ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE IN AIRDRIE

Environmental Scan

Submitted to:
The City of Airdrie

Submitted by:
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Big thanks also go to all 60 individuals who shared their opinions and feedback about the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie and how it could be addressed (please see Appendix A for a full list of their names and professional affiliations). They represented the following 14 organizations.

- Airdrie and District Victims Assistance Society (ADVAS)
- Airdrie Food Bank
- Airdrie Housing Ltd
- Alberta Health Services, Addiction and Mental Health Services
- Alberta Health Services, Public Health
- Calgary and Area Child and Family Services, Airdrie Office (CFS)
- Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter (CWES)
- Closer to Home Community Services
- Dinah’s Daughters
- North Rocky View Community Links (NRVCL)
- Protecting Our Women with Emergency Resources (P.O.W.E.R.)
- Rocky View Schools - Airdrie
- RCMP Airdrie Detachment
- RCMP Airdrie School Resource Officers

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the seven women who shared with us their time, personal experience and perspectives on what helped them deal with the abuse, the barriers they experienced and what gaps needed to be addressed in domestic violence service provision in Airdrie.
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I. Executive Summary

The City of Airdrie commissioned this study in the Spring of 2016 in order to learn about prevalence, perceptions and influencing factors regarding the social issue of domestic violence within its community. The research findings were intended to provide the City and community stakeholders with information that will assist in framing the issue of domestic violence by identifying existing supports, institutional mechanisms, and gaps that there may or may not be in programs and/or services. The research elements included:

- Guidance by the Project Steering Committee comprised of representatives of Airdrie service providing community and the City of Airdrie;
- Analysis of Airdrie context, including local population trends, domestic violence rates and services;
- Focus groups and interviews with 53 Airdrie service providers and 7 service recipients using an analysis of internal strengths and weaknesses/challenges as well as external opportunities and threats;
- Community survey, completed by 555 Airdrie community members using an on-line Survey Monkey platform and gathering community perspectives with respect to the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie and availability of services when they needed help.

In general, the study participants were very optimistic about Airdrie community’s ability to address the issue of domestic violence going forward, highlighting multiple community and service strengths that exist in Airdrie. Community capacity to work together and collaborate effectively has been highlighted as one very important opportunity on which to build. They described the community as “incredibly supportive and responsive”, and working well in partnership across a variety of different services, highlighting FCSS collaboration, Airdrie Cares, Interagency Committee, Airdrie Resource Council as examples.

1.1 Airdrie Trends

Airdrie catchment area comprises the Rocky View County with 16 hamlet communities, with a total population of 75,259. Airdrie proximity to Calgary, while beneficial in providing access to multiple city services is also a challenge since many of those services are not accessible to victims of domestic violence who live in Airdrie.

The city has experienced a steady average growth of approximately 7.5% over the last five years, producing increased demand for all services and particularly for services addressing domestic violence. Airdrie is also a young city, with a high proportion of families in child-bearing years (18 to 34) which is the most common age bracket when women experience domestic violence (Section 3.2).

Comparatively Airdrie is not significantly diverse, in terms of its immigrant or Aboriginal population, although there has been some recent growth of its immigrant community (Section 3.3). While this community is comparatively small, its needs are significant and there are limited local services that can support them (Section 5.3).

There is only one housing unit in Airdrie that is intended specifically for victims of domestic violence. Unfortunately, it is difficult to access due to limited number of units available. Housing that is available in the rental market is unlikely to be suitable for women who are leaving an abusive relationship usually with minimal financial supports and affordable housing options are limited. Overall, the reliance on market housing puts women who want to leave abusive relationship in the position of essentially being forced to either remain in the abusive relationship or leave Airdrie (Section 3.4).

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1.2 Domestic Violence as a Social Problem

Domestic violence has significant and long-term physical and health impacts on victims as well as their children.\(^2\) It is more common in homes with young children than homes with older children,\(^3\) and is one of the main causes of homelessness among Canadian families.\(^4\) Domestic violence also disproportionately impacts women in general, as well as Aboriginal and immigrant women. These vulnerabilities are also reflected in Airdrie population. Additionally, Airdrie is home to high proportion of families that are isolated – there are many young families here that are new to Airdrie and that have no informal supports on which to rely in times of crisis.

By comparison to the national numbers, Alberta has the second highest rate of self-reported spousal violence in the country.\(^5\) Based on locally acquired statistics, Airdrie had a rate of 1150 victims per 100,000 people in 2013, or 3.9 times higher than the provincial rate and the rate of domestic violence occurrence is increasing dramatically in Airdrie (Section 4.2). All this indicates a highly significant and increasing social problem that requires redress.

1.3 Services in Airdrie and Areas for Victims of Domestic Violence

Examples of the services currently available (some in Airdrie, and many in Calgary) include basic need supports such as Calgary emergency and second stage shelters, affordable housing, income support and food banks. Emotional supports include community based counselling, in-home supports, programs focused on relationship building and, parenting programs. These services are provided by both governmental and non-profit organizations from within Airdrie and in Calgary. There have also been some public awareness campaigns in Airdrie on the issue of domestic violence, usually connected to Alberta’s Prevention of Family Violence month.

In terms of services for Airdrie residents who are experiencing domestic violence, two significant gaps are identified.

1. That there is no domestic violence shelter of any type or size in Airdrie. This requires residents to leave their community at a critical time of crisis and,
2. Other than the lack of shelter, many other requisite services are in place. However, they are insufficient to meet the increasing demand. Some of this can be attributed to Airdrie’s increasing population, though not all. Nevertheless, more resources, and strategies to identify needed capacities, are required for each of the current and potential services to expand and meet resident need.
1.4 Service Provider and Service User Feedback

The focus group and interview questions focused on community strengths, challenges, opportunities and threats. The results of those discussions are summarized in the figure below.

SWOT Analysis Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses/Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Energy and optimism among Airdrie public</td>
<td>• Growth of the city increases challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support for services from broader community members and businesses</td>
<td>• Increased demand for all services and particularly domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community Links providing a large array of needed services</td>
<td>• Growing rates of domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many other services in place that are essential in addressing domestic violence</td>
<td>• Lack of a safe place for victims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong community collaboration</td>
<td>• Large proportion of younger population without informal supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• City Council that sets the tone and facilitates good will</td>
<td>• Insufficient affordable housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• FCSS focus on prevention, so the root causes of domestic violence are addressed</td>
<td>• Focus on prevention to the exclusion of crisis support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increasing awareness among the public that domestic violence as an important issue</td>
<td>• Transportation barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of resources</td>
<td>• Stigma and shame associated with domestic violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Proximity to Calgary and all associated services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Several emergency and second stage shelters available in Calgary and other surrounding areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Current political climate may be supportive of developing a response to domestic violence in Airdrie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Threats

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Proximity to Calgary and resulting assumption re: general service availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emergency shelters in Calgary and elsewhere have high turn away rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Domestic violence trends and service funding are influenced by economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Political climate can change very quickly and impact service sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access barriers in larger systems including police, courts, as well as financial and child-focused services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants also identified potential next steps for Airdrie’s response to the issue of domestic violence including:

- Develop a plan for Airdrie Collaborative Community Response to the issue of domestic violence
- Develop a service continuum to address the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie
- Work collaboratively to address existing resource gaps for existing services
- Build community awareness with respect to the issue of domestic violence
1.5 Community Feedback

The on-line survey was used to gather responses from the general Airdrie population and was extremely successful in reaching a relatively large number of citizens (n=555). Although the respondents may not have necessarily represented all of Airdrie, the survey suggests that family violence is a significant issue in Airdrie – 56% of respondents indicated that they experienced or knew someone who experienced family violence and almost 90% thought that it is important that the issue of family violence is addressed in Airdrie (Section VIII).

The respondent’s approach to seeking help in Airdrie depends very much on what is currently available in the community. They generally access RCMP, Community Links or Airdrie Victims Services and a sizeable proportion would like more locally-based services such as an emergency women’s shelter (63%), more counselling options (27%), more financial supports (17%), enhanced police response (12%) and affordable legal supports (10%).

1.6 Conclusion and Recommendations

Airdrie experiences as much as four times the Albertan average of domestic violence cases: 1150 victims per 100,000 people compared to Alberta’s 290 victims per 100,000 people (see Section 4.2). Based on Provincial, RCMP and Statistic Canada figures, which all use the same data sources to derive their statistics, as well as locally acquired statistics from several service providers, the rate of domestic violence occurrence is increasing in Airdrie. There is a full range of support services in Airdrie for victims of domestic violence; however, they are insufficient to meet current demand.

The request from the City of Airdrie was to provide high-level recommendations, focusing on initial first steps in addressing the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie, rather than specific details with specific implementation logistics. In light of this direction, we propose the following recommendations:

1. **Develop a plan for a coordinated community response to the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie and area**
   
   An effective response to the social issue of domestic violence in Airdrie requires a cross-sectoral integrated service approach for victims and perpetrators of abuse, including systemic advocacy, community awareness, outreach services and system navigation support, as well as access to housing. The City of Airdrie could take a lead role in convening non-profit, community at large and government stakeholders to build a plan with sustainable solutions and building on existing services.

2. **Develop a plan for a locally-based shelter**
   
   A shelter is needed to respond to problems in accessing Calgary shelters and to reflect the size of Airdrie population as well as high (and growing) domestic violence rates.

3. **Enhance affordable housing options**
   
   Given that the number one reason women stay in an abusive relationship is that there is nowhere else to go, there is strong support for expansion of the number of affordable housing units in Airdrie. Moreover, to address the affordable housing needs specific to domestic violence, Airdrie Housing should review its procedures to ensure survivors of domestic violence are prioritized.
4. *Enhance access to local community-based services*

The research revealed that non-sheltering, community based services do exist in Airdrie but are well over capacity. Work is needed with all stakeholders including provincial and federal counterparts to develop locally-based services to meet the demand.

Implementing these recommendations will be an ambitious endeavor. However, it will be a significant and important one as well. It will show that Municipal representatives not only listen to the opinions of its residents, service providers and other stakeholders, but that they are willing to collaborate and act upon them in order to achieve safety, security and well-being of its community members. It is a worthy endeavour and one that the City of Airdrie should be applauded for undertaking.
II. Introduction

In Spring 2016, the City of Airdrie expressed a desire to learn about the prevalence, perceptions and influencing factors regarding the social issue of domestic violence within its community. The City has issued a Request for Proposals to conduct an environmental scan to uncover what is happening in the community regarding domestic violence and what is potentially needed for the Airdrie community. The research findings were intended to provide the City and community stakeholders information that will able to assist in framing the issue of domestic violence by identifying existing supports, institutional mechanisms, and gaps that may or may not exist in programs and/or services. This direction for the City of Airdrie is guided by the 2012 AirdrieONE Sustainability Plan. The plan includes a goal for a healthy community wherein the City will “continue to be a strong advocate for the health, well-being and social needs of the community”.

The City of Airdrie posed the following research questions for the study:

- What are the factors that make residents vulnerable in Airdrie?
- Who are the most vulnerable residents?
- What is the state of awareness and perception around domestic violence in Airdrie?
- Who actually accesses and stays in women’s shelters?
- How many Airdrie residents use women’s shelters and the frequency of how often the shelters are accessed?
- What are the gaps of services needed?
- What are the options for best practices?

Following these research questions, the project helped identify the current programs, services, awareness, gaps and future needs as they relate to domestic violence within the City of Airdrie. A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis was used to guide the research process, which included the following components:

1. **Project Steering Committee**
   A Steering Committee was struck comprised of representatives from Airdrie service providers, the community and the City of Airdrie. The Committee provided general advice to the consultants over the course of the project, helped identify key community stakeholders who would participate in focus groups and interviews, suggested and facilitated access to organizations and individuals to include in focus groups, participated in the development of the on-line survey content and helped distribute the survey.

2. **Analysis of Airdrie Context**
   The analyses in Sections III, IV and V describe domestic violence as a social problem, including its general trends, scope and overall impact, both nationally and in Alberta. It also describes the Airdrie population and analyzes rates and services related to the issue of domestic violence in the City of Airdrie. This information provided context for the SWOT analysis as well as the focus group and survey results. A section on best practices (Section VI) is also included to offer models worthy of consideration in future planning.

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3. **Focus Groups with Service Providers**
   Fifty-four individuals participated in 7 focus groups and six more shared their opinions in interviews and by email. The participants included representatives of organizations in the community involved in addressing the issue of domestic violence as well as women who have themselves experienced domestic violence. These discussions took place in October and November of 2016 and addressed four key questions (see focus group invitation letter attached in Appendix B and the analysis of feedback in Section VIII of this document):
   - What strengths does the City of Airdrie have that can be utilized to address the issue of domestic violence in its communities?
   - What are the challenges the City of Airdrie faces in addressing the issue of domestic violence in its communities?
   - When you look outside of Airdrie, what opportunities do you see that Airdrie could utilize to address the issue of domestic violence in its communities?
   - When you look outside of Airdrie, what threats do you see that may create barriers to the City Airdrie in addressing the issue of domestic violence in its communities?

4. **Community On-Line Survey**
   General community feedback was gathered using an on-line (Survey Monkey) platform (see Appendix C for the survey content). It was marketed as part of the family violence prevention month activities during the month of November 2016. The survey was developed together with the Steering Committee, and was distributed to Airdrie community using social media (e.g., Websites, Facebook and Twitter) as well as during family violence prevention month events and by word of mouth among family and friends. The survey data was gathered anonymously, not requesting participants’ identifying information.

   The purpose of the survey was to gather perspectives of the broader community about the seriousness of the issue of family violence in Airdrie as well as about access to and availability of services in Airdrie for those experiencing family violence. City of Airdrie staff and the Steering Committee Members were instrumental in ensuring that the survey reached many participants (see Section VIII for the analysis of survey responses).

   Although we have received an excellent response to the survey (a total of 555 individuals completed it), the survey was not administered to a random sample of Airdrie community. Therefore, its results cannot be considered generalizable to the overall population of Airdrie.

5. **Data Analysis and Recommendations**
   Section IX provides conclusions and recommendations based on the information gathered over the course of the study. It discusses the types of services that exist and the gaps in those services and recommends how those gaps could be addressed. It also speaks to the directions for action for the City of Airdrie as well as service community as they move together to plan and implement a collaborative community response.

The report also includes sections titled: Authors’ Observations. These sections include authors’ interpretation and opinions about the data, and are separated from other sections to ensure objectivity of presentation.
III. The City of Airdrie – Description and Population Trends

3.1 Airdrie Catchment Area

The City of Airdrie is located approximately 32 kilometers north of the City of Calgary along the Calgary-Edmonton Corridor on the Queen Elizabeth II Highway. The local economy consists of retail, construction, manufacturing and professional services. Airdrie’s proximity to Calgary makes for a regional market of almost 1.5 million people. This includes the local trade of the surrounding rural communities. With more than 90,000 vehicles passing by on the QEII highway every day, Airdrie is a thriving regional hub.

