



Building the Future Together

MOVING FORWARD

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

SOCIAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

FEBRUARY 2002

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PREAMBLE

As the Department of Human Resources and Employment has been reorganizing and redesigning programs, advocacy organizations, who represent vulnerable populations, have expressed concerns regarding potential negative impacts of changes in programs and services on clients. The Working Group for Supports to Victims of Violence was originally brought together to make recommendations relating to victims of violence who seek the assistance of Transition Houses and Shelters. We have enlarged the parameters to include the concerns and needs of women who are dealing with issues of abuse in their homes, communities and relationships, and how the Department of Human Resources and Employment could better respond to this population.

The Strategic Social Plan identifies "integrated and evidence-based policy development and monitoring as the foundation for the design, delivery and evaluation of social policy development programs and services" as a fundamental goal.

It is important that the Department of Human Resources and Employment follow the example of the Strategic Social Plan and apply a "lens of inclusion" to all of its redesign work. This means a method of examining departmental programs to see who benefits and who is left out when restructuring occurs. It is a way of auditing a department whose mandate affects people at the most vulnerable time in their lives when they experience violence and/or poverty.

This work represents an attempt to enhance the level of trust and respect for the concerns of individuals who depend on the Department of HRE at difficult times in their lives.

Good social policy must be constantly evolving to address the ever changing needs of the most vulnerable populations: victims of violence and individuals and families who live in poverty.

The work of the committee needs to be considered more of a process than a product. The product is our recommendations, yet we feel that the Department of Human Resources and Employment should undertake similar processes as programs are designed or modified.

*Joyce Hancock
Provincial Advisory Council On The Status of Women*

The Department of Human Resources for its part is committed to shifting the way it does business in the development of a collaborative approach including representation of community, regional and government partners coming together to respond to the needs of victims of violence.

The Department established the Working Group for Supports to Victims of Violence to ensure the Department understands the issues and concerns of victims of violence.

It is important to the integrity of community/government partnerships and collaboration that the work we do together is based on shared values. The values, which guided the Working Group included respect for the dignity of all persons, the right to live without risk, respect for individual choice, responsive and holistic service that is pro-active in the prevention of abuse and violence, and that interventions are non-judgmental and validating.

The Working Group has made recommendations which will influence how the Department of Human Resources and Employment responds to victims of violence as well as potential victims. We recognize that anyone can be victimized and need social supports from the community and government.

We recognize that there are limited resources of funding for government programs. However, there must be a recognition of the cost to governments when vulnerable people fall “through the cracks” and the Income Support is not responsive to the extenuating circumstances that apply to victims of violence. Prevention and early intervention represent low-cost investment for long term savings and as such we present this report.

Each department on an on-going basis will:

- define standards for service accessibility in terms of eligibility, distance, time and affordability,
- identify existing barriers to access, including historical discrimination and vulnerability to abuse and violence, which have placed women and other vulnerable populations at a social disadvantage,
- develop strategies to eliminate barriers and to improve access to services.

Strategic Social Plan

BACKGROUND

Since 1998 the Department of Human Resources and Employment has been redesigning its income support program to better meet the needs and concerns of clients. Advocacy groups have frequently indicated that they do not feel that the Income Support Program adequately addresses preventative issues nor supports the needs of persons who are victims of violence¹. Most of the issues relate to policies, procedures, training for staff, improved linkages with other agencies, and improved communication with clients.

On a broader context in 1998, the Provincial Strategic Social Plan (SSP) established a framework that identified the need for new approaches in social policy development. This included government and the community finding more effective ways to address social and economic development issues. The Strategic Social Plan identifies a number of strategies for better public policy including government community partnerships, collaboration, inclusion, prevention and early intervention, regional voice in policy development, coordinated, client-centered service and accountability for results.

In addition, in the year 2000, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador through the Violence Prevention Initiative (VPI), outlined a five year, multi-departmental, government-community partnership to find long term solutions to the problem of violence against those most at risk. The VPI is a good example of the type of cross sectoral collaboration articulated in the Strategic Social Plan.

The VPI has provided government departments and agencies with an Interdepartmental Anti-Violence Policy Framework, which is intended to fulfill four main functions:

- to raise awareness regarding the pervasive nature of violence, and the need to review all relevant policies to identify implications for victims of violence;
- to provide policy makers with key information related to violence and to assist them in writing sensitive policy, which will foster the prevention of violence and facilitate improvements in services to victims of violence;

¹ Mobilizing Shelters To Mobilize Communities Conference Report, June, 2000.

- to provide an effective format and comprehensive process for development and implementation of government policy, that reflects understanding of the complexities of violence; and
- to educate the public about government's position and response to violence in our province².

In keeping with the SSP, VPI and as part of its redesign initiative, in April 2001, the Department of Human Resources and Employment established a Working Group to focus on reviewing and assessing the income support program policies and procedures related to persons who are victims of violence and explore options for improved client service.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, through its commitment to the VPI is responsible for:

- providing effective service to victims of violence,
- ensuring that legislation does not impose additional burdens upon those affected by violence,
- reducing and preventing violence.

Violence Prevention Initiative

Victims of Violence Working Group Members

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² Violence Prevention Initiative - Interdepartmental Anti-Violence Policy Framework, September, 2001.

INTRODUCTION

The VPI Interdepartmental Anti-Violence Policy Framework also clearly outlines the criteria to be used by government departments in the development of policies. The criteria include:

- multi-disciplinary partnership within government departments and between government and the community;
- consistency and co-ordination in the development and review of policies, protocols, and programs to ensure that the needs of all victims are addressed effectively and efficiently;
- coordination of policy and service delivery, both within departments and across departmental lines;
- service delivery standards which promote accessibility and quality as well as appropriate information sharing;
- programs which will reduce and prevent violence through early intervention and prevention, education, training, and awareness;
- coordinated training, guidance, and accountability for all service providers in the implementation of policies; and
- government and departmental accountability mechanisms based upon research and monitoring³.

