

Preface

The York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee (YRVAWCC) was established in 1997 in response to the McGuire Report. It is a collaborative effort of 15 social service providers, two health care service providers, the Regional Police, the Crown Attorney's Office and a Board of Education.

Our mission is to develop and implement a coordinated plan for a comprehensive community-based service system. We also endeavour to contribute to the overall effort to eradicate violence against all women and their children through a leadership role in advocacy, education, and social action principles. Working together, with a common set of principles, will increase the likelihood that when woman abuse survivors seek services in York Region, they will obtain the help they need.

The YRVAWCC endeavours to promote and encourage a response to the issue of woman abuse that is consistent and coordinated. The *York Region Woman Abuse Protocol: Best Practice Guidelines* is designed to encourage consistent practices and promote collaboration between York Region agencies in their response to woman abuse.

This protocol provides agencies with best practice guidelines in an effort to help them enhance services for abused women in York Region. It represents the on-going commitment in York Region to develop a coordinated set of transparent procedures for organizations that provide services to address woman abuse. It recognizes that no single organization completely addresses the issue of woman abuse and that abused women often require the assistance of a variety of services across different sectors.

The YRVAWCC originally developed the Woman Abuse Protocol (WAP) in 1998. In 2002-03 the protocol was revised, signed-off by member agencies and extensive training of frontline staff in the use of the protocol took place. In 2005 it became apparent that the revised WAP was not being widely used by service providers.

This revision was intended to make the document more user-friendly and to provide more relevant information to those who provide services to women experiencing abuse.

This revised protocol provides a framework for all agencies serving abused women and includes:

- A shared definition of violence against women;
- A set of principles to guide the development and implementation of policies and programs within agencies;
- An overview of the issue of woman abuse, including incidence and prevalence, indicators of abuse, possible health effects, and the impact on children;
- A protocol for responding to women experiencing abuse; and
- Information to assist agencies in working with diverse populations.

This document also includes profiles of agencies that provide services to women experiencing abuse in York Region. This information is intended to assist service providers in making appropriate referrals and in guiding women in need of assistance to the appropriate agency.

An additional change has been to the sign-off to the protocol. The signatories to the previous protocols signed-off on the entire document. Consequently, sign-off was again required when changes were made to any part of the document. In this protocol signatories have signed-off on the Statement of Principles, agreeing to a set of principles that will guide their delivery of services to women experiencing abuse. Any changes to other parts of the document will be overseen by a Protocol Working Group, and will not require the sign-off by all members of the YRVAWCC.

It is hoped that these changes to the protocol will enable it to be a document which is used by both frontline, program staff and managers to ensure effective delivery of services to women experiencing abuse.

While not all organization have the policies and procedures in place at this point to support all the principles and best practices outlined in this report, it is hoped that this document will guide them to develop the organizational supports needed to effectively deliver services to women experiencing abuse.

Statement of Principles and Signatories

We, the following agencies, have participated in the development of the *York Region Woman Abuse Protocol: Best Practice Guidelines* (2006) and hereby affirm our commitment and accountability to the implementation of this protocol across York Region.

We recognize that an effective and comprehensive response requires a shared philosophy and coordinated strategy among those who work with women experiencing abuse and violence.

We recognize that historically, there has been an overwhelming silence about women abuse in certain communities, particularly around same sex partner abuse. We are committed to breaking that silence and acknowledging the existence of woman abuse in all communities. The use of the word “woman” is intended to speak to all women, including those who identify as lesbian, bisexual and transgender, as well as heterosexual women from all social, economic, racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds and all abilities.

We therefore agree to the following principles to guide our delivery of services to women experiencing abuse:

1. All forms of violence against women are unacceptable and must not be tolerated.
2. Many forms of violence against women are crimes and where reasonable grounds exist, police should lay charges against the abuser. Legal sanctions should be pursued and enforced consistently and vigorously.
3. All women can be victims of abuse, regardless of their age, social, economic, racial, ethnic or religious group, sexual orientation or physical and developmental ability.
4. A holistic and systematic approach that includes, but is not limited to, policy reform, community development, education, advocacy, social action, and other preventive measures provides the basis for ending all forms of violence against women and their destructive consequences.
5. Abused women are never responsible for the abuser's behaviour.
6. Woman abuse undermines the mental and physical well-being of women and their children.
7. Women and their children have the right to be safe and live without fear of violence.
8. The safety and ongoing protection of women and children who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence are paramount considerations in any response.
9. The many forms of violence against women need to be understood in the context of unequal power relations. Abusers act out of a need to control and maintain power over the abused women.
10. The dynamics of an abusive relationship make it difficult for the abused woman to end the relationship.

