

A Better World for Women



*Government's Response to the
Minister's Working Group on Violence Against Women*



DECEMBER 2001



Dear Members:

I wish to thank you all for the tremendous amount of work and dedication you have put into the completion of the Strategic Framework to address violence against women. Your commitment to this project is deeply appreciated by the Government of New Brunswick.

I also want to thank all the service providers who opened their doors to me so I could see first-hand the work that occurs at the grassroots level and personally hear the concerns of workers. A significant amount of time was also given by professional groups, survivors and men in treatment for abuse, whose voices were heard during focus group sessions. Thank you all.

As you point out in the Strategic Framework, violence against women is a societal issue. It affects every man, woman and child in this province. The impacts of violence are severe and long-term, affecting not only abused women but also their children.

To make a difference, the issue needs to be addressed in a strategic manner and the work sustained over time. Eliminating violence against women will require concerted and sustained effort on the part of governments, the private sector, communities and individuals.

On the following pages you will find the government response to your recommendations. The three-year action plan represents expenditures of about \$2.8 million. I hope you will be pleased with the concrete actions to which we have committed to over the next few years.

I look forward to working with you again.

Sincerely,

Margaret-Ann Blaney
Minister Responsible for the Status of Women

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
YEAR 1	8
Key Result Area: Leadership and Co-ordination	8
Key Result Area: Legislation	8
Key Result Area: Stability/Sustainability	9
Key Result Area: Prevention and Education	9
Key Result Area: Policy and Support Issues	10
Key Result Area: Service Delivery	11
Key Result Area: Accountability	11
YEAR 2	12
Key Result Area: Legislation	12
Key Result Area: Policy and Support Issues	12
Key Result Area: Stability/Sustainability	12
Key Result Area: Prevention and Education	13
Key Result Area: Service Delivery	13
YEAR 3	14
Key Result Area: Prevention and Education	14
Key Result Area: Policy and Support Issues	14
Recommendations Currently Being Addressed	15
Recommendations Requiring Further Review	16
Recommendations Not Under Consideration At This Time	17

INTRODUCTION

The Government of New Brunswick concurs with the vision of the Minister's Working Group on Violence Against Women:

« That all New Brunswick families must live in a secure, nurturing environment free of abuse and violence. »

Government also agrees that eliminating violence against women requires sustained commitment, leadership and energy over time, by government and by communities.

Actions will be implemented in a way that endorses the principles and values of the Working Group, which are:

1. Violence against women is a serious health, social and economic issue.
2. Families must live in a secure, nurturing environment free of abuse and violence.
3. Family violence, in many of its forms, is a criminal act and should be treated as such in all aspects of society.
4. Women must have access to information and options to support them in decision making.
5. Interventions dealing with incidences of violence against women are long-term, systemic in nature and address the individual service needs of victims, children and perpetrators.
6. Poverty or the threat of poverty should not be a barrier for a woman seeking to leave an abusive situation.
7. Formal and informal caregivers/service providers should be helpful and do no further harm.

YEAR I

Key Result Area : Leadership and Co-ordination

Strategies :

1. A co-ordinator will be assigned to the Executive Council Office to co-ordinate work with respect to violence against women, including :
 - a) facilitating an annual meeting of the Minister's Working Group on Violence Against Women (with adjusted membership) to provide advice to government and consider progress on the implementation of the action plan;
 - b) facilitating the review and updating of existing protocols;
 - c) facilitating the development of a training strategy for government service providers;
 - d) working with community groups and private sector sponsors on the implementation of prevention and education initiatives;
 - e) working with the Provincial Caring Partnerships Committee and other organizations to strengthen existing partnerships and create new partnerships where they do not exist;
 - f) distributing the Working Group Strategic Framework and the government response;
 - g) developing an appropriate mechanism to report on progress made in this area over time. (Executive Council Office)
2. Each relevant department officially will recognize work related to violence against women on individual work plans for employees involved in addressing the issue.

Key Result Area : Legislation

Strategies :

3. An interdepartmental committee will be struck, chaired by the Department of Justice, to review family violence legislation in other provinces and provide government with options and recommendations on the feasibility of such legislation in New Brunswick. (Justice)

Key Result Area : Stability/Sustainability

Strategies :

4. Transition houses will be funded at 90% of approved cost. There will be no clawback by government of monies raised through fundraising. (Family and Community Services)

Key Result Area: Prevention and Education

Strategies:

