



Ottawa Inuit
Children's
Centre

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SANNGINIVUT

STRONG VOICES FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Improving Systems and Services
for Inuit Women and Children
Affected by Violence:

**Interviews with
Service Providers**

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Introduction

Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre (OICC) has embarked on a project to work with stakeholders in improving systems and services for Inuit women and children affected by violence in Ottawa. The goal of *Sannginivut: Strong Voices for Stronger Communities* is to reduce barriers and better support Inuit women and children by providing educational resources and training to build the capacity of agencies.

In year 1, we completed three research reports for the project: 1) interviews with Inuit women affected by violence, 2) interviews with services providers, and 3) a promising practices literature review. This report on interviews with service providers has been reviewed and approved by the project Advisory Group.

Method and Results

Method

Key informants interviews were used to gather information on and insights into the different systems and organizations in Ottawa currently providing services related to violence against women, and to discuss issues, needs, barriers and best practices in serving Inuit women and children. Some of the information on mandates, programs and services was gathered from agency websites.

Selected key informants were from either: 1) Ottawa service agencies and networks working in the areas of violence prevention and intervention, or 2) Inuit organizations providing individual and family support. Key informants were jointly selected by the researchers and the OICC Women's Services – Violence Prevention Coordinator (the project team), and include members of the project Advisory Group. The project team created and used a common interview guide (included in Appendix B) and also used the guide as the structure for the interview notes and this report.

Some interviews were conducted in-person, and others by telephone and email, depending on the availability and preference of the key informants. The OICC Women's Services – Violence Prevention Coordinator conducted or participated in many of the interviews in order to build her knowledge and to form closer relationships with key contacts.

Results

We interviewed 15 key informants from the following 11 agencies:

- Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario;
- Circle of Care Ottawa;
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa;
- Interval House of Ottawa;
- Children's Aid Society of Ottawa;
- Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women;
- Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre;
- Ottawa Police Service;
- Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre;
- Ottawa Victim Services; and

- Tungasuvvingat Inuit.

Appendix A provides a list of key informants.

Findings

Organizations Addressing Violence against Women

Community Organizations

A wide range of community health agencies, social services and justice organizations in Ottawa respond to violence against women. For example, [Ottawa Victim Services](#) (OVS) offers emotional and practical support to victims of crime, whether or not they choose to report the incident to police. It receives referrals from hospitals and the police, and is contracted to provide overnight coverage for police victim services. OVS delivers crisis, short- and longer-term counselling; victim accompaniment and emergency financial assistance.

Crisis intervention, counselling and support to victims of sexual assault are provided by the [Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre](#) (ORCC) and the [Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa](#) (SASC). The Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre responds to all types of sexual violence, applying a gender analysis and an understanding of marginalization. The agency has a 24-hour crisis line; short- and longer-term counselling; support groups; accompaniment to police, hospitals, courts, CAS, etc.; advocacy for women; and help with basic living needs.

[Interval House of Ottawa](#), as well as a number of other women's shelters provide women and their children with emergency accommodation and support when they are fleeing an abusive situation. Interval House has a 24-hour crisis line, and assists residents in finding affordable housing, education options and employment. Staff provides counselling on a range of issues, and operates child and youth programming.

Concerning children and their families, the [Children's Aid Society of Ottawa](#) (CAS) is a provincially mandated child protection agency that works with children ages 0 to 16. The agency responds to concerns about the welfare of children from their parents, community members and professionals who have the duty to report suspected maltreatment. Staff members determine what supports and resources a family might need, and work with parents to develop a service plan. A Violence Against Women Team assesses the needs of women and children who have been affected by family violence.

The [Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario](#) (CHEO) provides physical and mental health services to children up to the age of 18, and offers emergency medical attention to children and youth experiencing all forms of abuse and assault. CHEO has a Child Abuse Team that screens for type of injury, does a medical assessment, and makes recommendations for care. If staff suspects abuse of a child they are obliged to make a report to CAS.

