

Making the Links: Exchanges, Networking, and Access to Resources

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Summary

In many communities, multiple organizations often deal with various aspects of women's safety. It is important to participate on the committees of these other organizations in order to learn how others are responding to challenges, remain current on effective practices, identify service gaps, and discover how services can interact / complement each other. Participating in initiatives of different network members not only helps develop contacts (local, national, international) but also strengthens lobbying efforts.

It is also critical to participate in networks that may not directly address women's issues but can influence them, such as community associations wishing to address similar issues and to allow residents to take control in their own neighbourhoods. Likewise, it is important to seek funding from departments that may not be specifically women-oriented (ex., public transport, private security) so as to diversify potential funding avenues. Fundraising help from community members (ex., local artists, celebrities) provides a grassroots presence and can attract dynamic new people to the cause.

Establishing a relationship and, if possible, partnership with municipal government is very beneficial not only for obtaining sustainable funding but for promoting and implementing women's recommendations. Participating in advisory bodies that work with local government committees can help inject a more gender-based approach into different aspects of city operations.

Promoting the results of municipal funding through regular contact with City Council (ex., presentations, one-on-one meetings) helps convince local politicians of an organization's value to the community and keeps them fresh in their minds at budget time.

Exchanges and networking

Exchanging information and networking serves many purposes. Local networking helps the organization's purpose and services become known in the community. The resulting increase in awareness generates interest in and greater use of the services provided. It gives the

organization credibility and establishes it as a valuable contributor to the community, and particularly in the women's network.

In many communities, there are often several organizations that deal with women's safety issues in various contexts. It is important for a women's safety organization to not only be aware of these organization and networks, but to actively seek representation on their committees. Participation in the networking committees that exist in your community allows your organization to become known and provides information on the challenges that exist in the local community, with regard to women's safety and on how other agencies and groups are dealing with these challenges. It provides the organization with an opportunity to learn about who's doing what and how these services can interact and complement each other.

In Ottawa, the regional Co-ordinating Committee to End Violence against Women (RCCEVAW) brings many service providers, agencies and community people together on a monthly basis to discuss and address the wide range of issues involved in violence against women and women's safety. The members are from agencies from across the City – from urban to rural. Our policy and administrative co-ordinator, Valerie Collicott, is co-chair of the RCCEVAW coalition.

The Criminal Justice Round Table against Violence against Women brings together decision makers in key divisions of the criminal justice system (chief of police, Crown, etc.) with service providers (WACAV, RCCEVAW, Immigrant and Visible Minority Women against Violence, etc.) to address gaps in the criminal justice system in the area of partner assault. I am chair of this Round Table and WACAV's representative. Diane Holmes, a board and founding member of WACAV, and past chair of the Round Table will talk more about WACAV's role in the creation of the Round Table and the Round Table's role in the community.

In addition to providing our knowledge and input, WACAV works actively to support initiatives taken by these groups – writing letters of support and participating in lobbying efforts to affect proposed initiatives. There is a need for organizations to not only exchange information,

but to support each other in their efforts to address concerns for the safety of women and other vulnerable members of our community.

It is critical to also participate in agencies that do not directly address women's issues, but can influence and impact on them. For example, our policy and administrative co-ordinator also serves on the Security Management Advisory Committee at a local college campus. WACAV was involved with pathway patrol – which monitor bike and pathway network.

An important partner, not only in funding, but in making changes where women's safety is involved, is the municipal government. Establishing a relationship and, if possible, partnership is extremely beneficial in promoting the importance of addressing women's safety in having recommendations heard and implemented. Dr. Caroline Andrew (a member of WACAV) was a key organizer on the working group on Women's Access to Municipal Services. Our policy coordinator applied and was appointed to the Advisory Committee to the City of Ottawa's Health, Recreation and Social Services Committee. This City committee deals with parks, shelters and health and social issues within the city's policies. By participating in the advisory body to this committee, we are able to contribute to a more gender based approach in different aspects of city operations.

Another benefit to participation in various networks is the opportunity to learn of women's events, and events in general, which our members can attend and/or participate in. It keeps us current on the newest and most effective practices as well as what others are doing and helps develop contacts. It also increases our contact with members of the community who wish to address these issues in the communities they live and work in. We do a fair amount of work with community associations, which allows residents to take control in their own neighborhoods.

It can also lead to participation in a wider network, that is nationally and internationally, so our scope can broaden and our knowledge increase. Dr. Caroline Andrew, of the University of Ottawa representative of WACAV, is a sponsor and partner of this international seminar.

Access to resources

As our organization becomes more knowledgeable and more familiar with what is being offered and accomplished by others, our effectiveness in the services we provide increases. With that increase, often comes a demand for more of our services. This is encouraging and what we are seeking, but at the same time can be frustrating if the funds and resources are not available to meet the demand. Resources can include the money and ability to create and distribute tools we have developed, such as reports on audits (we have done a comprehensive report on public transit station audits), how-to manuals for community members, etc.

Resources can also include people power. Our organization is a two-person operation – we have a policy and administrative coordinator and program director. I expect this is common to many of the organizations here. The workload can be demanding. We are in the process of examining our demands, resources and priorities. Our board will be designing a work plan to guide our provision of services for the next year. We do not want to be in a position where we cannot fulfill our commitments due to lack of resources. That would affect our reputation in the community and our credibility when seeking funding.

There are many approaches to funding – both short-term and sustainable. Organizations need core, sustainable funding and often this type of funding is most available from the government level. The bulk of our funding comes from the municipal government level. We have also received federal funding, but this tends to be project oriented. Our most recent federal funding was from the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation for the workshops on “Promoting Women’s Safety”. We did develop a manual for the workshops, which will be a long term benefit of this short term funding. It is also important to seek funding from departments and divisions that may not necessarily be specifically women oriented. We have received funding from our public transit department to audit transit stations – not specifically women based – but it benefits women and those with disabilities as we look at all of those aspects in our audits. This diversity opens more funding avenues.

On the municipal level, we have found there is a need to promote ourselves and to illustrate the results of their funding. Our organization has formed a political action committee with the view of keeping our organization in the forefront of our local politician's minds and educating them on our organization and our value to the City. We have done presentations to the mayor and councilors and have invited councilors to meet one on one with us. It is important to have regular contact with the Council so we are fresh in their minds at budget time. This helps create a more favorable response to our requests.

Funding can also come from the community, through local fundraising efforts and often with the help of community members. This provides us with a grassroots presence in the community and encourages interest in our organization. This year a local artist has taken an interest in us and is holding showings on our behalf, with a percentage of proceeds going to our group. Another benefit from this kind of involvement is attracting dynamic and committed people to our board and as volunteers for our organization, which helps address the resource needs.