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Community Collaboratives as a Strategy to Engage Regional Government in the Prevention of Violence Against Women

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RÉSUMÉ

Les réponses pénales à la violence faite aux femmes tendent à être réactives et orientées vers le contrevenant. D'autre part, les initiatives préventives ne donnent que peu d'attention à l'importance de la prise en compte du genre (*gender mainstreaming*) dans leurs pratiques et politiques. Les actions des gouvernements centraux à l'égard de la violence faite aux femmes ne reflètent que rarement une analyse des causes systémiques du problème ou un engagement pour les types de solutions nécessaires pour améliorer la sécurité des femmes. Plusieurs ont donc tourné leur attention à tenter d'influencer les politiques et pratiques au niveau local et, plus particulièrement, à essayer d'assurer une approche systématique à l'intégration de l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes dans la planification, la mise-en-œuvre et l'évaluation des programmes et services municipaux ou régionaux. Cet article décrit l'émergence d'une telle tentative dans la Région de Peel en Ontario (Canada) sous la forme de collaboration communautaire entre de nombreuses agences qui œuvrent dans le domaine de la violence faite aux femmes. La discussion met l'accent sur leur succès et sur certains des défis auxquels ils et elles font face et termine en proposant des recommandations pour améliorer l'efficacité et la durabilité de la collaboration communautaire dans ce domaine.

ABSTRACT

Criminal justice responses to violence against women have tended to be reactive and offender-focused and crime prevention initiatives have paid relatively little attention to gender mainstreaming. Central government action in this area seldom reflects a broad analysis of the systemic root causes of the problem, or a commitment to the types of solutions needed to be effective in improving the safety of women. In response, many have turned their attention to attempting to influence local policies and practices and, more specifically, to trying to assure gender mainstreaming in the planning, delivery and evaluation of municipal or regional programs and services. One approach is the emergence of community collaboratives that bring together agencies and advocates active in the area of violence against women. Using a case study of two community collaboratives in Peel Region, Ontario (Canada) this article describes their emergence and their attempts to influence the practices of the Regional Government. The discussion focuses on some of their successes and on some of the challenges they face, and concludes with recommendations for improving the efficacy and the sustainability of community collaboratives.

Introduction

According to the *Beijing Platform for Action* adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995:

Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. (para 112)

Yet, designing and implementing an effective response to violence against women is proving difficult, in part because of the emphasis of central governments on justice-oriented and offender-based responses. Such approaches fail to acknowledge that interpersonal violence is linked to the social, political and economic structures in which individuals live or to see that violence prevention initiatives will only be effective if they address these structural factors (Hayes, 2006).

Addressing violence against women requires an integrated approach by all levels of government, and must include a commitment to “gender mainstreaming”, or the incorporation of a gender lens into all aspects and all

stages of the planning, delivery and evaluation of public policy. This has been espoused as necessary and critical to ensuring that the “needs and differential experiences of women and girls (and men and boys) are taken into account at all stages of community safety planning, especially at the local level” (Shaw & Capobianco, 2004, p. 3). Women’s voices must be present and supported as integral components of the governance in attempts to address violence against women. Structures and processes must allow women to participate in an effective and inclusive manner in the design, delivery and evaluation of initiatives that address community safety and the problem of violence against women. In addition, local municipal and regional governments must recognize their enormous potential to affect programs and services in a meaningful way using the knowledge and research available on crime risk and protective factors as they pertain to violence against women (Johnson, 2007).

One response is the emergence of community collaboratives. These initiatives usually involve cooperative relations among and between advocates, activists and agencies involved in responding to violence against women. This article focuses on two community collaboratives in Peel Region (Ontario, Canada). It describes the emergence of these collaboratives, and discusses some of their successes and some of the challenges they face in their attempt to achieve gender mainstreaming within Regional Government planning and activities.

Collaboratives: An Adaptation to Challenging Times

Collaboratives have been defined as “a group of community leaders who use an inclusive strategy to establish shared goals and agree to use their personal and institutional power to achieve them” (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2008, p. 3). Gray (1989) highlights that “collaboration is a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited visions of what is possible” (p. 5, as cited in Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996, p. 605). Collaboration is further “characterized by mutual benefit, interdependence, reciprocity, concerted action and joint production” (Abramson & Rosenthal, 1995, p. 1479 as cited in Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996, p. 605). Armed with a collective mandate and formal partner agreements, collaboratives are seen as credible and can attract and involve a wide range of community experts and resources. In an environment where resources are limited and government functions are increasingly decentralized, the trend toward collaboratives has been labelled the “devolution revolution” (Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996, p. 602) Inter-organizational community-based collaboratives are seen as a strategic response to a changing social work agenda, and a means for local

health and social service organizations, community leaders and neighbourhood businesses to improve their access to resources and decision-making processes (Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996).

