in your relationship and that the man is the head of the household. They need to overcome the fear that someone might find out, in order to be willing to share the secret of their abuse with someone who can help.

Respondents saw that young women continue to struggle with abuse;

A lot of young women in the county, who are in abusive relations, have abusive fathers, and their boyfriends are just like their dads.

The idea that relationships are not abusive unless there is physical violence is still very prevalent. Even young women often say, ‘If he doesn’t hit me, it’s not abuse.’

They are not getting good education on this issue. Schools are trying, but it’s not entirely their responsibility.

Still the reasons why women stay in abusive relationships are complex;

Some women are now very active in the farm business and are in a partnership with the abuser. They don’t want to leave the business. The other reason is pressure, the pressure to resolve it and go back, with people telling you, ‘You can’t carry on like this.’

The role of the church was discussed in the shaping of rural culture. When the question “Does church play a bigger role in the rural area?” was posed, there was agreement that the role of church has changed and that it’s an aging population that continues to be faithful churchgoers. It was pointed out that there are people who hold positions of power in religious organizations who do counsel women to stay in abusive relationships. At the same time, a note of caution was voiced, and we were reminded that a religion or spirituality that is responsible for promoting abuse is a bastardization of religion and spirituality.

Truly, religious people would not respond this way. They would keep the responsibility on the abuser.

Like the role of the church, attitudes towards women are evolving in rural communities. A respondent noted;

I'm in my fifties, and my generation was never encouraged to get drivers' licenses. Thirty years ago that wasn't something you wanted to have. This, of course, meant that there was not a readily available escape route. It was an event to go into town.

This generation of women was not encouraged to work outside of the farm, but their children's generation has been more actively involved in community, and they have more independence. Some boundaries for leaving have been alleviated with the younger generation.

Still, respondents counselled care and balance in approaching rural communities;

One of the difficulties is that you have to balance what can be radical feminism with the way of thinking in rural areas. There is a culture that tolerates more abuse than we are used to. There is less opportunity to address problems of woman abuse openly in small rural communities. There is more of a sense in the rural areas that family problems belong in the family.

You can't move faster than they are willing to move. You have to be sensitive to community values and choose your battles wisely. Change is not going to come within a month of being out there. You can make changes, but if you move too fast, people won't be ready for them.

One respondent spoke powerfully of how we need to consider the root causes of woman abuse and of the varied options open to us;

Although we are focused on woman abuse, we are really talking about a societal issue; men, woman and children are all wrapped up in this. It's about how we value women, how men value women and how we educate our children. We need to keep everyone involved. It's a big picture. How do we help children to develop healthy attitudes towards women? How do we help women to develop agency and confidence? How do we help men who are and who are not supportive of partners.

It's a very complex picture and we can go in many different directions and be effective.

One respondent provided a summary of the attitude changes she would like to see;

I would like a more caring general population, intervening instead of minding their own business. Knowing that people will not tolerate it would be helpful. Education is needed. Attitudes towards women are still very misogynous. Neighbours often look the other way.

We are still dealing with a closed mentality, and that is a greater barrier to helping women than the lack of services.

Levels of Service

Respondents acknowledged that women in the county have a much harder time accessing services than those in London. Some acknowledged that they cannot offer the same range of services in Middlesex County as they do in London. Others noted that they provide the same range of services, but not the same depth;

Individual counselling, outreach and preventative education are all areas of service that are more limited in the county than in London.

Even given the problems in the city, it's worse here. It's an uphill battle.

Strathroy is the largest urban centre in the county outside of London and you would expect that professional community of legal, medical and counselling services would be linked in such a way to ensure a basic level of services. But this is not always the case, and the shelter (Women's Rural Resource Centre) spends a lot of time getting women to London to see lawyers that accept legal aid. And sometimes we are dealing with medical issues that may have been neglected for a long time. It means incurring costs in terms of accessing transportation and for childcare.

A lot of women in the Strathroy shelter are from London, but they can't get back to London for programs and appointments because there is no transportation. This increases their isolation.

Sometimes limitations are dictated by funders;

In Parkhill, we can see anyone because we have funding pots, but in other areas of the county, Glencoe, Lucan, Dorchester, and Strathroy, we can only provide services to people on EI or OW and there are no group supports.

Funding formulas contribute to the problem because;

There is an assumption that it costs the same to deliver services in the city and the county, but in fact it costs more to work in the county.

Each community has a different mix of funding and services. A lot of services in Middlesex County are primarily related to the five employment resource centres funded by HRSDC.

The scarcity of group supports was often mentioned;

Groups in the county are not regularly scheduled. They are scheduled on an as-needed basis, and often a situation arises where two or three individuals need a group, but a minimum of eight is required to start a group.

This problem is compounded by a lack of safe space, where confidentiality can be preserved during group sessions. Women are often very resistant to participating in groups because they are concerned about who else will be there;

We have seen many odd situations where women in groups do know each other. Women will come into group and say, 'Oh, she did my insurance' or 'Our daughters go to ballet together.' These dynamics make it very difficult to preserve confidentiality for women.

The Mutual Aid Program for Parents (MAP) can't find space consistently in Glencoe or Strathroy.

Groups for children pose similar challenges and respondents described situations that would never arise in London, with biological children and foster children who know each other participating in the same group. Despite these challenges respondents did report that when women and children do have an opportunity to participate in groups, they gain a lot from them.

Both men and women are often obliged to come to London for service. Preventative programs, various rehabilitative groups and basic education for substance abuse, anger management and anti-criminal thinking were all mentioned as only being available in London. Respondents listed other services not available in the county;

There is not a childcare service like Merrymount in Middlesex County.

Most employment support services, including assessment, job training and retraining, are only offered in London.

LEADS Employment Service will work with women who have experienced women abuse, but generally only women who have been referred by the shelter or another agency would know this.

Outside of Strathroy, there are no shelters and very restricted access to food banks. There is a food bank in Ailsa Craig.

Some services based in Strathroy are intended to be available to other areas of the county, but transportation remains a problem.

Even if a counsellor is there for a half-day, it's still twenty-five kilometres away and she can't get to the service.

As one frustrated respondent explained;

A lot of referrals don't work out in the county. If you think about services abused women need, it makes sense to take it to them.

Efforts are being made to take services farther out into the county. The Northwest Middlesex Multi-Service Centre notes that demand is increasing;

In the past a lot of outreach was needed. Now younger women thirteen-, fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds, are asking for service. The school is more receptive to doing education. Some services have been spending a day or two a week working in the county, and more are beginning to do this.

Others see a less rosy picture. A respondent stated that there are waiting-lists for all services, that only short-term service is available and that this can lead to feelings of hopelessness;

Stress levels increase and violence increases. Hopelessness is the key to this cycle.

Under Serviced Areas

Strathroy is one thing, but rest of county is very isolated.

This was a commonly expressed sentiment. There are certain pockets in county where people are struggling. Parkhill, Ailsa Craig, Lucan, Glencoe, Mount Brydes, Melborne, Poplar Hill, Thedford, Arcona, Watford, Wardsville and Newbury were all named as areas that are under-serviced;

As you head towards Glencoe and Newbury, there are smaller populations and fewer services. Providing a cost-effective service to address the needs in these areas is a challenge that has still to be met.

