

*"Building the smallest democracies at the heart of society."*  
The United Nations: The International Year of the Family, 1994

Agreement# 40063171

## The Harmony Project



*by Joyce Schrader, Portage Family Abuse Prevention Centre*

**T**he *Harmony Project* was created when the Portage Family Abuse Prevention Centre (a non-profit 24/7, 365 day crisis call centre and residential centre for women and children fleeing abuse) was awarded a grant from **Status of Women Canada** in response to a call for proposals under the **Women Living in Rural and Remote Communities and Small Urban Centres** initiative. The Project's objective was to develop and implement a community plan to address barriers and reduce violence against women and girls in Portage la Prairie and surrounding area. The time frame for this project was March 28, 2012, to March 27, 2015.

This project was guided by a multi-disciplinary steering committee comprised of local representatives from various organizations and government departments. The first year of the project was devoted to research activities and consultations to inform the development of a community plan. Key activities included a review of Gender-Based Analysis and best practices literature, interviews and focus groups with service providers and men and women in the community, and a community-awareness survey. Research findings were presented at a community forum that was held at the end of the first year. Community stakeholders identified three priorities for the community plan to be further developed and implemented during the remaining two years of the project. These included (a) raising community awareness about the issue of gender-based violence, (b) educating youth about healthy relationships, and (c) the need for increased collaboration between agencies when working with

high risk individuals and families.



### Raising Community Awareness

At the start, the project seemed like a daunting task. There was community resistance to discussing and addressing the issue of violence against women. The subject was taboo and open discussion about violence, including sexual assault, rarely took place. Initially, starting conversations and finding interview and survey participants was difficult. However, a slow transformation took place. The local media was very supportive and provided extensive newspaper and radio coverage of the project activities. The steering committee and project team worked to build relationships and engage a widening group of stakeholders to embrace and implement the community plan. Soon, it seemed that the community was talking.

### Healthy Relationships Training and Workshops

The Project partnered with the Red Cross to train 25 Healthy Youth and Adult Educators

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## Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence, Alberta: Overview of Research Project and Findings



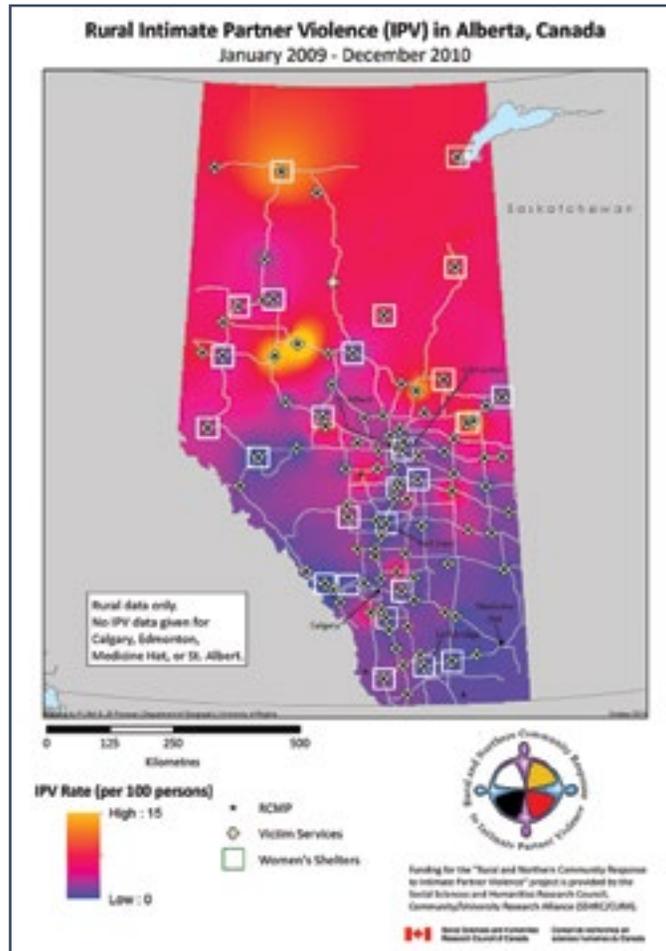
by S. Barton, K. Hungler, D. McBride, N. Letourneau, & S. Mailloux

**T**his Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence Research Project, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities

Research Council of Canada, is a five year Community University Alliance Research Project designed to examine needs of northern and rural women who experience intimate partner violence (IPV). **Dr. Mary Hampton**, with RESOLVE-Saskatchewan at the University of Regina, leads this project. The goals are to enhance understanding of effective community response to IPV in rural and northern regions of Canada and, through actions with community partners, to affect policies to provide better responses to IPV. This multidisciplinary, multi-region study encompasses researchers and community members from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the North West Territories.