There are two collaboratives active in the area of violence against women in the Peel Region – the Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse (PCAWA) and the Peel Committee on Sexual Assault (PCSA) – which have been operating for almost 25 and 20 years, respectively. In our view, the established partnerships and a history of working relationships with the municipality, combined with a roster of successful initiatives, have encouraged the increasing support of municipal leaders for gender mainstreaming in attempts to respond to violence against women.

Peel’s response to issues of violence against women has broadened over time to extend the focus beyond a single problem and toward affecting social change by utilizing a comprehensive, integrative anti-racism/anti-oppression approach. As articulated by Together We Can (2009), “reform will not succeed unless collaboratives give serious attention to the inclusion of diverse groups, drawing upon their cultural strengths and ensuring equal opportunity for people of all backgrounds”. Often, municipal governments are simultaneously engaged in a multitude of services and programs that address issues of violence against women yet do not recognize the broad links between social, economic and health services as they impact women’s lives and safety. Engaging participation from and partnership with the municipal government has been a deliberate strategy by the collaboratives in attempting to get involved in policy and program development, and to encourage the types of complex and multi-departmental regional approaches that will contribute to ending violence against women.

Community collaboratives can be fragile. Together We Can (2009) describes the collaborative process as “non linear” and emphasizes that “collaboratives are a spiral process, where they often take several steps forward and then double back to address earlier unresolved issues.” Being in a collaborative is a journey in patience, frustration, insecurity and complete exuberance where collective voice is often delicate and powerful all at once. Bailey and McNally Koney (1996) add that collaboratives are often faced with dilemmas that reflect competing realities: “a dilemma, unlike a problem, presents different approaches to an issue. Whereas a problem tends to have a good and bad or right and wrong solution, a dilemma usually represents multiple truths with degrees of rightness and wrongness” (p. 4). As with many conflicts that arise in collective work, these dilemmas cannot be treated and resolved as if they were problems – they must be managed (Bailey & McNally Koney, 1996).

Collaborative work on violence against women, and attempts to partner with municipal governments, face a number of challenges, including limited funding, misunderstandings and misinformation, personal biases, stereotypes and entrenched systemic sexism, racism and other forms of oppression. The combination of traditional approaches to crime and caution around entering the realm of private, domestic or sexual behaviours can also generate resistance to gender mainstreaming work. Collaboratives are entities that must continually adapt to challenges, some of which are expected and others that are unforeseen.

Nevertheless, the government in Peel Region is including longstanding community collaboratives in their attempts to broaden the scope of anti-violence work. Through a case study of Peel Region, this article will address:

- The nature of collaborative partnerships between Peel regional government and two community collaboratives, the Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse (PCAWA) and the Peel Committee on Sexual Assault (PCSA).
- The dynamics of a deepening relationship between the regional government and the two community collaboratives.
- The critical role of Women in Cities International (WICI) and the skills and increased capacity that PCAWA and PCSA have acquired as a result of participation with WICI.
- The strategies that are being used to ensure the successful integration of equity tools and gender mainstreaming principles in the municipal government’s programs, services and internal operations, and the challenges that come along with these initiatives.

The Collaboratives of Peel Region

A Snapshot of Peel Region

Peel Region is a large urban and rural geographical expanse, situated directly west of Toronto, Ontario. It is comprised of two cities, Mississauga and Brampton and one town, Caledon. Peel has a two-tier governance system including regional and local governments. Peel also has three mayors, one for each city and town. At present, all three mayors are women, and a higher than average number of elected counselors in Peel are also women (58% compared to the national average of 22%).

According to 2006 Census data, the population of Peel is 1,159,405 people, and is 51% female and 49% male (The Social Planning Council of Peel, 2007).

Peel Region is ethno-racially and culturally diverse:

- 43% of Peel's population are immigrants compared to the Provincial average of 27%;
- There are 93 ethnic groups in Peel, with 60 different languages spoken; and
- 50% of Peel's population consists of people from racialized communities.