For those dealing with abusive relationships in the county, specialized services are even farther away and even more expensive to access.

Several respondents noted that existing relationships in the county are strong and communication is good, and that this can help to mitigate the dearth of service. Some new efforts are being made to reach the more isolated areas of the county.

Glencoe has an outreach worker from the shelter.

Family Service London is now at GAINS Centre in Strathroy and is going to Glencoe and Parkhill. This is a significant development that has been funded by the Middlesex County Ontario Works initiative.

Transportation

“Woe betide you if you don’t have a car” is perhaps the most concise description of transportation problems in Middlesex County. Women who have experienced violence and service providers were unanimous in their judgment that mobility and transportation issues are an almost overwhelming challenge;

There are still a number of women who do not have a driver’s license. For other women, there’s not a vehicle and no access to one. In Strathroy transportation is a problem if women don’t have bus money or another means of transportation.

For women who live outside of Strathroy, the problems intensify;

Women from outlying areas may be able to access service in Strathroy in a crisis or on occasion, but they go back to their community, and they still have no transportation and no access to service they need.

Many women are tied to the farm and not able to leave. A woman says, ‘I’m getting out of here; I’m going.’ She gets to the end of the lane, but where is she going to go? Transportation is a huge ongoing issue and it can freeze women.

Some women would prefer to come to London for confidentiality reasons. For those without transportation, getting into London is a problem, leaving them with restricted options or, sometimes, no options at all. These problems with transportation pose the risk of stigmatizing small and rural communities in Middlesex County;

Girls who are sexually assaulted in the county have problems with transportation. They can’t get to services on their own. There is a lot of victim-blaming and they may not want to disclose to their parents.

Transportation is an issue for any youth and for single parents.

It is difficult for men to get to Changing Ways for the early intervention program. Probation officers also face this barrier. They can’t get to every small community, and with no transportation and no money for transportation, it is difficult to mandate counselling.

Transportation to the Sexual Assault Care and Treatment Centre at St. Joseph’s Hospital is often a problem for women outside of London. There was a suggestion that a fund for transportation could be established to pay for taxis for women. It would also be helpful to decide what police service has responsibility for transportation when a woman is willing to go with police.

For the most part, each agency is trying to deal with its transportation problems in isolation and is using internal resources when they are available. Because the Children's Aid Society works with children, they have had to provide transportation to their Community Group Treatment Program. Their experience helps to illustrate some of the challenges, which are not just financial. They have volunteer drivers for the city, but not for the county. In the county, they have liaised with bus companies and have used a mini-bus for picking up kids. They were professionals in transporting kids and this arrangement worked well. They also use taxis;

We want drivers to be sensitive to situations of children. Confidentiality is a huge issue with cab companies. Safety is also an issue with cab companies, as they don't always understand that they can't just drop kids off. Transportation for clients in Middlesex County remains an ongoing challenge.

Respondents discussed options for improving transportation for abused women in the interviews. The ideas call for cooperation and collaboration;

What if eighteen agencies were to give up \$2,000.00 to do some coordination of driving?

The idea of having a coordinating service offering free and confidential transportation and childcare for clients of all social service agencies was raised. It could function with a network of volunteer drivers, who are reimbursed only for their costs. It would require a central number to call in order to arrange for a ride and childcare if needed. This sort of solution calls for funding in order to sustain it.

Volunteer drivers would need training on woman abuse, on the importance of confidentiality for clients and, depending on the situations in which they would be used, perhaps on how to deal with crisis and people in distress. This model raises liability concerns that would need to be worked out;

If volunteer drivers were to be used, it would make sense to work with CAS on training since they already do it. Volunteer drivers enjoy their work and sometimes they work much better than cabs because often the same driver is used and it's possible to build a relationship. On the other hand, it may be difficult for someone who has been assaulted to go with a volunteer driver. Their sense of personal safety might be compromised.

Other ideas included making funds available to women so that they can access buses or cabs to get to services or providing funds to the staff of agencies so that they can meet women in safe places that are also accessible to the women they are seeing.

All respondents in the county mentioned that they would like to see safe transportation. Respondents concurred that currently no one has sufficient money in their budget to cover transportation needs and that it is often very difficult for women to come in to access service;

Many women have to travel far for services.

On the day of court Police can assist, but this is not an appropriate use of resources.

In a perfect world, we would have free transportation for everyone. Agencies would save many hours trying to problem solve who will pay for clients transportation, how to cost share it.

Transportation Committee

A transportation committee to address transportation issues in Strathroy and surrounding communities, called “The Driving Force,” was set up in 2001. It is looking at models in other counties to see if something can be set up in Middlesex. It received funding from HRSDC and COMSOC. A Research Coordinator was hired in 2003 until the end of March 2004. The next plan is to hire a Project Coordinator and continue to have more community forums.

When a service is established, initially it will be for HRSDC clients only. It may be possible to expand that mandate at a later time. Some ideas under discussion to address the transportation issue are;

- Ride-sharing, car-pooling or volunteer drivers; initiatives that would be advertised in workplaces;
- A shuttle service for Strathroy; a shuttle service between Strathroy, Mt. Brydges and Glencoe, may also include a shuttle into London. This idea came out of a community survey;
- A car coop concept, allowing people access to vehicles when they needed them, supported by agencies pooling their resources.

These ideas will now go forward to the committee to decide which ones will be pursued. The Committee is trying to obtain funding for Phase 2, which would involve hiring the Project Coordinator and implementing some of these ideas.

The existence of this committee highlights the lack of transportation in the county and the barriers that poses for people. Although the ideas that have been formulated may help those seeking employment if they are implemented, they will do nothing to address the need for women and children who experience violence or for men who are abusive to obtain service. The lack of transportation remains a significant barrier to accessing services in Middlesex County and there is no sign that this problem will be dealt with in the near future.

Policing and the Justice System

In principle, residents of Middlesex County have the same access to policing and justice services as those in London. At least one police representative felt that there is no difference in access to service for policing;

The Ministry of the Attorney General is mandated to prosecute anyone who is charged with a criminal offence and, in terms of services to victims, the same mandate exists in the county as in London.

In practice, there are differences, beginning with victims of crime. The Victim Witness Assistance Program doesn't have branches in county. If a woman can't make it in to London, she may have to rely on someone with less skill and less experience to help her. In the county, it can be a challenge to find support services for an abused woman in order for her to serve as a witness. Providing more money for women's services so that they can support a woman to be a more willing and participatory victim in the criminal prosecution would be a helpful strategy.

Transportation is again named as the major barrier for women in the county needing to access the Victim Witness Assistance Program. There are no funds allocated to assisting someone from county to get to the London office. Sometimes that means having to do work over the phone and this can impede the development of a good relationship.

A lack of childcare when meetings are scheduled with Victim Witness Assistance staff and on the day of court was also named as a significant impediment for women who participate in criminal prosecutions as witnesses.

