

Midterm Thematic Report: Enhancing Collaboration and Integration of Support Services for Children Impacted by Intimate Partner Violence: A Child-Centred Approach

Overview: This midterm report highlights key emerging themes gathered from engagements with frontline workers in Kelowna, BC, conducted as part of the community-based research project focused on enhancing collaboration and integration of support services for children impacted by intimate partner violence (IPV), taking a child-centred approach. It captures initial frontline perspectives on barriers, opportunities, and essential practices to improve service delivery for children and families impacted by IPV.

Activities undertaken to date:

Preliminary Phase:

- Round Table with Key Community Stakeholders (N=18, representing 12 organizations)
- Day of Sharing with Key Community Stakeholders (N=6)
- Received Written Responses to Preliminary Questions (N=3)
- Individual Information Sessions (N=2, Kelowna Women's Shelter, ICAT)

- Organizational Presentations (N=2, Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society, Westbank First Nation)

Engagement Phase (current phase):

- Survey completion (N=2)
- Individual Engagements (N=3, 1 more scheduled)
- Group Engagements 2 scheduled (N=~20)

Themes and ideas identified within the Engagement phase:

Enhancing Collaborative Funding Strategies

In the context of organizational competition for grants, there is a pressing need for enhanced transparency among community resources in Kelowna regarding the funding opportunities they pursue. This transparency should foster more collaboration among like-minded programs grounded in respectful communication and a mutual understanding of each organization's strengths and capabilities.

Preventing "Mission Creep"

One significant concern is "mission creep," which often arises when organizations seek funding, leading them to deviate from their core missions. Currently, the trend towards program-based funding—as opposed to operational funding—compels organizations to develop new programs simply to secure the funding necessary for their ongoing operations.

Commercial Strategies to Build Capacity

Moreover, integrating product or service sales with charitable objectives is permissible, provided these activities align with the organization's mission and values. When delivering these services for a fee, support structures could be improved by offering training at no cost to smaller not-for-profit organizations, while larger, well-funded entities would bear the costs, ensuring equitable access to resources across the board.

Unified
Community
Resource

The goal is to create a comprehensive information sheet that outlines various community organizations and their respective services. This would be designed to subtly include resources for anti-violence support, without explicitly labelling them as such. By doing this, clients, particularly women seeking support, can take the sheet home without any perceived risk, as it would appear as a general community services brochure rather than one specifically for the Kelowna Women's Shelter.

Typical
Pathways aren't
Trauma-
Informed or
Unique

Many typical pathways for children and families impacted by IPV are not trauma-informed, unique, and fail to meet individuals where they are in their healing process. A key aspect of effective support is adopting a survivor-centred approach rather than an agency-centred one. For instance, practices such as reaching out in a thoughtful manner, like collaboratively deciding with clients how they would best be reached, demonstrate a commitment to being trauma-informed.

Weekend and
After-hours
Support

The importance of providing weekend and after-hours support for children and families cannot be overstated. Many organizations operate solely during business hours, leading to delays in assistance and reactive measures when crises occur. Having staff available on weekends, particularly during the unstructured time of summer, would be invaluable as this is often when families face difficulties.

Empowering
Client Narratives
through Warm
Transfer
Documents

The warm transfer document can be a comprehensive record that contains all personal and case-related information for each client. It is structured to provide a holistic view of the individual's circumstances and experiences, ensuring that critical details are readily available when engaging with various support services. Importantly, this document is owned and maintained by the client themselves, rather than being tied to any single organization. This empowers clients to have control over their information and facilitates smoother transitions between different services or practitioners, allowing for a more personalized and efficient support experience.

Timing of
Offering Support

It is essential to provide help promptly, as this initial outreach can be crucial for individuals in distress. However, in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic incident, individuals may not be in the best position to make decisions. So, while early support is key, a check-in a few days later can reinforce the offer of assistance.

Connecting in
Safe Spaces for
Clients

Recognizing that there may already be established safe spaces for children and families is key to fostering meaningful connections. These environments offer opportunities for individuals to engage with mentors, frontline staff, and peers in a manner that encourages healing and builds trust. Meeting clients where they are, within these familiar and safe contexts, can enhance their comfort and openness, creating a solid foundation for supportive relationships that promote their growth and recovery.

Ensuring the
Necessities of
Life

Families experiencing IPV often face heightened challenges such as financial, housing or food insecurities, that can severely affect children's well-being and development and hinder their ability to heal and move forward. When these families have access to essential resources, such as safe housing, nutritious food, and emotional support, they are better equipped to escape cycles of violence and provide a nurturing environment for their children. Meeting these fundamental needs is vital in promoting resilience and healing for both children and their families affected by IPV.

High Instances
of Bullying

Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, particularly those affected by IPV, often face bullying. As a result, these kids may lash out at their peers as a way of coping with their experiences.

Empowering
Caregivers

The importance of community in this context cannot be overstated; it truly "takes a village" to raise children. By having more people involved in the support network, families can thrive. A key aspect of this support is reducing the stigma around asking for help. Many single mothers feel pressured to embody the strong, independent woman archetype for the sake of their children, which can inadvertently prevent them from seeking the assistance they need. The message that organizations and support systems need to convey is that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but rather a necessary step toward fostering resilience and strength within the family.

Conclusion and Next Steps

These findings support the study's direction: to strengthen collaboration, reduce fragmentation, and prioritize the needs of children and families. The voices reflected here represent only a portion of the frontline service providers in Kelowna who serve children and families impacted by IPV. We will continue to engage with frontline staff.