Peel Region is one of the top ten fastest growing Regions in Canada, and from 2001 to 2006, it was the second fastest growing Region in Ontario, with 34,000 people moving into Peel Region each year (The Social Planning Council of Peel, 2007). This poses significant challenges to the service system in its attempts to provide truly accessible and inclusive services. One of the ongoing barriers to meeting the service needs of residents in Peel is the "Fair Share" allocation of provincial funding support, which is not reflective of the reality of Peel's growth patterns:

Provincial funding for social services has not kept pace with the growth of regions in the [geographical areas surrounding Toronto] or with increasing ethno-cultural diversity, which have both contributed to significant increases in need. Indeed, Peel receives less than half of what some municipalities received when viewed on a per capita funding basis for the province. (Fair Share Task Force, 2009)

Wait times for subsidized housing for applicants who have experienced domestic violence have increased to 1-3 years compared to the originally intended wait of 1-2 months. In Peel, wait times for subsidized housing for adults and families is the longest in the Province and is currently 21 years (Region of Peel Housing, 2009).

As for crime rates, Peel Regional Police annual statistical reports for Mississauga and Brampton indicate that from 2003 to 2007, domestic disputes have increased by 35.4% and sexual assaults have increased by 18.5%. These rates remind us that in an increasingly borderless world, gender-based violence is a wide-spread and socially tolerated form of human rights violations, and "both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims" (United Nations Population Fund, 2005 as cited in Johnson, 2006, p. 8).

Meet the Collaboratives

The Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse (PCAWA) and the Peel Committee on Sexual Assault (PCSA) operate as community collaboratives in Peel Region. Both have a combination of core funding and project funding and engage multiple community partners representing a wide variety of human service sectors, including education, health, police, legal, crown attorneys, victim witness, child witness, victim services, sexual assault services, counseling, family services, housing, shelters, children's aid, Ontario Works, ethno-specific, seniors and youth. Initiatives range from the development of Regional best practices and protocols, to cross-sectoral training, service coordination, referral practices, resource development, professional development and training, networking, relationship building, public education, advocacy, and media relations.

The Peel Committee Against Woman Abuse was first established in 1984 when a group of individuals from various Violence Against Women agencies came together to consider ways of working collaboratively towards the elimination of violence against women in the Region of Peel. In the early years, PCAWA's core operations consisted of networking, advocating for increased funding, raising public awareness through education and outreach campaigns, community development, and building the organizational capacity of the membership. PCAWA has since grown in size and scope, reflecting the needs and capacities of its members and the diverse communities they serve. PCAWA's membership now consists of close to 40 agencies and organizations. It currently has two full-time staff; additional staff are hired on contract to implement individually-funded projects when they arise. Currently, it is not an independently incorporated organization and relies on having a lead or trustee organization to manage its funds.

The Peel Committee on Sexual Assault (PCSA) formed in 1989 when a consortium of multi-disciplinary professionals came together to work collaboratively to establish a comprehensive and effective community response to sexual violence. In 1992, Trillium Health Centre became the Regional Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Treatment Centre for Peel Region. Shortly after, in 1995, the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care provided core funding for PCSA to operate as a part of Trillium Health Centre's Women's and Children's Health System, and the Ministry of the Attorney General funded the Sexual Assault/Rape Crisis Centre of Peel.

PCSA's goal is to enhance interagency and community co-operation and collaboration and to promote, enhance and maintain a continuum of education, prevention, service delivery, research and social change initiatives. PCSA operates as a community collaborative and has 25 signatory members. Like PCAWA, the core operations consist of networking, advocating for increased and supplemental funding, raising public awareness through education and outreach campaigns, community development, and building the organizational capacity of the membership. It is currently staffed by one full-time coordinator and one part-time administrative assistant. Contingent on project funds, consultants are occasionally hired to work on specific initiatives.

PCAWA and PCSA operate from a common framework that provides a foundation for understanding issues and experiences, and also serves as a tool for problem-solving. The *Integrative Feminist Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression Framework* is an approach that is woman-centred and focuses on the lives and realities of women and marginalized people. It affirms women's right to contribute to, and to determine, the social, political and economic changes in their lives. It affirms their right to safe spaces in the groups, agencies, and institutions they encounter in their lives. This framework also recognizes that racism and oppression are systemic within our institutions, both formally and informally, intentionally and unintentionally. It recognizes that power and privilege exist and that these are based on skin colour, sexual orientation, class, gender, age, faith, and ability, and that these privileges are institutionalized and help maintain unequal relationships between people and groups. An *Integrative Feminist Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression Framework* recognizes that, while violence against women cuts across all communities of women, it always happens in a social and historical context.