The City of Airdrie is surrounded by the Rocky View County. There are 16 hamlet communities within the Rocky View County that have combined a population of approximately 38,055 people or slightly more than half of the total population of Airdrie. There are also five urban municipalities that surround Airdrie. They are: Village of Beiseker, City of Chestermere, Town of Cochrane, Town of Crossfield and, Town of Irricana. According to the 2011 Census data, these five municipalities have a total population of 37,204. Combining this population with that of Rocky View County, results in a total population of 75,259 people (in 2011). This figure is 21% more than the 2016 total population of 61,842 for the City of Airdrie. Given that many of these communities depend on the Airdrie for a full range of goods and services, including those related to domestic violence, the City of Airdrie could potentially be serving a population twice the size of the City itself.

Residents of the northern Rocky View County communities such as Madden, Bottrel, and Crossfield may also turn to Airdrie for domestic violence services over other neighbouring cities such as Calgary or Red Deer. Residents in the east, west and southern communities would turn to Calgary or Strathmore for domestic violence related services. Having said that, depending on the severity of the situation, women fleeing domestic violence will often travel to wherever there is shelter space.

Proximity to Calgary

The City of Calgary is the largest urban centre that serves Airdrie. Despite thousands of people moving out of Calgary, its population is still growing and in 2016 reached 1,235,171 people. Many of the services required by residents of Airdrie are provided by Calgary based agencies. This is true of businesses, government services and non-profit services including those addressing the needs of victims of domestic violence.

In the spring of 2012 the Province of Alberta approved the annexation of approximately 12,640 acres of land from the Rocky View County to the City of Airdrie. The south portion of the annexed land, coupled with expansion of Calgary's city limits in 2007, have placed the two cities' boundaries within only a few kilometers of each other.

9 http://www.airdrie.ca/index.cfm?serviceID=672
Authors’ Observation

While one may think that the proximity between the two cities would ease the way for women needing a domestic violence shelter or other services, this is unlikely to be the case. Calgary services are already at full capacity with lengthy wait lists and Airdrie women are very likely to be turned away and have to go to hotels, move in with family or remain in an unsafe situation with their abuser (as reflected in statistics in Section 5.1 and feedback from both service providers and community in Sections 7.3 and 8.4). Calgary is a city that is also growing in terms of its population and its rates of domestic violence, and is struggling to meet the demands of its own citizens. It is therefore unrealistic to expect that women from Airdrie would be able to access services in Calgary in a timely manner.

An important second factor is that, regardless of how close the two cities are to one another, both service providers and the women with lived experience stated that the lack of public transportation between them is a significant barrier to Airdrie women accessing Calgary services. One cannot presume that the woman leaving abuse will have ready access to a personal vehicle. Therefore, public transportation between the two communities is required. Still, in cases where the situation is urgent and the woman has children with her, a good transportation system between the cities may not be enough. For these situations, Airdrie needs a safe facility within its own boundaries and local transportation to get the fleeing family to safety.

3.2 Age of Airdrie Population, 2016

The 2016 city census indicates that the City of Airdrie has a population of 61,842 people. This reflects a steady average growth of approximately 7.5% over the last five years. Approximately 35% of the current residents are between the ages of 25-44 years, suggesting a population of young families (Figure 1). Indeed, 23% of the population are under the age of 14 including 8%, or over 5000 children, who are under the age of 4 years. Looking to the 15-24 age group, there are 6,253 youth that make up roughly 10% of Airdrie population.

Figure 1. Airdrie Population by Age Group, 2016

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10 All population statistics are from http://www.airdrie.ca/getDocument.cfm?ID=4366
The above demographics have implications for domestic violence service needs in the City of Airdrie. First, the literature suggests that the most common ages when women first experience domestic violence are between 18 and 34 years. Given that 35% of Airdrie residents fall within this age bracket, one can expect a high number of first time experiences of domestic violence. These women would require a full range of immediate domestic violence related support services, particularly if they are mothers of small children. The required services include some form of shelter or housing, practical supports such as income, transportation and medical attention, emotional support or counselling and, parenting support when children are involved. Given the research that suggests domestic violence is more common in homes with young children, it is likely parenting support services would be in high demand.

In addition, with 23% of the population being under the age of 14, there are a high number of children that will move into the high risk 15-24 age bracket within 10 years. Of note, the rates of violent crime against women aged 15 to 24 are 42% higher than rates for women aged 25 to 34, and nearly double the rates of women aged 35 to 44. Approximately half of these children are female which is the gender that is four times more likely to experience domestic violence than their male counterparts. These statistics therefore suggest that Airdrie will see a significant increase in its already high rates of domestic violence over the next 10 years.

### 3.3 Diversity in Airdrie

Statistics Canada 2011 National Household Survey data indicates that Airdrie’s population consisted of approximately 10% immigrants. In 2011, an additional 3% self-identified as Aboriginal making Airdrie’s population approximately 87% of Euro-Canadian descent. According to information gained from focus group participants, this profile continues to fit Airdrie’s population. Additionally, the vast majority of the residents have lived in Airdrie for more than two years. Those who have not previously resided in Airdrie came first from Calgary, second from other locations within Alberta, and then from other provinces. Only 115 households in the National Household Survey reported residing in another country immediately before moving to Airdrie, reinforcing the low immigrant population figures.

As noted elsewhere in this document (Section 4.1) Aboriginal and immigrant women are vulnerable to domestic violence in ways that are different from non-Aboriginal and non-immigrant women. However, Airdrie does not appear to have a significant population size that would warrant particular focus of services for these population groups. While these communities are comparatively small, their needs are significant and there are no local services that can support them.

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12. PTSD Symptoms in Young Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence, By Alytia A. Levendosky, G. Anne Bogat and Cecilia Martinez-Torteya. 2013, p 1-2 Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/G_Anne_Bogat/publication/235659438_PTSD_Symptoms_in_Young_Children_Exposed_to_Intimate_Partner_Violence/links/55ba8a6b08ae092e965dac1f.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/G_Anne_Bogat/publication/235659438_PTSD_Symptoms_in_Young_Children_Exposed_to_Intimate_Partner_Violence/links/55ba8a6b08ae092e965dac1f.pdf)


3.4 Housing Options in Airdrie

The vast majority of Airdrie households own their own homes. However, approximately 3800 households are rented. Without housing dedicated to victims of domestic violence, market rental is the option that most women leaving an abusive relationship explore.

The majority of rental units in Airdrie are 2-bedroom units that, as of October 2015, were rented for approximately $1400 per month. This amount of rent requires an annual income of $56,200 to $58,000 for it to be considered affordable; income that most women leaving an abusive relationship rarely have. In fact, most women in this situation find themselves reliant on Alberta Works for their income. Alberta Works provides approximately $1286 per month if a mother has two children. This amount is intended, but is insufficient to cover all living expenses for the family.

Authors’ Observation

Households that are unable to afford local rents are likely to have limited options. This is especially true given the historically low vacancy rates observed between 2011 and 2014. These options may include:

- Living beyond one’s means by paying more than the CMHC standard of 30% on rental housing to obtain a suitable sized unit,
- Living in overcrowded conditions, such as a family with children renting a one bedroom unit where the parent, child or children are either forced to share a single bedroom or family members are required to “sleep on the couch”;
- Living in inadequate and/or unsafe conditions such as renting spaces that are affordable either because they are in poor condition or because they are not designed to serve as permanent living spaces,
- Finding shared accommodations such as living with extended family or friends; or
- Some combination of any of the above.

These options are not suitable for women and children leaving domestic violence. This is especially true considering that many of these women already have housing to which they cannot return for safety reasons. The real issue is, therefore, that they do not have personal safety within their housing. All too often this results in women having to deal with housing and/or homelessness in order to become safe enough to focus on the primary issue of family violence.

Having to rely on market rental housing, when leaving abuse also makes women vulnerable to the volatility of the housing market. For example, as with elsewhere in the province, Airdrie’s vacancy rate for rental properties went from essentially 0% in January 2015 to approximately 8% in October 2016. The vacancy rate is forecast to decline in 2017, and again in 2018. This volatility adds to the uncertainty a woman may already be experiencing in her relationship and makes planning a safe future for herself and her children extremely difficult.

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17 Airdrie Housing Needs Assessment and Strategy, (Draft), prepared by Housing Strategies Inc., November 2016
20 Ibid
When they cannot access market housing, women may turn to affordable housing provided by Airdrie Housing Ltd. However, there are few such units and the waiting list is long. Additionally, the referral process to prioritize women is cumbersome. Some women do benefit from the Provincial Direct Rent Supplement program offered through Calgary Housing Company, although it too is sometimes difficult to access due to waiting lists, eligibility requirements and limits on the maximum amount of subsidy funds that can be provided each year.

Overall, the reliance on market housing and shortage of affordable housing puts women who want to leave an abusive relationship in the position of either remaining in the abusive relationship or leaving Airdrie. Indeed, the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters report that the number one reason that women stay in an abusive relationship is because she has nowhere else to go. Airdrie statistics on the prevalence of domestic violence (described below) suggests that approximately 1307 Airdrie women find themselves in this very situation: being unable to escape the domestic violence they experience because there is no housing option to which they can go.

3.5 The City of Airdrie - Summary

The City of Airdrie is located approximately 32 kilometers north of the City of Calgary along the Calgary-Edmonton Corridor on the Queen Elizabeth II Highway. Airdrie proximity to Calgary, while providing access to multiple city services is also a challenge since many of those services are not accessible to victims of domestic violence who live in Airdrie.

Airdrie catchment area comprises the Rocky View County with 16 hamlet communities, resulting in a total population of 75,259 in 2011. The city has experienced a steady average growth of approximately 7.5% over the last five years, producing increased demand for all services and particularly for services addressing domestic violence. Airdrie is also a young city, with a high proportion of families in child-bearing years (18 to 34), which is the most common age bracket when women experience domestic violence.

Airdrie is not significantly diverse in terms of its immigrant or Aboriginal population. While these communities are relatively small, their needs are significant and there are no local services that can support them.

There is no housing in Airdrie that is dedicated to victims of domestic violence, housing that is available in the rental market is unlikely to be suitable for women who are leaving an abusive relationship usually with minimal financial supports, while affordable housing options are limited. Overall, the reliance on market housing and shortage of affordable housing puts women who want to leave abusive relationship in the position of essentially being forced to remain where they are.

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21 https://www.acws.ca/collaborate-document/2548/view
IV. Domestic Violence as a Social Problem

Domestic violence is a complex social problem that happens in all cultures and religions, in all ethnic and racial communities, at every age, and in every income group. Studies show that Alberta has the second highest rate of self-reported spousal violence in Canada. This not only has a devastating toll on the victims, their families and their community, but also has a significant ongoing cost to all Albertans. In the five-year period 2007 to 2012, it is estimated that over $600 million was spent on the provision of basic health and non-health supports and that about $521 million of that cost came out of the pockets of the Albertan taxpayer.22

Domestic abuse or violence is defined as any use of physical or sexual force, actual or threatened, in an intimate relationship. It may include a single act of violence, or a number of acts forming a pattern of abuse through the use of assaultive and controlling behavior. The pattern of abuse may include: physical abuse; emotional abuse; psychological abuse; sexual abuse; criminal harassment (stalking); and threats to harm children, other family members, pets, and property.23

The impacts of domestic violence are extensive and long-lasting. Domestic violence has significant and long-term physical and health impacts on victims as well as their children.24 It is more common in homes with young children than homes with older children,25 and is one of the main causes of homelessness among Canadian families.26

4.1 Domestic Violence Research

Some self-reported research shows men are almost as likely as women to experience domestic violence.27 Although some people claim that men are too embarrassed to admit a woman has abused them, the reverse is actually true – men tend to over-estimate their partner’s violence while under-estimating their own. At the same time, women over-estimate their own violence and under-estimate their partner’s. This explains why self-reported research often shows similar levels of violence by men and women, even though other research clearly shows that women are disproportionately the victims.28

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25 PTSD Symptoms in Young Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence, By Alytia A. Levendosky, G. Anne Bogat and Cecilia Martinez-Torteya2, 2013, p 1-2 Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/G_Aanne_Bogat/publication/235659438_PTS_D_Symptoms_in_Young_Children_Exposed_to_Intimate_Partner_Violence/links/55ba8a6b08ae092e965d4c1f.pdf
Most men are not abusive to their families. However, when family violence does occur, the victims are overwhelmingly of the female gender. Research shows that:

- About 70% of people who experience family violence are women and girls.\(^{29}\)
- Women are twice as likely as men to be victims of family violence.\(^{30}\)
- Women who experience spousal violence are more likely to endure extreme forms assault including choking, beating, being threatened with a knife or gun, and sexual violence.\(^{31}\)
- Women are 4.5 times as likely as men to be victims of intimate partner homicide.\(^{32}\)
- Girls are 1.5 times more likely than boys to experience violence at home.\(^{33}\)
- 48% of spousal victims were reported they were physically assaulted before the age of 15.\(^{34}\)

While violence against women happens in all cultures and religions, in all ethnic and racial communities, at every age, and in every income group, some women are especially at risk:

- Aboriginal women are 2.5 times more likely to be victims of violence than non-Aboriginal women\(^{36}\) and are killed at six times the rate of non-aboriginal women.\(^{35}\)
- Immigrant women may be more vulnerable to domestic violence due to economic dependence, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge about community resources. Newcomers who arrive in Canada, possibly traumatized by war or oppressive governments, are much less likely to report physical or sexual violence to the authorities for fear of further victimization or even deportation.\(^{36}\)
- The most common age when domestic violence is first experienced by women is age 18-24 (38.6%), followed by age 25-34 (29.7%), 11-17 (22.4%), age 35-44 (6.8%) and age 45+ (2.5%).\(^{37}\)
- Rates of intimate partner violence and homicide are highest for women in the 15-24 age group.\(^{38}\)

\(^{29}\) Infographic: Family Violence in Canada, Statistics Canada. Available at: [http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2016001-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2016001-eng.htm)


\(^{34}\) Ibid


4.2 Domestic Violence Rates

By comparison to the national numbers, Alberta has the second highest rate of self-reported spousal violence in the country. Specifically, in 2011 the percentage of self-reported spousal violence in Alberta was 7.6 percent, compared to 6.2 percent nationally. These figures underestimate the actual rates, since cases where no charges have yet been laid are not included.

In 2013, Alberta’s family violence rate was roughly 290 victims per 100,000 people, which is higher than the national average. According to the RCMP Municipal Detachment statistics, Airdrie alone had a rate of 1150 victims per 100,000 people in the same year, or 3.9 times higher than the provincial rate. However, the figures for 2016 are even higher. In the first 9 months of 2016 alone, RCMP figures indicate the rates for domestic violence as 1240 victims per 100,000 people, or a full 4.3 times higher than the provincial average (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Domestic Violence Rate for Every 100,000 Individuals by Location

A number of different organizations gather information about domestic violence rates in the Airdrie. The figures from three organizations that work specifically with victims of domestic violence are outlined below. They are North Rocky View Community Links (NRVCL), Airdrie and District Victims Assistance Society (ADVAS) and the RCMP Airdrie Detachment. These sources, combined with information from other organizations described later in this report, reveal that Airdrie is not immune to the issue of domestic violence and, in fact, is experiencing a problem of significant magnitude.