5. Government will begin to expand the Healthy Learners program to Grades 6 to 8 through a reallocation of public health nurses. The program currently is being evaluated and the Departments of Education and Health and Wellness will bring forward further advice pending the results of the evaluation. (Health and Wellness/Education)
6. Government will encourage relevant professional organizations to request that education in violence issues be incorporated into their professional training and that time be set aside each year for ongoing sensitization on the issue of violence against women. (all relevant departments)
7. The Woman Abuse Protocols will be updated and distributed, in consultation with the community. (Executive Council Office/Family and Community Services)
8. The Child Abuse Protocols will be updated and distributed, in consultation with the community. (Executive Council Office/Family and Community Services)
9. A training strategy for government service providers will be developed to address ongoing training, in-service training, and orientation packages for new government service providers (Executive Council Office).
10. Government will pursue corporate sponsors, including Aliant, to assist in developing and producing an abuse information page for inclusion in telephone books throughout the province. (Executive Council Office)
11. The Minister of Training and Employment Development will suggest to the appropriate service providers that abuse information be incorporated into second-language training for immigrants. (Training and Employment Development)
12. The government, through the Department of Education, will provide \$20,000 to the Making Waves/Vague par Vague program. (Education)

Key Result Area : Policy and Support Issues

Strategies :

- I3. The Department of Family and Community Services will begin a review of its social assistance and housing policies and procedures, including second stage housing, to determine the implications of enhancements to support abused women. Feasible and appropriate changes will be implemented over time. (Family and Community Services)
- I4. The Department of Public Safety will examine the feasibility of piloting a program for child witnesses of abuse who come to the attention of the criminal justice system. (Public Safety)
- I5. All relevant departments will render their program information accessible to the public through a public education strategy. (Executive Council Office)
- I6. The Department of Justice will approach the Law Society of New Brunswick to educate lawyers on the importance of bringing forward abuse information during court proceedings. (Justice)
- I7. The Ministers of Public Safety and Justice will lobby the Solicitor General of Canada to provide financial assistance and other required services to victims of violence so they are able to attend and present impact statements at parole hearings. (Public Safety/Justice)

Key Result Area : Service Delivery

Strategies :

18. The Department of Family and Community Services will examine various options with respect to outreach, access to information, sexual assault services and services to rural women. The department invites communities to bring forward their ideas. (Family and Community Services)
19. In partnership with the Valley Family Resource Centre in Woodstock, the Department of Public Safety will establish an integrated response to victims of crime, from police notification to finalization of the case. Particular emphasis will be placed on family violence victims and having a community response to victims. (Public Safety)
20. Government will work with communities to identify gaps in services to sexual assault victims and explore different ways to deal with the situation. (Executive Council Office)
21. An inventory of services, both community and government, will be produced to assist victims, perpetrators and children. This inventory will be updated periodically and be made available via the Internet. (Executive Council Office)

Key Result Area : Accountability

Strategies :

22. Government will undertake an attitudinal survey in order to establish a baseline from which to measure the effectiveness of the education and prevention strategy over time. (ECO)

YEAR 2

Key Result Area : Legislation

Year 2 Strategies :

1. Action in Year 2 is dependent on decisions taken once the review of legislation in other jurisdictions is completed and recommendations are presented to government. (Justice)

Key Result Area : Policy and Support Issues

Strategies :

2. The Department of Family and Community Services will continue to review its social assistance and housing policies and procedures, including second stage housing, to determine the implications of enhancements to support abused women. Feasible and appropriate changes will be implemented over time. (Family and Community Services)

Key Result Area : Stability/Sustainability

Strategies :

3. Transition houses will be funded at 100% of approved cost. There will be no clawback by government of monies raised through fundraising. It is expected, however, that transition houses will continue to fundraise with a view toward enhancing programs (i.e. outreach, counselling services), and facilitating staff development and training. (Family and Community Services)

Key Result Area: Prevention and Education

Strategies :

4. Government will implement its training strategy for government service providers, beginning with training in Adult Victims of Abuse Protocols. (Executive Council Office/Family and Community Services)
5. Government, in partnership with the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Foundation and the Public Legal Education and Information Service, will develop a public awareness strategy. (Executive Council Office)
6. The Adult Victims of Abuse (elder and vulnerable adults) Protocols will be updated and distributed in consultation with the community. (Executive Council Office/Family and Community Services)

Key Result Area: Service Delivery

Strategies:

7. The Departments of Justice and Public Safety will explore the London Family Court Clinic model and other innovative models with a focus on the potential for importing aspects to New Brunswick. (Justice/Public Safety)
8. The Department of Family and Community Services will explore options for providing a 24-hour help line to victims and perpetrators. (Family and Community Services)
9. Based on the feasibility study, the Department of Public Safety will implement a pilot project for child witnesses of abuse who come to the attention of the criminal justice system. (Public Safety)

YEAR 3

Key Result Area: Prevention and Education

Strategies :

1. A woman abuse public awareness campaign will be launched. Private sector and foundation contributions will be sought. (Executive Council Office)
2. Government will undertake a review of the content included in parenting classes offered throughout the province with a view toward adding information on healthy relationships and abuse. (Executive Council Office)

Key Result Area : Policy and Support Issues

3. A study will be undertaken, in partnership with the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research, on best practices in other jurisdictions with respect to universal screening. (Executive Council Office)