In 2013, 30 IPV service providers from ten selected communities, representative of northern rural and southern rural Alberta, were recruited and interviewed individually. This sample included Women's shelter directors, RCMP officers, and victim services' coordinators. In 2014, three focus groups were conducted and involved 25 service providers, such as first responders (e.g. police), administrators of government programs, and those in helping professions (e.g. addictions counselors, social workers, psychologists). An environmental scan that listed available IPV services such as women's shelters, victims' services, RCMP detachments, court services, and counselling options was completed. Geographical information system (GIS) tools were used to map services, supports, and IPV incidents. This research project used a grounded

theory approach and identified four areas affecting women experiencing IPV in rural and northern Alberta:



1. Protective factors such as the presence of personal and external resources available to women;
2. Informal supports derived from family, friends, and communities (which may include cultural, faith, and/or geographical communities);
3. Formal services including the provision of professional services ideally within integrated case management; and
4. Context which includes environmental and geographical factors that impact daily life for women in rural and northern communities in Alberta.

The low socioeconomic status of women who experience IPV creates barriers for women who choose to live independently from IPV offenders. Lack of subsidized, second-stage and affordable housing, along with a lack of transportation such as public transportation within the community and between communities, is problematic. Extreme weather and road conditions also impede travel. Many women in abusive relationships typically do not have their own private vehicles and taxi service—if available—is expensive. Diverse subpopulations of women were noted, and their unique contexts give rise to unique challenges that need to be considered.

The court system was depicted as having a number of issues with stories of discrimination toward women and secondary victimization of those encountering

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## Manitoba Update: *Manitoba Undergraduate Research Award Recipient*



by Jane Ursel

**C**ongratulations to **Richelle Ready**, who has received the University of Manitoba Undergraduate Research Award. This highly coveted award recognizes and supports undergraduate students who conduct important research under the mentorship of an academic in their selected field. We are so pleased that Richelle applied for the award to work on our new RESOLVE study of the criminal justice processing of sexual assault cases in Winnipeg. There has been much debate across Canada about the low rates of reporting sexual assault, and the troubling experiences of victim/witnesses if their cases



proceed to court. This is a critical study that is supported by a team of concerned agencies/institutions, and we are pleased to add the University of Manitoba to the list of funders along with the Manitoba Justice Department, and Clinic Community Health Centre. We couldn't ask for a better research assistant for this project. Richelle has worked for three years on the Winnipeg family violence court project and is thoroughly familiar with coding data from police, prosecutors and court files to compile data sets to help us address some of our more challenging questions about how to do "justice" in cases of interpersonal violence. ☘

### *Introducing Our Steering Committee Members*

#### **Lori Rudniski**

by Cheryl Fraehlich



Lori Rudniski

Helping people overcome challenges, grow, and flourish, is an ongoing passion for **Lori Rudniski**. For over 25 years, she has worked with women, children and families as they deal with the impact of trauma and abuse. As the Executive Director of Bravestone Centre (second stage housing, formerly known as WISH Inc.) since 2004, she has ensured that research plays an integral part of the ongoing development and delivery of the variety of quality services provided to women and their children who rebuild their lives after abuse. Lori has been an active RESOLVE Steering Committee member since 2009. She also sat on the RESOLVE Publications Committee since 2010, and served on the RESOLVE Awards Committee in 2015.

Lori places great value on evidence-based programming and under her leadership, Bravestone Centre has been involved in a number of research projects, many of these directly working in partnership with RESOLVE Manitoba. The agency's most recent research, *Developing a Framework for Strengthening Families: Phase I*, focused on determining if the centre's pilot project, the *Family Attachment Program*, should

become part of the permanent services offered at Bravestone Centre and developing a framework within the existing system of programs at the Centre. This research has now been completed with the final report to be made public in the near future.