All government policies should be evaluated on the following criteria to ensure congruence with the policy direction:

- victim safety is the paramount consideration;
- informed choices and the right to self determination are supported;
- any element of victim blaming is eliminated;
- access to a range of service options is available/offered to the victim; and
- inequities resulting from regional variation are addressed.

Violence Prevention Initiative

³ Violence Prevention Initiative - Interdepartmental Anti-Violence Policy Framework, September, 2001.

This Working Group has identified 16 issues along with proposed solutions to improve services to victims of violence. The Working Group, in the identification of issues and solutions, sought input from various stakeholders. The Provincial Association Against Family Violence presented a list of issues to Mr. Wayne Penney, Director of Income Support. The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Gateways Women's Centre presented a list of issues to Minister Smith and Vivian Randell, Deputy Minister. Finally, the Coalition of women's centres, transition houses and ad-hoc women's groups also had a conference call with Vivian Randell on many of the same issues. All of these issues were subsequently referred to the Working Group for review. All of the solutions presented in this report are consistent with the SSP framework for policy development, the VPI policy criteria for policy development and the Department's Strategic Plan. The issues presented in this report can be best captured under the following categories:

- Procedures
- Training/Cultural Shift
- Client Empowerment
- Seamless Service
- Accountability

It is important to note that the Department of Human Resources and Employment does a great deal to support victims of violence today. There were many positive examples presented during the analysis that clearly show staff have been very flexible and creative in finding ways to support victims of violence. Many of the solutions presented in this report are intended to articulate in policy what is already the current practice.

The Working Group also identified a number of issues that more appropriately fit within the mandate of other government departments as these issues impact more than individuals in receipt of Income Support. These issues will be presented to the other departments for consideration and copied to the Violence Preventive Initiative (VPI) for additional follow-up.

Important Facts - Putting a Face to the Analysis

- In Canada, 21% of women abused by their partner were assaulted during pregnancy; 40% reported that the abuse began during pregnancy⁴.
- Women under 25 are also at a greater risk of being killed by their male partner⁵.
- Wife battering carries on into old age. Spousal homicide accounts for one third (30%) of murders of women over 65⁶.
- A Disabled Women's Network survey found that 40% of women with disabilities have been raped, abused or assaulted⁷.
- A vast majority of aboriginal women have been assaulted. From 48% up to 90% have been assaulted at the hands of their partners, depending on the community in which they live⁸.
- Girl children are targets of abuse within the family more so than boys. Four out of five victims of family-related sexual assaults (79%) are girls, and over half (55%) of physical assaults of children by family members are against girls⁹.

⁴ Facilitator's Guide - Violence Awareness & Action Training, Statistics Canada, Family Violence in Canada (Ottawa: Minister of Industry, 1999).

⁵ Facilitator's Guide - Violence Awareness & Action Training, Statistics Canada, Family Violence in Canada (Ottawa: Minister of Industry, 1999).

⁶ Facilitator's Guide - Violence Awareness & Action Training, Statistics Canada, Family Violence in Canada (Ottawa: Minister of Industry, 1999).

⁷ Facilitator's Guide - Violence Awareness & Action Training. Jillian Ridington, Beating the Odds: Violence and Woman with Disabilities (Disabled Women's Network, 1989).

⁸ Facilitator's Guide - Violence Awareness & Action Training. Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence-Achieving Equality (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1993).

⁹ Facilitator's Guide - Violence Awareness & Action Training. B. Lent, "Obstetrical Issues in Wife Abuse". Canadian Journal of Obstetrics/Gynecology of Women's Health Care 4(5) 1992, pp.330-33, as cited in the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence - Achieving Equality (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services 1993).

ISSUES - SOLUTIONS - RESPONSES

PART I - POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

ISSUE #1: HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE

Victims of violence who must leave their home are basically homeless and require additional support to start over. Whether the victim is a single individual or has children, it is very difficult to plan an escape that includes taking all of the items required to start over. Even if the victim has managed to get some items, they will face significant financial cost in setting up a new home. These financial costs place considerable stress on victims, especially when children are involved.

Financial stress is one of the biggest factors that contributes to victims returning to the violent situation.

*Debbie Keats
Administrator
Iris Kirby House*

Currently, the household furniture and equipment policy is very restrictive in what can be provided. For example, beds can be provided for children only and table and chairs, dressers, sofa, etc. cannot be approved. While there is some flexibility to respond to emergencies, there is no consistency as to whether a Client Services Officer might consider a victim of violence to be in an emergency situation. There is also inconsistency in what might be approved. In addition, there is currently no ability under existing policy to assist victims in purchasing many of the basic necessities to set up a new home e.g. linens, pots, pans, etc.. The staff at Iris Kirby House and the Nain Shelter assisted in determining the actual cost of setting up a new home for a family of one adult and two children by developing a price list for essential items. These costs were used to determine the amount of the start-up fund.

There must be an acknowledgment that government cannot possibly be expected to respond to all of the needs faced by victims when setting up a new home. The community, family, and friends also play a role in providing support. Unfortunately, in most cases, support from these other sources is very limited. Successful re-establishment very much depends on the community and on the victim being supported by the family. This is not always the case. The cost of setting up a new home, minus what the Department of Human Resources and Employment

currently provides and what victims can acquire from other sources, usually results in a significant shortfall. This shortfall places considerable stress on victims and/or their children and causes victims to return to the violent situation.

Solution #1

Introduce a more responsive approach to support victims of violence, who move into rental accommodations. This new approach would consist of a start-up fund, which would replace the current furniture policy, for this client group. The start-up fund is intended as a contribution to assist clients in purchasing the necessary items to set up a new home including beds, table and chairs, dishes, pots and pans, linens, clothing, etc.. This new approach is intended to be more flexible in that the money is not for any specific item. For example, in one situation the client may be able to get a used table and chairs and beds for the children from a family member and a second hand couch from a used furniture store. The start-up fund will be used to purchase a bed for the mother, pots, pans, pillows, beds, clothes and toys for the children, etc.. In another situation, the client might be able to get second hand pots and pans, dishes, clothes, etc. from a family member, but will use the start-up fund for beds, and table and chairs.