Recommendations Currently Being Addressed

1. The Department of Education is in the process of implementing a new personal development course in schools and teachers are receiving the necessary training. This should respond to the needs identified by the Working Group. (Education)
2. Government congratulates the Beaverbrook School in Moncton for receiving its certification as a Quality School, and supports any school where teachers and students wish to become involved in this program.
3. Non-government organizations are able to access government training opportunities at the same cost as government employees. The calendar of training is available at: www.gnb.ca/0163/learning-e.asp. (Office of Human Resources)
4. The Department of Public Safety contracts the provision of court ordered treatment in recognized programs for both spousal abuse offenders and sex offenders. Research has shown that group-oriented treatment is most effective for spousal abuse offenders which accounts for the lapse of time that sometimes occurs before such programs are available. Sex offenders receive one-to-one therapy with private therapists. (Public Safety)
5. Police forces in New Brunswick continue to take violence against women seriously. Priority is given to all crimes of violence, particularly domestic violence. Charges are laid if there is sufficient evidence to proceed. As part of the updates and training related to the protocols (i.e. women, children, adult victims), the Department of Public Safety will ensure police actively participate in the development and training initiatives. (Public Safety)
6. Sentencing provisions in cases of family violence are on the current agenda of the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Sentencing. (Justice)
7. The Department of Family and Community Services has identified funding for a Children's Support Program to provide services to children who have witnessed family violence. Transition houses will deliver this program using a program design that has been developed by the Coalition of Transition Houses and government staff. (Family and Community Services)

8. Mechanisms have been established to enhance working relationships between transition house workers and government workers. (Family and Community Services)
9. Government recognizes the importance of evaluation and, over time, all programs and services will be evaluated. (all government departments)
10. The Centre for Coaching Education of NB, a partner of the Culture and Sport Secretariat, has launched a program that focuses on promoting fair play by coaches of all New Brunswick children. The handbook and television advertisements focus on developing a positive self-image in young athletes, safety in sport and places emphasis on participation. (Culture and Sport Secretariat)
11. The Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) available to all employees of Part I of the public service provides counselling services to women who are victims of violence as well as dependent children. Various Employee Assistance Plans are available to employees of Parts II and III of the public service. (Office of Human Resources)

Recommendations Requiring Further Review

1. With respect to provisions related to the age of consent for treatment/ intervention for children under the age of 19, several legal implications exist and must be reviewed before providing a response. (Executive Council Office)
2. The Department of Justice will assess, in consultation with Legal Aid New Brunswick, the impact of applying flexibility when assessing the value of a woman's equity in determining eligibility for division of marital property under the Domestic Legal Aid Program. (Justice)
3. The Department of Justice will assess the viability of expanding access to the *For The Sake of the Children* program. (Justice)
4. The screening of policies and programs to ensure the special needs of immigrant, disabled, aboriginal, military and rural women are taken into account will be integrated into the review and updating of abuse protocols. (Executive Council Office/Family and Community Services)
5. The Department of Health and Wellness will explore integration of mental health and alcohol and drug dependency services, with a view toward addressing the issue of access to services. (Health and Wellness)

6. The Department of Health and Wellness will explore alternative interventions (e.g. facilitated support, self-help groups and psycho-educational initiatives), in addition to the existing therapeutic approach for treating adult victims of child abuse within existing community resource networks. (Health and Wellness)
7. Public health nurses will be consulted on the appropriateness of distributing information on abuse to new parents by including it in the Born to Read Packages distributed at birth, and also among the information packages distributed at the 3.5-year screening and kindergarten entry. (Health and Wellness)
8. The Department of Public Safety will review the recommendation relating to necessary security supports for high-risk victims to determine if personal alarm systems, beepers, etc., are effective solutions. In rural areas of the province, cellular telephones and beepers are not effective and may give a false sense of security. (Public Safety)

Recommendations Not Under Consideration At This Time

1. That a ministerial committee be struck to allow for broader consideration of the issue and to serve as a co-ordinating mechanism for long-term actions which cross various departments. This Committee should meet yearly, or more often if deemed necessary. *A ministerial committee is not an appropriate co-ordinating mechanism. This can be achieved through the co-ordinator.*
2. That the funding application process for community groups be streamlined and accompanied by transparent criteria and decision-making. *Provincial government funding of community groups is done on a case-by-case basis as department budgets permit.*
3. That funding for government-purchased services and programs be approved on a three-year basis. Moreover, a user-friendly mechanism be developed to ensure that a yearly review and adjustment process is part of the funding criteria. *Budgeting of government programs and services is done on an annual basis.*
4. That a review be undertaken to assess the adequacy of public support provided to existing community services and to address any identified anomalies over the course of the five-year government action plan. *Funding of programs and services is reviewed as a routine part of the annual budget process.*
5. That, in addition to teachers, parents be invited to participate in the Making Waves Program. *This recommendation needs to be addressed by the Making Waves co-ordinators.*