Men who abuse women also experience a lack of service in the county with detrimental effects;

As part of his bail conditions, a man charged with abusing his partner will have forty-eight hours to contact Changing Ways and get into a group. If he doesn't have transportation, he can't come to group, and Changing Ways will be obliged to report that to the police. He ends up back in jail. If he is successful in meeting all of his conditions, he can get a conditional discharge and he will not have a criminal record.

One respondent pointed out that Changing Ways will go to Strathroy, but not Delaware, Lucan, Alisa Craig, Parkhill, Mount Brygdes or Ilderton.

Changing Ways does not run groups regularly in Strathroy because of the difficulty of having a sufficient number of men ready to participate in a group at the same time.

A police officer reported that if a man is willing to leave the house when a domestic dispute occurs, it is difficult for police to get him a place to stay in Strathroy. Several respondents expressed concern that charges are not being laid as often as they should be in cases of woman abuse in Strathroy. Women reiterated this fact in the stories they told in the rural women's focus group.

New policing models are evolving to serve the needs of the rural areas of Middlesex County. There was a local decision to have an OPP Domestic Violence Coordinator in Middlesex County.

This could become a regional policy, but right now the decision to have such a position is made detachment by detachment. The Domestic Violence Coordinator position has been filled for two years and is the only one in the province. The Coordinator is on-call around the clock. Once a charge has been made, she takes over the investigation. She develops a relationship with the woman. She takes a victim statement, provides referrals and ongoing contact with OPP and monitors court paperwork. She is able to provide consistency for court preparation and Crown briefs and this leads to enhanced investigation. She also sits on committees that deal with the problem of violence against women. The position is seen as a model for this kind of work. It was created because a gap for victims of crime was identified.

The downside of it is that other officers don't learn how to deal well with domestic situations. Efforts are being made to develop this expertise in other officers, beginning with one on each platoon.

One respondent noted the need for this, identifying;

... a need for training around sexual assault and woman abuse issues and how to make effective referrals to anti-violence agencies for OPP officers.

Another respondent provided an example of why it is important for all officers to have an understanding of woman abuse;

A woman went to the police about stalking. An officer told her, 'You need to get a lawyer and deal with this through a separation agreement. You don't want the police involved in this.' Who the hell are they working for?

To balance concerns about inconsistency in police response in rural Middlesex County, some respondents noted that when charges are laid, women get very good service. Usually a single officer is able to handle her case from start to finish, permitting her to establish a rapport with the officer, facilitating communication and offering better access to information about her case.

Custody and Access and Support Payments

Women who have to work out custody and access agreements and/or obtain support payments from abusive ex-partners are at a definite disadvantage in Middlesex County;

There are no lawyers that take legal aid clients for family issues.

This means that women must go to London. Then, of course, they face the challenges already discussed in finding and paying for transportation. One respondent working in Middlesex County reported being asked how to get documents to Legal Aid in London. Such problems put an additional burden of stress on women at a time when they are least well-equipped to deal with it.

Children's Aid Society

There was agreement that Children's Aid Services are generally known in Middlesex County and, like policing, that they are universally available. A closer look reveals that while mandatory child protection services may be readily available, awareness of and access to more innovative programming such as the Community Group Treatment Program for children who have witnessed violence and their mothers is more restricted in remote areas;

There are not sufficient resources to bring all moms together for a group, as happens in London. At this point CAS workers are traveling to them. In the city, we would never have siblings in the same group. In the county, sometimes we have a group of just siblings.

The most common strategy for offering service in Middlesex County is to hold groups in Strathroy. Occasionally, it is possible to go out to a more remote area. Sometimes confidentiality is a big concern. Issues have arisen because moms know each other. In principal, groups for moms should not be comprised of anyone other than moms, but sometimes CAS is approached by foster moms or other caregivers also wanting to participate. In London, it is possible to offer a separate group for caregivers.

One respondent reported that;

An attempt to mix mothers and caregivers in the same group in the county was unsuccessful.

While this can be a problematic situation, another respondent was able to successfully work with it;

One of the mother's groups I did had a mix of foster and biological moms and it was successful. I do know that the previous one didn't go very well, but we were successful with the second one.

There are no supervised access points for parents whose children are in CAS care in Middlesex County outside of London, posing a serious obstacle for parents trying to maintain a relationship with their children and for children who want to continue seeing a parent from whom they have been separated.

Shelter

Several respondents expressed concern over restricted access to women's shelters in Middlesex County. As with many other services, the shelter intended to serve county residents is located in Strathroy. This prompted one respondent to remark that;

There is no shelter in rural Middlesex County. Women may not come to a shelter because they don't know how they will get their kids to school. They have to be mobile. They face the uprooting of their children away from friends and school.

The Women's Rural Resource Centre will help women get to their shelter in Strathroy, but that does not solve all of the transportation problems that women will continue to face. Shelter workers make arrangements for cheaper transportation where possible, but it is a constant challenge both for the women and for the overextended resources of the Shelter;

As women come out of abusive situations, they are able to begin to deal with medical, support and legal issues. WRRC has become the hub to expedite these types of referrals.

Often women are involved with or need service from more than one agency, but none of these agencies have budgets to cover transportation costs.

When women live outside of town and require transportation, costs are very high.

Clearly the lack of access to public transportation complicates service delivery. Nowhere is this more evident than in the situations that shelter workers attempt to help women navigate.

At the same time that shelter workers in Strathroy face extra challenges in assisting the women they serve, they work with fewer resources and diminished opportunities to secure better resources. A respondent explains;

The staff gets smaller with cutbacks and there is a smaller pool of expertise to draw upon. We would like better trained counselling staff, feminists with formal social work qualifications, but because our salaries can't compete with those of other agencies, we tend to hire less qualified staff and therefore we have a great need for ongoing training.

A lack of resources makes it difficult to provide such training. Even when training opportunities arise;

Staff must cover their own expenses for accommodation and food costs.

We are not able to provide professional development to relief staff.

The challenges of providing twenty-four-hour services are amplified by restricted resources;

Relief staff work by themselves, but they tend to be the least qualified because the pay is so low. We need the best problem solvers in these roles, but it's difficult to attain. We need to promote the best to full time.

Grant funding is not a solution to limited resources for a variety of reasons;

It's difficult to compete with larger, better known agencies. It's time consuming to write, monitor and report on grants. Small agencies are disadvantaged in the challenge to come up with the resources needed to get grants. Funders insist on collaboration. It takes time and travel money to develop collaborative relationships. The requirements of grants are too onerous to justify the work it takes to get and implement them.

Other concerns were also expressed about grant funding;

It fragments funding and can fragment service delivery, creating difficulties for women accessing services and agencies delivering services.

Funding may be restricted to specific agencies or sectors or may only be for women who use the criminal justice system and this may not match community preferences for organizing services.

The restricted funding available to the rural shelter leaves that shelter with a long list of services that they would like to provide but cannot;

We would like to be able to offer more mobile services (i.e., send workers to hospitals or other services).