The start-up fund will be the financial support that victims need to start over. It will no doubt have a positive influence on helping victims move on with their life instead of returning to a life of abuse.

*Debbie Keats
Administrator
Iris Kirby House*

Clients would not be expected to provide receipts. Table 1.1 illustrates the amount of start-up funding, which is based on family size and is intended to ensure that families are not financially worse off than under current policy. The higher start-up amount for Labrador would be provided in areas that are currently entitled to the Coast of Labrador Allowance (COLA). In all other parts of Labrador clients would receive the same as the island portion of the province. While the table shows the full range of family size, the average family size for victims of violence in transition houses is 1 adult plus 2 children for the island and 1 adult plus 4 children for Labrador.

Table 1.1

| Adult | Child | Island Start-up fund | Coast of Labrador Start-up fund |
|--------------|--------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 | 0 | \$500 | \$600 |
| 1 | 1 | \$600 | \$750 |
| 1 | 2 | \$700* | \$900 |
| 1 | 3 | \$900 | \$1150 |
| 1 | 4 | \$1000 | \$1300* |
| 1 | 5 | \$1200 | \$1550 |
| 1 | 6 | \$1300 | \$1700 |
| 1 | 7 | \$1500 | \$1950 |

*Average family size, for victims who stay in transition houses.

It is important to note that victims of violence often return to the violent relationship. In some instances, many attempts are made before the cycle of violence can be broken. Start-up funds may be required more than once. In such situations, the start-up funds are not to be classified as an overpayment. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to assist the client find a place to store the furniture. Should a client decide to return to the abusive relationship, this will help minimize the need to provide start-up funds more than once.

Role of Client Services Officer

The Client Services Officer should play a key role in assisting the client in identifying and linking to appropriate community supports and/or counselling. This may be necessary to help the client assess their readiness to leave the violent relationship or alternatives to setting up a new home; e.g. a stay at a Transition House, with a family member or friend, for a temporary period, etc.. Client Services Officers, in consultation with the supervisor, will have the authority to approve the start-up fund. Supervisory approval will be required for repeat requests for the start-up fund.

Role of Transition Houses Staff

In the case of victims of violence, who are ready to leave a shelter and to move into rental accommodations, staff will make a recommendation to Client Services Officer for the approval of the start-up fund.

The working group is aware that the funding for the start-up fund must be addressed within the household furniture budget within the Income Support

Program. We are aware that there are no additional funds available for this new approach. Because the start-up fund is a relatively new concept, the Working Group acknowledges it is important that implementation be monitored both from the perspective of its responsiveness to victims of violence and the related costs and include a formal review following the first year of implementation.

The Departmental Response

The current policy does provide for the approval of furniture. However the Department recognizes there is a need to make the existing policy more responsive and supportive to victims of violence. The Department is committed to a pilot approach to be initiated as soon as possible to collect additional data to help confirm the cost. The Working Group representatives will be consulted with respect to the pilot.

ISSUE #2: TRANSPORTATION TO SUPPORT/EMPOWERMENT GROUPS

Currently, there is inconsistency in victims of violence obtaining approval for transportation to attend support/empowerment groups.

I have worked with a number of victims who really needed the support of an empowerment group. The Client Service Officer that I dealt with was very supportive and had no problem giving approval. It really made a difference.

*Renee Byrne
Victim Services*

Solution #2

The policy needs to clearly state that the Department recognizes victims of violence require additional supports, such as support/empowerment groups, and provide for their transportation.

The Departmental Response

The current policy does provide for the approval of transportation to support/empowerment groups. However the Department recognizes there is a need to clarify and make the existing policy more supportive. The Department is in the process of re-drafting this specific section of policy.

ISSUE #3: TRANSPORTATION OUTSIDE OF THE PROVINCE

In exceptional circumstances, relocation to another province is necessary. In such cases, there are usually many professionals involved i.e the police (RCMP, RNC), transition house, women's councils/centers, Health and Community Services and Victim Services (Justice). Currently the policy is unclear, resulting in inconsistencies in the decision to approve relocation. In addition, staff are unclear as to what type of documentation is necessary to support the case. This results in victims and professionals being requested to provide supporting documentation with a duplication of effort.

Solution #3

Develop clear policy, which supports the approval of transportation outside the province in exceptional circumstances. The policy should clearly state that documentation by any one of the professionals identified above will be considered sufficient documentation confirming the move is necessary. The documentation should include an outline of the client's circumstances and why the move to another province is the most appropriate option. Transportation outside of the province will require the approval of the Program Supervisor/District Manager. In addition, it may be necessary to provide moving expenses for household furniture and other belongings. In such situations consideration must be given to what are reasonable expenses. In some situations, it may be more cost effective to provide the start-up fund to assist clients in starting over rather than paying moving expenses.

The Departmental Response

The current policy does provide for the approval of transportation outside of the province. However, the Department recognizes there is a need to clarify and make the existing policy more supportive. The Department is in the process of re-drafting this specific section of policy.

ISSUE #4: TRANSPORTATION TO MOVE HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE

In some instances victims of violence, who require assistance with transportation costs to move household furniture have not received support. The current policy does provide for the approval of transportation costs for moving household furniture, however, there appears to be an inconsistency in the interpretation of the policy.

Solution #4

Develop clear policy which identifies victims of violence who must move to a different location as being eligible for transportation to move household furniture.

The Departmental Response

The current policy does provide for the approval of transportation of furniture. However, the Department recognizes there is a need to clarify and make the existing policy more supportive. The Department is in the process of re-drafting this specific section of policy.

ISSUE #5: TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM EMPLOYMENT

Occasionally, victims of violence leave their home community to stay at a shelter or with a family member in a different community. As a result, the client incurs additional costs associated with traveling to and from employment. There is inconsistent interpretation if such expenses can be considered when calculating entitlement to supplementary benefits.

