

The Peer Champion Model as a Best Practice for Anti-VAW Work

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Context

Violence against immigrant and refugee women in Canada occurs in a context of:

- **Immigration and refugee policies that create vulnerability to violence**
- **An immigration detention system that furthers violence against women**
- **The economic subjugation of immigrant and refugee women of colour in Canada**
- **An affordable housing crisis that exacerbates vulnerability to violence**
- **Far-right discourse that positions immigrant and refugee communities as the “cause” of VAW in Canada, and thereby argues for closing our borders**
- **Structural racism within existing VAW federal legislation and in VAW services**

Project Background



RESEARCH

Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee Reviewed ?? cases of domestic violence death. The resulting report identified patterns, signs of high risk, and recommendations for action



KEY FINDING

In most cases of femicide, there were neighbours, friends and family members knew about the abuse but did not know how to offer support



OUTCOME

Launch of the Neighbours, Friends and Families (NFF) campaign to raise awareness about the warning signs of abuse and how community members can support women living with abuse. Also launch specialized NFF sub-Campaigns targeting specific communities

- “Mainstream” NFF
- NFF for Indigenous Communities
- NFF for Francophone communities
- **NFF for Immigrant and Refugee Communities**

The Immigrant and Refugee Communities NFF Campaign

Scope: Province-wide (Ontario). Several community agencies and organizations have been involved in the Campaign since its inception

Key Activities of the Campaign:

- Carry out anti-DV prevention and education work within immigrant and refugee communities
- Develop multi-lingual and culturally relevant information resources for immigrant and refugee communities
- Build communities' capacity by mentoring Peer Champions who act as anti-VAW educators and leaders within their communities

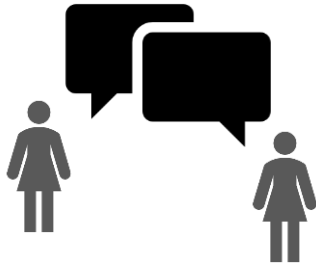
OCASI's Current Role:

- We are in the middle of a 3-year project, funded by MSW, to Coordinate a province-wide Peer Champion initiative for the Immigrant and Refugee Communities NFF Campaign

Summary of the Peer Champion Model

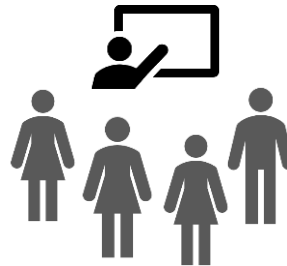
OUTREACH

Outreach strategies are used to recruit key members of immigrant and refugee communities to be Peer Champions with the Campaign



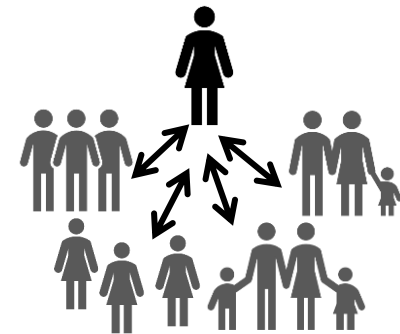
TRAINING

Peer Champions are trained in issues related to domestic violence prevention, intervention, and community engagement.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Peer Champions carry out grassroots educational and capacity-building anti-VAW work in their communities.



Examples of Peer Champion Events

- 12 Peer Champions were recruited and trained for the Campaign last year. This year, 21 Peer Champions have been recruited for the upcoming year of community engagement activities
- **General strategy for Peer Champion events:** Find a creative and relevant way to bring your community together, and use that event as an opportunity for education and capacity-building on anti-VAW work

Examples of Peer Champion Events

“Sewing Love into Our Community”: Women from the Afghan community brought together to learn traditional Afghan embroidery, and discussed domestic violence and support resources, in Dari and Pashto

“Bring an Aunty”: A self-care event for women in the Tamil community, where a presentation on VAW and resources were provided in Tamil and English

“Love Walk”: Members of the community were brought together for a meditative walk, and then had a discussion and connected to resources on VAW

Examples of Peer Champion Events

“Ramadan Potluck”: 300 Muslims were brought together for a community fast-breaking meal and learned about domestic violence and how to offer support for women living with abuse.

“Forging Roots in Our Community”: Service providers, community members and survivors in the Latin community were brought together to hear a presentation in Spanish and obtain resources

“Visiting Workshop”: A former student for a language instruction class for newcomers visited her old class with a workshop on domestic violence and how to support women living with abuse

Strengths of the Peer Champion Model

- **Anti-Racist and Asset-Based:** The Peer Champion model negates the false idea that immigrant and refugee communities are the “cause” of VAW in Canada, and sees members of immigrant and refugee communities as assets and leaders in anti-VAW work
- **Tailored to Community Needs:** Immigrant and refugee communities are not a monolith; anti-VAW work can look different depending on the context. The grassroots model allows for resources and approaches to be developed in accordance with distinct community needs.
- **Overcomes Language and Cultural Barriers:** By taking leadership from community members, it avoids many pitfalls of traditional service provision

Current Limitations of the Peer Champion Model

- **Volunteer-Based:** Immigrant/refugee women of colour are the primary demographic of Peer Champions, and face economic marginalization. They are carrying out this vital work without being compensated for their time, which reproduces inequity
- **Missing Race Analysis:** The Campaign does not explicitly name race and racism in the overarching framework, yet it acts as a stand-in for the needs of racialized women in Ontario
- **Broad Mandate:** The Campaign collapses a wide range of immigrant and refugee communities under one umbrella
- **Missing Structural Analysis:** The Campaign focuses on individual and community-level responses to VAW, but not on structural issues that create vulnerability to VAW in immigrant and refugee communities

Recommendation 1

Mandate an anti-racist and intersectional lens be implemented for anti-VAW work across Canada

- Anti-VAW work must be situated within the context of Canadian racism, which includes anti-Black racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and other racist processes. We need frameworks and practices that attend to the unique intersection of racism and sexism that make Black, Indigenous and women of colour particularly vulnerable to violence in Canada, and severely unsupported for the abuses they face in their lives
- This anti-racist and intersectional lens would also include a focus on LGBTQAI communities and use a disability justice framework.

Recommendation 2

Eliminate vulnerability to VAW created by Canada's current immigration and refugee laws

- Create a pathway for women fleeing/living with abuse to have their status be automatically regularized in Canada. Remove the burden of “proof” or police reports in order for them to be believed. Grant them permanent residence through a Humanitarian & Compassion Claim. Historically (20-25 years ago), there was a process in which these applications were regularly approved. We must return to that approach.
- Ensure that there are Access Without Fear policies that are put into practice across VAW services in the country. As it stands, women are afraid to access services for fear that their status could become known
- End immigration detention, which represents a direct form of violence against migrant women

Recommendation 3

Revise the strategy of the Immigrant and Refugee Communities NFF Campaign

- Add a race analysis to the framework and deliverables
- Add a structural analysis framework and deliverables
- Allocate resources towards the direct support and development of Peer Champions so that the work becomes sustainable and cumulative
- Create sub-campaigns that direct resources towards supporting:
 - Black women (both newcomer and those who have lived in Canada for generations)
 - Women who are migrant workers, international students, and living with precarious status in Canada
 - LGBTQAI immigrants and refugees
 - Distinct immigrant/refugee communities identified as facing multiple barriers, such as the Tamil community and Somali community
 - Newcomer and racialized women living with disabilities

Contact Information

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