We would like to provide advocacy to women during court processes; to assist them with access to Victim Witness, lawyers' appointments, health care practitioners, government services, housing and employers.

We would like to be able to do more preventative work.

We need to be able to do more work with families when women don't want to leave an abusive partner. We would like to bring in fathers, grandparents and other relatives to help them understand the impact of children witnessing violence and abuse.

We want to do more work with men.

We need to provide programs that are culturally sensitive.

We need to do more work with community leaders and key contacts that have influence [in the community].

A respondent noted that a lot of women chose not to go to shelter because of the stigma attached to doing that. She wished there was an alternative place for women to go, where they could be safe and not be labelled.

The challenges in providing access to emergency shelter to women in Middlesex County are numerous and complex. The services in place are only minimally able to meet the needs of women despite a willingness to be creative and flexible on the part of shelter staff.

Childcare

Unfortunately there is little to report on childcare services in Middlesex County. Respondents summed up the situation very succinctly;

There are no childcare services.

There is a lack of emergency childcare services.

Childcare is not available.

This lack of childcare services was named by women who have experienced abuse and respondents alike as one of the most significant barriers women face in leaving and staying out of abusive relationships.

Counselling

Above we discussed the lack of legal services, but there are also problems related to the availability of counselling;

We have now established a family counselling service funded through Child Supplement Dollars.

This service will fill an obvious gap, but respondents generally recognized that clawing back Federal Child Supplement cheques from women who desperately need the money creates difficulties that cannot necessarily be addressed through counselling.

Several respondents mentioned a lack of choice as being a serious obstacle for those seeking a counsellor;

We need more counsellors.

There is very limited outreach counselling. WRRC offers outreach counselling, but nothing east of Highway 4. Putnam, Dorchester have no outreach counselling.

One respondent lamented the loss of the social worker at Four Counties Hospital;

Previously, we could refer to Four Counties, the social worker, and she would go to schools. She's gone now; no outpatient care. We used to really count on her services.

More supports are needed for childhood sexual abuse survivors. Many women who are victimized as children end up in abusive relationships as adults. Some women who have been in abusive relationships spoke openly of this fact in the focus groups.

Agencies that do provide counselling are limited to short-term counselling. This is adequate for some women, but not for others. And with the scant resources available to them, they are not able to provide advocacy for housing and legal services. Often a woman cannot fully benefit from counselling until these needs have been adequately met. Respondents also noted a lack of therapists in private practice and psychiatrists who are sensitive to violence against women.

And even when the counselling services exist, women face the recurring problems of finding transportation and protecting confidentiality. One respondent observed;

Thursday and Friday work for counselling because she is often coming in for groceries.

Volunteer drivers are sometimes available for various programs, but it's difficult to work together for confidentiality issues.

Housing

There is a lack of housing in rural areas, including emergency housing. There are very few units. A few units geared to adults and a number of units for seniors are available, but there is little for families. This restricts people's opportunities to stay in Strathroy or other communities in Middlesex County. Rent is more reasonable in the county than in the city, but there is limited rental space, and limited geared-to-income housing.

London Housing has two subsidized buildings in Strathroy, but many women are reluctant to live there. They are far from a grocery store and they are perceived as being problem buildings;

Everyone wants to go to Head St. across from Food Basics. There is a big stigma attached to Bella. People don't want to live in Penny Lane because it is perceived as problem kids, problem families. Even women in shelter don't want to go to the five bedroom units. Women want to get into the coops.

One respondent remarked that we need to include Second Stage in our conversation, noting that;

It's especially important in the county. There is no place for a woman in crisis to stay, no place to go. In Parkhill, the only housing available is in apartments above the stores downtown. Where do farm women go?

Affordable housing is critical to a woman's ability to stay out of an abusive relationship. Many times a woman will not even consider leaving if she knows in advance that she will

not be able to obtain housing. This is an area that requires immediate attention from all levels of government.

Income Security

Respondents affirmed that cuts to social services have impacted clients tremendously;

How are women to survive? Poverty is much more extreme.

They noted that people get trapped in a desperate struggle just to survive. Changes to Ontario Works, such as the imposition of mandatory work, have also posed complications for women. A respondent noted that some women are trying to meet that demand and deal with severe behavioural problems with their children.

I see many more cases like this now than before.

When an abused woman has children, often she continues to have to deal with her abuser because he is also the father of her children. This can provide the abuser with an ongoing opportunity to continue to control the woman. When an abused woman requires support payments, she remains financially dependent upon her abuser. This can play havoc in her life;

OW encourages women to get support orders, but partners stop paying and it's difficult to get her reinstated.

An ex-partner's refusal to pay or to pay on time can jeopardize a woman's economic survival. Ontario Works is not responding to support these women quickly and is leaving them extremely vulnerable economically.

Should a woman relocate to London from the county, she faces additional red tape from the system;

Policies that dictate that women from the county be seen by a specific team and if a woman relocates to London, she must go through another assessment.

Questions were raised in a rural focus group about how accessible Ontario Works is to farm women, who often hold joint assets with their abusive partners.

OW would look at liquefiable assets and would ask a woman to make efforts to get something from joint assets. But they would talk to women about what are liquefiable assets and what are not. Cars are not liquefiable. Not all RSPs are liquefiable. If a client was not comfortable or safe contacting a partner, Ontario Works would not ask them to contact a partner.

For a woman who identifies herself as leaving an abusive relationship, some barriers to accessing OW can be removed, but OW does not screen for woman abuse in Middlesex County. It is not a standard question as administrators feel that they may cross boundaries

in that way. This puts the onus squarely on the shoulders of a woman to disclose her situation of abuse. Given the discussion about rural values, that could be a very difficult disclosure.

After an abused woman who requires financial assistance has overcome such obstacles, she continues to face censure from others in the community. A respondent noted that;

The attitude towards people on assistance is very negative.

Another respondent noted that very few women are on social assistance in the county. Many are working for minimum wage in small factories;

There are a lot of working moms that don't have drug benefits or other benefits available to those on Ontario Works.

Additionally, a lot of work is seasonal, making women's financial situations very precarious.

Health Care

Accessing health resources in Middlesex County can be very difficult;

There are no walk-in clinics, no nurse practitioners, and there is a shortage of family doctors. Women have to go to the emergency department at the hospital, for anything. This leaves them with no continuity of care, no prevention and no follow-up. This is not good health care and it is expensive to provide. If a nurse practitioner could go to all of the shelters with the Public Health Nurse, that would provide women with some much-needed medical attention.

Education

Education opportunities in rural communities are quite limited. Women need services to enable them to safely upgrade their education;

Adult Education courses are available, but they are expensive.

A woman's level of education plays an important role in her ability to sustain herself and her family and to live free from an abusive relationship. Currently education is a real barrier to women's ability to lead lives free from violence.

Services for Youth and Young Women

A respondent who works with youth in the country describes seeing deeper poverty than she has seen in city. The list of problems youth are dealing with include;

... addictions, sexual abuse, kids living with men who are taking advantage of their vulnerability (more with girls), a lot of aggression, anger management issues, drug use and psychiatric issues. These are not new issues. They have been present for these youth since public school, but not addressed. We are really

dealing with high-risk kids. They are not going to be okay if you leave them alone.