Solution #5

Develop clear policy which indicates that the additional transportation costs to and from the temporary accommodations to work is a legitimate expense.

The Departmental Response

The current policy does provide for the cost of transportation to and from work as a legitimate expense. However, the Department recognizes there is a need to clarify and make the existing policy more supportive. The Department is in the process of re-drafting this specific section of policy.

ISSUE #6: DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY FOR INCOME SUPPORT/ ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

1. In order to process an application for Income Support, all applicants must provide confirmation of their social insurance number. It is not always possible for victims of violence to take their social insurance card when they leave the violent situation. In addition, it is not always possible to acquire a replacement card or new card within the required 60 days.
2. When determining Income Support eligibility Client Services Officers must assess and calculate the income of both the applicant and spouse. In some situations, Client Services Officers have requested that victims of violence provide confirmation of the ex-spouse income.
3. When determining Income Support eligibility Client Services Officers must assess all available assets e.g., bank account, RRSP's, etc.. In violent relationships the abuser often has complete control of all of the finances and assets. It may be difficult for the victim to acquire the necessary documentation without placing themselves in danger.
4. In order to process an application for Income Support all applicants must provide confirmation of birth for each family member. It is not always possible for victims of violence to obtain documentation to verify birth dates or the documentation within the required 60 days.

Solution #6

1. Whenever necessary, the Client Services Officer should assist victims to authenticate client's social insurance numbers. For new social insurance numbers (SIN) and with the approval of the supervisor, clients should be given 90 days to obtain a SIN card.

2. Clearly state in policy that victims of violence are not expected to provide confirmation of the income of their spouse.
3. The current policy should clearly reflect the role of the Client Services Officer in assisting the client to acquire the necessary asset documentation and the need for caution and sensitivity in these matters. For safety reasons, in some situations, it may be necessary to delay requiring the client to acquire documentation or to access the available assets.
4. The Client Services Officer should assist the client in obtaining the necessary documentation by completing the form "Application of Verification of Birth" and sending it to Vital Statistics to be completed and signed by the Registrar. In situations where the client was born in another province it may be necessary to extend the number of days in which a client can obtain assistance up to 90 days without the appropriate documentation and with the approval of the supervisor.

The Departmental Response

The Department recognizes there is a need to clarify and make the existing policies and procedures more supportive. The Department is in the process of re-drafting these specific sections of policy.

ISSUE #7: ASSISTANCE WITH OBTAINING CHILD SUPPORT

Victims of violence have been told they are being referred to a Support Application Social Worker for child support which causes them concerns. Client Services Officers do not always explain to the client that a referral to a Support Application Social Worker does not mean that the client will be forced to pursue child support.

In addition, most district offices, when sending out an application for Income Support, include the Assessment and Referral for Child/Spousal Support form to help speed-up the application process. Some offices also include an information sheet which states that all required documentation is to be provided with the application. The information sheet also states that if the documentation is missing, the application will not be accepted and will be returned to you by mail with a letter outlining what is required. This will further delay the processing of the application.

Attaching the above noted forms to the application is intended to ensure that the Department obtain all of the documentation necessary to process an application for Income Support. Unfortunately, this can contribute to a victim of violence choosing to remain in a violent relationship as the client is unaware of the Department's policy of not requiring victims of obtain child/spousal support, where safety is a factor.

Solution #7

The Client Services Officer should be aware of the power imbalances in relationships that contribute to client anxiety over having to deal with the other parent. Clearly outline in policy that the client does not have to pursue child support if they do not wish to do so, because of fear of violent behavior from the other parent. Therefore, the Client Services Officer should explain the role of the Support Applications Social Worker to the client and that a referral does not automatically mean that the client will be required to apply for child support.

Discontinue the practice of automatically including an assessment and referral for child/spousal support form with the application for Income Support. Section F of the application for Income Support offers a much more positive approach, by asking the applicant to identify any reason as to why the applicant is not receiving or has not sought support. Once an application has been received and processed, the Client Services Officer should contact the client to explain the role of the Support Application Social Worker and to request the client to complete and sign the assessment and referral for child/spousal support. The form should be enclosed with the first cheque.

The Departmental Response

The Department recognizes there is a need to clarify and make the existing policies and procedures more supportive. The Department is in the process of re-drafting these specific sections of policy.

ISSUE #8: RENT FOR SINGLE CLIENTS

Currently, the Department encourages single able-bodied adults to secure board and lodging arrangements as opposed to rental accommodations. It is assumed that most singles can be appropriately accommodated. Currently, there is flexibility within the

policy to provide rent to single clients in extenuating circumstances. The policy indicates that in certain circumstances, the client may have to get a doctor's note stating that board and lodging is not an appropriate type of accommodation. This means that the victim often has to be declared as mentally ill or disabled to qualify for rent.

There are many examples of women, having maintained their own home for many years, being told their first option is board and lodging. In some cases, the Client Services Officer may be unaware of the circumstances of the client. In others cases it is the strict application of the policy. Whatever the reason, it means some victims choose not to leave, or even return to, the violent relationship.

Once the single client qualifies for rent they are then faced with rental rates which are considered inadequate and often results in victims of violence have limited options from which to choose. For many victims the financial burden of trying to find and or maintain rental accommodations based on \$149 plus an additional \$61 per month, causes some victims to either not leave or return to the violent relationship. Current policy states that, in exceptional circumstances and where the client can provide medical documentation which states that the client is unable to live with other people, the client may receive up to and including the family shelter amount of \$372 per month. This means that the victim often has to be declared as mentally ill or disabled to qualify for higher rental benefits.

The Working Group struggled with making a recommendation concerning the amount of rental benefits provided to singles. Through our discussion we came to realize that the current rental amounts do not only impact victims of violence but all single clients. The Working Group is aware that any increase in the current rental amounts for singles has the potential for significant cost. However, we also feel that adequate, affordable and stable accommodations is a significant contributor to the health and well being of clients. Therefore, the Working Group recommends the Department make an increase in rental rates for single clients a priority for future program improvements.