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44 Report on Spousal Abuse, PROS data pull 2016-10-04. RCMP Airdrie Municipal Detachment
North Rocky View Community Links

Figure 3 below reflects statistics for domestic violence services provided by NRVCL over the last three years. Due to the range of services provided by NRVCL, these statistics include but are not limited to the services that specifically address domestic violence. Of all of the information in the Figure, of most significance is the steady increase in the number of referrals they receive from the local community services, as well as the self-referrals, for the programs described above. In 2014 they received 188 referrals for domestic violence services. In 2015, the figure was 434 – a full 130% from the previous year. By early December 2016\(^\text{45}\), the figure increased to 1020 referrals, which is another 135% increase from the previous year.

![Figure 3. NRVCL Service Statistics\(^\text{46}\)](image)

Airdrie and District Victim Assistance Service

Airdrie and District Victim Assistance Service (ADVAS) track the number of cases, which may consist of individuals or families, that they become involved with and/or provide supports to. Like NRVCL, ADVAS has also seen a steady increase in the number of domestic violence related cases over the last several years. In fact, according to ADVAS statistics, the number has more than doubled from 599 cases in 2012 to 1247 cases in 2016 (see Figure 4 on the following page).\(^\text{47}\) While ADVAS does provide services within the Airdrie and Beiseker Detachments and surrounding districts, these statistics are still relevant to this report in that the victims served may turn to the City of Airdrie for service provision.

Note that while these figures include only cases that are clearly domestic violence related, there are other case categories where domestic violence is not the presenting crime but could be inherent in the crime. Examples of such categories are: sexual assault, threats and harassment. Statistics from these categories are not included in the Figure 4 below making the incidence of domestic violence in Airdrie potentially even higher than indicated.

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\(^{45}\) Data is up to December 6\(^{th}\), 2016  
\(^{46}\) Obtained from NRVCL in longer format  
\(^{47}\) Statistics as provided by Airdrie & District Victims Assistance Society, March 2017
RCMP Airdrie Detachment

RCMP Airdrie Detachment uses the nation-wide Police Reporting Occurrence System (PROS) to arrive at its statistics regarding domestic violence. This is also the database that Statistics Canada draws upon when reporting provincial and national rates of domestic violence, making Airdrie RCMP statistics directly comparable to Statistics Canada data. Unlike ADVAS who track the number of cases they work on, RCMP detachments across Canada track the number of incidences, or each time they are called out to a domestic violence related situation.

Their statistics reveal trends similar to those of ADVAS - increasing incidences of domestic violence within the City of Airdrie over the last five years. Specifically, there was a 17% increase in spousal abuse incidences (or calls) from 2012 to the first nine months of 2016 (Figure 4). Note the exception in 2014 when the numbers drop substantially – it would be interesting to explore the reasons for this this result. Notwithstanding the outlier in 2014, the RCMP incidence rate appears to be continuing to grow in that there were 527 incidents in the first nine months of 2016 for an average of 58.5 per month. Pro-rated to a full year this results in an estimated 703 incidents of domestic violence in Airdrie for 2016.

Figure 4. ADVAS and RCMP Service Statistics

Domestic Violence Rates and Population Growth in Airdrie

As has been noted throughout this document, some of the growth in domestic violence rates in Airdrie can be attributed to population growth, although there may be multiple other factors, the discussion of which is beyond the scope of this document. Figure 5 compares the proportion of growth in NRVCL domestic violence referrals, ADVAS cases and RCMP domestic violence incidents to Airdrie population growth, in order to determine the degree to which factors external to population growth may have contributed to the increasing incidence of domestic violence in Airdrie. As can be seen in Figure 5 below, with the exception of the RCMP statistics in 2014, the growth in the incidence rate exceeds Airdrie’s population growth over the same five-year period. Note, in particular, the significant growth in domestic violence referrals to NRVCL in 2015 and 2016 by 130% and 135%.

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48 Obtained from NRVCL in longer format
Authors’ Observation

The results reported in this section highlighting the growth in domestic violence rates in Airdrie are even more significant considering that the national and provincial averages reported by Statistics Canada are constructed from both PROS and census self-reports, while the Airdrie domestic violence numbers used in this report are drawn only from PROS reports. Statistics Canada reports that, across Canada, the police are never made aware of approximately 70% of spousal violence victims. Assuming that the 70% figure applies to Airdrie, the implication would be that the city would have 2108 victims per 100,000 people or 1307 victims for its population of nearly 62,000 people. There are similar implications for the additional 75,259 people residing in the MD of Rocky View and five surrounding municipalities described above, who may turn to Airdrie for domestic violence services and supports.

Based on these locally acquired statistics, the rate of domestic violence occurrence is increasing dramatically in Airdrie. Overlaying national and provincial averages, it is found that Airdrie has approximately four times the rate of domestic violence than the rest of the province, which is already higher than the national rate. All this indicates a highly significant and increasing social problem that requires redress.

V. Services in Airdrie and Area Addressing Domestic Violence

A full range of support services exist in Airdrie and surrounding area for victims of domestic violence. There are far fewer available for perpetrators of domestic violence. As seen below, the challenge is that the existing services are often over capacity, require resources and transportation that are often not available, and/or require that victims move away from Airdrie. Many of these services are, therefore, inaccessible to those who need them.

Examples of the services currently available include basic need supports such as emergency and second stage shelters, affordable housing, income support and food banks. Emotional supports include community based counselling, in-home supports, programs focused on relationship building and parenting programs. These services are provided by both governmental and non-profit organizations from within Airdrie and from Calgary. There are also some public awareness campaigns on the issue of domestic violence, usually connected to Alberta’s Prevention of Family Violence month. Below is a description of the key domestic violence related services that are currently available to victims residing in Airdrie.

5.1 Women’s Shelters in Surrounding Area

Women’s Emergency Shelters

Within the City of Calgary, there are three women’s emergency shelters that offer a total of 119 beds where women with children fleeing domestic violence can stay for approximately four weeks. They are:

- Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter, which has 50 beds
- YWCA Sheriff King Home, which has 42 beds
- Awo Taan Healing Lodge, which has 27 beds

In addition, there are three woman’s emergency shelters within approximately an hour’s drive from Airdrie. These include:

- Wheatland Emergency Shelter in Strathmore, which has 25 beds
- Rowan House Emergency Shelter in High River, which has 24 beds
- Central Alberta Women’s Emergency Shelter in Red Deer, which has 40 beds

While these shelters are in closest proximity to Airdrie, they are all usually full and difficult to access in urgent situations. According to Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters statistics, 8,076 women and 8,283 children were turned away from member shelters due to a lack of capacity in 2015-2016 alone,\(^{50}\) and the turn-away statistics are on the increase in both Calgary shelters and shelters in smaller locations in the area\(^{51}\) (Figure 6). In fact, this past May the Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter reallocated staff to support victims in the community rather than the shelter because of the rising demand for already full shelter beds.\(^{52}\)

\(^{50}\) [https://www.acws.ca/collaborate-document/2697/view](https://www.acws.ca/collaborate-document/2697/view)

\(^{51}\) Includes shelters in Red Deer, Rocky Mountain House, High River, Strathmore, Lethbridge and Bow Valley

Second Stage Shelters

Beyond the woman’s emergency shelters, there are three second stage shelters in Calgary where women can live with their children for up to two years. These facilities offer a total of 77 self-contained apartments of various sizes. They are:

- Brenda Strafford Centre, which has 34 units
- Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society, which has 19 units
- Sonshine Centre, which has 24 units

Again, these units are essentially always full. Due to the long tenancy of the families, the turnover rate for these apartments is quite low. This makes it all the more difficult for the women who are in the emergency shelters and are looking for some form of affordable and safe housing. Statistics on the number of women who are turned away or waiting for a second stage unit is not tracked because of the low turnover in apartments. That is, by the time an apartment is vacated, a woman’s time in the emergency shelter has usually expired and alternative housing has been found, or she has returned to the abusive relationship.

Recognizing that one of the main reasons women return to their abusive relationships is that they have nowhere else to go, Discovery House and Brenda Strafford Society each developed alternative supportive housing programs for its clients. In 2009, Discovery House developed the Community Housing Program where women are supported in securing and maintaining market housing in Calgary and area. Support services include practical and emotional supports similar to those provided in a second stage shelter.

Brenda Strafford’s response to the client’s housing need was the Progressive Housing Program. The program offers 51 two-bedroom units in an affordable and independent living apartment dwelling to women with children who, after having resided at the second stage shelter, are now equipped to be more independent, yet still be provided appropriate and adequate supports. On average, families stay for approximately 24 months at which time they are prepared to transition to the broader community.

Authors’ Observation

It seems clear that as comprehensive and innovative as domestic violence shelters surrounding Airdrie are in providing shelter for women leaving abusive relationships, it is still not enough to address the need. The turn-away rates are high at all emergency shelters, progressive housing units are quickly filled, and market permanent housing options went beyond expected capacity.
Airdrie residents leaving abusive relationships may be fortunate to get into one of the options offered, but it is certainly not something that they can count on. Even if some women are able to access a Calgary shelter, they have to negotiate a number of significant barriers, including transportation to and from Airdrie, accumulating necessary resources for the move, addressing school attendance issues for their school-age children and negotiating employment or use of other services that, for many, are located in Airdrie. There is no doubt that the city of Airdrie requires some form of immediate and longer-term shelter options to offer these residents.

5.2 Airdrie Counselling and Support Services for Domestic Violence

Locally-based counselling and support services for domestic violence in Airdrie are funded and administered by two main sources – Airdrie Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and Alberta Government (e.g., Justice, Human Services and Mental Health). Airdrie FCSS provides funding for preventative social initiatives intended to enhance the well-being of individuals, families and communities. Based on the provincial FCSS Act and Regulation funding for direct domestic violence services, intervention or treatment related to domestic violence is not eligible through that Program. Services administered by the Alberta Government include RCMP, Airdrie Victims Assistance, Child and Family Services and Airdrie Addiction and Mental Health. All these organizations report increasing demand for their services, as well as resource challenges.

North Rocky View Community Links

North Rocky View Community Links (NRVCL) is a non-profit organization that provides valuable services to support individuals and strengthen families and thereby help to prevent or mitigate domestic violence in Airdrie. Many Airdrie service providers indicate that NRVCL is the ‘go to’ agency for both prevention and intervention services related to domestic violence. NRVCL offers many domestic violence related services including:

- **Journey of Change** - This group provides treatment for men and women who are mandated or volunteering to receive counselling for intimate partner violence. Participants increase awareness of their beliefs and attitudes around intimate partner violence and learn to manage their anger more effectively. Some participants attend individual counselling session where appropriate. This program has served an average of 138 unique individuals per year over the last three years. The data for 2016 indicates an estimated 30% increase in program participation from the previous year.

- **Journey of Healing Group** - This group is a combination of a process and psycho educational group for women who have experienced abuse in an intimate partner relationship or in their family of origin. Topics such as understanding abuse, safety planning, emotional health and trauma are explored. The Journey of Healing Program has served an average of 229 women per year over the last three years for a total of 687. A strong and steady increase in numbers can be seen over the three-year period, from 126 women in 2014 to 245 in 2015 to 316 by early December 2016.

- **Counselling** - Individuals, couples and family groups can receive many different types of counselling services from NRVCL regarding domestic violence concerns within the home. They also have drop-in counselling which allows people to receive immediate assistance.

As noted in Section 4.2 above, NRVCL has seen a steady increase in the community and self-referrals for domestic violence services by 130% and 135% in 2015 and 2016 respectively.
Airdrie and District Victims Assistance Society (ADVAS)

ADVAS is a non-profit, volunteer based organization that provides 24-hour crisis response and support to victims of crime and/or tragedy. The volunteers support victims by providing a compassionate response, emotional and practical assistance, information on victims’ rights, and referrals necessary to help reduce the negative impact of victimization. ADVAS is supported by and operates within the Airdrie RCMP Detachment. They assist individuals within the Airdrie and Beiseker Detachments and surrounding districts. Similar to NRVCL, and as reported in Section 4.2, ADVAS has also seen a steady increase in the number of domestic violence related cases over the last several years. In fact, according to ADVAS statistics, the number has more than doubled from 599 cases in 2012 to 1247 cases in 2016.53

Calgary and Area Child and Family Services, Airdrie Office

The Airdrie Office of Child and Family Services falls under the domain of Calgary and Area Child and Family Services (CFS) which is delegated by the Provincial Government to provide a wide range of services to strengthen families and keep children and youth safe and protected. These services include: Early Intervention; Child Intervention Services (Family Enhancement and Child Protection); Child Care Licensing, Monitoring and Subsidy; Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD); Foster Care; Adoption and Permanency Planning; Protection of Sexually Exploited Children (PSECA); and Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying.

While domestic violence is inherent in many of the cases that CFS works with, the specific number of domestic violence related cases is not tracked. Instead, the number of children that experience emotional or physical injury is tracked which would encompass more situations than only domestic violence as we have defined it earlier in this report.

Airdrie Addiction and Mental Health Services

Similar to Child and Family Services in Airdrie, the addictions and mental health services in Airdrie falls under the domain of the Provincial Government, specifically Alberta Health Services. Airdrie Addiction and Mental Health Services provides short and long term therapy to help people address and manage their emotional, psychological, addiction and mental health concerns. Their services include assessment and treatment to mandated domestic violence offenders. Psychiatrists, psychologists, registered nurses and social workers may provide these services. The services are for individuals who live Airdrie and the surrounding rural area. It was reported that for the period January to November 2016, only 4 of the 194 referrals made for Airdrie were specifically family violence related. In these cases, the caller was referred to Community Links, Sherriff King Home, Calgary Counselling Centre, or Carya depending on what the concerns were.

P.O.W.E.R.

The mandate of this newly established non-profit organization is “Protecting Our Women with Emergency Resources.” They achieve this by providing emergency kits to agencies, such as Victims Services and Community Links, to give to women who access their services due to domestic violence. P.O.W.E.R. has just started this service a few months ago, and have handed out 20 kits.

53 Statistics as provided by Airdrie & District Victims Assistance Society, March 2017
The ultimate mission of P.O.W.E.R. is to bring an emergency women's shelter to Airdrie. To this end, they are focused on raising approximately $3M, and advocating with community members, municipal and provincial governments to support their mission.

5.3 Related Supports and Services in Airdrie

In addition to services that provide counselling and support to victims of domestic violence, there are several other supports and services that victims need to access as they attempt to flee abusive relationships. Those include local services such as Airdrie Housing Ltd. and Airdrie Food Bank and, government services such as RCMP and Alberta Works.