The context for these youths is grim;

There are no youth centres, nothing for kids to do, no way to escape what is going on at home. There is just nothing for them. Some churches have youth groups, but disenfranchised youth are not into organized religion.

There are no youth shelter beds, no crash beds.

A young student [that I was working with] would have had to change schools and friends in order to leave her abusive situation, and that was too much to cope with.

Not surprisingly;

There is a big drug culture. There is often deep hopelessness.

Other problems were named;

Parents don't want children to achieve more than they have. It is a conservative mentality.

Many younger people don't want to ask for help. They are afraid to ask for help.

There is very little preventative education. You can't do outreach in the high school. Services try, but the high school is not very open to this.

Several respondents drew attention to the gap in services for fourteen- to sixteen-year-olds. Many counselling services are only funded for those sixteen years of age and older;

There is a gap with younger women and the violence starts early.

There is nothing for those kids. Kids need a letter of consent from their parents in order to receive counselling, but often can't get it. This is part of the problem.

We need to start educating younger and speak to more boys about abusive behaviour being unacceptable. Girls do know that it's unacceptable, but if everyone is doing it, then they think it must be okay. We have to get to the children who are witnessing violence. How are we going to deal with making a change for the future?

The John Howard Society is one agency that is working with youth, and more work like this needs to happen.

If students need condoms, their parents will find out if they buy them at the pharmacy. They have just started to have better access to birth control, but they have to ask permission from a teacher to access that service. There is no anonymity. They do provide condoms in Guidance. Glencoe has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the province.

A respondent reported that the Guidance Counsellor at Glencoe is excellent. Still many barriers remain. For example, there are no female doctors whom young women can see.

Youth in the county do not want to come to London. A respondent said that she has offered to find a place in the shelter or a group home for young women in trouble, but they do not want to do it. They want to stay in their community;

They will set themselves up in all kinds of dysfunctional situations to stay. There are many situations of older people preying on young, vulnerable people.

Outreach and Awareness of Service

Some respondents felt that there is a lot of information, but that it is difficult for some women to access it. A lack of public awareness was named as the problem;

Women living closer to larger towns, who get community papers and who are in touch with word of mouth networks are more aware. More isolated women, further out in rural areas, may not know as much about what help is available.

Perceptions of how much awareness exists varied. One respondent noted that once someone makes use of a service, the referral network is good. Some respondents felt that women are aware of available services and that an informal secondary referral system exists through high schools, police, family doctors and crisis lines that are familiar with the services;

A lot of people go to the GAINS Centre to find out what is available. It is not intimidating because going there doesn't identify you as having a particular problem. A range of services are available.

Yet, another respondent remarked that members of the Lion's Club didn't even know about the Shelter in Strathroy and that a lot of medical people don't know about the services that are available. As a respondent noted;

Consistently women in shelter say they rely primarily on friends and family for information about woman abuse and services. This speaks to the need to raise awareness on a community-wide basis and to disseminate information widely.

As one respondent asserted;

We need to engage our community to stop the violence and use our schools to change the thinking.

A rural focus group had several ideas for ways to use existing community networks and institutions to raise awareness;

The Federation of Agriculture is willing to help get some information flowing. They are giving out kits on stress-related issues. These are kits on product-related materials. Information about woman abuse could be included that doesn't target individuals, but gives out information that can be used generally. The tone could be one of, 'You may know someone who needs this.'

The Women's Institute is an important network for rural women, and libraries were identified as a good point of distribution for information. It was suggested that the head branch could help to distribute materials to smaller branches. 4H is a strong organization in the county. In fact, Middlesex has the largest 4H in Ontario;

Programs can be developed by anyone interested who has an understanding of 4H. Relationships would be an excellent project topic for clubs.

One respondent remarked that the 4H provides a direct link to mothers who may be abused through their children. She spoke about shelters going into schools and talking to kids about violence awareness and seeing those kids talk to their moms. Many women came forward for their kids. The same potential may exist through 4H clubs.

It was also suggested that services could build networks with church groups;

Those are the caring people that would carry the flag.

When people who live and work in rural communities sit down and begin talking, they reveal an intricate web of networks and possibilities for communication. Tapping into these existing networks in order to educate residents about woman abuse will require some creativity, some cooperation and collaboration and some resources. There is no lack of interest in raising awareness about woman abuse, but the work is not likely to move too far ahead if it falls to already overworked service providers.

Services for Men

There was acknowledgement that there is little response for men who are seeking help in Middlesex County. A respondent identified the need to develop skills to work with men and the need to tap into the strength of rural communities to do this work. Some suggested that we need to empower the community to hold men accountable for violence they commit against women;

Institutions like the church and the extended family can support men's violence or hold men accountable.

While involving the traditional institutions of the community in ending violence against women is a very good idea, the support of agencies with specific expertise is still

required. As discussed above, men in the county may not be able to access Changing Ways groups because of a lack of transportation;

Some men on probation are given very short supervision orders, and there may not be enough time to start a group while he is bound by an order. There is fear that abuse will continue in the home unreported in these cases.

Multiple Layers of Isolation for Rural Women

Abuse is characterized by the isolation of the victim. Rural women are particularly vulnerable to isolation. Geographic isolation is a fact of rural life. And as a respondent states;

Geographic isolation is problematic when abusive men control the transportation.

Due to geographic isolation, neighbours may not know what is going on;

Often the closest neighbours are family members of the abuser and are invested in keeping the abuse a secret.

Each time you add a factor that contributes to isolation, such as a mental health problem, or being First Nations, it becomes more of a challenge for a woman to make connections and for service providers to respond.

Farm Women

Respondents explained that challenges for farm women in abusive relationships are tied up with the nature of farming practice;

Woman abuse is a farm safety issue.

The woman leaving the relationship can mean the end of the farming practice. In rural areas, women are tied to the farm. It is their livelihood.

A number of women don't have access to a bank account or an independent income.

Farms are family businesses. The family is also a business, and if either spouse leaves, both economic livelihoods are destroyed. If the man is removed the whole business can fall apart.

If women are to access financial benefits, they have to divest themselves of assets.

Farm and rural business situations have similar dynamics.

When police arrest, they will remove the man. All men have to agree not to have any communication with the victim and not attend where she is living. If she is in the house and the kids are in the house, he can't go back there. The problem is

that she will say, 'You have to let him back between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. to do the chores, but he can't go near the house.' He is out there, she is isolated and he has access to guns. Kids may be used in those situations to facilitate hostile and sometimes even intimidating communication between the abusive man and the abused woman.

A focus group participant from the farming community talked about another significant barrier for farm women in abusive situations;

My sense is that the dissolution of the immediate family and the farm would also affect the extended family. Often groups of brothers own farms together. There is a social stigma associated with a person responsible for breaking up a family or business. The community is an extension of the family and those values.

Another respondent added;

There is a mentality among women who have been raised on farms that you cannot break out of this, that you cannot face the stigma of breaking up the farm. Often abusers are well-liked in their community.