In addition to her work at Bravestone Centre, Lori has co-chaired the Family Violence Prevention Consortium of Manitoba and is actively involved in projects that increase awareness and quality of this sector. As a licensed therapist and certified Counsellor Supervisor, Lori is very active in counsellor education and currently teaches at the University of Manitoba, in the Faculty of Education, and in the Faculty of Extended Education. ☘

## Saskatchewan Update



### *Introducing Our Steering Committee Members*

#### *Crystal Giesbrecht*

A registered social worker, Crystal Giesbrecht is a member of our steering committee, and has presented her research at RESOLVE Research Day on several occasions. Crystal first became involved in domestic violence work through volunteer work at Regina Transition House, and then as a Domestic Violence Counsellor on a casual basis, a position she still holds. Since 2011, she has worked as Director of Member Programs and Services at the Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan (PATHS).

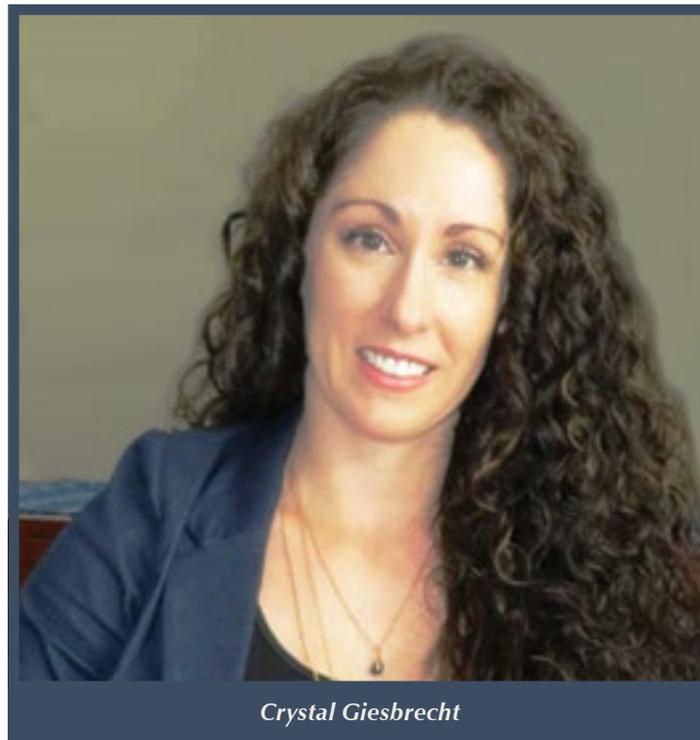
Crystal's work at PATHS includes supporting member agencies (21 domestic violence shelters and counselling agencies across the province) by organizing training, developing resources, planning a biennial conference (the next to be held in Regina in May 2016).

An important part of her work is to educate member agency staff, other professionals, and the public. She delivers presentations on intimate partner violence and supports survivors of violence to recruits at Regina's RCMP Depot and the Regina Police College, along with members of other community organizations. Crystal also offers training on best practices for working with older adults who have experienced violence, and other topics pertaining to intimate partner violence and abuse. She is also a certified trainer in the Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA).

She is one of many collaborators on the Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations (CDHPIVP), a five year

project to conduct research on domestic homicides in Canada, identify protocols and strategies to reduce risk, and to share this knowledge with the wider community. PATHS is also a partner organization on the project.

As well as her work at PATHS, Crystal works as a sessional lecturer for the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Regina. She has also worked as a Research Assistant, assisting to develop course content for social work courses on working with immigrant and refugee children and families.



*Crystal Giesbrecht*

Her volunteer work also centres around working to end violence against women. She is an Amnesty International Fieldworker, where a large part of her role is to educate members and the public on human rights issues in Canada and worldwide as well as recruiting and mentoring new members. Crystal is also a Board Member of Amnesty International's Regina Community Group and is a former Board member of the Regina Sexual Assault Centre. She has been involved in the presentation of information on the

harms of the sex trade to men who participate in a program for those arrested in the attempt to purchase sex from women in prostitution ("john school").

Other committee work includes STOPS to Violence Tasks Committee and Regina's Community Partnership Against Violence (CPAV) Committee.