Solution #8

Re-write current policy so that Client Services Officers must work with clients to determine the most appropriate accommodations option. Clearly indicate that it is

not necessary for any client to get a letter from a doctor to qualify for rent including the higher rate of rent if it has been determined as the most appropriate option.

The Departmental Response

The current policy does provide for the approval of rent for single clients in specific situations. However, the Department recognizes there is a need to clarify and make the existing policy more supportive. The Department is in the process of reviewing the types of exceptional circumstances that would warrant a higher rate of rental benefits for single clients.

ISSUE #9: EXIT PLANNING

Due to the nature of violent relationships, victims may take months or years before they leave. Whether the victim of violence is already in receipt of Income Support or not, they may contact the Department to ask questions about their eligibility including availability of benefits, application process and when they may receive their first cheque.

In some instances, the victim may, in fact, wish to have a plan in place prior to leaving a violent relationship that would include the advance approval of transportation.

Currently, the policy is unclear if the Client Services Officer can work with a victim to have an exit plan in place.

I recall a case where a staff of HRE had worked with a victim over a long period of time to have in place a exit plan (escape plan) for when she was ready to finally leave the violent situation. The concept of exit planning is currently not covered in policy; however, it is seen as important support for some victims.

Mona Wall

Solution #9

Policy should clearly outline the role of the Client Services Officer in assisting victims prepare an Exit Plan. The role will include providing information on services which are available within the Department, explaining how the victim can apply for Income Support, providing information or referring the individual to service providers such as the Department of Health and Community Services or transition houses. Later in this report the Working Group will reference the role of Client Liaison Officer, which the Department is considering as part of its new service delivery model. This is a good example of how this position would act as an additional support to victims of violence who are planning to leave a violent relationship.

The Departmental Response

The Department recognizes there is a need to clarify and make the existing policies and procedures more supportive. The Department is in the process of re-drafting current policy to include a specific section on exit planning.

Government and Community Partnerships

The remaining issues in the area of policies and procedures have been grouped together under a category called government and community partnerships. The reason for this grouping is to draw attention to the fact that these particular issues require a multifaceted approach including changes to existing policies along with a new way of delivering service. This new approach would see the Department of Human Resources and Employment enter into service agreements with individual transition houses throughout the province to provide direct services to clients. This new approach is not intended to imply that the Department will no longer be responsible for providing these services, rather the Department will work in partnership with Transition Houses to ensure the best possible services to victims of violence. The proposed solutions clearly reflect that transition house staff are in the best position to provide the most responsive service to the women they serve.

ISSUE #10: PERSONAL ALLOWANCE

Most women who enter a shelter are either in receipt of Income Support or have limited or no income. There are many different reasons why a victim might choose to stay at a transition house. The length of stay ranges from overnight to a number of months. The average length of stay is about 12 days.

Currently, the policy states that Income Support benefits should be adjusted at the end of the month of admission to a transition house at which point the client is not eligible for Income Support benefits. Instead the client is eligible for a lesser amount in the form of a personal allowance intended to respond to basic personal need. Consequently, a temporary stay in a shelter can cause a significant disruption in the ability of victims, who are in receipt of Income Support, to manage their financial affairs. Take, for instance, the following examples:

Example #1: A client, who is a victim of violence is notified of an upcoming court hearing with respect to an assault on the victim. As the court date approaches, the

victim fears that the abuser may threaten her safety. The victim, decides that it is safer for her and her children to stay at a transition house. In such cases, the client must continue to pay rent, utilities, etc.. If the client entered the shelter on January 20th , based on current policy, Income Support benefits would be suspended on January 30th in favour of the personal allowance.

Example #2: A husband and wife are in receipt of Income Support and the woman enters the transition house on October 20th with her two children. The woman has no intention of returning to the rental apartment shared with her spouse. Based on the average length of stay, the woman will be ready to move out of the shelter on November 2nd. In the meantime, the light bill and phone bill is in her name at the old apartment. She (i) cannot afford to pay either of these bills and/or (ii) falls in arrears if she wants to move to new accommodations.

In addition to the examples outlined above, women, who are not in receipt of Income Support at the time they enter the shelter, may have to wait up to 30 days before they qualify for a personal allowance. This can be particularly stressful if there are infant children who are still in diapers and require infant formula. Other examples might include over the counter medication, personal articles, etc.. Overall this policy causes considerable financial burden for women. Many women either choose not to go to a shelter or not to notify their worker that they are in a shelter, thus making them feel like they are committing a crime.

Solution #10

Women who are in receipt of Income Support at the time they enter the shelter will continue to receive their benefits. In the case of example #1 the client would receive full benefits plus rent. In the case of example #2, the client would receive family benefits only; rent would be temporarily removed. In both instances, clients would not receive a personal allowance.

Provision of Personal Allowance

The Department of Health and Community Services will enter into an arrangement with individual transition houses to provide the personal allowance to women not in receipt of Income Support and/or women who have no other resources at the time they enter a shelter. Women who enter transition houses may be provided access to a personal allowance for a portion or for the duration of their stay depending on

their financial situation. Transition houses would be responsible for determining the need and the administering the personal allowance.

The Departmental Response

Human Resources and Employment

The Department recognizes that the current policy needs to be more supportive and responsive to the unique needs of victims of violence and, as such, the Department is in the process of re-drafting this policy to reflect the solutions presented in this report.

Health and Community Services

The Department recognizes that the current policy needs to be more supportive and responsive to the unique needs of victims of violence and as such the Department in conjunction with the Health and Community Services Boards, will revise existing service agreements to include the administration and delivery of the personal allowance by transition houses.

ISSUE #11: TRANSPORTATION TO A SAFE LOCATION

Currently there are a number of concerns with respect to the approval of emergency transportation for victims of violence:

1. Victims of violence who call a shelter must either wait while the shelter calls the on-call worker to seek approval for transportation or must hang up the phone and personally call the on-call worker. This often results in the victim experiencing undue stress.
2. Currently, there are inconsistencies in the interpretation of policy regarding whether or not emergency transportation can be provided to victims of violence who are not in receipt of Income Support.