Airdrie Housing Limited

Airdrie Housing Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of the City of Airdrie. It offers clean, safe homes at affordable rents for those who qualify. While they have a total of 44 units available, an estimated 31 of them can be considered as near-market affordable rentals (if applying the organization’s preferred ratio of 70% affordable and 30% market rents).

There are an additional 15 units currently in the planning and development stages for the former Airdrie RCMP site. Using the organization’s 70:30 ratio, 10 of these units will likely be considered affordable. In 2015 Airdrie Housing Ltd. had 73 families on their wait list or, almost twice as many of the current housing units in total.

Statistics that are maintained by the partnership between NRVCL and Airdrie Housing indicate that 31% of Airdrie Housing waitlist clients report that domestic violence is a concern. A full 33% of current clients report that domestic violence is a concern. Given that the number one reason women stay in an abusive relationship is that there is nowhere else to go, these statistics offer strong support for expansion of affordable housing options in Airdrie.

Authors’ Observation

It is encouraging to note that there is a commitment by Airdrie Housing, the Airdrie Rotary Club and Community Links to prioritize survivors of domestic violence for one of their housing units. The caveat is that the women must be recommended to Airdrie Housing through a second stage shelter provider. The domestic violence counsellors from Community Links will act as the conduit between the second stage shelter provider and Airdrie Housing. Though statistics specific to the number of such recommendations are not formally maintained, however, anecdotally it was reported that there have been only two such recommendations in the past five years.

This appears to be a low rate of recommendations, especially given the high rates of domestic violence in Airdrie. Since a second stage provider does not exist in Airdrie, the recommendation would be coming from a provider outside of Airdrie, likely Calgary. This may mean that the abused woman may have already established residency in a location other than Airdrie. The time required for a woman who experienced domestic violence in Airdrie, but received services from an emergency and/ or second stage shelter in another city, could be upwards of two years. In that time, it seems reasonable to think that she has established herself within the new location and that she may have little or no interest in returning to Airdrie.

54 Domestic Violence Statistics provided by Airdrie Housing Limited, December 23, 2016
55 Ibid
While the commitment to dedicated domestic violence housing is laudable, the current system works against achieving the goal. Revising the system so triage and recommendations could come from an Airdrie based organization, such as NRVCL, would directly serve Airdrie victims and achieve the desired goal.

**Airdrie Food Bank**

The Airdrie Food Bank collects and distributes food to those in need and educates the community on hunger related issues. Over the last year, they have seen an increase in the number food hampers that are distributed each week. While specific numbers are not tracked, Airdrie Food Bank does provide support specifically to women who have just left shelters to help them get re-established. Obviously, this is an important resource for victims of domestic violence.

**RCMP Airdrie Detachment**

The RCMP Airdrie City Detachment serves the municipality of Airdrie. The City Detachment has a Domestic Violence Unit that consists of 3 Constables (investigators) and 1 Sergeant (supervisor) who report to a Staff Sergeant as part of the General Investigation Section (all plain clothes members). In addition, Airdrie City Detachment can access the services of the RCMP Southern Alberta District Domestic Violence Coordinator. This role is filled by a single Corporal who serves 37 detachments throughout southern Alberta. The Coordinator provides training to frontline officers regarding domestic violence, and whatever assistance may be required to ensure a quality investigation.

As noted in Section 4.2, RCMP statistics reveal a high rate of domestic violence within the City of Airdrie. There was a 17% increase in spousal abuse incidences, or the number of times they were called to a domestic violent situation, from 2012 to 2016. This rate appears to be continuing to grow in that there were 527 incidents in the first nine months of 2016 for an average of 58.5 per month.

Interestingly, the rate of charges laid is also on the rise, which is a reflection of the trends in RCMP response to domestic violence in Airdrie. In 2015, 1 charge was laid for every 6.5 incidents as compared to 1 charge for every 4.9 incidents in 2016. This increase in the charge rate can be seen as a positive step in making Airdrie homes safer for women and children.

**Alberta Works**

Alberta Works provides a range of services to help unemployed and low-income Albertans meet their basic needs and find jobs. These services include employment related services, income support, health benefits and child support services.

Currently, there is one Alberta Works Caseworker who works in Airdrie four days per week. This coverage is a significant increase from a few years ago, when the caseworker was in Airdrie only one day per week. The increase in coverage was strictly in response to the high demand for services in Airdrie. Alberta Works does not track the numbers of clients requesting support due to experiences of domestic violence. However, it was reported anecdotally, that of the approximately 35 weekly appointments in Airdrie, roughly 30% are requests related to domestic violence.
5.4 Calgary-Based Domestic Violence Services

In addition to the aforementioned shelters within Calgary, there are some non-residential, community based domestic violence related support services that are offered to Airdrie residents by Calgary based organizations. These services were usually established in response to the growing demand as well as requests for support from Airdrie based organizations. In many cases, Airdrie services are part of a broader “community outreach” program where other communities are served by the same organization, if not the same worker. Therefore, Airdrie statistics and client profile are not available. Below is a description of domestic violence services that are provided in Airdrie by Calgary based organizations.

**Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter (CWES) Community Outreach Services**

As part of their Community Outreach Services, CWES has a Community Services Counsellor that works out of the Child and Family Services (CFS) office in Airdrie. This counsellor’s role is preventative in nature. That is, she will support the families that CFS may be investigating and work to prevent more formal and intrusive interventions from CFS. The majority of the Airdrie referrals come from CFS but there have been a few clients that have come through the CWES helpline.

For the last year, the counsellor has spent two days a week in Airdrie and also served clients in Calgary and Cochrane. Services included safety planning, emotional support and referrals for basic needs, financial, counselling and legal services. The Community Service Counsellor who serves Airdrie has a caseload of approximately 22 families, which includes 48 children. These numbers are inclusive of all clients that the Community Service Counsellor serves outside of Calgary, not only Airdrie.

**Children’s Cottage Society**

This organization has many programs and services that can be accessed by Airdrie residents should they choose to go to Calgary to receive them. However, in Airdrie and surrounding area, the Children’s Cottage provides a component of their “Healthy Families” Program which includes in-home support to parents of young children, seeking to improve their parenting skills and overcome the challenges in their lives. In this way, the program is seen as a preventative measure against domestic violence occurring or escalating within a home.

Over the last two years only 4 families have been referred to Healthy Families with family violence listed as reason for referral. However, both of the Airdrie home visitors stated that it is typical for family violence to be disclosed only after a relationship has been established with the home visitor. Data on domestic violence disclosure after service delivery has started is not available.

**Closer to Home Community Services**

This organization provides the “Family Matters” program in Airdrie and the Rocky View Region. The Family Matters program offers in-home support services for children and youth, and their families, who are experiencing a crisis. The role of the program staff person is to mentor and teach parents effective communication skills, address inappropriate child behaviour and manage crises. The goal is to improve the overall functioning of the family in order to avert formal intervention of Child and Family Services. Approximately 30% of their caseload in Airdrie and surrounding area are families experiencing domestic violence.
Legal and Justice Services

Although some legal services are available in Airdrie (e.g., Domestic Violence Court, some legal supports), oftentimes they are over-capacity in Airdrie and the victims must go to Calgary to receive these services. Some examples of legal service needs include addressing custody issues in Family Court, using a visitation service, receiving free or subsidized legal advice or attending Criminal Court.

5.5 Services in Airdrie - Summary

The discussion in this section reflected the comprehensive range of services required for early intervention in potential domestic violent situations. They are much needed as evidenced by the steep and steady increased of referrals and numbers of people being served. As stated earlier, the demand for domestic violence related services is well over the current capacity of these agencies to deliver. Financial and other forms of support are needed to meet present and projected future need. In terms of services for Airdrie residents who are experiencing domestic violence, two significant gaps are identified.

1. That there is no domestic violence shelter of any type or size in Airdrie. This requires residents to leave their community at a critical time of crisis; and,
2. Other than the lack of shelter, many other requisite services are in place. However, they are insufficient to meet the increasing demand. Some of this can be attributed to Airdrie’s increasing population, though not all. Nevertheless, more resources, and strategies to identify needed capacities, are required for each of the current and potential services to expand and meet resident need.

Authors’ Observation

The lack of shelter is an especially concerning gap in resources because of how essential shelter is at the time of crisis. It is unreasonable to expect women and children to somehow make their way to another city at a time of extreme emotional and physical turmoil. Beside the lack of shelter, Airdrie has insufficient capacity of many requisite domestic violence support services. The most significant appears to be the diminishing capacity for income support, affordable housing, individual and/or group counselling and legal supports.

The rate of domestic violence and the population size of Airdrie alone indicate that a shelter is required. Comparison to other cities of similar population to Airdrie is informative to understand the level of shelter services that may be required in Airdrie. Medicine Hat has a population size of 63,018 people, very similar to Airdrie. There, a full range of support services in addition to three shelter and housing options are offered. The shelter options are:

- Phoenix Safe House, which is a woman’s emergency shelter with 24 beds
- Musasa House, which is a second stage shelter with 10 three-bedroom townhouse units
- The Housing First Family Violence Stream, which is a community based housing model that supports approximately 30 families.

Similarly, Grand Prairie has a population of 68,556 and offers the following shelter and housing options in addition to support services:

- Emergency shelter with 42 beds and,
- Serenity Place, Regional Supportive Housing, which is a brand new 14-unit apartment building
VI. Best Practice Summary

There are several best practices being used to address domestic violence in Airdrie. Below is an overview of those practices. Some that are used in Calgary, elsewhere in Alberta or identified from the literature are also described. The descriptions of the best practices fall within four categories: community awareness, direct service provision/intervention, primary prevention and system collaboration.

6.1 Community Awareness

Community awareness is considered a best practice in addressing family violence for two main reasons. One is that it can help community members identify that they are, or someone they know is, in an abusive relationship and can reach out for help. Second, it helps community members understand the detrimental effects domestic violence has on not only individual community members but also on the community at large. This understanding motivates people to take action against domestic violence and eventually create social change.

A significant public awareness campaign on the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie was connected to Alberta’s Prevention of Family Violence month. Last November (2016), Airdrie Victim Assistance Services hosted a one day seminar with a guest presentation on how domestic violence affects the workplace and the community. The seminar had many elements that made it a community awareness best practice: it was a free public event and therefore accessible to anyone; the topic was relevant to multiple audiences, i.e., the business community as well as the community at large; the presenter had a level of expertise that the community could respect and; it was connected to a Province wide campaign which reinforced the significance of the issue.

There was also a Candlelight Vigil during Prevention of Family Violence Month. An activity such as this is likely to drive home the severity of the issue and motivate people all the more to take action to address domestic violence in the community.

6.2 Direct Service Provision/Intervention

To be considered a domestic violence service delivery best practice, the following considerations should underlie the service provision.56

- Service provision should endeavor not to collude with traditional gender ideologies that excuse or justify the violence against women and/or blame the victims.
- All those who have contact with victims need to use a “trauma informed” approach and be aware that the manner in which they respond can make a difference.
- The service reflects the needs of victims - be they women, children or men - which will vary according to the forms of violence they have suffered, how long such violence has been going on and other aspects of their history and current context.

Research conducted by the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (ACWS) identified similar principles for the provision of domestic violence supports and services: they should be long-term, woman-centered, safety-focused, culturally competent, and holistic.\textsuperscript{57} In addition, programming for children is considered a best practice because of the potential to break the inter-generational cycle of violence.\textsuperscript{58} Examples of best practices in Airdrie are as follows:

**North Rocky View Community Links**

As described in Section 5.2, North Rocky View Community Links offers a wide range of domestic violence related services. They are considered a best practice because the services target many points in the continuum of care for those experiencing domestic violence. NRVCL offers individual counselling to the adult and child victim as well as the perpetrator. They also offer support in groups for the adult victim and perpetrator. These services may be offered in their offices or in the community. In addition, NRVCL holds community awareness activities and prevention programs targeted towards children such as Safe4Life and Roots of Empathy.

**Airdrie District Victims Assistance Society**

ADVAS is another example of a best practice service provider. Described as “exceptional” by focus group participants, they work closely with the RCMP while at the same time actively respond to the needs of victims. They do this by providing emotional and practical assistance, information on victims’ rights, and referrals necessary to help reduce the negative impact of victimization. They are also a key provider of court support to victims of domestic violence – a role that the participants in the women with lived experience focus group stated was extremely valuable to them.

**Domestic Violence Court**

Since 2000, eight Domestic Violence Courts have been established across Alberta. In these courts, all proceedings are focused specifically on domestic abuse cases and with the knowledge and understanding of their individual and social impact. In Calgary, HomeFront supports these cases by working alongside Child and Family Services, Crown, Calgary Police Services, defense counsel and probation officers to support the victims through the criminal court process. These elements as well as programs specifically working with victims, informing them about the court proceedings, supporting their engagement with the court and connecting them with needed resources result in improved efficiency and effectiveness at achieving a relatively quick resolution to a domestic violence case.

In May 2006, a Domestic Violence Court was established in Airdrie. It was the first circuit court to provide specialized family violence processes. Now, the docket matters and trials that are related to domestic violence are blended with other matters in two court days per week. Though the Judges rotate, there is one specialized Crown who consults with the RCMP Family Violence Coordinator before court and conversations are on-going about a possibility of having a dedicated Domestic Violence Court in the future.


Offender Treatment

Offender treatment services in Airdrie are provided by NRVCL and Alberta Health Services, Mental Health and Addictions. They are for men who are either court mandated or volunteering to receive counselling for intimate partner violence. Service provision takes the form of counselling, either individually or in a group setting.

Shelters

Examples of best practices that are offered by Calgary organizations and others throughout the province, but are not currently evident in Airdrie, are predominately related to shelter and housing. For example, as noted in Section 5.1, Calgary has a total of six shelters for women leaving domestic violence. Women’s shelters have existed in Alberta since the 1970s and are widely recognized as an essential intervention to situations of domestic violence. They are a best practice not only because of the trauma-informed safety and support provided, but also because the services address the full spectrum needed by the women, and children, who are victims of domestic violence. Additionally, the services may be provided in the shelter, community or the victim’s home. For example, the Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter provides community outreach counselling services in Airdrie two days a week. Calgary

A related best practice is the provision of long-term housing options that are safe, affordable and support women leaving domestic violence. As noted above, Discovery House and Brenda Strafford Society in Calgary have developed alternative supportive housing programs for its clients that meet the specific need that women leaving domestic abuse.

6.3 Primary Prevention

Primary prevention is activity that takes place before perpetration or victimization has occurred. Therefore, many primary prevention best practices focus on teaching children and youth about non-violence, and strengthening vulnerable youth and families. Often, these practices will use a home visitation approach meaning services are provided in the family home. Because they target a significant risk factor for future perpetration and victimization of domestic violence, home visitation programs are becoming recognized as a domestic violence best practice.59

Some authors stress that to be a best practice “prevention strategies must address the causes of violence against women, which are rooted in male dominance and ... empowering women and girls and ensuring their perspectives and voices are heard must be at the center of such efforts”.60 Below is a description of activities provided within Airdrie that address these understandings of primary prevention.