The [Ottawa Police Service](#) responds to reports of physical and sexual violence, ensures the safety of victims, makes referrals to community agencies and conducts criminal investigations. Members of the Partner Assault Unit and Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Section receive specialized training and follow internal policies and procedures to effectively respond to incidents of sexual assault or abuse. Its Victim

Services Unit provides short-term counselling and support to victims and family members, and acts as a conduit to community agencies.

The [Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa](#) works with young and adult women who are or may become involved with the criminal justice system. It provides a wide range of services including post-release housing/supervision to federally sentenced women, individual and group counselling services, youth programs and a court support program. The agency operates halfway houses for women released from federal prisons, including the Grand Valley Institution for Women in Kitchener.

Indigenous¹ Organizations

There are a number of Indigenous organizations working in the area of violence prevention and support. [Oshki Kizis Lodge](#) is a 19-bed shelter for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women and children fleeing abuse. It offers culturally appropriate services including crisis intervention, advocacy, counselling, court accompaniment, and other services. The Oshki Kizis shelter is operated by [Minwaashin Lodge](#), which provides community-based support services to survivors of domestic and other forms of violence, and who may also be suffering the effects of the residential school system. Programs include counselling services, employment and training readiness, child and youth programs, a sex trade outreach mobile unit, and a transitional housing program. [Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health](#) provides medical care and mental health counselling to First Nations, Inuit and Métis clients in the Champlain Health Region, and addresses violence and abuse within its family, child and youth programs. Wabano also operates the [Circle of Care Program](#) which supports Indigenous families involved with the CAS and assists those experiencing family violence to create collaborative safety plans, deal with court orders and get the counselling services they need.

In the Inuit community, [Tungasuvvingat Inuit \(TI\)](#) is an Inuit-specific, provincial service provider that provides social support, cultural activities, counselling and crisis intervention services as a one-stop resource centre in Ottawa. TI provides services along the full spectrum of family violence, from “at risk” programming to counselling and advocacy with all members of the family – children, youth, mothers and fathers. TI has two staff members that respond directly to family violence, and the centre as a whole offers supportive and healing services for those affected. Service plans are flexible, individually tailored and case specific, and can include housing support, navigation of the legal system, accompaniment to appointments, CAS support, and referrals to other agencies as needed.

The [Ottawa Inuit Children’s Centre](#) serves Inuit children, youth and their families living in Ottawa or here temporarily to receive health, child protection and mental health services. The Centre offers a range of community programs including Head Start, child care, kindergarten and school liaison programs, after school and youth cultural programs, systems navigation, and parent support. OICC supports Inuit children, women and families affected by violence through crisis intervention, safety planning, advocacy, accompaniment and referrals, with women’s and children’s safety being the primary concern. OICC works closely with CAS to support Inuit families in distress and to ensure cultural connections for children in care, and recently launched a Violence Prevention Program operating at the systems level.

The [Akausivik Inuit Health Team](#) is a community health centre that provides culturally appropriate, interdisciplinary primary care for Inuit in the Champlain Health Region. It focuses on identified Inuit health priorities as well as research.

¹ Indigenous is the preferred term to Aboriginal among First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

Multi-Agency Tables

There are two multi-agency tables in Ottawa related to violence against women. The [Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women](#) (OCTEVAW) is a network of 35 member organizations and 10 non-voting partner agencies. It advocates on violence against women issues, educates the public and raises awareness, promotes communication and cooperation, and exchanges information. Members work through three committees: public education, justice, and frontline support in order to address issues of common concern. OCTEVAW doesn't coordinate services but does sponsor educational events for members.

A Violence Against Women Management Group, which is made up of executive directors of about 13 Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services-funded VAW services in Ottawa, meets monthly. Members exchange information, identify issues, apply for funding to address common concerns, and work to address gaps in services and reduce program duplication.

National Organizations

Two leading national organizations working to end violence against Indigenous women are Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada and Native Women's Association of Canada. [Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada](#) represents all Inuit women in Canada. Addressing violence and abuse issues is a major priority, and the organization has created numerous campaigns, community resources and tools related to child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, family violence, and murdered and missing Indigenous women.

