

Review of Yukon's Police Force 2010 Facilitated session for Women

July 5, 2010

I. In attendance:

- 13 women representing both women's organizations and women from the general public
- Co-Chair Simone Arnold
- Advisory committee members Lois Moorcroft, Lorraine Netro
- Officials from Government of Yukon Department of Justice and Women's Directorate
- Barb Nimco, facilitator
- Margaret Nefsted, counselor

II. Summary:

In order to protect confidentiality, the views expressed at this meeting have been condensed and summarized in to two areas; concerns and ideas for action, and the information has been organized in to themes which emerged.

III. Concerns

RCMP response to women- particularly in cases of domestic violence and sexualized assault:

- Concerns were expressed and stories shared about RCMP response to reports of sexualized assault- women are told that the RCMP won't investigate, that they don't have enough staff or that they do not believe an offence has taken place.
- Participants relayed stories where they felt the RCMP has insinuated that it is the woman's fault and where reports of assault were met with an underlying tone of blame.
- Response to sexualized assault doesn't always include offering of a sexual assault kit, and no offer of kits on ice.
- Women expressed that they are not believed and often blamed when reporting sexualized assault or domestic violence.
- Participants noted that RCMP need to understand dynamics of domestic violence, including that an abuser may appear to be upstanding community member.
- Participants noted that police need to protect confidentiality and believe women and shared stories where safety had been severely compromised when confidentiality was not kept.
- Participants noted that a number of other agencies, including victim services, nursing stations and transition homes provide support and service.
- Participants noted that police need to show compassion and understanding of what it takes for a woman to come forward- that the biggest hurdle she is going to jump over is calling the RCMP- and that she won't ever call again if she gets a bad response.

- Participants questioned why are so few reported crimes resulting in charges?
- Participants noted that there is nothing in place if a young woman goes missing in order to mobilize a quick and thorough response.
- Participants advised that women in isolated communities are scared and don't want to bring more shame on their family so reporting to the police is very challenging.
- Participants expressed concern that police training on Family Violence Prevention Act hasn't stayed consistent.
- Concerns were noted that there has been an increase in women being charged- and many of these women are women who seek service as victims in long term abusive relationships.
- Participants expressed concerns that women who are using resistance in violent relationships are being charged.
- Participants felt that we can't expect one person to have all the skills needed to respond to complex issues (yet police are currently being required to) and expressed support for the creation of response teams.
- Participants also noted that there are not enough Victim Assistance Volunteers.

RCMP interaction with communities and First Nation people

- Participants talked about First Nation citizens often feel racism, and worry that their children will experience racism by police because of their appearance.
- Participants noted that for many first nation people, experiences with RCMP as a child and as an adult, even through work have always be negative- the police are there only in times of negative experiences.
- Participants also talked about the challenges of living in communities, and noted that there is lots of lateral violence in communities.
- Participants also asked how communities can support women.
- Participants described retaliation from RCMP against people who file complaints.

RCMP internal culture and systems

- Participants expressed that many RCMP officers are very good, contributing, hard working people.
- They noted that there is something wrong systemically.
- Participants talked about seeing an "old boys club" in police and corrections- a system which supports and perpetuates an imbalance of power and control. It was noted that this extends to some of the police volunteer groups as well.
- Participants expressed concerns about sexual harassment of female officers and felt that female officers have to internalize the message of the oppressor in order to make it in the workplace.
- Participants expressed concern about the use of "black humor" and noted that police and other responders need to stop using it and stop accepting it as OK.
- Participants noted that they always try to find something "redeeming, helpful, protective" about the police but that they are not seeing that right now.
- It was noted that the police fit within the other parts of the system and that they are all small parts of the same machine.

RCMP accountability

- Participants expressed concern about the complaints and investigation of complaints process.
- Many participants recommended that the RCMP should not be investigating themselves
- Participants noted that although police are a para-military organization, we are governed by a civilian government which should provide a check and balance, yet this isn't currently working.
- Participants noted that it is important to remind police and citizens that police are public servants.
- Participants do not feel that RCMP are accountable to the public- only to other people in power.
- Participants noted that power without accountability is dangerous, and it is important but challenging to bring accountability to a system which has a lot of discretion.

Reporting crime, fear and vulnerability

- Many participants talked about fear related to policing, crime and reporting. Participants talked about fear of reporting as there is often a backlash from community. They also talked about fear of reporting police misconduct and they shared stories of backlash from police.
- Participants noted that they and many community members would not call police if they were being victimized and noted that their experience to date is that the police are the "last people to call".
- Participants noted that a person is very vulnerable when in police custody and police officers hold incredible power and responsibility.

IV. Ideas for Action

Complaints process

- It was recommended that federal/territorial/provincial governments establish a national civilian investigation unit that acts as a first responder to all situations where there are founded complaints against the RCMP behaviour resulting in injury (broadly defined) or death and that the investigation immediately be turned over to this investigative unit.
- Participants recommended that all police reviews/investigations into RCMP conduct should be done by an outside/independent a-political body.

Training:

- Participants recommended that there be women faculty members at RCMP depot and more women senior officers.
- Participants recommended new and/or improved training in the following areas:
 - Good basic human rights training (by men and women instructors who incorporate those values)
 - domestic violence, dynamics of abuse and how an abuser can appear to be an upstanding citizen, and training to stop blaming women.

- intensive addictions training.
- Social justice.
- Empathy, compassion, and sensitivity training.
- Participants recommended that training be upgraded and mandatory throughout the ranks- not just at depot- all ranks, male and female officers, other staff, auxiliaries, Citizens on Patrol and other volunteers.
- Participants also noted that there needs to be increased public information about what training RCMP go through.

Response to domestic violence and sexualized assault

- Participants recommended that support and training for victim volunteer groups needs to increase.
- It was recommended that female officers be present at reports of domestic violence and sexualized assault.
- Participants recommended the creation of response teams which would include medical support- especially for cases of family violence.
- Participants expressed support for the creation of primary aggressor legislation and policies.

Internal culture and systems

- Participants noted that complaints need to be taken seriously and addressed.
- Participants expressed that the RCMP needs to encourage and accept diversity.
- They also strongly recommended that the use of “black humor” needs to be addressed.
- Participants noted that female officers can not be complacent in their workplace, and that all RCMP need to voice concerns in a safe work place environment.
- Participants noted that there needs to be stronger penalties for RCMP and employees who are allowing sexist attitudes/harassment.
- Participants felt that all RCMP need opportunity to come forward in a safe manner to share/explain how/what needs to change.
- Participants recommended that community and service agencies should be inputting in to annual RCMP work-planning/priority setting.

RCMP and First Nation relationships

- Participants recommended the creation of a community specific response which would include asking each community how they want to deal with crime and with police accountability.

Review process

- Participants noted that female officers need to be given the chance to identify what challenges they face.
- Participants requested more meetings to look at framing the recommendations and asked to see the research that will be used to frame the report and recommendations.
- Participants noted the importance of creating Yukon based solutions and not solutions that are made for the south.