This framework is further supplemented by an *intersectional* approach (Crenshaw, 1994) that analyzes how gender, race, class, sexuality and other social and cultural identities intersect to create a system of multiple forms of oppression. This requires that members of both collaboratives also consider their own lives in the light of an intersectional framework, to see who they are, how they are connected and how they are also participants in systems of oppression. It is important to recognize that the process of developing and fostering this understanding is complex and transformative, and it can be challenging to make the necessary changes to move towards more equitable systems and relations. This framework, and the insistence that women and girls must be distinctly named and included in any crime prevention initiative, are the rudder that steers the collaboratives in their work, whether internally, within partner agencies, amongst the community or when engaging in political consultation.

Groundwork with Peel Municipal/Regional Government

The PCAWA and PCSA have been around long enough to build trusting relationships with regional partners. The Region of Peel was an early supporter of collaborative work and of the community working together to end woman abuse, and participates in a number of work groups and community projects in areas such as public health, sexual health, housing, Ontario Works, mental health, childcare, early child development, youth, and police services.

The Region has contributed directly to the governance of both collaboratives through the allocation of staff representatives and financial resources. Furthermore, the Region of Peel currently provides core financial support to PCAWA, which illustrates the value the Region places on the outcome-based and community-driven model of work adopted and practised by PCAWA. This level of participation has ensured that the collaboratives receive current information on related regional programs and have direct access to some of the supports and resources offered by the Region. There have been many successful partnership projects over the past twenty years between the Region of Peel and the two collaboratives, some of which are still in place. One such example is the Building Blocks Project, which developed an anti-violence resource for service providers and parents to use with children. Member organizations of the collaboratives, including the Region of Peel's Public Health Department, participated in its development and production. More recently (and four years after its initial production), the Public Health Department reached out to the collaboratives in order to revise the tool and reproduce and redistribute it to the community. Another successful undertaking was the partnership created between the Region of Peel's Public Health Department and the collaboratives to provide awareness raising and educational initiatives to service providers in Peel on the topic of sex work. This also resulted in the adoption of new protocols within both the PCSA and PCAWA for the inclusion of sex trade workers.

Yet, despite the longstanding relation between the collaboratives and the Region, and some successful ventures, a pattern of unidirectional influence was apparent. The Region's support was largely financial, advisory and in the form of staff support for working groups, making the collaboratives the recipients of support and information from the Region. There was no forum through which the expertise or equity-based philosophy of the collaboratives could be captured in any Regional planning or programming. In 2006, participation in a national project and in a United Nations Conference would be the catalyst for monumental change in Peel.

Women in Cities International

As in many Western countries, ground level work on women's safety and equity in Canada and in Peel Region specifically is often carried out in isolation and with much energy expended on organizational survival and meeting the immediate service needs of women and their children. Often, knowledge exchange and involvement in broader global advocacy is not within our practical reach or part of the focus of funding priorities. Our introduction to Women in Cities International (WICI) would offer us the opportunity to position ourselves on the international stage and enable us to examine the work in Peel in relation to similar work that was happening globally.

In 2006, Women in Cities International, funded by Status of Women Canada, circulated a call for proposals for a project entitled "Building Partnerships for Local Action on Women's Safety." WICI is an international network of partners concerned with gender equity issues and the place of women in cities. It seeks to disseminate information on issues related to gender equality, the role of women in cities, and the application of a gender approach in community and municipal decision-making and public policy processes. This network acts as a consultant to local, national, and international governments in promoting policies and programs that take gender into account, foster the greater participation of women, and increase the effectiveness of actions undertaken by women's organizations at the community level. The Building Partnerships for Local Action on Women's Safety project aimed to facilitate the involvement of women's organizations in the public policy process and increase sustainable working relationships between public bodies and communities by developing and implementing a new partnership model in six pilot communities in Canada. Peel was accepted as one of the six pilot sites (along with Williams Lake, BC; Regina, SK; Bellechasse, QC; Kuujuaq, NU; and Charlottetown, PEI) and began a multi-year initiative with WICI to learn to partner effectively with our Municipal government and raise awareness of gender mainstreaming and ultimately facilitate its implementation. The conclusion of the second year of this project involved Peel region's participation in the UN-Habitat Conference, the World Urban Forum III (WUF3).