[Native Women's Association of Canada](#) (NWAC) is a national organization whose goal is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations and Métis women. It has created community resources and training materials on violence prevention and safety for Indigenous women, and founded Sisters in Spirit, a research, education and policy initiative on violence against Indigenous women, and missing and murdered women.

Inuit Women and Children Affected by Violence

While all of the local organizations included in key informant interviews serve Inuit women and their children, very few are able to identify and track their needs and service use. Tungasuvvingat Inuit, Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre and Akusivik Inuit Health Team are the Inuit-specific agencies in Ottawa providing direct services to Inuit women affected by violence, but they too do not keep a record of violence-related interventions. All of the key informants in non-Inuit organizations expressed a desire to work more closely with Inuit organizations to promote their services, provide and receive referrals and improve their ability to serve Inuit clients.

Due to their size and the nature of services, the Ottawa Police Service, Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and Children's Aid Society of Ottawa serve a significant number of Inuit women and their children, although they are not formally identified as such. Police most often respond to reports of physical abuse and sexual assault, and CAS to concerns about child abuse and family violence. Other non-Indigenous organizations reported serving small numbers of Inuit women who self-identify or are identified as Inuit by referring agencies. Ottawa Victim Services has just begun to ask clients about Indigenous identity. If a woman is identified as Inuk, organizations such as the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre and Interval House of Ottawa will ensure they let the woman know about local Inuit and Indigenous

agencies where they might access services if they prefer, or to augment “mainstream” services at a later date.

Almost all of the women in post-release housing (halfway homes) provided by the Elizabeth Fry Society have been victims of violence as adults or children, and often are “criminalized” even if they are the primary victims in an abusive situation. The agency serves Inuit women from Nunavut and Ontario who have served federal sentences and are in Ottawa for community reintegration services.

Anecdotal information indicates that police reports often are made by third parties, and agencies might first become aware of mental health and addictions issues among Inuit clients, which can be indicators of violence and abuse. It is generally believed that only a small portion of incidents are reported to police or health services. Also, high rates of abuse in Inuit communities may be creating a tolerance of violence so that Inuit women are resigned to violence against them, and as a result may experience longer-term and extreme forms of abuse which escalates over time.

Barriers to Using Services

When asked about barriers to services for Inuit clients, a few key informants commented that Inuit organizations are the most appropriate sources of information. It also was noted that all marginalized populations face barriers to some extent in mainstream services.

Key informants from both Inuit and non-Inuit organizations highlighted a number of barriers that they think Inuit women face in getting help related to violence and abuse, including:

- language;
- culture;
- concerns about privacy and confidentiality;
- transportation and location of services;
- past negative experiences;
- fears of losing custody of children; and
- stigmas and stereotypes.

Language barriers most directly affect unilingual Inuit language speakers and those recently relocating from Inuit communities where they are used to accessing services in Inuktitut. Even among those who speak English or French, expressing oneself in a second language can be difficult in stressful situations. Inuit also rely more on non-verbal communications which aren’t apparent to non-Inuit. Key informants also noted that meanings may not be clear, for example, what a police officer thinks a phrase in English means might not be what was meant by the Inuit speaker.

Similarly, cultural differences can create barriers. All informants from mainstream agencies acknowledged gaps in their staff’s knowledge of Inuit culture and historical contexts, and that familiarity with First Nations is more common (which can also result in wrong assumptions as Inuit and First Nations cultures are distinct). Key informants noted that an Inuk woman may not feel culturally safe in an agency if there are no Inuit staff members or visible markers of Inuit knowledge or culture. While most agencies have a general awareness of cultural safety and the importance of being inclusive, staff members currently receive very little Inuit cultural training, and no training specific to Inuit women and violence.