North Rocky View Community Links

As noted above, NRVCL offers prevention programs targeted towards children. Two such examples are Safe4Life and Roots of Empathy. There are also many parenting programs that target the parents though will benefit the child’s development. NRVCL also offers several programs targeted towards youth. They are “Girl Circle” and “Guy Circle” and “Healthy Relationships”, all of which empower youth to growth with confidence, develop positive self-esteem and have healthy relationships. All of these programs align with the description of a best practice.

59 World Health Organization and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2010; Olds et al., 2011
Children's Cottage Society

This organization is located in Calgary but provides a component of their “Healthy Families” program in Airdrie. As described above, the “Healthy Families” program is a home visitation program that provides support to parents of young children who seeking to improve their parenting skills and overcome the challenges in their lives.

Closer to Home Community Services

This is another organization located in Calgary but provides a home visitation program in Airdrie. Their “Family Matters” program offers in-home support services for children and youth, and their families, who are experiencing a crisis. The goal is to strengthen family functioning and avert formal government intervention.

6.4 Collaborative Community Response

A coordinated approach to domestic violence means working together across disciplines and agencies to encourage an integrated and consistent approach to the victim, the children and the offender. Such an approach includes the justice, health care, child protection, social services, immigrant settlement, and education systems, as well as those services that specifically address the diverse needs of women fleeing domestic violence. Major reports on violence against women and children over the past 25 years have confirmed the crucial importance of coordination of all sectors, at all levels, across the entire continuum of the response to domestic violence. These efforts are most effective when they are anchored in the core principles, including:

- A rights-based approach
- Victim/survivor centred approach
- Advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment
- Safety is paramount
- Culturally and age appropriate and sensitive
- Perpetrator accountability

There are several collaboration best practices in Airdrie and Calgary. As follows:

North Rocky View Community Links

This organization was viewed as being particularly strong in working with other organizations in order to support wrap around service delivery to families experiencing domestic violence. Examples of agencies that work collaboratively with NRVCL include the local Food Bank, Airdrie and District Victims Assistance, Airdrie Child and Family Services, and Boys and Girls Clubs.

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61 The preceding paragraph has been taken whole and with authorization from Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters, October 2016. “Safety From Domestic Violence: Using Evidence Based Practices to Keep Women Safe”. Discussion Paper.
Justice System Partners

There are several organizations that collaborate specifically around the judicial system and processes as they relate to domestic violence in Airdrie. For example, there is a partnership of agencies, facilitated by NRVCL, that works with domestic violence offenders that meet regularly to ensure the judicial needs of both the offender and victim are addressed. In addition, the RCMP has a specialized Domestic Violence Unit that works closely with Airdrie and District Victims Assistance, Airdrie Child and Family Services, ITRAC\(^2\) and others. Finally, the Airdrie Domestic Violence Court is described as both responsive and connected to the agencies that interface with court proceedings.

As mentioned earlier, some research participants highlighted HomeFront as a model that Airdrie could follow. HomeFront is a Calgary based organization that ensures victims and offenders receives specialized counselling and treatment services quickly and efficiently. It does so through strong collaboration and coordination among law enforcement, criminal justice and the social service system.\(^3\)

Shelters

Partnerships between Airdrie services and Calgary shelters exist as well. First and foremost, they are very responsive to working in partnership with local organizations to deliver emergency services to victims in Airdrie. Additionally, the Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter provides community outreach counselling services in Airdrie two days a week. Calgary shelters will also provide domestic violence training, workshops and public education sessions in Airdrie as needed.

Calgary Domestic Violence Collective (CDVC)

CDVC is a collective of social profit agencies, funders and governmental bodies that strategically work to address the issue of domestic violence. It is a true “Collective” in that no single agency or organization has ownership of the Collective’s activities or greater decision-making power. In 2013, CDVC was awarded the Alberta Government “Inspiration Award, Leadership in Family Violence Prevention”. The CDVC approach is a best practice that could be modeled by Airdrie domestic violence service providers and stakeholders.

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\(^2\) I-TRAC is “a joint forces multi-disciplinary unit that provides law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies with threat assessment services and proactive approaches to reduce acts of targeted violence within their communities”. [http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/mlfvc-elcvf/vol2/p5.html](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/mlfvc-elcvf/vol2/p5.html)

VII. Service Provider and Service User Feedback

A total of 53 individuals were consulted over the course of 7 focus groups and additional 6 shared feedback over the course of interviews and in email communication. The participants represented key organizations in the community involved in addressing the issue of domestic violence as well as women who have themselves experienced domestic violence.

The focus groups included:

- Airdrie Community Stakeholder Group (6 people) – October 27, 2016
- Offender treatment group (4 people) – October 12, 2016
- Community links group (5 people) – October 27, 2016
- Women with lived experience (7 people) – October 26, 2016
- CFS Airdrie Office (12 people) – October 12, 2016
- RCMP - Government Stakeholders (8 people) – November 3, 2016
- AHS Public Health (12 people) – November 9, 2016

These discussions took place in October and November and addressed four key questions (see focus group invitation letter attached in Appendix B):

- What strengths does Airdrie have that can be utilized to address the issue of domestic violence in its communities?
- What are the challenges Airdrie faces in addressing the issue of domestic violence in its communities?
- When you look outside of Airdrie, what opportunities do you see that Airdrie could utilize to address the issue of domestic violence in its communities?
- When you look outside of Airdrie, what threats do you see that may create barriers to Airdrie in addressing the issue of domestic violence in its communities?

Figure 7 below summarizes, at a high level, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as shared by Airdrie service providers in their interviews and focus groups and confirmed information describing the Airdrie catchment area and service statistics. As shown in Figure 7 there are many considerations that are both a strength and a challenge or an opportunity and a threat. In general, it is Airdrie’s sense of community that is a key strength, it’s growth and lack of resources its key weakness or challenge, and its proximity to Calgary as both its best opportunity and the biggest threat.
**Figure 7. SWOT Analysis Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses/Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Energy and optimism among Airdrie public</td>
<td>• Growth of the city increases challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support for services from broader community members and businesses</td>
<td>• Increased demand for all services and particularly domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community Links providing a large array of needed services</td>
<td>• Growing rates of domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many other services that are essential in addressing domestic violence</td>
<td>• Lack of a safe place for victims</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong community collaboration</td>
<td>• Large proportion of younger population without informal supports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• City Council that sets the tone and facilitates goodwill</td>
<td>• Lack of resources – local services overwhelmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• FCSS focus on prevention so the root causes of domestic violence are addressed</td>
<td>• Insufficient affordable housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increasing awareness among the public that domestic violence as an important issue</td>
<td>• Focus on prevention to the exclusion of crisis support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transportation barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stigma and shame associated with domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Proximity to Calgary and all associated services</td>
<td>• Proximity to Calgary and resulting assumption re: service availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Several emergency and second stage shelters available in Calgary and other surrounding areas</td>
<td>• Emergency shelters in Calgary and elsewhere have high turn away rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Current political climate may be supportive of developing a response to domestic violence in Airdrie</td>
<td>• Domestic violence trends and service funding are influenced by economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Political climate can change very quickly and impact service sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Access barriers in larger systems including police, courts, as well as financial and child-focused services.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
7.1 Community Strengths

The participants were very optimistic about Airdrie community’s ability to address the issue of domestic violence going forward, highlighting multiple community and service strengths that exist in Airdrie. Community capacity to work together and collaborate effectively has been highlighted as one very important opportunity on which to build. They described the community as “incredibly supportive and responsive”, and working well in partnership across a variety of different services, highlighting FCSS collaboration, Airdrie Cares, Interagency Committee, Airdrie Resource Council as examples.

- Airdrie is a model for other communities – we are developing collaborative efforts, we’ve done some amazing things – we’ve had this feedback from Chief Crown that the collaborative approach is the cream of the crop;
- When we have our meetings, we have RCMP, Crown, Victims Assistance, Addiction Services, men’s and women’s treatment services - we all know each other and can talk to each other;
- All the organizations dealing with family violence work together...[providing] the intersectional supports, knowing one another and making referrals – it is amazing;
- [We spent] a lot of time understanding what everyone did...everyone knows each other...we are respectful of one another;
- Collaboration is extremely important... [it creates] open dialogue and communications about complex cases, also about what’s working in agencies, what is each others role...we can walk across the street and talk to them if we need to – it’s a fabulous working environment – we struggle together.

Information sharing was raised as one important element of community collaboration. This is usually a very challenging issue to negotiate when working with families experiencing domestic violence, which appears to have addressed well in Airdrie. Probation appears to act as a central player, gathering and sharing (to the degree possible) information that emerges. Formal consents are also used to support information sharing among different agencies and community partners.

Community Links has also emerged as one of the key community resources that contributes in a significant ways to addressing the issue of domestic violence and is an important service that could be leveraged as Airdrie moves forward with developing its response to the issue of domestic violence. The particular strengths of Community Links included a wide range of services targeting many types of different issues including domestic violence, and their openness to working closely in partnership with other service providers in the community in order to support wrap around service delivery.

- [Community Links] addresses the whole continuum of services...providing non-judgmental support;
- What’s working for us is partnership and relationship with Community Links – they do an intake service...[and together] we can act quickly...it is the way of providing a holistic service;
- Community links – what would we do without them!
- We really value having Community Links in Airdrie because they do a lot of amazing work with family violence.
There were many other services in Airdrie that the participants described as essential and providing important contribution to addressing the issue of domestic violence, including Airdrie District Victims Services, Alberta Addictions and Mental Health Services, Justice System partners, Airdrie Housing, Airdrie Health Services, Alberta Works, Calgary shelters, local schools and others:

- Airdrie District Victims Services described as “exceptional” and a “stand in between the police and the community”, providing court support to victims and working closely with RCMP;
- Alberta Addictions and Mental Health Services that are accessible and well-staffed, working with mandated domestic violence offenders but also providing counselling and general mental health and addiction services as part of community outreach;
- Justice system partners, addressing the issue in a variety of ways, including RCMP’s policy and procedures guiding responses to domestic violence, use of ITRAC to assess risk as well as the specialized Domestic Violence Team; Airdrie Domestic Violence Court that is described as “responsive” and “connected”;
- Urgent Care Response through Airdrie Health Services, with doctors and nurses helping to assess and flag instances of domestic violence, referring to the community services, and providing health-related services and supports;
- Alberta Works helping address the growing demand for services (with about a third related to domestic violence and accessing FLEE funds);
- Partnership between local services and Calgary shelters, providing training as well working in partnership with local organizations to deliver services to victims;
- Local schools contribute in a significant way by helping identify families that need help, providing supports to children and their families and linking them to the needed community services;
- Airdrie Housing providing access to affordable housing and giving priority to women who are fleeing abusive relationship;
- There are numerous other services and supports in the community that work together to help address the issue, e.g., the local Food Bank, Airdrie Child and Family Services, and Boys and Girls Clubs.

The strength of Airdrie also lies in its broader community that is always available to provide informal and personal support as well as help sustain programs. This is done through corporate donations, but also through a variety of clubs as well as local churches that contribute in a variety of different ways including providing space for meetings. The community strength is also in the energy and motivation of some of its members to become vocal and persistent bringing the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie and surrounding community to the forefront.

- We have a group called Airdrie Cares...Airdrie has a huge heart;
- Community is incredibly supportive – every time you put out a need whatever it happens to be this community comes together – Airdrie Angels, Airdrie Dads, a lot of people, good neighbours, once they recognize the need they step up.

All of this work is supported by Airdrie City Council which “sets the tone” and “facilitates the good will in the community”. In particular, the community members appreciate the City’s willingness to listen to the community and respond in correspondence to the community needs. This study was raised as one such example.

64 Alberta Works, Fleeing Abuse Supports
7.2 Service Gaps and Barriers

While it is important to build on and leverage the existing community strengths and opportunities when addressing the issue of domestic violence, it is also necessary to acknowledge and address some of the challenges that are currently present for Airdrie and surrounding areas. Those challenges are described below and include systemic barriers, such as overall lack of resources and problems with larger systems (e.g., legal and justice response, children’s services, and financial supports), but also issues that are common to smaller jurisdictions such as Airdrie, including transportation, housing and general service proximity.

Lack of Resources

The participating service providers spoke to the general lack of resources as a particular challenge impacting their work. They highlighted the need for sustainable and stable funding that would allow for program start-up as well as long-term planning and funding to address the full scope of demand that exists in the community. They also described some funders’ focus on prevention as a barrier, since much of the work to address domestic violence may not qualify as prevention including, in particular, funding for emergency shelters or crisis-related services.

- It’s so unknown...we start programs and then it ends...we need sustainable support;
- City won’t fund family violence...it’s all about prevention;
- It is not just about actual dollars to maintain programs...we could run 3 or 4 additional programs if we had expertise, we lose staff because dollars are not in place;
- Funding is vulnerable to the economy and contrary to what is needed - when economy is bad, domestic violence goes up, therefore the need for money goes up;
- Politics [impacts funding] priority for domestic violence services changes with political will and whim.

Lack of funding, but also the assumptions that people can go to Calgary for services, results in general lack of local service access. There is also frustration among both service providers and service recipients with their inability to provide or to access needed services.

- It is frustrating that we can’t do anything to help them...one woman had really floundered for a long time, has not healed as quickly as she should have;
- I have spoken with a few women here, who said they did not leave their relationships because there was nowhere to go;
- [We should] always remember that just because Calgary is close does not mean it’s accessible.

Service Access Issues

The participants identified several different types of services that presented access challenges for those seeking to get help with the issue of family violence. Oftentimes these services were also described as community strengths, reflecting both differences in the perceptions among the participants, as well as potential inconsistencies in services as they are being delivered.
For example, they identified issues with access to services for children who are exposed to domestic violence, referring to the consistency in response as well as some staff not believing women when they describe the abuse they experienced. They had several suggestions in this regard, including affordable childcare, access to specialized counselling for children as well as children’s advocate to advocate on their behalf.

- There are no resources for children who are acting out in severe manner – we have two play therapists at Community Links but they are booking 2 months out...income is a big issue especially for children’s therapist.

They also spoke about the legal system, including the length of time it takes to process cases in court as well as the lack of local legal supports to ensure victim safety (e.g., obtaining Emergency Protection Orders or Restraining Orders), for families that are dealing with custody issues and require support with supervised exchanges, and for victims to negotiate the justice system. Some had mentioned limitations that RCMP have in how they can help, focusing on the need for physical evidence, need for supervision and training of new recruits, as well as lack of a triage process to manage serious situations.

- Overall legal system is not helpful. There are system breakdowns;
- [We need] services to come out to Airdrie, where people can go and apply for a parenting order; [having to go to Calgary] creates challenges - people have to miss work. We need someone who can come in weekly or bi-weekly...for people to work with the lawyer – within shelter or in the community;
- If there is a no contact order and someone is needing access to a visitation service for either pick up or drop off or providing onsite visitation due to safety concerns...we do not have such a resource here in Airdrie;
- We need free legal advice or free lawyer services. Legal clinic only gives 20 minutes face-to-face or over the phone sessions. Legal advice doesn’t get the job done;
- RCMP should have a case management/triage process, similar to Calgary police service, for more serious DV situations;
- Better connection with RCMP is needed which has a high turnover rate – it’s hard to develop rapport.