A focus group participant from a farming community explained that;

A lot of times when we speak of abuse, we mean physical, and there is a lot of emotional abuse that is not recognized. I think it's more prevalent with farm women. I know a number of women experiencing that, but they can't address it. They don't have access to services. They don't have financial resources and the farms are in the names of husbands. Women don't recognize that they are being abused; it just goes with the territory.

In a rural focus group participants asked a series of questions;

How do we reach out to farm women and reframe who is responsible for breaking up the farm?

How do we help people to understand that it is the abuser's actions that are responsible for breaking up the family and the farm, not the woman?

How can we help women to leave?

One woman at the table noted;

I'm always surprised that women don't know their rights.

Suggestions emerged from this discussion that included providing legal information about property rights to women and letting them know that they don't have to leave the farm when their husbands or partners are being abusive. It was noted that women are

motivated to do things for their kids and that we can let them know about the impact of witnessing woman abuse on kids. Participants agreed that we have to pay attention to how we frame the issue, being careful not to further blame or stigmatize abused women.

Respondents expressed increasing concern about the need to work together in order to reach farm women;

We know that women are at higher risk when those [financial] stresses are there and we may be approaching a crisis in the farming community.

A researcher noted that we don't know what the rate of abuse among farm women is, but clearly it has the potential to increase.

Last year at the International Plowing Match, Women's Rural Resource Centre had a booth. There was agreement that this is but a start to the outreach and education that is needed to reach farm women. Some respondents noted that work on reaching farm women has already been done;

CAPRO looked at where can we educate and be effective. The Ontario Farm Women's Network were key players. We don't need to reinvent the wheel.

Culturally Diverse Communities

Many respondents spoke about the homogeneous population of Middlesex County and noted that there is very little cultural diversity. But there are communities of people with distinct cultures. The one most often mentioned was the Portuguese community. There was agreement that women from this community don't seek help outside of the family and the Portuguese community and that there is little understanding of woman abuse. Rural values that discourage help seeking outside of the family in the rural community are also values of the Portuguese community.

In Portuguese and rural culture, you don't seek help outside of family

Similarly respondents noted that the Mennonite community does not seek help outside of family. In this community, there is limited access to all technology, including transportation;

Mennonite society generally doesn't call the police.

A respondent noted that;

CAPRO has done some work with the Portuguese and Mennonite communities in the past. They came up with the idea of training facilitators [from within the community] to work in these communities.

Seasonal workers come during the summer from Jamaica;

These migrant workers are not seen as part of the community. They remain isolated.

Some respondents noted a lack of cultural sensitivity towards the First Nations community. One respondent noted that;

There are some native kids in Strathroy, and there is no understanding of their cultural background.

This lack of cultural sensitivity deepens a sense of isolation and alienation, leaving the most vulnerable with even more restricted access to supportive services.

Lack of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Confidentiality or the lack of it in rural settings was named as a significant problem;

Confidentiality is a concern, and women are not willing to seek out service. They say to themselves, 'If I go in that door the neighbours will all know, so I won't go.'

There are still some party lines in the county.

Obviously this could serve to restrict access to information and support available over the telephone.

Women can't trust that their confidentiality will be respected because they often know people who are working in the services. When clients do understand that their confidentiality will be respected, they fear that they will be seen by a neighbour. This really leaves them with no one to go to if they are being abused. Respondents explained;

Women need a place where they feel safe to come, a non-threatening environment. Rural women don't want a service where they will be known. They don't want to be re-victimized by gossip.

Many times women are not given a chance in their own communities. They don't have an opportunity to be present and be who they are and not mask who they are. If they can come to a place where there is no judgment and no shame attached, it can be a strength builder.

If women can find ways to access services outside of their own communities, it can help them.

This again speaks to the desperate need for transportation and the barrier that it poses for abused women.

Even group therapy is difficult to deliver because of close community connections and a reluctance to meet people who are known in therapy. A respondent working in a Multi-Service Centre noted;

Counsellors would offer a group, but women won't come because of confidentiality concerns. We need general groups where they won't be stigmatized [as they] share and grow. Sometimes it helps that services are available from a multi-purpose centre, but women are still likely to be seen.

The problems surrounding the issue of confidentiality are related to the nature of rural communities, but they are also related to a mentality that blames women for the abuse they experience and the shame that results from that. Providing transportation to women so that they can access service outside of their own community is one solution. Continuing to work to raise awareness about the need to hold perpetrators of abuse responsible for their actions will begin to enable women to feel comfortable accessing services in their own community. The words of one respondent working in a rural setting reinforce this,

Services need to be available in smaller communities. Many people are intimidated by big services. At the beginning, many said that people wouldn't use services, but that hasn't been true. There is a trend in services coming to the county and more interest in services, more inquiries. The stigma has eased and it's easier for people to come forward.

Options for Service Delivery

Currently, there are five Multi-Service Centres in Middlesex County, funded primarily through HRSDC. The intent of these Centres is to allow someone to come in and access several different services and agencies. There is a large focus on Employment Insurance and related programs. They include the GAINS Centre in Strathroy, the Quest Centre in Glencoe, the Parkhill Multi-Service Centre, the Ausable Centre in Lucan and the Dorchester Employment Resource Centre in the Dorchester Library. Staff from these Centres meet monthly to discuss concerns and issues. They usually have a guest speaker. As a result of interviews conducted for this project, a speaker was invited to one of these meetings to present information about woman abuse and the referral network of existing services.

Several of these Centres are already involved in addressing woman abuse;

The existence of the Quest Centre, open four years now, has improved access to service, as it enables the WRRC counsellor to meet women here. She went from spending half a day here to one and a half days and it has been very helpful to have her come out this way. The school has sent over students occasionally. A link is growing between the public health nurse, the school guidance counsellor and the WRRC counsellor.

The Parkhill Multi-Service Centre provides space for an impressive array of service providers, enhancing access for the local community. They organize a Health Fair every two years and do regular outreach to the high school, church groups and service clubs. The John Howard Society, Family Service London, the Sexual Assault Centre London and Search Community Mental Health Services all have a counsellor based there. Probation and Parole uses office space and See Saw, a peer group for people who are bipolar, runs out of the office.

The GAINS Centre in Strathroy offers spaces to a wide array of services. We have already acknowledged that Strathroy is a hub for many organizations that serve Middlesex County. Women's Rural Resource Centre is the focal point for services specific to woman abuse, but many complimentary services are located at the GAINS Centre. Ontario Works has offices and meet clients there, as does ODSP. LEADS has an office. LEADS will assist women who have experienced abuse in finding employment. Probation and Parole meets clients. Fanshawe College has Continuing Education classes in the evening. During the day the Strathroy Adult Learning Centre runs credit courses through the Thames Valley District School Board. There is a literacy and numeracy component program to provide upgrading to continue onto credit courses. London Interfaith Counselling has been contracted through HRSDC to provide service to those in receipt of employment insurance. The John Howard Society counsels primarily youth and St. Leonard's Society works with youth who have been ordered to do community service. Family Service London offers general short-term counselling, funded through a grant from the County of Middlesex and Credit Counselling London, which recently merged with FSL. ATN works with those with learning disabilities and provides one-on-one tutoring. Two employment counsellors, funded through HRSDC, work there. There is access to computers, primarily for job searches and career planning. GAINS has partnered with the Middlesex London Health Unit to share meeting space and offices. Staff from OHIP come two days each month to do new health cards. Applications for Social Insurance Numbers, passports and Canada Pension are available, along with Income Tax Forms. Community Information is on the shelves and GAINS staff get lots of questions about services. They have general knowledge about what is available and make many referrals.