Since the mid 1970s, the United Nations has been experiencing a ground swell of women-led advocacy around issues of women's safety and political participation. At that time, the United Nations supported the UN Environmental Program (UNEP), which struggled to differentiate the complex intersection of environmental and habitat issues (Lee-Smith, 2006). The result was the formation of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS),

which, in 2002 became United Nations Habitat (UN-Habitat), a full fledged program of the United Nations (Lee-Smith, 2006). The tireless advocacy of many feminists and their allies to highlight women's unique experience of their environment and habitat fostered a growing consciousness of the rights of women to own, control and inherit property, as well as their role in governance and community development, including safety. The World Urban Forum III took place in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in June 2006 and was the meeting ground for the Women in Cities International pilot site directors, as well as thousands of women's organizations from around the world.

The WUF3 was dedicated to examining rapid urbanization in a world where half of humanity lives in cities and where, over the next 50 years, that proportion is expected to reach two-thirds of the global population. Most of this urban growth is taking place in developing countries, but wealthier nations are also experiencing problems of rapid urbanization such as crumbling infrastructure, smog, and social exclusion. The Region of Peel's Commissioner of Health and both collaborative directors traveled to Vancouver for the WUF3. The Forum brought together experts from around the world representing all levels of government, local authorities, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, community groups, urban and business professionals, academics, students, and national and international associations. For five days, thousands of participants from more than 150 nations discussed, debated and shared experiences about how to make our cities better places to live. Canada's participation featured Peel Region, along with the other five Canadian pilot sites, as models of communities working effectively with their municipal government. The experience provided the collaboratives with strategies to continue to broaden their influence with the Region. Participation in this event provided PCAWA and PCSA with a stronger rationale and an evidence-based foundation on which to begin changing the unidirectional nature of their relationship with the Region and introduced both the collaboratives and the Region of Peel to the fundamental principles of gender mainstreaming in local governance.

Gender Mainstreaming in Peel Region

Upon returning from the World Urban Forum in June 2006, PCAWA, PCSA and the regional Commissioner of Health developed new strategies as to how to influence discussions about gender mainstreaming at the regional level. Coincidentally, the Region was in the midst of developing a three-year Regional Strategic Plan (2007-2010), for which it was soliciting stakeholder input. Both collaboratives participated in the stakeholder sessions to attempt

to push for gender analysis at the Regional planning level. While input was graciously received at that time, the priorities of the Regional Strategic Plan did not reflect gender specifically, but rather referred to gender within the context of a grouping of diverse communities and vulnerable people. Response to this omission by the collaboratives was swift. A joint letter was prepared which represented the collective disappointment of over 40 community agencies.

The Region of Peel responded by inviting PCSA and PCAWA to a meeting with senior administrators, including the Regional Chair, the Chief Administrative Officer and two commissioners (Health and Human Services). At this unprecedented meeting, a series of recommendations for a “Gender Strategy” were made. The following recommendations were presented by PCSA and PCAWA to the Region of Peel:

- A commitment to developing and establishing a gender strategy in the 2007-2010 Strategic Plan.
- A resourced staff person or consultant to implement the “gender strategy” for Peel Region tied to the strategic priorities and plan.
- The adoption and application of an agreed upon gender equity tool through which the Region considers the impacts of gendered experiences of diverse groups of women.
- The development of an accountability process that engages diverse women and women’s groups within Peel to ensure the success of the gender strategy.
- The development of, and support for, a Women’s Advisory Council to ensure structured community participation by diverse women and women’s groups to advise the Region on issues of concern.
- The expansion of financial support from Peel region to gender specific work through support of the PCSA and PCAWA collaboratives.

Shortly following this meeting, two of the recommendations were adopted by the Region: a senior staff person from the Region was assigned to work in partnership with the collaboratives on issues of gender mainstreaming, and a commitment was made to identifying and using a gender equity tool. The Region was not questioning “why” gender mainstreaming was critical, but acknowledging that they needed the collaboratives’ help in understanding “how” we could successfully work together to achieve it. This was indeed a turning point in our work together and has been the foundation and centre of our work since.

Following several brainstorming meetings over several months, we collectively agreed to proceed by exploring the adoption of a gender equity tool. We discussed how to integrate such a tool, and in particular the existing one developed by the City of Ottawa, into regional strategic processes at all levels. Additionally, work with senior regional staff began to identify and align pre-existing work at the Region which was addressing some of the individual, relationship and social/systemic factors identified by the World Health Organization as key risk factors for violence (Krug et al., 2002).