Crystal's goal is to continue work in the movement to end violence against women, and to contribute to this work through research and public education. ❧

## Alberta Update: *Importance of “User-Friendly” and Accessible Justice Services*



by Nela Cosic

**M**y friend, “Susan”, surprised me recently by disclosing that her partner had become abusive and that she had ended the relationship. She told me that she needed help in obtaining a court order to prevent the perpetrator from contacting or approaching her. After confirming that she was physically and emotionally well, I agreed to help. Applying for a court order was a completely foreign and exceedingly frustrating process for both of us. Clear guidelines for issuing a court order (particularly for those with no legal experience or knowledge) proved to be largely inaccessible to us. Even law and policy representatives who were recommended to Susan—who are highly educated and dedicated to their area of expertise—could not provide specific direction for court order application. After connecting with numerous representatives from Calgary Legal Guidance, she was finally sent the application form over e-mail. Her next challenge became arranging the completion of the application and ensuring the defendant (perpetrator of DV) was aware of the order. I was compelled to write about this particularly because the process of arranging this legal matter felt unfair, even though the resolution was just.

When trying to access civil or family justice legal services, many other self-representing litigants describe experiences similar to Susan’s, often “finding themselves in failed or endless referral loops between unrelated and uncoordinated agencies.” Many reports and reviews have established that access to justice services is often quite difficult and reformation in the structure of the justice system has been strongly suggested. Civil and family justice issues are one of the primary reasons why people seek assistance through the courts, hence the importance of ensuring their fair and effective access. This convoluted and costly system, intended to serve justice, fundamentally adds more stress to individuals already experiencing significant stress, anxiety or depression as a result of interpersonal violence or other civil or family justice issues. To make matters worse, the adversarial nature and complicated process of court hearings enforces conflict between parents, imposing heightened stress on children, who already have difficulty adjusting to family deterioration. Abundant evidence suggests that maternal and paternal

chronic stress correlates to child developmental problems, which may be worsened or prolonged by the stress of applying and waiting for the resolution of a court hearing. Improving the accessibility of justice services should thus consider how the complicated current structure may be imposing additional stress to individuals or families already experiencing significant problems.

Most people seeking legal assistance in resolving family or civil justice issues are not highly educated in law, may be experiencing mental health problems as a result of the issues they are seeking help with, and are self-representing litigants. Therefore, restructuring the justice system to become “user-friendly” has potential to not only improve the accessibility of justice services, but also the mental and physical health of individuals and families. We need to tailor the structure of the Alberta civil and family justice system for the individuals who use these services, which would not only benefit the individual, but likely also reduce the social and health costs for society. ❧



Nela Cosic

Article references available upon request from the Editor.

*Harmony Project...* continued from Page 1



Students from *William Morton Collegiate Institute* launch their anti-abuse video—part of the *Portage Family Abuse Prevention Centre's Harmony Project*

from local agencies, the community, and area First Nations. These trained educators then provided Healthy Relationships training to over 1,500 youth in various schools in Portage la Prairie and the surrounding rural catchment area. This training was the catalyst for students of a rural school to create the video **#YouAreGoodEnough** [www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P\\_b\\_yj6H-M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3P_b_yj6H-M). A second video—*Carry the Message*—was also created by a The Portage Friendship Centre. Accreditation remains with the educators and workshops will continue beyond the Project's timeline.

### Coordinated Community Response Model

Members of the Harmony Project Steering Committee and key agency stakeholders formed a Coordinated Community Response Model Committee that developed a model for agencies and organizations to work together with women/families who experience, or at risk for, abuse. Although two models of community response planning had previously been attempted in Portage la Prairie, the lack of success of these attempts was at least in part due to a top-down, authority-driven approach. The Committee was determined that a successful model to reduce the silos among service providers could be developed with a grassroots, locally-informed approach. After extensive consultation and a review of best practices and models implemented elsewhere, what is now known as the Portage &

Area Coordinated Community Response Model was developed. Members of the newly formed model, from several local agencies, are very invested in ensuring that the model is used and remains active past the Harmony Project time frame.