These multipurpose centres are one model of service delivery. They can be a cost-effective way of bringing a greater range of services to various parts of the county. Many respondents pointed out, however, that this sort of model cannot be viewed as a panacea for the problems of availability of and accessibility to woman abuse services in Middlesex County.

Services under one roof is what we are stuck with; there are not a lot of options. There is not much security in any of those locations; transportation is still a big problem. They probably serve both perpetrators and victims in the same place. Confidentiality is served; there could be a lot of reasons why you are there.

Services have always done what is easiest for service providers, set up outreach sites. Going to women's homes, taking service to her, is exceptional. We do what

works for service providers, but we also need to try and accommodate individual needs. CAS have voluntary clients because they go to homes.

Specific gaps and concerns were observed by respondents which should be taken into consideration when reflecting on optimal models of service delivery;

I would like to be able to offer more groups.

I would like to see a parenting or life skills group, maybe overlapping with WRCC.

Services that are in the county are not flexible enough. We can't get OW to come to shelter unless there is extreme danger.

There are many practical services in terms of food and clothing that we should also make accessible.

Respondents noted that there will always be some services that we can't take to women and that better transportation continues to be needed;

Victim Witness Assistance Program is still in London and the Crown Attorney is still in London. Housing applications have to be faxed to London and communication is complicated. If financing were there to transport women to London, that would ease the situation.

It was noted that Alcohol and Drug Services and the John Howard Society took a step in the right direction when they decided to extend service to the county two days a week;

... regularly and ongoing, not sporadic or dependent upon numbers.

Several respondents expressed a desire for other agencies to follow suit.

Many respondents felt that there is also a need to reevaluate service models. The suggestion to have a generalized advocate trained in offering multiple supports was repeatedly mentioned. This would be an alternative source of support to work in tandem with existing services;

Create a superworker, an advocate who is mobile, for working with women and kids.

Do some cross-training and have someone available for legal needs and also housing needs.

This suggestion was not put forward as a solution for all problems and respondents added;

We will still have the transportation issue. It's appealing as long as it doesn't become the only way in and slow down access to service.

Sometimes solutions lie in the ability of agencies to be flexible. A Public Health Nurse noted that she was impressed with WRRC;

I had a client and they made an exception and came to her home and sat in the car with her, while I looked after her kids in the house.

An observation surfaced several times that;

The number one support for women is friends and family.

The suggestion that followed was;

Let's educate the community on how to respond to abused women and their families. There is a need to build capacity in community to support women, as well as a need for service development. This approach would help women stay in their community.

Another suggestion supported an alternative model of service delivery;

Mentoring in a rural area is one of the most cost-effective ways of providing ongoing support and anchoring change. The professionals focus on immediate, serious and complicated needs, but the mentor is a phone call away. It's very important in the rural areas because of the issue of isolation. This is the biggest factor that stops a person from self-referring and inhibits the ongoing success of a case. You really have to look at cost-effectiveness in the county because you have a large geographic area and isolation is a reality.

Whatever model is implemented, there was consensus that there is a need to improve transportation and childcare and that resources to meet these needs can't come from within existing agency budgets. A need for the development of subsidized and free transportation services was clearly expressed over and over again by respondents.

Rural – Urban Collaboration

Respondents perceive an inequity in service provision on all fronts in the county.

Police response is less consistent due to multiple services. There are fewer supports outside of shelter; lawyers, housing and childcare are harder to access.

There were strong feelings that the needs of rural women in Middlesex County are not being met, that their issues are being overlooked and that services in London bear some responsibility for addressing the situation;

Most services that are based in London are responsible for delivering service to the county. Most are funded to deliver services in the county, and they should be engaged in problem solving on how to do this.

In nine out of ten counties in the region served by one provincial government ministry, there is not the same separation between city and county that we see between London and Middlesex. No other county has two coordinating committees. For example, the Windsor-Essex Coordinating Committee takes responsibility for the whole area.

In Elgin County they have spent the last three years developing protocols and seeing how services link and work together.

There must be a will of London services to assist with problem solving around service delivery in the county.

London-based service providers addressed some of the challenges they face in meeting this expectation;

It's financially prohibitive to set up an office and put staff there. It takes a lot of time and it's harder to network with agencies that are farther away.

To go to the LCCEWA takes ten minutes travel time; it is two hours to go the MCCEWA. This limits the ability to keep connected with agencies in the county.

A respondent acknowledged some efforts by London-based agencies to serve the rural community, but pointed out the shortcomings in the approach as well;

A lot of London agencies have tried to put service in county, but it is not a priority for them. Sometimes workers get dumped out there. They are on their own, and it's hard to keep programming flexible and adapted to needs.

To address this problem, it makes sense to share resources and to work together across agencies. It was even suggested that it might be possible to coordinate a transportation service. Innovative thinking will help to meet the challenges;

Sometimes we need to be more flexible and creative. We can connect via teleconference for meetings in London. It is preferable to not being able to participate at all. We can have a counselling session on the phone with a woman who can't make it in to her appointment. It helps her from being completely isolated.

A London-based respondent felt that;

It is insulting to think that urban services have solutions for rural problems. We want to have good links and want to enhance services that grow from rural expertise.

None of the county respondents contradicted this logic, but they did feel that urban communities are not accountable enough to rural communities and that there is a need to recognize needs existing in rural areas and to build plans for meeting these needs into the programs of agencies based in London. And one respondent pointed out that although people make an honest effort to work collaboratively,

The existing situation is an opportunity not to be well-coordinated.

Simply put;

Everyone who works in this area has an obligation to ensure equitable service to all abused women.

**ADDRESSING THE IMBALANCES OF SERVICE IN LONDON
AND THE REST OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY**

“The way we talk about rural communities shows that we really don’t want to know.”

A primary goal of this report was to examine the inequities in service provision that exist between London and the surrounding rural areas of Middlesex County. The section focusing on *The Rural Context* does that. That section also contains the seeds of many ideas for beginning to address those inequities. But before we can begin to effectively work towards improving access to service for abused women and their children in the rural areas, a fundamental shift must take place. London-based service providers and decision makers, who control many of the available resources and who control the flow of those resources, must accept responsibility for serving all of Middlesex County. The current structures reinforce the geographic isolation of rural-based services and the urban-rural divide. Respondents in a rural focus group reported feeling that;

Rural women are not getting their needs met and rural issues are overlooked.