3. District transportation policies, in most instances, do not allow for the approval of transportation for a victim to get to a safe location within the same community or district. The victim, who is fleeing a violent situation and who has managed to get out with some belongings, is left with limited or no transportation to a safe location.
4. In certain circumstances safety necessitates relocating a victim from one shelter to another. Currently, there is inconsistency in getting such transfers approved.

Solution #11

1. The Department of Human Resources and Employment (HRE), would enter into service agreements with transition houses throughout the province, to provide them with the authority to approve transportation for victims to get to a shelter. Shelters will be responsible for forwarding all invoices for transportation to the Department on a timely basis for payment.
2. Clearly state in policy that victims of violence, who request transportation to safety, will be eligible for transportation whether they are in receipt of Income Support or not.
3. Clearly state in policy that safety must be the first priority. Therefore, transportation should be approved for victims of violence regardless of the distance.
4. Clearly state in policy that for safety purposes only, it may be necessary to move an individual or family from one shelter within the province to another shelter. In such instances, the staff of the shelter will contact the Department on behalf of the client to seek approval from the program supervisor.

The Departmental Response

The current policy does provide for the approval of transportation as outlined in each of the issues. However, the Department recognizes there is a need to clarify and make the existing policies more supportive. The Department is in the process of re-drafting these specific sections of policy.

The Department also recognizes that transition houses/shelters throughout the province are in the best position to respond to request for transportation for victims of violence to travel to a shelter. The Department's four Regional Managers will work with transition houses in the development of service agreements to address the transportation concerns. This new approach is intended as a partnership response that would allow for a more supportive and timely response to emergencies

ISSUE # 12: EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATIONS

1. Occasionally transitions houses are full. In such situations, the current policy is unclear as to what should be the appropriate response. Currently, there is no specific section within policy which outlines under what circumstances alternate accommodations would be approved. Currently within St. John's when Iris Kirby House is full, victims of violence are placed by the Department of HRE in pre-selected hotels with an understanding that the Department will pay for the cost of accommodations, breakfast, and supper. Lunch and all supportive services are provided by Iris Kirby House staff. In most cases, the need for such accommodations occurs after hours and requires that the shelter contact the on-call worker.
2. In some situations a victim of violence may live in an area of the province where there is no shelter and the victim is reluctant to leave the area to travel a long distance. This is especially true in the middle of the night or due to adverse weather conditions. Most victims of violence, who are in need of emergency accommodations, generally do not think to call HRE. Even if they were to call the on-call worker, HRE staff feel they are not trained to respond appropriately.

Solution #12

1. The Department enter into a service arrangement with transition houses throughout the province. In the event the shelter is full to capacity, that the shelter has the authority to approve alternate accommodations. In such situations, the shelter will provide support to the individual and/or family, including access to any programming or services offered by the shelter.
2. The Department, in conjunction with all of the transition houses, work out arrangements with hotels and motels in areas that are a considerable distance

from the shelter, whereby staff at the shelter can approve emergency accommodations and meals, for one night on weekdays; and three nights on weekends. The shelter will notify the Department the next business day of the approval of emergency accommodations. The public would need to be informed of who to call if you are a victim in need of shelter.

The Departmental Response

The current policy provides the ability to cover emergency accommodations. However, the Department recognizes there is a need to make the existing policies more responsive. The Department also recognizes that transition houses/shelters throughout the province are in the best position to respond to request for emergency accommodations after hours for victims of violence. The Department though our four Regional Managers will work with transition houses in the development of service agreements to address the emergency accommodations concerns. This new approach is intended as a partnership response that would allow for a more supportive and timely response to emergencies.

The Department is in the process of re-drafting these specific sections of policy.

PART II - TRAINING/CULTURAL SHIFT

ISSUE #13: TRAINING FOR HRE EMPLOYEES

The Working Group as part of its analysis, sent a questionnaire to approximately 50 Client Services Officers, approximately 35 staff responded. Eighty percent of the respondents indicated they are not sufficiently informed or trained to support victims of violence. The survey contained a number of questions concerning interpretation and application of current policies. The results confirmed significant inconsistencies in the staff's level of understanding and in the application of the policy. This confirms what victims of violence and advocacy groups have been articulating.

Training needs identified by staff in the questionnaire (direct quotes from staff):

- Training in talking to clients so as not to stress them out more.
- Training in understanding the cycle of abuse.
- Some sort of counselling training so that if we do have to take a call, we are able to deal with the person in the most compassionate and effective manner.
- I think that training in the cycles of abuse as well as issues of self-esteem and survival would be appropriate. I also feel that workers could benefit from departmental training around policies and regulations and how they pertain to the Department's stand on violence. In a lot of cases, this policy is not seen as a priority by workers and as a result they are not up to date on it.
- Training to help recognize the warning signs of a victim of violence, knowledge of programs/agencies available for assistance and basic counselling techniques.
- Perhaps some training with warning signs and how to talk to people when you notice something wrong to encourage them to get help.
- Basic training in who is a victim of violence and how to deal with situations, legal requirements i.e., disclosure of abuse, difference between emotional and physical abuse.
- How to provide emotional support while offering the available resources.
- Helping victim plan their leaving, dealing with sensitive issues.

Having a designated worker assigned by HRE to work with shelters has helped make the stay for residents at shelters more successful. Having a knowledgeable, sensitive, responsive worker can make a tremendous difference in helping individuals and families make a safe and successful transition from the shelter to a new home.

*Debbie Keats
Administrator
Iris Kirby House*

Victims and advocacy groups also note that appropriate staff attitudes and any expressed indifference to victims of violence significantly contributes to the lack of an appropriate response when victims and/or community agencies look to HRE for services. Front line managers clearly have a responsibility for ensuring that staff

understand policy, and that the values and guiding principles are incorporated in the day to day activities. In particular, front line managers are responsible for ensuring that staff respond appropriately and with sensitivity to the needs of clients, especially those most at risk.