11. A coordinated response to woman abuse must provide equitable access to services regardless of a woman's age, socio-economic status, race, culture, language, religion, ability or sexual orientation.
12. The response to women who have been subjected to violence should take into account the diverse needs and interests of women. Women and children must have access to linguistically sensitive, culturally appropriate and accountable services.
13. Violence against women is a serious societal problem that negatively affects the health, well-being and development of women, children, families and the community. This fact must be acknowledged by all members of society.
14. Services must be provided in ways that facilitate a woman's ability to exercise informed choices and enable her to be a full participant in the process. Information and support to victims should be provided in such a way as to facilitate and empower the victim.
15. Women of all ages who have been subjected to violence have the right to services and resources that are appropriate, ensure her safety, meet her material and financial needs and provide her with emotional support.
16. All staff are responsible for providing high quality and compassionate care to all victims of woman abuse. Staff will take responsibility for the services they provide and will emotionally and physically support abused women.

We are dedicated to assisting all abused women sensitively with the goal of empowering them to make the best choices for themselves and their children. In order to do this, it is important for us as professionals to have an understanding of the complexity of woman abuse.

In the development and implementation of policies and programs to address violence against women, we agree to be guided by these principles. We will endeavour to ensure that our services to abused women will be guided by policies, procedures, programs and training in accordance with these principles.

Dated October 31, 2006

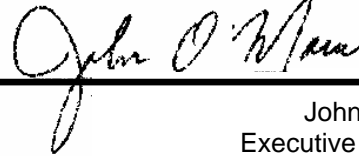
Signatories

AIDS Committee of York Region



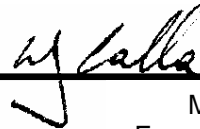
Radha Bhardwaj
Program Manager

Addiction Services of York Region



John O'Mara
Executive Director

COSTI family and Mental Health Services



Mario J. Calla
Executive Director

Family Services York Region



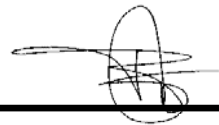
Elisha Laker
Executive Director

Jewish Family and Child Services



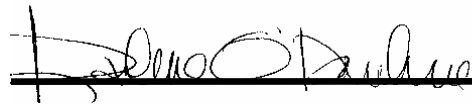
Dr. Richard Cummings
Executive Director

**Lance Krasman Memorial Centre
for Community Mental Health**



Tanya Shute
Executive Director

Multilingual Community Interpreter Services



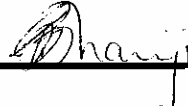
Darlene O'Donohue
Director of Service Delivery

Sandgate Women's Shelter



Patti Bell
Executive Director

Social Services Network of York Region



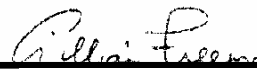
Tazim Bhanji
Program Director

**Transitional and Supportive Housing
Services of York Region**



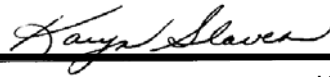
Monica Auerbach
Executive Director

Victim Services of York Region



Gillian Freeman
Executive Director

Victim / Witness Assistance Program



Karyn Slaven
Manager

Women's Centre of York Region



Joanne Preston
Executive Director

**Women's Support Network
of York Region**



Michelle Smith
Executive Director

Yellow Brick House



Lorris Herenda
Executive Director

York Catholic District School Board



Patricia Preston
Executive Superintendent

**York Central Hospital,
Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault
Care Centre**



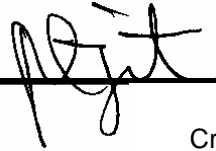
Gail Rehfeld
Co-ordinator

York Region Children's Aid Society



Martin McNamara
Executive Director

York Region Crown Attorney's Office



Paul Tait
Crown Attorney

York Region Abuse Program



Alison L. Peck
Executive Director

**York Region LGBT Community
Outreach Project**



Barbara Urman
Coordinator

York Regional Police



Chief Armand La Barge
Chief of Police