Key informants in Inuit and non-Inuit organizations mentioned women's concerns with confidentiality and privacy. Inuit women sometimes prefer to receive services from mainstream agencies due to the small size of the Inuit community, multiple family connections, and worries about reprisals from abusers. This can be a particular concern when Inuktitut translation is provided by an Inuit community member known to them and their families. All service organizations place a high priority on protecting privacy and confidentiality, however, client confidentiality policies also can sometimes make it difficult for service providers to share information that would help them to work together to better serve clients.

The downtown location of services can be a barrier to clients who live in other areas of the city, lack transportation, or are unfamiliar with public transportation. Women are not always aware of mobile services such as Ottawa Victim Services. Also, past experiences, or negative reputations of health services and child protection in particular (and to a lesser extent the police), were mentioned as barriers to women reaching out to helping agencies. Sole reliance on "white and western" healing approaches and environments (e.g., talk therapy in a business office) also can reduce women's willingness to seek help.

Inuit face stigmas and stereotypes in their interactions with service providers. For example, if Inuit are viewed as quiet and peaceful (and they may appear so in formal or intimidating situations), then staff will be less likely to probe further for experiences of violence.

Key informants spoke of the importance of understanding the context in which Inuit live – their history, present day challenges, experiences with service agencies in the North and southern Canada, family and community norms and values, and also how they view violence and victimization – in order to provide better informed and culturally safe services.

Addressing Barriers

Key informants offered some suggestions for addressing barriers to violence and abuse services for Inuit women:

- provide training to service providers in Inuit communication styles and non-verbal communication;
- offer educational sessions on Inuit culture, historical context, family values and gender issues specific to issues of violence and abuse;
- be able to visibly demonstrate to clients that an agency is culturally welcoming (similar to the rainbow flag indicating support for LGBTQ clients, using an Inuit symbol);
- expand ways in which help is given, e.g., using Inuit healing methods and approaches, community-based locations, storytelling, gatherings such as cooking and sewing, peer support, etc.);
- hire more Inuit staff;
- reinforce confidentiality and privacy policies, and give women choices about counsellors, translators and meeting places;
- provide services at more locations in the community, do home visits, and provide transportation and bus fare;
- develop ways to rebuild community-wide trust in institutions;
- create low-cost methods of informing Inuit women about the services and supports available (most agencies have very small budgets for advertising and promotion);

- examine ways in which current child protection legislation and policies can be a barrier to women seeking help; and
- don't criminalize women who are affected by violence.

Key informants stressed that all clients should have ready access to trauma-informed, seamless services that meet real needs. Options also need to be available for clients who require more extensive services for complex needs.

Linkages between Inuit and non-Inuit organizations are seen as crucial to overcoming barriers in the service system. For example, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Ottawa, Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, Tungasuvvingat Inuit and Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre all have had success in engaging Inuit liaison staff/facilitators/systems navigators to support Inuit clients in the service system.

Protocols, Policies and Procedures

A few agencies have or are developing policies specific to Indigenous clients. The Circle of Care and Children's Aid Society of Ottawa apply policies related to Indigenous families involved with the CAS, and CHEO is clarifying its policies related to Indigenous children and youth. Interval House of Ottawa and all provincially funded shelters must adhere to new standards that state: "Shelters will have a written policy and procedure that outlines the supports that will be provided to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit women and dependents accessing shelter services" and "shelters are encouraged to work collaboratively with Indigenous and First Nation communities, as well as urban Indigenous organizations to establish effective and responsive policies, services and supports for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit women and dependents."² The Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre is planning to develop an overall accessibility policy.

Existing Cultural Competence Training

There currently are a few sources of Inuit-specific and general Indigenous cultural training in the city. OICC and TI have provided training to the Circle of Care and CAS, among many other agencies. This training is well-regarded by local organizations. CAS had an Inuit liaison officer for a few years, and while she was on staff she developed an orientation handbook for foster homes and child protection staff that addressed Inuit culture, language, communications, food, etc. that is still in use.