The need for better financial supports for women who are trying to leave an abusive situation was also frequently discussed. Considerations included insufficient income support rates, lack of funds for key basic needs such as transportation, utilities and childcare as well as stringent eligibility requirements. Lack of affordable and subsidized housing also contributes to financial challenges that victims of domestic violence experience. The participants provided several different suggestions, including a contingency fund to address emerging needs, support for women to obtain education, low or no cost services and access to a financial advisor.

- When people are leaving the situation – we are able to access Alberta Works but a lot of it is Calgary based, is there a way to support someone for maybe 6 months, to help them get set up and establish?
- At Alberta Works it takes too much time to qualify. Also, women have to go to Calgary and stand in line to apply;
- Increase monthly Alberta Works rates; provide funds for additional needs such as transportation and childcare;
Better financial support – provide an advocate or financial advisor;  
Reprieve or subsidies for bills such as utilities. Banks to give reprieve on mortgage payments;  
We need Alberta works office in Airdrie;  
Access to school or education for the women so they can provide for themselves;  
Provide contingency funds and resources, for example bus tickets, grocery gift cards, gas cards;  
[We need both] affordable housing and low income housing – people can’t find a place to live.

Participants identified transportation as another key barrier, particularly for women fleeing abusive relationships. It takes about 45 minutes to get to Calgary downtown where most of the services are located and most women do not have access to a vehicle or cannot afford a taxi. According to the respondents, the existing bus routes between Airdrie and Calgary are limited, often making it impossible for women to follow-up on referrals, attend appointments or leave their home when their safety is at risk. Participants’ suggestions in this regard included enhancing local outreach response for those who wish to remain in their communities and creating more local bus routes for those who need to access services outside of Airdrie.

Other service needs that were raised in discussions included a need for a 24-hour urgent care response, an organization focusing specifically on immigrant population and their settlement needs, as well as counselling and/or peer support services for women that are free, accessible and have childcare.

7.3 Airdrie Growth and Proximity to Calgary

The focus group and interview participants represented a wide range of organizations in Airdrie that are involved in addressing the issue of domestic violence in the area. They consistently spoke to the timeliness of this project and the urgent need to address the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie. They talked about significant growth the population of Airdrie and Area (over 100,000 people now), the associated increase in local rates of domestic violence (“well above provincial rates”) and the demand for local services.

In the same context, they described Airdrie’s proximity to Calgary as both an opportunity and a threat. There are great opportunities in having access to specialized services and expertise, but the proximity also creates assumptions that there is not a need for locally based services. The latter is particularly an issue for domestic violence services, since Calgary shelters are full and often turn-away applicants.

- It’s so close that the City doesn’t think we need services here;  
  Calgary has over a million people – with 19,000 calls a year [to shelters] ...if [women] get a closed door that can be devastating, Calgary can’t handle their own demand;  
- The numbers have increased – we have seen more individuals seeking supports [for domestic violence services].

While they still see benefit in working with Calgary’s services, they see Airdrie now as a “stand alone” community that requires its own set of services, especially those that address the safety of its citizens and that must be quickly and easily accessible. In particular, they spoke to the issues associated with the absence of a domestic violence shelter which requires that women uproot and travel to Calgary, and manage all of the associated barriers (e.g., being turned away, lack of transportation, taking their children out of school, disconnect from community and services).
Airdrie has big city needs – it is growing so fast, we can’t keep up. We are a city in population but in resources we are not. There is a lack of recognition that we are not a bedroom community of Calgary, we are a stand-alone community;

For us [the proximity to Calgary] means that there is no shelter here and we have 60,000 people... by comparison Strathmore has a shelter; Red Deer is a busy shelter [similar size cities];

Threat is – the “us and them” mentality between Airdrie and Calgary.

7.4 The Most Vulnerable Groups

While the issue of domestic violence spans all population groups and ages, there are some groups that are more vulnerable than others, and their needs must be considered in the planning of the Airdrie response. The feedback from the participants identified groups that are also frequently discussed in domestic violence literature and which included people of child bearing age, families with children as well as other marginalized groups including the poor, seniors, newcomers, those with mental health and addictions and those who are isolated and alone. Of course, in most, if not all instances the families experience more than one of these vulnerability factors. Unique to Airdrie is the issue of isolation – there are many young families here who are new to Airdrie and have no informal supports on whom to rely. The comments below illustrate the participant feedback:

Families with children
- Most of the individuals we see are single mothers with children who are separating due to domestic violence;
- [We often see] larger families or higher number of children and family. Rarely a single child household;
- Homelessness among youth is quite high [and may be due to domestic violence at home];
- Children with behavioural and developmental issues may cause or escalate domestic violence in the home;
- Children are repeating patterns of the abusive partner.

Impacted by economy
- General economy impacts [domestic violence] ...higher stress leads to domestic violence – the number of referrals ...have increased [with recent downturn of the economy];
- [Stress in the relationship is caused by] change in family dynamics and job situation (e.g., oil riggers come back home after being laid off);
- [A new term - Recession separated – is coined to describe situations where individuals are] living together for financial reasons though they consider themselves separated;
- For most, its job loss, frustration over finances...the families are struggling with job loss – come to a breaking point, hitting a wall;

Isolated families
- [There are many] isolated families, new families to Airdrie. Not a lot of natural supports in place. Not many extended family members, many young families;
- Many families are “transplants” from Calgary – it is a young population that lacks support because no family or other relatives live here.

Newcomers to Canada
- As much as Airdrie is Caucasian – we have seen increases in multicultural backgrounds, increases in different backgrounds;
- We are seeing more [newcomer] communities – second language speakers can’t attend groups, there are translation/interpretation barriers [and we have to refer them] to the multicultural centre at the north end of Calgary...there is nothing here for ethno-cultural communities;
We are definitely aware of this and make sure that our resources are addressing those pieces and sensitivity to cultural background... English is not an issue but culturally there is a problem;

Families that come from other cultures come with extra barriers, they often don’t have supports in the community;

Immigrants/newcomers to Canada [come with] male dominant cultural background.

Seniors
- I have seen senior [abuse] – child to parent (he was receiving the disability pension...rent was not being paid...she was stealing the money);
- Seniors are also a vulnerable group...we have had seniors divorcing after 50 years of marriage – they don’t have any idea of how to live on their own;
- Older [clients] put up with it [abuse]. Maybe because of marriage vows;
- We have seen an increase in seniors – elder abuse, historical trauma.

LGBTQ
- [There has been] an increase in gay and lesbian domestics – maybe more are speaking out and more are living here in Airdrie...they need supports – maybe their family is not supportive... In a couple of cases children are involved.

Vulnerable communities – mental health and addictions
- We have a psychologist from FAOS65 [to manage higher risk clients] ...some clients have mental health issues that are really vague, difficult to proceed with those types of cases... they are voluntary come to us and we can’t manage;
- Those experiencing addictions;
- [Oftentimes domestic violence incidents] are alcohol related.

7.5 Directions for Action

The participants’ suggestions for change reflected closely their opinions regarding community strengths and challenges. In most instances the suggestions focused on three main interrelated directions: 1) opening a locally-based women’s shelter; 2) strengthening the collaborative community response to domestic violence; and 3) enhancing prevention and public awareness activities.

Need for a Women’s Shelter

The need for a locally-based shelter was identified in every focus group or interview. The participants justified the need for shelter by citing a growing number of domestic violence referrals, increasing pressure from local community and the issues associated with going to Calgary for women and children who wish to leave abusive relationships. Some of those considerations included women not willing or able to leave their community, challenges accessing shelters in Calgary, as well as difficulties associated with staying in Calgary and having to access services and schools in Airdrie.

- It is essential to have an emergency shelter – [for women] to get prepared and have their minds and hearts in the right place...many women don’t realize what is ok and what isn’t ok;
- Airdrie is big enough for its own shelter. A shelter is an important first step in leaving and abusive relationship;
- There are a number of people that won’t leave the community... [or if they do go to a shelter in Calgary] there is no room for them...or they can’t get counselling from Airdrie;

65 Forensic Assessment Outpatient Service delivered by Alberta Health
- We need a woman’s emergency shelter because Airdrie women are being turned away from shelters in Calgary;
- We need an emergency shelter that should be in Airdrie or in surrounding areas - women have children who are in school and women maybe working in Airdrie;
- Shelter is the single most important resource needed for women right now. Most people I see are stay at home moms with small children;
- Domestic violence in Airdrie would decrease if we had a shelter – maybe people are staying in their homes because shelters are full, and the situation is escalating;
- Our domestic violence stats are going up and they are repetitive, if they know there is a shelter they will be more likely to leave;
- We are a smaller community [and some people are] afraid of the large city which is what is stopping these families [from going to Calgary]. They don’t want to be in a big city and are not used to the environment.

The participants also recognized that a shelter in Airdrie is but one component of the full continuum of long term, supported housing options that is needed by those leaving domestic violence, and including second stage shelters as well as long-term, affordable and safe housing.

- Big part of it is ending the cycle – we also need a second stage and continual health [support];
- What happens after 21 days [in an emergency shelter]? It’s not a long time...we need some type of housing...there is not enough time to locate affordable housing and the rent supplement is off the table right now;
- Affordable housing is needed - increase the number of units. For example, couples are staying together but living separate lives because there is no affordable housing;
- When your shelter gets built we have to provide a comprehensive spectrum and path – what is her path to affordable or market housing and moving forward in her life? We have to identify that path;
- It’s the ones that have gone through that and are ready to leave which is where we get stuck, or the high-risk people who need to leave now ...we need a whole wrap around piece and long-term supports – second stage and all of the community supports are key to that as well.

The participants also highlighted some important issues that need to be considered when discussing the need for a local women’s shelter. First was the question of reciprocity among women shelters in Alberta, Canada and internationally; ensuring that there is access to facilities across the world to support women and children wherever they live and wherever they wish to go in order to escape abuse. This means that there may be women from outside of Airdrie accessing the Airdrie shelter as well as women from Airdrie who may still wish to go to Calgary or elsewhere.

Second, was a cautionary note with respect to ensuring confidentiality of women who will come to Airdrie shelter, which may be difficult to sustain in a smaller Airdrie community. Ultimately, everyone will know where shelter is located, which may pose a safety risk for shelter residents. However, in many jurisdictions the shelters are no longer hidden places but rather are well integrated into the community and supported by partnering community service providers. The shelter location is known, and kept secure using an array of security measures and partnerships with local police departments.

There was also a recognition that bringing a shelter to Airdrie will have an impact on programs that are already in place: some may need to grow to support shelter programming and some maybe in jeopardy if shelter services duplicate what is already in place. Careful planning must take place before decisions are made, building effective partnerships between the new shelter and existing programs and services.
There needs to be shelter space as well as additional supports around shelter... They will have their own staff and outreach programming – they have to have the funds and they have to be able to staff it and it has to be sustainable .... [existing programs] should not pickup everything;

The shelter will enhance programs that are already here;

Augment [existing programming] because they are already well established;

Huge part of my job is to make sure that the funding is intact – if shelter comes in it will be a competitor.

Collaborative Community Response

While the participants spoke to the need for a shelter, they also understood that a shelter alone will not address the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie. Ultimately, an integrated initiative is what is needed in Airdrie with shelter, existing community programs, collaborative initiatives and housing all coming together to create a comprehensive community response. Some participants highlighted the example of the HomeFront partnership as a model that Airdrie could follow, others talked about assigning advocates to work on women’s behalf, and others still spoke about a ‘one-stop-shopping’ idea where a woman and her children could access a full continuum of services that they need.

There might be a lack of understanding that shelters, though part of the puzzle won’t fix everything, providing community programs also needs to come with that;

I really liked the HomeFront partnership in Calgary...and would like a HomeFront model here, provided [better training for all systems involved];

Need one centre where everything can be coordinated for the woman. The center could be a one-stop shop for victims of domestic violence. Ideally, service providers would be developing the centre collaboratively;

We need an advocate or a person who will stay with the women from start to end. This should be a professional...

Strong collaboration and coordination among Airdrie service providers was described as an important precursor to developing a collaborative community response. Although most saw community collaboration as a strength, some issues do exist and would need to be considered for Airdrie to effectively respond to domestic violence. Some respondents saw the City of Airdrie taking on the role of community convener and others suggested establishing a community coordinating body similar to Calgary’s Domestic Violence Collective (CDVC).

Sometimes we work very well together and there are times when we get into our silos and don’t co-operate as much as we should;

Improved communication among service providers would help – organizations can get creative when working together;

[We need] better coordination/communication/collaboration between service providers regarding domestic violence strategies. Similar to CDVC;

[We need to engage in] community development work. There’s too much isolation amongst agencies. It creates a referral circle. People don’t know what others do;

We need collaboration of ideas and City should take this role on. It should coordinate the service providers, figure out how to communicate and work together. This is for all stakeholders, government, non-profit, schools.
Prevention and Community Awareness

The participants spoke to the importance of general community awareness about the issue of domestic violence and referred to several local initiatives that are already in place. These included multiple events during the family violence prevention month, the presentations service providers make in the community as well as increased media coverage. However, while this work has produced some shifts in the community awareness and understanding of domestic violence, the participants thought that more work needed to be done to engage the community and enhance general awareness of the issues.

- There is more awareness about family violence within the city of Airdrie, more media coverage, it is more normalized to admit there is something wrong, it’s getting harder to deny that it’s an issue in Airdrie;
- We do general presentations in the community...but it can be challenging to reach those vulnerable populations, we only reach a small percentage;
- There has been a bit of a shift in terms of family violence and partner violence that has increased over the years... we have family prevention month; we do multiple interviews with media, events, there is more and more awareness out there...but there is still more work to be done in terms of how we understand family violence – the fears and stigma.

The stigma surrounding the issue of domestic violence is an important consideration to address if Airdrie works to further develop its community awareness work. The community needs to be encouraged to speak about the issue, acknowledge its scope, understand the issues of power and control, learn about healthy relationships and how to step in when they see violence taking place. Community awareness initiatives should target all segments of the population – the general community, schools, first responders, community organizations and churches.

- People don’t think domestic violence is a thing any more – blown away by the scope of the problem – we need to expose it and shine the light on it;
- Public will likely say – we don’t have an issue if they have not been touched by it ... people don’t talk about it even if it is happening with them...until you need something its not your concern;
- We need community awareness about what abuse is so the neighbors, teachers and employers can help;
- [People need to understand how] domestic violence affects every stratum of the society, [addressing] stigma as another hurdle, it’s embarrassing and shameful...there has to be a way to educate people about what really is abuse and who is vulnerable to it.