Feeling frustrated by the inequities, some respondents question;

Why is there a separate Coordinating Committee for Middlesex?

Others reflect on the history of the separation;

When the Middlesex County Coordinating Committee was formed most London-based services didn’t have satellite offices. The intent [of the MCCCEWA] was to connect with local services.

There was a concern that if the Committees were combined we would lose rural voices or the Middlesex Committee would become subordinate to the London Committee.

However legitimate the separation, respondents made it clear that there are downsides to it;

The two Coordinating Committees contribute to the lack of uniformity in police response.

Currently, rural issues are invisible to London.

Some respondents advocated merging the two Coordinating Committees;

It would help to have one Coordinating Committee. I would like to see more coordination between the city and the county around initiatives.

But respondents also noted that working in different contexts, the two Coordinating Committees have evolved differently;

In Middlesex, we are more hands on and do public education and outreach. London is more focused on policy concerns.

There was a strong sense that this is work worth sustaining. One respondent suggested a way of doing this if the Committees merged;

Perhaps we could have a Rural Issues Committee doing some of the work that we have started around public education.

Overall, there was a large degree of agreement, particularly from rural respondents, that;

Somehow we have to be more integrated.

One of the issues many respondents felt it is most important to address is a uniform police response throughout the county. Some expressed hope that this goal can be assisted through a new structure;

Integration of the two Coordinating Committees will lead to more uniform police response.

A respondent pointed out that it will be important to think about how to restructure in a way that will make both Committees more effective;

We don't want Middlesex to become subordinate to London, which could happen through a subcommittee structure.

Another respondent suggested;

We could have an annual consultation with groups like farm groups and people like Joan Nicole from the Parkhill Multi-Service Centre.

One respondent proposed a starting place for moving forward;

The vision of a coordinating committee is to be a group of representatives. There would be better coordination if the two groups sat together. The focus would not be solely on the rural areas or the city. The needs might be different and strategies might be different, but issues are the same. This could provide a unique opportunity to recommend policy that speaks to all abused women and their children.

APPENDIX 1

Interview Respondents

Al Lamont	South West Middlesex Health Centre
Alison Cunningham	Children and Families in the Justice System, London Family Court Clinic
Anne Finnigan	Sexual Assault And Domestic Violence Care and Treatment Centre
Brenda Mezza	Rotholme
Betty Matos	Support Link
Caroline Kennedy	OPP, Community Service Officer
Cathy Hird	London District Catholic School Board, Secondary School Teacher, Violence Prevention Consultant
Colleen Montgomery	United Way of London & Middlesex
Darlene Ritchie	At^lohsa Native Family Healing Services
Darlene Silverira	Probation and Parole
Derrick Drouillard	CAS Community Group Treatment Program
Eileen McCoy	GAINS Centre
Eleanor Schnall	Judge, Ontario Court of Justice
Estela Quintero	United Way of London & Middlesex
Jacquie Carr	Community based Advocate
Jane Arrand	Domestic Violence Coordinator, Middlesex County OPP
Janet Baltessen	LEADS Employment Service
Jennifer Lee	Quest Centre Community Initiatives
Joan Nicol	Parkhill Multi-Service Centre
Joanne Sherin	Family Service London (Community Counselling Program)
Judith Potter	Lawyer
Kate Wiggins	Women's Community House
Kathleen Chapman	Family Law Information Centre
Kathleen Howe	John Howard Society

Katie Moeller	Children's Aid Society
Kim Betteridge	Family Service London in Middlesex County
Kim Davis	Research Coordinator, The Transportation Driving Force Working Group
Laurie Ewing	London Police Service
Lisa Heslop	Family Consultants – Victim Services Unit
Liz Rodrigues	LUSO Community Services
Lori Cunningham	John Howard Society
Lynn Booker Collins	Merrymount Children's Centre
Marg McGill	London Interfaith Counselling Centre and Psychotherapist with a private practice
Maria Loranzo- Perez	LUSO Community Services
Mary-Angela Coderre	LEADS Employment Service
Mary Beth Millar	London East Mental Health Services
Mary Huffman	London Middlesex Health Unit, Family Abuse Prevention Project
Mary Pinder	Probation and Parol
Mary Poore	London-Middlesex Housing Corporation, Community relations worker
Megan Beavers	Victim Services of Middlesex County
Megan Walker	London Abused Women's Centre
Michelle Hurtibuise	London Intercommunity Heath Centre
Michelle Paddon	Changing Ways
Mike Sauer	Across Languages
Michael Stok	Strathroy-Caradoc Police Service
Morella Yopez-Millon	Sexual Assault Centre London and Psychotherapist with a private practice
Mohamed Baobaid	Changing Ways
Mohammed Al-Adeimi	South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre, Breaking the Barriers of Isolation in South London
Nicole Johnson	Sexual Assault Centre London

Pam Hill	Heartspace
Petra Taylor	Glen Cairn Community Centre
Ray Hughes	Thames Valley District School Board
Roy Hardy	Ontario Works, Middlesex County
Sandra Daters-Bere	Ministry of Community and Social Services
Susan Macphail	London East Community Mental Health Services, Canadian Mental Health Association
Susan Ralyea	Middlesex-London Health Unit
Tim Kelly	Changing Ways
Tom Drouillard	London Police Service
Vickie Stevens	Search Community Mental Health Services
Wendy Arnott	Women's Rural Resource Centre

Focus Group Participants

Bev Lumsden	Victim Services of Middlesex County
Beverly Leipert	Chair in Rural Women's Health, University of Western
Betty Matos	Support Link
Bonnie Williams	London Interfaith Counselling Services
Carol Roberts	Branch Coordinator for Middlesex County library
Darlene Ritchie	At^lohsa Native Family Healing Services
Dave Morris	Middlesex County CAS
Donna Waterman	Middlesex London Health Unit
Frances Shamley	Community Development Agent for Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition
Jean Johnson	Director of Middlesex Federation of Agriculture
Joanne Lubansky	Middlesex London Health Unit
Joanne Sherin	Family Services London
Joy Lang	Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children
Kate Wiggins	Women's Community House
Kim Betteridge	Family Service London

Laurie Ewing	London Police Service
Lisa Heslop	Family Consultants, London Police Service
Mary Huffman	Middlesex London Health Unit Family Abuse Prevention Project
Mary Pinder	Probation and Parole
Melissa Nicols	Sexual Assault Centre London
Michelle Paddon	Community Group Treatment Program, Children's Aid Society/Caring Dads Program, Changing Ways
Michael Skok	Strathroy-Caradoc Police Service
Mike Sauer	Across Languages
Nicole Johnson	Sexual Assault Centre London
Roxanne Bail	Family home visitor with Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, Middlesex London Health Unit
Salley Bennet	Middlesex County Community and Social Services, Ontario Works
Thelma Perry	Women's Institute
Teri Allen	Strathroy General Hospital
Tim Kelly	Changing Ways
Valerie Clark	Middlesex County Library
Wendy Arnott	Women's Rural Resource Centre
10 women	Participated in a Strathroy based focus group
12 women	Participated in a London based focus group