CHEO has been working with the Government of Nunavut over the last three years on four staff training modules. While the modules are geared to patients from Nunavut, the general cultural content would likely apply to Ottawa Inuit as well. CHEO involved Ottawa Health Services Network Inc. (OHSNI, the organization coordinating services for Nunavut residents receiving care in Ottawa), TI and OICC in its development. Once the materials are complete, they will be promoted to staff, but with 2,000 employees it isn't feasible to use them in face-to-face training.

Agencies have taken advantage of Wabano's Culture as Treatment workshops, and staff at Elizabeth Fry Society has participated in cultural training called "Walking in Our Moccasins."

² www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcscs/open/vaw/vaw_Manual.aspx

Concerning Indigenous violence, Ottawa Victim Services had a session of the Native Women's Association of Canada training program "You are not Alone" on violence against women. Interval House of Ottawa recently hosted a training session by Minwaashin Lodge for all staff on Indigenous women and violence. As this training is funded by MCSS, Interval House will be able to repeat it regularly. And CAS has used Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada materials on violence.

Needs for Inuit-Specific Training

All of the key informants expressed the need for both more Inuit culture-specific training in general, as well as content that is specific to issues of violence and abuse. Suggestions for additional Inuit cultural content and knowledge sharing included:

- Inuit cultural norms and how they transfer to an urban environment;
- Inuit history, and what is needed to support Inuit in moving forward;
- elders' knowledge and teachings related to service delivery;
- information on Inuit-specific services available in Ottawa to facilitate referrals;
- information on Indigenous services and programs that Inuit women, men and children use; and
- how to fast track referrals to Inuit organizations.

A few key informants from non-Inuit organizations commented that they would like to ask the Inuit organizations to provide more training to their staff, but have limited budgets to pay for training, and are hesitant to request training from already-stretched groups for little or no fee.

While key informants appreciate the general cultural competence training available from OICC and TI, specific training modules related to violence are seen as a valuable contribution in improving cultural safety for those affected by violence. Suggestions for content related to violence and abuse included:

- an understanding of the relationship of Inuit to police in northern communities in order to appreciate urban community expectations and ways police can better assist Inuit;
- hearing from Inuit women themselves about what they see as barriers to services;
- young women's experience with online violence and how to prevent it;
- how Inuit express themselves and their experiences of violence, how best to support them, and what challenges they face;
- levels of violence, barriers to leaving abusive relationships, and what can shelters do to better support Inuit women; and
- information on Inuit elders that can provide support.

Best Practices and Training Resources

Key informants had a few ideas for training best practices and resource materials. They value the involvement of Inuit with lived experience of violence in training opportunities. In addition to providing a high level of authenticity and depth to the training process, the experience is seen as valuable to survivors themselves as a way of giving back through empowering others.

While "virtual" training through webinars and online training modules is seen as useful, in general key informants both in Inuit and non-Inuit organizations prefer face-to-face training experiences. Inuit are an oral culture and can best share knowledge face-to-face. However, in order to reach more people, this

can be augmented with printed materials and online learning. For example, Victim Services Ottawa provides one-half of its volunteer training in-person and the other half is self-directed online learning.

Reciprocal training and knowledge sharing was seen as a useful approach. For example, Inuit organizations can provide training in cultural safety, and community organizations can share their expertise in working with marginalized populations, trauma counselling, and confidentiality in case coordination.

CAS and OICC have developed an Integrated Plan of Care for families involved with CAS that includes best practices related to confidentiality and family “wrap-around” care. Two other organizations that offered their specialized skills and knowledge to the project are the Ottawa Rape Crisis Centre and Interval House of Ottawa.

Examples of other training materials and resources that were recommended are:

- *The Inuit Way* and Nuluaq project materials on child sexual abuse by Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada;
- the Indigenous cultural awareness training provided to Ontario Provincial Police officers;
- Mental Health First Aid – Inuit edition from the Mental Health Commission of Canada;
- the Inunnguiniq Parenting Program, Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, Nunavut; and
- I am a Kind Man Project, Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres and the White Ribbon Campaign (a strengths-based approach).