Disseminating information about services is another important element of community awareness work. We often heard from people about victims’ lack of knowledge of existing services and where to go when they needed help.

- I struggled with feeling of being really alone, not knowing how to make the connections;
- More and more younger women in abusive relationships do not know that this is an abusive relationship and do not knowing who to turn to and reach out for support;
- I need something to tell me what to do. Don’t give me a pamphlet. Don’t give me too much information and options. Women can’t sort it out and just need someone to tell her what to do (especially around legal issues);
### 7.6 Next Steps for Addressing the Issue of Domestic Violence in Airdrie

One of the questions for the participants was to provide suggestions for the Airdrie with respect to the immediate next steps for addressing the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie. Their priorities mirrored much of what they had said over the course of the discussion and focused on developing a community plan and common vision for addressing the issue of domestic violence, developing a continuum of services, including a shelter and community awareness components and, addressing most significant resource access barriers.

**Develop a Plan for a Collaborative Response**

The participants suggested that, before any concrete decisions are made, the key community stakeholders work together to develop a plan focused on short- and long-term solutions, goals and a timeline for implementation. This plan has to be anchored in a common vision that is developed by key community partners and stakeholders, sustainable over a long-term and informed by local statistics as well as best practice models and frameworks. No such plan currently exists and is required if it is to inform the direction for this work.

- *I would just advocate on behalf of all of the agencies working together towards a common vision and share with them that we are willing to work together, to let them know that we have a willingness to work with them and work with each other and create some long-term solutions;*
- *I would really would like [to develop] a vision of Airdrie as a safe city...I would like us to get some passion to make Airdrie just an amazing place to live;*
- *Make sure the ground work is in place;*
- *It has to be sustainable – in family violence especially you can’t start something and yank it out later.*

Bringing the community together was identified as one of the critical first priorities, building on some of the existing initiatives, but also possibly creating new ways of coming together that involves all key stakeholders and decision-makers (i.e., the City of Airdrie, the service providing organizations, community members, representatives of the outlying communities). One important consideration in this work is to ensure that the plan can leverage existing services and resources instead of unnecessarily re-creating something new.

- *Continuing to bring the partners together, talk about how we are using current resources together...respecting what [those resources] contribute; ensure that all the right players are involved in the process;*
- *Look at the local resources as first... first ask local services rather than agencies from Calgary or Red Deer;*
- *Collaboration is built on trust and respect – key is in not trying to bring outside staff in, instead looking at what is already here that works really well;*
- *Help facilitate the dialogue about the need for coordinated supports by service providers;*
- *It needs to come from the people who are doing the work and the clients, in unison with the city... talking to people who have been doing the work for a long time – listening to what the gaps are and what is needed...it needs to be a community and group effort.*
Develop a Service Continuum

Although emergency shelter was brought up as an important need, there was a general consensus that it should represent one element of the overall community response, which should also contain a cross-sectoral integrated service approach, system navigation, community awareness, outreach services, and access to affordable housing.

- Develop an umbrella system of communication and coordination of a domestic violence situation i.e. a System Coordinator who has knowledge of other services;
- We need more resources and integrated units [police and community services]. Domestic violence is a social issue not a police issue;
- Access to affordable housing needs to be key piece...we need to have more units to help support families in need;
- Shelter and low income housing is needed in Airdrie;
- Having outreach services, building an emergency shelter is awesome and all of the other services should be part of it to support the full journey;
- Looking at the whole continuum of services that’s needed with shelter a part of it...we don’t want to put on a band-aid and ignore the rest;
- Pour money into resources like a shelter, housing or counselling, outreach worker, systems navigation. Women are temporarily powerless to take control over their own life. This support would reduce dependency on the system in the long run;
- Taking a look at a bigger picture, need a shelter but also need supports in place, also the second stage and a third stage piece.

Address Resource Gaps

There was also an emphasis in these conversations on addressing the general problems with resource availability including, in particular, funding for existing community services that are overloaded with the demand for service and enhancing access to transportation, legal supports and emergency response.

- Women need a safe point of contact 24/7 and the transportation to it;
- Safe advocate/social worker. Someone who can walk with them through the whole process. Someone who knows the legal and all systems;
- A facility that can help with civil orders, and educating them on it;
- Tell them we need resources here in Airdrie because transportation to Calgary is too difficult;
- Increase of resources, increase accessibility to resources, so that community can move forward.

Build Community Awareness

The participants also emphasized that both intervention (e.g., the shelter and associated services) and prevention (e.g., community awareness) are important and that the Airdrie plan should support both. With respect to community awareness the participants suggested focusing on education of children and youth, as well as the broader community.

- Let’s build the shelter and raise awareness in young teenage children – what is right and wrong behaviour;
- Airdrie has a lot of events – it’s about being present at all of these different functions and utilizing those [to disseminate information] ...should also raise awareness in schools;
- The way you broach it in the community is incredibly important – have to have a positive approach, have to be careful about it;
- Need education about what exactly abuse is;
- Do early intervention/awareness in schools. Focus on young teens i.e. grade 6 and up – in transition from bullying to potential domestic violence;
- It is a circle of violence, learned behaviour. Need to stop it by starting with children: safe exchange, child counselling, teach emotional regulation, i.e., teach how to deal with anger and frustration;
- Develop awareness and recognition of emotional and mental abuse. Focus on better protection of children’s mental health in these situations.
VIII. Community Feedback

General community feedback was gathered using an on-line (Survey Monkey) platform (see Appendix C for the survey content). It was marketed as part of the family violence prevention month activities and distributed during the month of November 2016. The survey was developed together with the Project Steering Committee, and was distributed to Airdrie community via social media sites including Websites, Facebook and Twitter as well as during family violence prevention month events and by respondents sharing the survey link with family and friends.

The purpose of the survey was to gather perspectives of the broader community about the seriousness of the issue of family violence in Airdrie as well as about access to and availability of services in Airdrie for those experiencing family violence. The survey data was gathered anonymously, not requesting participants’ identifying information. City of Airdrie staff and the Project Steering Committee members were instrumental in insuring that the survey reached a large number of Airdrie community members.

8.1 Survey Participants

At total of 555 individuals responded to the survey – a substantial number given usual uptake of similar types of tools, and perhaps confirming the importance of this issue in Airdrie. Their responses were entered into Survey Monkey between November 24, 2016 and January 29, 2017.

- About 80% of the survey participants were female (n=454), this rate consistent with the often-cited proportion of victims of family violence who are female\(^{56}\);
- Most participants were between 25 and 54 years old (78%, n=433), and about 19% of participants were 55 years of age or older (n=106). The remaining 3% were 18 years of age or younger. Again, this distribution reflects the age of individuals who are most likely to experience family violence – adults in their childbearing years\(^{57}\). Note, however, that the respondent group was older than the general population of Airdrie, where 35% of general Airdrie population are between 18 and 34 as compared to 28% of the survey respondents\(^ {58}\);
- A third of respondents (29%, n=158) dealt with family violence as part of their employment or volunteer work. This question was important to ask in order to understand the degree to which responses may be informed by individual’s professional or volunteer experience.
- As intended, almost all of the respondents (92%, n=509) were residents of Airdrie.
- About half of the respondents accessed the survey using Facebook (51%, n=281), most of the others learning about it from friends or family (17%, n=93), or City of Airdrie website (15%, n=82). There were numerous other sources, reflecting the effectiveness of survey distribution approach and including community awareness events, twitter, Airdrie radio stations or newspaper, employment and community meetings.

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\(^{56}\) Infographic: Family Violence in Canada, Statistics Canada. Available at: [http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2016001-eng.htm](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2016001-eng.htm)


\(^{58}\) All population stats from [http://www.airdrie.ca/getDocument.cfm?id=4366](http://www.airdrie.ca/getDocument.cfm?id=4366)
8.2 The Issue of Family Violence in Airdrie

Over half of the respondents (56%, n=312) indicated that they knew someone or have personally experienced family violence while living in Airdrie. Although likely not representative of the overall Airdrie population, this is a significant proportion, especially when compared to Alberta rate of family violence of 290 victims per 100,000 people. 

Even a higher proportion, 89% (n=462), thought that it is extremely (n=371) or fairly (n=92) important that the issue of family violence be addressed in Airdrie. Predictably, the community members are likely to assign less importance to addressing the issue of family violence if they have not had a personal experience or do not know someone who has experienced it. For example, 11% of those who have not had any previous experience as compared to only 2% of those with experience had indicated that this issue was not important or that they did not know (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Assignment of Importance by Personal Knowledge

Similar results are obtained when the assignment of importance is compared by gender or by person’s involvement in addressing the issue professionally or on volunteer basis. Females were more likely than males to think that the issue is extremely or fairly important (85% as compared to 77% of males), and those involved in addressing the issue were more likely than others to think so (88% as compared to 82%). It should be noted that even among groups who are less likely to think that addressing the issue of family violence was important, a majority still think that it should be addressed.

8.3 Seeking Help

Those who had experienced or knew someone who experienced family violence were asked whether they or the person tried to get help to deal with family violence. Of 308 people who answered this question 30% (n=93) indicated that they or the person did not look for help. Fifty-three of those who did not look for help identified reasons for not seeking help, with lack of Airdrie-based services as the most frequently occurring response:

Note that the terms domestic violence and family violence are used interchangeably in this document — the term family violence was used in the survey to be consistent with the labeling of the “Family Violence Prevention Month”

Lack of locally-based or responsive services (n=19)
Fear for her safety (n=9)
Felt she could manage on her own and did not ask for help (n=9)
Stigma/shame/embarrassment (n=7)
Did not know where to go (n=5)
Did not recognize behaviour as abusive (n=4)
Did not have needed financial resources to get help (n=3)
Emotionally too fragile to seek help (n=2)

The idea that there are not enough services in Airdrie to address the issue of family violence is further supported by the responses to the question: “Is there enough help in Airdrie for people experiencing family violence?” As illustrated in the chart below, only 10% of those who responded to this question thought that there was enough help, with 49% responding negatively and the remaining 41% who were uncertain or did not know.

Figure 9. Is there enough help in Airdrie for people experiencing family violence?

Again, there were differences among respondents depending on their gender, their experience with family violence and their professional or volunteer association:

- Females were more likely to indicate that there was not enough help (49% as compared to 22% of males), while males were more likely to say that there was enough help (22% as compared to 6% of females) or they did not know (39% as compared to 26% of females). This break-down confirms that females are much more likely to be impacted by the issue of family violence than males;
- Those who have had some exposure to family violence were more likely to indicate that there was not enough help (57% as compared to 29% of those who have not had any exposure), and predictably, those without any exposure were more likely to not know about availability of help (46% as compared to 17% of those with experience).
- Those who volunteer or work professionally in the field were also more likely to indicate that there was not enough help – in fact they were the largest group in this regard (59% as compared to 38% of those who do not work or volunteer in the field). Hypothetically, those who deal with the issue on a daily basis might have a better understanding of its scope.
8.4 Type of Help Available

Among those 193 respondents who did seek help and responded to the question about type of help that was available to them, 36% (n=69) indicated that they got all the help that was needed, while the simple majority, 47% (n=90), said that they needed more or different help than was available. The remaining 17% (n=34) provided additional explanations, in most instances referring to a need for a locally-based shelter as well as access to other services and resources, such as transportation, legal supports and counselling.

The respondents were also asked to identify the services they actually used when seeking help. They often identified several types of services, usually including the RCMP, some type of counselling service (e.g., Community Links), services in Calgary and Airdrie Victims Services. These services were similar to those identified by all respondents when they were asked where they would go for help if they had experienced family violence (Table 1).

There were some differences between the responses of those who had used services and when all of the respondents were asked about the services they would use. Many more of the larger group would go to RCMP or police (47% vs. 36%), but fewer appeared to know about existing services – 8% said that they did not know where to go, and fewer identified local services such as Community Links, or Airdrie Victims Services. Although caution is recommended when interpreting these comparisons of two different groups of respondents, these results support the notion that the broader community is not well aware of the existing services or that there are not enough local services that are available to support people dealing with family violence.

Table 1. Services Used by Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services and Supports</th>
<th>Used (n=192)</th>
<th>Will Use (n=444)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RCMP (and 911)</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Links</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter in Calgary or other Calgary Services</td>
<td>3061</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airdrie Victims Services</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified Counselling and Support</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Friends</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Mental Health Services</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church/Minister</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and Family Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other62</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know/Nowhere</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey participants’ responses to the question about type of help that was needed but not available when they were seeking help mirrored that of the focus groups perspective on service gaps. A total of 112 people provided responses to this question. Five major themes emerged and are summarized below and illustrated with selected comments.

61 In many instances the respondents were not able to access the shelter due to its being full
62 Services for children and youth, FCSS, legal supports, food bank, Red Cross, school, internet
1. A safe place that is locally based or a shelter or safe affordable housing (n=70, 63%)
   - The woman’s husband was prone to violence and had a record of aggravated assault against another woman in his past. She feared for the safety of herself and her young child. Hours were spent on the phone looking for a shelter, but they were all full. Finally, she was able to get into a hotel through Alberta Works, but that was only for a few days.
   - Having a shelter in Airdrie would prevent women living in Airdrie from having to spend the little money they might have on fuel to get their kids to and from school while living in a shelter in Calgary. Also, when you live in Airdrie, most everything you need and do on a daily basis is in Airdrie. Having to live in Calgary at a shelter and deal with life in Airdrie just adds to the stress which no one needs when they are already going through so much.

2. Availability of general counselling and supports for women and their children as well as those that understand their needs (n=30, 27%)
   - I spoke to someone regarding my child being sexually abused... I’m not being taken seriously. They think I’m lying and just trying to get my ex (daughter’s father) in trouble.
   - A restraining order was put in place to prevent further abuse from the perpetrator. However, no other counselling or wrap-around supports were provided.
   - There wasn’t a great deal of support in Airdrie (or maybe there is but it’s not common enough knowledge for the supports to be easily found and accessed...which is true of a lot of the supports in Airdrie).

3. Financial supports and assistance to help manage the transition from abusive relationship, e.g., rent, childcare, income support, transportation (n=19, 17%)
   - Either way the system is not set up to help those who want to leave and have no financial relief to support food and shelter for mother and child for a prolonged period of time so the mother usually is forced to go back to the abuser and expose children to unsafe situations.
   - Help with rent so she and her 6 kids could stay in their home, less red tape every time she needed help. If it wasn’t for her church she and her children would have been homeless and hungry.

4. More consistent and compassionate response from RCMP (n=13, 12%)
   - RCMP was not particularly helpful in providing assistance to get the person’s belongings from their home, nor were they inclined to do something when this person was being stalked and harassed by their former partner. Threats were uttered to this person’s friends. Again, no action taken.
   - The RCMP refused to arrest the husband, even though he was continually breaching the protection order/peace bond.