Solution #13

The Department of Human Resources and Employment is currently in the process of providing all front line staff with Awareness Training in conjunction with the Violence Prevention Initiative. As a result of input from the Working Group, the training will include the use of scenarios to show how the policies can be applied in different situations. The Working Group would like to acknowledge the Department's commitment to providing this training.

It is the understanding of the Working Group, that the Department also plans on providing all front line managers with Awareness Training which is to be immediately followed with training on the proposed issues and solutions presented in this report. The Working Group would like to acknowledge the Departments commitment to providing this training to all its managers.

In addition to providing all staff with Awareness Training, it is also recommended that the Department provide a number of specific staff within each region with in-depth training in working with victims of violence. These staff would be resources to the other staff within the districts. It is the understanding of the Working Group that the Department is currently working on plans to make this happen.

Training alone will not result in a significant shift in improved service. Managers must monitor the on-going effectiveness to determine how the training is being applied. Managers must assess if supplementary training is required. It is suggested that the Department use internal newsletters as a way to pose issues related to policies that support victims of violence; and provide managers and staff with language, cultural, class and gender sensitivity training.

The Departmental Response

The Department is in the process of implementing a training plan that would see all staff receive Awareness Training. In addition, plans are currently underway that would see all front-line managers provided Awareness Training along with specific training on the issues and solutions presented in this report by the end of March 2002. The Department is committed to providing on-going training to our employees so as to enhance the Department's ability to provide quality service to victims of violence.

PART III - CLIENT EMPOWERMENT

ISSUE #14: INFORMATION ON PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Victims of violence, like other individuals who apply for or who are in receipt of Income Support, do not know what their rights are or what services/benefits are available. There is still a view among some staff within the Department "unless the client asks, then don't offer." This results in victims and clients either relying on third hand information, that may or may not be correct, in guiding their decision making. It also results in increased levels of stress and distrust by clients and contributes to clients feeling the need to appeal and/or complain. Victims of violence sometimes make decisions that result in their staying or returning to the violent situation because they are not aware of what services are available.

Solution #14

The Department develop program brochures that describe all available programs and services along with client rights and responsibilities in accessing services. It is also recommended that the Department development a plain language policy manual that is more easily accessible by clients.

It is recommended that all printed material should take into consideration literacy, culture, class and gender sensitivity.

The Departmental Response

The Department recognizes the need to provide clients with information on all benefits and services available within the Income Support program. The Department has plans in place for 2002-2003 to develop program brochures that describe not only all available programs and services but also client rights and responsibilities. The Department will also begin work on the development of a new policy manual. Both of these initiatives will take into consideration literacy, culture, class and gender sensitivity.

PART IV - SEAMLESS SERVICE

ISSUE #15: SERVICE COORDINATION

This issue addresses the process by which victims of violence access support services, in particular counselling services, to deal with the complex personal, social and economic challenges that confront a person who has experienced violence. It is the view of the Working Group, that the redesign of services including the separation and shift of programs from the Department of Human Resources and Employment to the Department of Health and Community Services and Boards, has resulted in concerns about the ability of victims of violence to access such support in a timely and appropriate manner. Specific concerns include:

- The Department of Human Resources and Employment is frequently the first point of contact for individuals wishing to leave a violent situation, but social work services are now provided by the Health and Community Services Boards. Effective client referral services are not in place to ensure that clients approaching HRE are: (i) provided with an opportunity to identify and discuss the full range of concerns that they have; and (ii) assisted to access counselling and support services through HCS and related community agencies.
- The reorganization of departments and services has contributed to a perceived narrowing of functions and roles within both departments. This has contributed to each agency providing a part of the service that may be required by a victim of violence (e.g., income support by HRE and child welfare services by HCS), but a loss of focus on the comprehensive or holistic supports that may be required by the client. The Working Group acknowledges that under the former

Department of Social Services, the level and quality of service for victims of violence were not necessarily better. Nevertheless, the situation was different in that the client could expect to see a social worker who would listen to the concerns of the client. With the transfer of social services and social workers to HCS, the Working Group believes that such access is now more difficult, unless a specified need, such as child protection or a mental health issue, exists.

- At the field level, victims of violence, staff and advocacy groups are confused where the roles of Human Resources and Employment and Health and Community Services begin and end, and what the appropriate linkages are. The staff of both agencies also seem less clear about their responsibilities related to victims of violence.

The concerns of the Working Group point to unintended consequences for clients arising from the re-organization of departments and services, that both the Departments of Human Resources and Employment and Health and Community Services acknowledge. The Working Group on Supports to Victims of Violence was established to ensure that the concerns of community groups and advocates were acted upon. Throughout the re-organization process, both Departments have worked collaboratively to identify and address issues and ensure a smooth transition. The departments have re-activated an interdepartmental liaison committee, including representatives of the Boards, to evaluate progress, identify any existing concerns and devise solutions.

Solution #15

Referral of the Working Group's issues related to better coordination of services for victims of violence to the Interdepartmental HRE/HCS Liaison Committee, with the recommendation that an integrated service agreement be developed that defines specific and mutual responsibilities for both partners as it relates to victims of violence. The development of such an agreement would include input from community partners. A new model is needed which is forward thinking and not about what once was. Any service agreement must clarify the roles and relationship of the staff of HRE and HCS in supporting victims of violence.

As the Department of Human Resources and Employment proceeds with the implementation of a new service delivery model, it is essential that the model include components that would place the Department in a better position to more effectively respond to vulnerable client groups. Telephone application has the potential to improve services for some clients from where it is today. However, staff who determine eligibility for Income Support through a telephone application process must be better trained to conduct interviews that acknowledge that for some client groups, the need for Income Support is coupled with other needs. Staff must have sensitivity training as it relates to vulnerable client groups along with skills in active listening. The staff must also be knowledgeable in what services are available in the community.