Some concern was expressed about raising the profile of abuse and violence issues among Inuit before agencies are well equipped to serve them. Suggestions for programming for Inuit include: more healing circles; events where Inuit men and women can interact in a positive way; and more use of elders with knowledge of how violence was handled in the past.

Collaboration among Agencies

All key informants support increased inter-agency collaboration to improve responses to Inuit women and children affected by violence. There is a genuine willingness among the agencies contacted to work together on solutions. One key informant expressed the hope that this opening dialogue will then progress to organized training and knowledge sharing that continues on a regular basis. Key informants were very favourable toward the community Advisory Group for the project, and could see it evolving into an ongoing forum for addressing emerging issues and concerns.

Some suggestions for follow-up include:

- having the project lead speak to members of the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women and the Violence Against Women Management Group, and using these groups as a way to connect with more agencies;
- participation by Inuit organizations on other service coordination committees in the city;
- working collaboratively on safety plans for Inuit women;
- developing a common statement on violence against Inuit women and children;
- using Woman Abuse Prevention Month in November as a time to raise awareness among agencies and the public on violence against Inuit women; and

- sharing and comparing different agency approaches to confidentiality and to working with CAS.

Conclusion

These interviews with representatives of key agencies working in the violence against women field provided a good overview of agency roles and responsibilities related to violence against Inuit women; barriers to services; protocols, policies, and procedures; training opportunities, needs and best practices; and the benefits of collaboration. Combined with other sources of knowledge for the project – Inuit women affected by violence, and a best practices literature review, these findings will help to ensure that project activities build on the considerable knowledge among stakeholders, and result in improved systems and services for Inuit women and children affected by violence.

Appendix A – List of Key Informants

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Appendix B – Key Informant Interview Guide

Name and position of interviewee(s):

Organization:

Date of interview:

Interviewer:

Introduction and Consent

The Ottawa Inuit Children’s Centre (OICC) is conducting research on Inuit women’s experiences and needs for community services related to situations of violence and abuse toward them and those they are close to. This research is a part of a larger project to work with stakeholders in improving systems and services for Inuit women and children affected by violence in Ottawa. The goal of the project is to improve access to and quality of health, social and justice services for Inuit. We are speaking with representatives from a variety of frontline services to gather information on their organizations and insights into needs for and barriers to services for Inuit.

The information we collect from you will be shared with OICC staff and the project’s Advisory Group. If you would like particular comments or your whole interview to remain anonymous, please let me know. If the information is later included in a publicly available report, we will not identify comments by name.

Do you have any questions about the research?

Do you consent to participate in the research as described?

Questions

For this research, we are focused on:

- physical, sexual and psychological/emotional violence and abuse,
- by partners, family members and friends (that is, by people known to victims).

We are interested in discussing situations in which Inuit women are:

- the victims of violence and abuse, or
- supporting victims who are close to them (e.g., their children, other family members, or close friends).

1. Can you clarify your 1) organization’s role or service area, and 2) your own responsibilities in relation to violence and abuse against women in Ottawa?
2. To what extent does your organization serve Inuit women affected by violence (that is, either as victims or when supporting those close to them)? What types of situations and issues related to violence and abuse do they bring to your agency?
3. What do you think are some of the barriers that Inuit women might face in using your agency’s services? Have you successfully reduced barriers or improved services for Inuit or other client groups with distinct needs?

4. Does your organization have any protocols, policies or procedures to respond to violence against Indigenous women in general or Inuit women in particular?
5. Can you describe any cultural competence training related to First Nations, Métis or Inuit that service providers in your organization have received?
6. What type of training in Inuit culture and community needs would be helpful to you?
7. Are there ways that your organization and Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre could work together to better prevent and respond to violence and abuse in the Inuit community?
8. Are you aware of any relevant best practices or training resources that might be helpful to us?
9. Do you have any thoughts or comments on the project?