5. Affordable or free legal assistance and advice for victims of family violence (n=11, 10%)
   - Help with lawyers, help with finances - I’m not I charge of the money ... all the questions I was asked I couldn’t get the help...I never knew how much anything was payed for billed ... I was turned away from Legal Aid because I didn’t know how much things cost.
   - A service [for victims] like Calgary Homefront does not appear to be available in Airdrie.
8.5 Community Feedback Summary

The on-line survey was used to gather responses from the general Airdrie population and appeared extremely successful in its ability to reach a relatively large number of citizens (n=555). Although the respondents may not have necessarily represented all of Airdrie, the survey suggests that family violence is a significant issue in Airdrie – 56% of respondents indicated that they experienced or knew someone who experienced family violence and almost 90% thought that it is important that the issue of family violence is addressed in Airdrie.

The approach to seeking help in Airdrie depends very much on what is currently available in the community. The respondents generally access RCMP, Community Links or Airdrie Victims Services and a sizeable proportion would like more locally-based services such as an emergency women’s shelter (63%), more counselling options (27%), more financial supports (17%), enhanced police response (12%) and affordable legal supports (10%).
IX. Conclusion and Recommendations

This document is the research report developed in response to the call for more information regarding domestic violence in Airdrie. The research was intended to highlight the roles and responsibilities of the broad range of community stakeholders in providing effective best practice strategies to meet the well-being and social needs of the community with respect to domestic violence.

The primary research framework was contextualized using an analysis of population trends in Airdrie and its catchment area, review of domestic violence rates in the area and overview of services currently available to women leaving abusive relationships. The study also uncovered what service providers believe is happening in Airdrie regarding domestic violence and what is potentially needed for the community to address this social problem. A public survey was also conducted to reveal a ‘big picture’ of the perception and understanding of Airdrie residents regarding this social problem.

Domestic violence is a complex social problem that happens in all cultures and religions, in all ethnic and racial communities, at every age, and in every income group. When family violence does occur, the victims are overwhelmingly of the female gender. Airdrie is not immune to the problem of domestic violence. Airdrie suffers from as much as four times the Albertan average of domestic violence cases. Based on locally acquired statistics, the rate of domestic violence occurrence is increasing dramatically in Airdrie.

There is a full range of support services in Airdrie and surrounding area for victims of domestic violence. However, two significant gaps exist:

1) There is no domestic violence shelter of any type or size in Airdrie. This requires residents to leave their community at a critical time of crisis.
2) Other than the lack of shelter, many other requisite services are in place. However, they are insufficient to meet the increasing demand. Some of this can be attributed to Airdrie’s increasing population, though not all. Nevertheless, more resources, and strategies to identify needed capacities, are required for each of the current and potential services to expand and meet resident need.

Based on the community survey results, Airdrie residents are aware of domestic violence occurring in their community and concerned that the issue is not being sufficiently addressed. Indeed, only 10% of survey participants indicated that there is enough help in Airdrie for victims of domestic violence and 93% said it is fairly or extremely important that the issue addressed in Airdrie. The City of Airdrie may wish to positively respond to its citizen’s opinions by directly funding and overtly support funding applications to governments, foundations and other donors that may secure funds for the full range of prevention and intervention services related to domestic violence.
9.1 Recommendations

The request from the City of Airdrie was to provide high-level recommendations, focusing on initial first steps in addressing the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie, rather than specific details focused on logistics of implementation. In light of this direction, we propose the following recommendations:

1. Develop a plan for a coordinated community response to the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie and Area.

Moving forward with the work of addressing the issue of domestic violence requires a coordinated community response that involves all relevant service sectors, including non-profits, the community at large and various levels of government. The community can work together to develop a comprehensive plan for this response, leveraging existing services and identifying service gaps. An effective response to the social issue of domestic violence in Airdrie requires a cross-sectoral integrated service approach for victims and perpetrators of abuse, including systemic advocacy, community awareness, dedicated domestic violence court, outreach services and system navigation support, as well as access to housing.

This plan could be targeting both short- and long-term solutions and develop goals and timeline for implementation. The plan would outline concrete actions, needed resources and associated responsibilities and focus on the elements recommended below. The plan needs to be sustainable over a long term and be informed by statistics and research as cited in this report, as well as best practice models and frameworks. Critical to success of its implementation is ensuring that the plan builds upon strength of services that are already available and functioning effectively in Airdrie.

The City of Airdrie could take a lead role in developing the processes and facilitating community discussions and building on strong collaboration already developed among Airdrie service providers and the high level of interest and commitment demonstrated by stakeholders throughout this research project. An external facilitator knowledgeable of domestic violence issues will also be required to guide the process, relieve stakeholders from much of the related workload and ensure that key elements of coordinated response, programming, staffing and operations are fully reflected.

2. Develop a plan for a locally-based shelter.

The lack of shelter is an especially concerning gap in resources because of how essential shelter is at the time of crisis. The shelters in Calgary are almost always full and therefore difficult for Airdrie residents to access. Airdrie residents leaving abusive relationships may be able to access one of the options offered, but it is certainly not something that they can count on. There is no doubt that the city of Airdrie requires some form of immediate and longer-term shelter options to offer these residents.

Developing a shelter in one’s community is a significant undertaking. It is usually initiated by a non-profit group and achieved through significant collaboration between the non-profits, the community at large and all levels of government. The cross sectoral steering committee convened to develop the plan could also support the development of a shelter plan. Once established, shelters become an important piece of the professional network that is needed to address the social problem of domestic violence in a community. Shelters that are operated by lay people rather than professionals have been found to close within the first few years of operations. One recent example is Sparrow’s Hope, a shelter that opened in St. Albert in 2013 and closed in 2014.66

66 http://www.westlocknews.com/Sparrow%E2%80%99s-Hope-shuttered-20140311
Airdrie could build upon several opportunities to develop a shelter and expand its support services to victims of domestic violence. One such opportunity is community support. In the past, the Rotary Club has expressed interest in the need for a shelter and dedicated one housing unit for victims of domestic violence. Another is that new land has been acquired through the recent annexation, providing an opportunity for a shelter location. In addition, the Federal government has expressed interest in infrastructure development such as affordable housing specifically for victims of domestic violence. Federal funding opportunities exist now though it is difficult to know how long they will be in place. Finally, local research on several different shelter models does exist and could be drawn upon to develop a shelter that will best fit the Airdrie community.

3. **Enhance affordable housing options**

Airdrie Housing Limited offers clean, safe homes at affordable rents for those who qualify. Their statistics indicate that domestic violence is a concern to over one-third of Airdrie Housing clients. Given that the number one reason women stay in an abusive relationship is that there is nowhere else to go, these statistics offer strong support for expansion of the number of affordable housing units in Airdrie. Also, while women who experience domestic violence and try to access Airdrie Housing have priority status theoretically, the current referral process does not facilitate that intention. As a result, many women move away from Airdrie for housing.

To address the affordable housing needs specific to domestic violence, Airdrie Housing Limited could consider revising its procedures to better prioritize survivors of domestic violence as well as expand the number of affordable housing units available to them.

4. **Enhance access to locally-based community services**

The research revealed that non-sheltering, community based services do exist in Airdrie but are also well over capacity. Services that are of particular priority to Airdrie citizens who are experiencing domestic violence include counselling, affordable housing, system navigation as well as financial and legal supports. Because the data collected by NRVCL, other non-profits and the provincially mandated services show a significant and steady increase in the number of referrals they each receive, work is needed with all stakeholders including provincial and federal counterparts to develop locally-based services to meet the demand.

Implementing the recommendations above will be an ambitious endeavour. However, it will be a significant and important one as well. It will show that Municipal representatives not only listen to the opinions of its residents, service providers and other stakeholders, but that they are willing to collaborate and act upon them in order to achieve safety, security and well-being of its community members. It is a worthy endeavour and one that the City of Airdrie should be applauded for undertaking.
Appendix A
Study Participants

Angela Wright, ADVAS
Barb Gross, NRVCL – Manager Family Resource Services
Barb Tanner, School Resource Counsellor
Bernie Moen, NRVCL – Manager of Counselling Services
Brenda Hume, NRVCL – Executive Director
Brenden Kroeker, AHS Public Health
Caren Anderson, NRVCL – Supervisor of Counselling Services
Carmen Fitt, CFS – Airdrie Office
Carolyn Vucsics, AHS Public Health
Christal Boys, Airdrie Power
Cindy Lipsett, CFS – Airdrie Office
Constable Carla Norum, General Investigation Section - Domestic Violence Unit - Airdrie
Constable Erin Sowers, General Investigation Section - Domestic Violence Unit - Airdrie
Constable Jennifer Weedmark, Airdrie RCMP Community Resource Officer, School Liaison
Constable Justin Gallant, General Investigation Section - Domestic Violence Unit - Airdrie
Corporal Pascal Richard
Dianne Campbell, AHS Public Health
Gloria Hemming, AHS Public Health
James J. Smith, CFS – Airdrie Office
Jena Roberts, CWES
Jody Plomer, CFS – Airdrie Office
Karina Cantiga, AHS Public Health
Kathy Jones, AHS Public Health
Kim Hill, AHS Public Health
Lea Bediako, CFS – Airdrie Office
Lisa Conner, CFS – Airdrie Office
Lori Henderson, NRVCL
Laurie Jacob-Toews, NRVCL – Manager of Community Development
Lori McRitchie, Airdrie Food Band
Margie Yellowega, AHS Public Health
Mary Pat Heily, AHS Public Health
Megan Bott, NRVCL – Intake Team Lead
Melissa Lefebre, Alberta Works, Radisson Office
Melody McCann, Closer to Home
Morgan MacLeod, CFS – Airdrie Office
Natalie Sztogryn, CFS – Airdrie Office
Natasha Pearson, ADVAS
Pansie Starker, Dinah’s Daughters
Pat Davis, AHS Addictions Services
Rebecca Aharer, CFS – Airdrie Office
Ruth Strohschein, AHS Public Health
Sandy Phillips, AHS Public Health
Sergeant Kent Dahl, General Investigation Section Airdrie
Shelley Sweet, Airdrie Housing
Staff Sergeant Joshua Graham, General Investigation Section Airdrie
Tanya Bowdrige, CFS – Airdrie Office
Victoria Lewis, AHS Public Health
Appendix B
Focus Groups Introductory Letter

September 20, 2016

Dear Community Member,

As you may know, the City of Airdrie has commissioned a research project regarding domestic violence services in your community. This research project will help City Council make decisions about future priorities, initiatives and community supports, as well as identify strategies that will address the issue of domestic violence in Airdrie.

Your name has been put forth as someone who could provide valuable information to this project. We would therefore like to invite you to a community consultation in the form of a focus group of 5 to 12 people. The consultation process will be designed to gather your insight into Airdrie’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and strengths as they relate to domestic violence in the community. Sample questions that may asked are:

- What strengths does the Airdrie have that can be utilized to address the issue of domestic violence in its communities?
- What are the challenges does Airdrie faces in addressing the issue of domestic violence in its communities?
- When you look outside of Airdrie, what opportunities do you see that Airdrie could utilize to address the issue of domestic violence in its communities?
- When you look outside of Airdrie, what threats do you see that may create barriers to the Airdrie in addressing the issue of domestic violence in its communities?

This consultation process will also inform us about what you are experiencing in your day to day service delivery, what services are currently in place and where there are gaps in services, if any.

Focus groups are currently being scheduled so we will send time, date and location details as soon as possible. We hope you will join us and share your perspective on this important issue. Please contact us should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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Appendix C
City of Airdrie ‘Prevention of Family Violence Month’ Survey

In recognition of November as “Prevention of Family Violence Month” the City of Airdrie has commissioned a research study to learn about resident perspective about family violence in your community. This research project will help City Council make decisions about future priorities, initiatives and community supports, as well as identify strategies that will address the issue of family violence in Airdrie.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this 5 minute survey. Your feedback is very important to us and will contribute to a better understanding of this important social issue. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. We are not asking for your name. The data will be reported only in the aggregate and no individual responses will be identified.

Upon completion, we would appreciate it if you would forward this link to at least one adult male and one adult female who live in Airdrie and whom you believe would be willing to complete this survey. Thank you.

1. What is your age?
   - Under 18
   - 18 to 24
   - 25 to 34
   - 35 to 44
   - 45 to 54
   - 55 to 64
   - 65 to 74
   - 75 or older

2. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Other

3. Do you deal with family violence as part of your employment or volunteer work?
   - Yes
   - No

4. Are you a resident of Airdrie?
   - Yes
   - No
5. How did you hear about this survey? (Please check all that apply)
- City of Airdrie website
- Friend or family
- At a community awareness event
- On Twitter
- On Facebook
- Don’t remember
- Other (please specify)

Family Violence Definitions

Violence can happen between anyone in a family or in a close intimate relationship including children, parents, grandparents, siblings, intimate partners and extended family, like uncles or step-parents. It can happen in opposite sex and same-sex couples.

Family violence affects Canadians in all types of families and relationships-no matter how old they are, where they live, or how much money, education or type of job they have. It can affect people of every race, religion and sexual orientation.

Some common forms of family violence include:
- **Physical abuse**: Slapping, choking, or punching the person. Using hands or objects as weapons. Threatening them with a knife or gun. Committing murder.
- **Sexual abuse**: Using threats, intimidation, or physical force to force the person into unwanted sexual acts.
- **Emotional or verbal abuse**: Threatening to kill the person (or to kill the their children, other family members or pets), threatening to commit suicide, making humiliating or degrading comments about person’s body or behaviour, forcing the person to commit degrading acts, isolating them from friends or family, confining them to the house, destroying their possessions, and other actions designed to demean the person or to restrict person’s freedom and independence.
- **Financial abuse**: Stealing or controlling person’s money or valuables (of particular concern to older adults). Forcing them to work. Denying them the right to work.
- **Spiritual abuse**: Using person’s religious or spiritual beliefs to manipulate, dominate, and control her.
- **Criminal harassment/stalking**: Following a person or watching the person in a persistent, malicious, and unwanted manner. Invading their privacy in a way that threatens her personal safety.

6. Do you know of someone or have you personally experienced family violence while living in Airdrie?
- Yes
- No
7. Did the person or you try to get help to deal with family violence?
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

8. If you or the person did not go for help, please explain why not.
   *Box for open-ended responses*

9. Where did the person or you go for help when they experienced family violence?
   *Box for open-ended responses*

10. Did the person or you get all the help that was needed?
    ☐ The person or myself got all the help that was needed
    ☐ The person or myself needed more or different help than was available
    ☐ Other (please explain below)

11. What type of help was needed but not available?
    *Box for open-ended responses*

12. Where do you think you would go for help if you or someone you knew experienced family violence?
    *Box for open-ended responses*

13. To your knowledge, is there enough help in Airdrie for people experiencing family violence?
    ☐ Yes
    ☐ Maybe
    ☐ No
    ☐ Don’t Know

14. In your opinion, how important is it that the issue of family violence be addressed in Airdrie?
    ☐ Extremely important
    ☐ Fairly Important
    ☐ Not really important
    ☐ Not important at all
    ☐ Don’t know

Thank you again for completing this survey.
And thank you for forwarding it to others in Airdrie.