The Harmony Project is an example of a successful community-based effort that reduces the stigma associated with violence against women and girls, and creates solutions to violence. Although the Project included a formal evaluation process that documented activities and successes, I remain inspired by the informal measures of success. An individual who worked at a local pizza restaurant said that she noticed that young patrons now openly discussed healthy relationship topics. A principal of a rural high school told me that she has overheard students discuss healthy relationships in the hallways; this had not occurred prior to the Healthy Relationships workshops. An executive director of a local Indigenous social services agency called to let me know that her son, a student in a middle years school, came home from school one day very excited. He had been at a Healthy Relationship presentation and wanted to tell his mother everything he learned that day. Donations in the form of money, clothing, and other goods have been pouring into the shelter. These donations include funds provided by a couple in lieu of giving wedding favours to their wedding guests, and donations that were made in lieu of flowers for a family who asked that donations be made in memory of their deceased loved one. Such examples illustrate increased levels of awareness and hope for the future. ☘



## Announcements, Conferences and Events



**May 13, 2016 - Responses Matter: Responses to Interpersonal Violence** Network Meeting and Conference in Montreal, Quebec. Presented by Responses to Interpersonal Violence Network. Aspects such as social, systemic, and organizational responses to victims and policy will be discussed. The approaches victims themselves have identified as helpful to their recovery will also be addressed. For more information e-mail [janie\\_d\\_c@hotmail.com](mailto:janie_d_c@hotmail.com).

**May 17–18, 2016 - PATHS Conference: Violence is Everyone's Business**, at the Ramada Plaza Regina in Regina, Saskatchewan. Keynote presentations will be made by artist and feminist activist Cherry Smiley on *Aboriginal Women, Colonialism, and the Sex Industry: Making the Connections*; and Barb MacQuarrie, Community Director of the Centre for Research and Education on Violence against Women & Children in the Faculty of Education at the Western University, on *The Impact of Intimate Partner Violence in the Workplace*. Advance registration is required. Online registration and additional details, including presenter biographies, a list of workshops and plenary sessions, is available at [pathssk.org/events/conference-2016](http://pathssk.org/events/conference-2016).

**October 4–5, 2016 - RESOLVE Research Day 2016: Aboriginal Trauma and Healing**, at the Alberta room, Blue room and Senate room, University of Calgary, Alberta. Presented by RESOLVE–Alberta. For more information refer to [www.ucalgary.ca/resolve/research-day-2016](http://www.ucalgary.ca/resolve/research-day-2016).

**October 16, 2016 - 25<sup>th</sup> Equality Breakfast together & 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Equality Provisions of The Charter: Veiled Threat? Women, Multiculturalism & Equality in Canada** at the RBC Convention Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Presented by Manitoba W.I.S.E. Inc. (formerly LEAF Manitoba Inc.). For more information refer to [manitobawise.com/2015mbwise\\_poster\\_equality\\_breakfast.pdf](http://manitobawise.com/2015mbwise_poster_equality_breakfast.pdf).

**November 17–18, 2016 - 16<sup>th</sup> Diverse Voices Family Violence Conference** at the Fantasyland Hotel in Edmonton, Alberta. For more information refer to [www.diverse-voices.com](http://www.diverse-voices.com).

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the court system prevailing. Many participants reported that there was often a lack of IPV–trained service providers (e.g., police, lawyers, victim support counsellors, judges, and crown prosecutors), which limited their ability to protect and advocate for women and their children. Overall, service providers described a different standard of justice in northern and rural court systems versus urban centres—lengthy time in addressing IPV incidents/homicides; lack of coordination of services; difficulty accessing sufficient, affordable legal support; and long distances to travel to attend court to name a few.

Service providers' capacity to deliver programs was tied to resource allocation, with large inequities across Alberta for formal IPV service programming, especially in northern and rural communities. Limited funding results in limitations in the range, level, and locations of service, as well as staffing issues. The GIS map shows a disturbing trend that indicates that the IPV rate per 100 people is generally higher in more remote locations and where there tends to be fewer services available.

Positive northern and rural attitudes, such as a strong sense of community were found, although such issues as addictions and isolation were also prevalent. This was noted especially for temporary workers or recently immigrated families, due to damaged feelings of positive attachment and community belongingness. Defending IPV offenders—even normalizing IPV—and limiting the definition of IPV to physical assault were commonly reported. Issues of confidentiality and privacy are compromised in rural and northern communities since “everyone knows everyone else,” and the ability to access and receive support may be eroded by public scrutiny.

A PDF copy of our community report is available at [www2.uregina.ca/ipv/research.html](http://www2.uregina.ca/ipv/research.html). ☘



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