The work with the Region of Peel in the prevention of violence against women remains a case study “in motion”, as it is still largely in its infancy. The relationship with and support from WICI was the catalyst from which the well-established collaboratives gained the momentum necessary to work with the Region in a richer and more reciprocal way. The gender mainstreaming approach has provided a sound, evidence-based vehicle for PCAWA and PCSA in working towards integrating gender as a dimension in planning, policy and service delivery in Peel Region.

Successes and Challenges

Recognizing and Integrating Gender

According to Shaw and Capobianco (2004), “over the past few years the need for gender to be taken into account at all policy levels has been clearly articulated[...] There is now some evidence of greater understanding of the need to put gender *into* crime prevention” (p. 3). The absence of a gender analysis in political discourse contributes to the invisibility of private violence that is perpetrated by friends, acquaintances and intimate partners and family members in the privacy of homes. The systemic variables involved in global violence against women and children are critical targets of effective crime prevention and safe, sustainable cities. Gender mainstreaming, or the incorporation of gender into all areas of public policy, was formally promoted by the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. It requires that governments ensure that women participate in political decision-making (Shaw & Andrews, 2005). Central to the concept of women’s empowerment and voice is an approach that walks with women from dependence to autonomy. According to Whitzman (2006):

The people who are most vulnerable to violence can become experts in what is needed to make their communities safer. They need to be listened

to, given the resources to help themselves, and empowered to make positive decisions for themselves and the people they care for. (p. 25)

In Peel Region, we have met with considerable successes in the area of naming gender and introducing concepts of gender mainstreaming, though there is still much work to be done. Successes include the broadening of a gender equity approach into a multi-focal strategy that recognizes intersecting oppressions and is more inclusive. Also, there is an increasing understanding on the part of funders of the priority of addressing violence against women and of the importance of consulting with women-centred service agencies around their future funding priorities. There is a growing acknowledgement of the notions of equity and inclusion and most community initiatives have a strong “diversity” component. Lastly, initiatives such as those supported by WICI and Status of Women Canada highlight the connection between global and local advocacy efforts and provide us with rare opportunities to position our Region in the context of international advocacy.

Despite these successes, we continue to face a number of challenges in the area of naming gender and successfully applying a gender mainstreaming approach. Woman abuse and sexual violence continue to remain outside the traditional notions of crime prevention. Many victims and advocates continue to place issues of woman abuse outside of the concept of “crime” – statistics around disclosure and accessing the criminal justice system for domestic violence and sexual assault reiterate the great number of victims who do not see the criminal justice system as providing them with just, nor, acceptable solutions. While the reasons for this phenomenon are beyond the scope of this case study, the relevance to our work in Peel is that the concept of preventive work around woman abuse and sexual violence is often secondary to the work of providing adequate and valuable service to victims who are seeking support. In an environment where waiting lists, case overload and project-based funding prevail, education, advocacy and prevention initiatives are sparse, short-term and difficult if not impossible to adequately evaluate. Where communities are fortunate enough to have community collaboration, the participants typically lack the capacity to adequately or extensively evaluate the short or long-term efficacy and effectiveness of any given initiative.

Regional Government: The Ideal Site for the Prevention of Woman Abuse

According to Hayes (2006), “it is at the local level and via local government that violence prevention policies and interventions may best be enacted, with

municipal governments facilitating the coordination of local initiatives and supporting community initiatives” (p. 9). Gender mainstreaming approaches attempt to resource, coordinate and mainstream the many separate services that exist independently at the regional level of government (Hayes, 2006). UN-Habitat concurs that local government is a key player in strategies to fight violence against women and in making connections between women’s experiences of private and public violence.

Governance includes the pivotal role of mayors and other municipal leaders in confronting increasing problems of community safety. Shaw (2001) argues that the twenty-first century will present a “huge challenge” for mayors and local government around emerging issues of urban migration, poverty, social exclusion, minority and immigrant populations, substance abuse and urban crime. Local governments are coming to view community safety as a human right and a necessary condition for full participation in civic life, and crime remains a debilitating threat to urban sustainability.

The work in Peel Region highlights our success in partnering with local government around the issues of woman abuse and sexual assault. There is an ongoing commitment from PCAWA, PCSA and the Region of Peel to engage the regional leaders and the Region as the appropriate place to link all efforts to address the prevention of woman abuse. This is largely due to successes in working collaboratively with multiple sectors to engage in effective crime prevention.