The Department must recognize that some clients require additional supports beyond Income Support to help identify what their issues are, deal with crises, navigate through the system, and/or link to other programs and services. Obviously, there is only so much support that can be provided over the telephone. Other mechanisms need to be found to ensure that vulnerable clients are fully assessed in terms of their full range of needs.

It is the understanding of the Working Group that the Department is currently considering incorporating into the new service delivery model, a Client Liaison Officer, whose role would be to ensure vulnerable clients are supported as they try to access other community supports and services. The Working Group extends support for such a position and feels the role of Client Liaison Officer is critical to making the new service delivery model successful and ensuring appropriate linkages to other agencies such as HCS. The role of the Client Liaison Officers should also include strengthening partnerships with other government departments and community groups to look at broader social issues and solutions, recognizing that poverty and low income are intimately linked to other social problems.

The Departmental Response

To address these issues, some background on the re-structuring of the two departments is needed to put the discussion that follows in context. The former Department of Social Services delivered the social assistance program, the

employment opportunities program, child welfare services, community youth corrections, and family and rehabilitative services. Re-structuring of these services was undertaken to achieve better services for clients of these programs by:

- Placing community health and social services programs together under a community board system. Community health and social services share common purposes related to preserving and protecting health and well-being. These services also strive to achieve a greater focus on prevention and early intervention. These services share common clients, placing an onus on the professionals involved to coordinate their efforts. These were the primary reasons for re-organization. A community board structure allows these services to be delivered with community input and provides greater program flexibility.
- Targeting available provincial funds and programs aimed at labour market development to better address the needs of persons on social assistance. Skilled people are a pre-requisite for economic development. Jobs and job growth are a pre-requisite for health and social development. Establishing a separate Department of Human Resources and Employment was intended to:
 - (i) introduce improvements to the social assistance program to facilitate the transition to work; and
 - (ii) strengthen the focus on employment and career supports for clients of social assistance. This separate focus provides for an increased emphasis on unemployment, an important factor contributing to poverty.

From the perspective of the Department of Human Resources and Employment, the provision of income support services clearly involves a responsibility to be sensitive to the related needs of clients who access this service and to ensure that, where appropriate, referral mechanisms are put in place to assist clients to access the range of available services that they require. The Department also recognizes that one of the biggest needs of victims of violence and other vulnerable client groups is helping them to openly discuss the issues they are confronting. Even though the Department's role has changed in terms of the provision of social work services, it recognizes that it has a responsibility to carefully assess the client's problem and assist with appropriate referrals to other agencies, including HCS.

The Department of Human Resources and Employment will continue to be the first point of contact for many victims. As the Department continues to make improvements in service delivery related to income support, such as a mail-in and

telephone application process, these improvements are intended to add to not detract from the access clients can have with the Department. These additional options for applying for income support provide clients with greater privacy and confidentiality, but are not intended to replace a face to face office visit, if a client prefers. Nevertheless, these alternate service options place a greater burden of responsibility on the Department to ensure that vulnerable clients are identified early and assessed in terms of their related needs.

The Departments of Human Resources and Employment and Health and Community Services are committed to reviewing and improving the processes between departments.

PART V - ACCOUNTABILITY

ISSUE #16: IMPLEMENTING ACCOUNTABILITY

1. The issues presented in this report cover many areas, including policies, procedures, training for staff, improved linkages with other agencies, and improved communication with clients, etc.. It would be naive to think that implementing the solutions presented in this report would resolve all of the issues concerning services for victims of violence. However, it is a great first step. A cultural shift is needed within the Department and on-going monitoring of service quality is vital in making such a shift. Based on the analysis and information gathered by the Working Group, there appears to be no real monitoring of services to victims of violence.
2. The Department of Human Resources and Employment and transition houses/shelters throughout the province share a common responsibility in supporting the needs of victims of violence. As such, they share accountability that can only be achieved through partnership and collaboration. Many of the solutions presented in this report will require that the Department and transitions houses work more closely together to monitor the on-going effectiveness, challenges, cost, etc., associated with the changes. The issues presented in this report will also require that the Department and transition houses/shelters to work in partnership with other government departments, boards, women's councils-centers and advocacy groups to ensure on-going effective services for victims of violence.

Solution #16

1. Front-line managers must take a necessary leadership role by simply asking how are we doing in supporting victims of violence. Do all staff understand policy? How are the policies working? How well did we respond to victims of violence? How many victims of violence did we support last month? Are the staff aware of community resources? These are just a few examples of the types of monitoring that managers can do to ensure improved service.

Regional Managers must play a key role in monitoring services to victims of violence by talking with community partners, such as shelters, women's centers, etc., on a regular basis. This will ensure that issues related to service delivery and policies in relation to victims of violence are reviewed on a timely basis.

The Executive of the Department of Human Resources and Employment must ensure quality service through the articulation of a Departmental vision, guiding principles, and goals and objectives that clearly indicate the role of the Department in supporting victims of violence. The Executive through the use of "quality services" audits must include questions that assist the Department in determining the responsiveness of programs and services to individual victims of violence.

2. Transition houses, advocacy groups etc., and the Department meet on a regular basis to review the outcomes of the proposed solutions presented in this report. Partners work to establish an on-going relationship dedicated to monitoring and development of government and community services for victims of violence.

The Departmental Response

The issues and solutions presented in this report have been extremely valuable in assisting the Department in identifying ways to better respond to the needs of victims of violence. The Working Group has also highlighted that a partnership approach between government and the community is vital to moving forward. The Department, through the four Regional Managers, will work with transition houses and advocacy groups in the on-going monitoring of supports to victims of violence. The Department, as part of training front-line managers, will provide clear direction with respect to expectations to monitoring services to victims of violence.

The Executive of the Department of Human Resources and Employment is committed to ensuring that we build on the positive results on the partnership that Working Group from time to time to monitor the on-going responsiveness of our programs and services to individual victims of violence.