Challenges include the lack of a formal regional vision on crime reduction that is inclusive of a gender analysis, as well as the absence of a formalized process for the Region to engage in community consultation and to incorporate the input into operations. In addition, the community collaboratives, while formally structured, have difficulty in sustaining consistent partnerships due to a lack of funding, the turnover of leadership, changing membership, competing priorities and sometimes differing philosophies and ideologies.

Financial and Ideological Support

The financial sustainability of collaboratives remains tenuous and unstable. Both PCAWA and PCSA have some core funding, but they are largely influenced by external factors and the political climate of the day. This instability and the constant need to chase funding can result in staff turnover. Unfortunately, most collaboratives do not have a paid or formally structured coordinator position, and collaborative work is often taken on by dedicated staff as an add-on to full

time work commitments. This compromises the sustainability of partnerships with regional government. Sustaining relationships and strategic objectives long enough to accomplish the formal integration of gender mainstreaming into regional policy becomes very difficult when staff and organizations are at constant risk.

Another problem is the tendency for funding bodies to restrict support to project-based work. Without operational support, agencies scramble to meet the funder requirements, and often must apply staff resources and volunteers to short-term, unsustainable programs. There is usually relatively little hope of having the capacity to maintain the project after the funding ends. In addition, non-incorporated agencies (like community collaboratives) require a lead agency to serve as the financial administrator for the funds. These agencies may be competing for the same funding. Despite assurances by funders that all proposals are considered separately and that they greatly encourage community partnerships, agencies may be afraid that partnering with others or that serving as a lead will compromise their chances of receiving funding. In addition, some initiatives are not defined as part of the core function of the collaborative, and therefore are difficult to maintain. In Peel, the work of gender mainstreaming is a relatively new initiative and has not received specific financial support. This additional work then becomes one of the many priorities of the collaboratives and is at times difficult to sustain in the face of competing demands.

Collaboratives such as PCAWA and PCSA are accountable to their member agencies and must exercise caution around messaging and media interaction. Mainstream organizations, who receive funding from a government body or with a visible public profile, may not be agreeable to strong, critical messages about issues such as intimate relationships and sexual behaviours, and may be cautious about criticism of systemic and institutional discrimination. Gender neutrality seems to be a palatable reaction to the challenges of addressing the issue of woman abuse, and this serves to hamper crime prevention efforts aimed at violence against women.

Conclusions

PCAWA, PCSA and the Region of Peel are well aware of the challenges that are inherent in this work. The future of the partnership between the collaboratives and the municipal government is rooted in a strong foundation. In the foreseeable future, it appears as if all partners are committed to investing in this gender mainstreaming initiative. Despite this optimism, we are also aware that

resistance (both practically and ideologically) is common. While confronting this, it is critical that we continue to work towards building and nurturing the trust between the individuals and agencies involved, and recognize and utilize the support of allies within the municipal government. We also recognize that moving forward in Peel requires an ongoing commitment to an anti-racism/anti-oppression feminist framework as reflected in the “multi-focal approach” with the regional government. The collaboratives are working towards a sustainable *strategy* and a sustainable *structure* that can cope with changes to staffing, turn-over in political leaders and a varying political climate. The goals of the collaboratives are to have gender and other identities such as race, faith, sexual orientation, class and ability recognized, and to address and overcome the inequality that exists.

The prevention of violence against women remains on the margins for most local and regional governments. The private nature of woman abuse and sexual violence, and the tendency to blame victims rather than those perpetrating the violence, are a significant part of the problem (Johnson, 2007). Despite this, considerable advances have been made in the area of women’s safety, stranger assaults and public spaces. Unfortunately, far less has been accomplished in responding to the private nature of violence against women and the irrefutable connection to systemic conditions of gender inequality.

In response, it is paramount that community collaboratives and their respective memberships work together to develop a shared vision to ensure successful community partnerships, project successes and credible relationships with funders. In essence, the evolution of solid partnerships between local/regional government and community service agencies serves to sustain the collective work of the regional government and the collaboratives.

We know that our work in Peel Region is in its infancy but we have been successful in creating a space for dialogue and learning. Working with regional government requires a belief in the process of “relentless incrementalism” and the passion to persevere in the face of anything and everything that gets in the way of our vision to one day end violence against women.

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