



# *Together for Justice...*

*The Journey 2011 to 2014*



**Liard Aboriginal Women's Society  
June, 2015**

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## Preface

**Editor's Note:** Reports on successful human endeavors to create a better, more caring world do not always give sufficient credit to the brave and compassionate qualities that make such endeavors successful. Having watched the Together for Justice' process unfold over time and appreciating the human qualities that have made it a success, I could not avoid including 'the things of the heart' in this preface. – A.S.

### The Dream of a Better Life

Journeying to a new land does not begin without a good and compelling reason. Why else would we set out on a path that is unfamiliar and uncomfortable guided only by a dream of a better life? We are all immigrants in that sense, regardless of whether we move our minds, our hearts...or our feet.

In our personal journeys to a better life and no less in the unfolding journey portrayed in these pages, we are reminded that such journeys require courage, resolve, compassion, patience, and vision – not on the part of one, but of many.

### A Good and Compelling Reason

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*“Women’s interests in police services and community life are comprehensive, and are not limited to women’s safety. The police are one part the legal system, and of society. During the Review, people raised concerns that are associated with the criminal justice system as a whole, and also spoke about the social needs that communities and governments must address, in order to make Yukon women safe.”*  
*-- Lois Moorcroft, from a submission to the Review of Yukon’s Police Force 2010 entitled “If My Life Depended On It: Yukon Women and the RCMP”*

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The Together for Justice journey was borne out of a deep divide between escalating violence and a faltering criminal justice system, with women, and in particularly Aboriginal women caught in the middle. Findings from a Government of Yukon *Review of Yukon’s Police Force, 2010*, coupled with the findings of a Federal *Task Force on Governance and Cultural Change in the RCMP*, and high profile incidents involving the RCMP in the Yukon provided a good and compelling reason for the journey that was about to begin.

## Commitment

The plight of Yukon women caught in the divide between escalating violence and a faltering criminal justice system provided a good and compelling reason to act, but to act would require courage and resolve in the face of resistance, compassion and patience in building common ground, and a vision, a plan for moving ahead -- again not on the part of one, but of many.

It would require a commitment on both sides of the divide.

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*"The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no [one] could have dreamed would have come [their] way. Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now."*

— Attributed to Goethe

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Fortunately, the initial commitment to action was already there, nested in a closely knit social movement, a circle of women who had worked tirelessly for years to bring the issue of violence into the full light of day. But now the circle and commitment needed to grow and fully embrace the issue of escalating violence, the justice system and the women caught between the two.



Sometimes we are unaware that the steps we are taking one day will be invaluable in the next, and so it was that the solution to growing the circle, creating a vision and moving forward was found in the work of the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society in their efforts to heal the complex effects of colonialism and residential school abuse, restore the rightful place of Kaska women within their Nation and revive their traditional culture. 'Courageous,

*Innovative, progressive, inclusive, compassionate, and patient'* are the best way of describing the Society's way of working, and now these same steps would lead the way forward into engaging the larger community in addressing violence against women

Much of what was to follow to make a beginning and to maintain the momentum of the movement was the hard work of relationship building, finding funding, finding spaces in time and places to meet, and coordinating a myriad of details – the logistics of making anything happen with a large and diverse group of busy people. But it was the steps familiar to the Society that really made the difference.

## Crossing the Divide

Something was needed to overcome resistance to change – a new way of looking at things. Something was needed to bring the larger circle together, something that would cross the divide between violence and justice.



From nearly the start of its work in 1998, the Society utilized a unique and compatible blend of western and traditional therapeutic methods to meet the individual and collective needs of its community. But it was careful in what it chose to use, careful to find models of therapy and societal change that fit together, models that were culturally aware, culturally sensitive and based on empowerment and human dignity. The ideal model proved to be *response-based therapy* an innovative and highly successful approach to healing with significant applications in the field of social justice.

This was the catalyst needed to bring a larger circle together and cross the divide.

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*“People respond in accordance to how you relate to them. If you approach them on the basis of violence, that’s how they’ll react. But if you say we want peace, we want stability, we can then do a lot of things that will contribute towards the progress of our society.”*  
--Nelson Mandela, in an Interview with Readers Digest

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The most likely path forward appeared to lie in bringing together the issues of violence, the justice system and the women caught in the middle -- to look at all three together in the light of response-based practice. Recognizing that change would take some time and that common ground would be necessary to maintain commitment over the long term, the most workable approach was to open the dialogue by developing common ground, introducing a new perspective on the issues, and impassioning a continuing desire to learn more.

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*“We can find common ground only by moving to higher ground.”*  
-- Jim Wallis, Peace and Social Justice Advocate

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The opening dialogue would be called ‘*Bridging the Gap*’ and would be the doorway to a two-year process of dialogue and learning – ‘*Together for Justice: Language, Violence & Responsibility.*’



The goal of *'Bridging the Gap'* was to provide a safe venue for open and honest cross-cultural conversations between community members and the RCMP in the communities of Watson Lake and Whitehorse, and to inspire all segments within each community to work together to create safety. Having secured the necessary funding, the Society encouraged a diverse group of people with an interest and stake in social justice to gather in each of the two Yukon communities for a two day conversation facilitated by practitioners from the Centre of Response-base Practice.

This would be new ground for many, and also discomforting for many. Changing hearts and minds and crossing what divides us to meet each other is not easy. It requires courage.

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*"To look at something as though we had never seen it before requires great courage."*  
— *Henri Matisse*

*"Courage is fear that has said its prayers."*  
--*Dorothy Bernard, American actress from the era of silent films*

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## Momentum

'Bridging the Gap' did succeed in crossing the divide, and through the many meetings that were to follow, social justice relationships would be profoundly changed. The ending of this document speaks to the symbolic meaning of the *Together for Justice Community Safety Protocol* agreement between LAWS and the Watson Lake RCMP Detachment.

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*"The protocol in Watson Lake is a codification or a documentation of things that had been talked about and agreed to, largely based on relationships and people. Not that the documentation is not important, because that's the legacy. But it's the people, the relationships, the tolerance of each other and the willingness to have the difficult conversations that makes the protocol successful."*  
-- *Participant*

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## Introduction

### The Vision

A climate of fear and mistrust of the justice system exists in many Yukon Aboriginal communities and this is especially true among women who experience violence. The lack of a constructive relationship between police, communities and individuals has impaired the feeling of safety of women and girls and has eroded public trust in the police<sup>1</sup>.



In response, the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) recognized the critical need for dialogue and understanding between the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the various groups responding to violence in Yukon communities, particularly in the LAWS' home community of Watson Lake. It was understood that coming together to develop a shared understanding and collective response to violence would support the growth of trust and confidence in policing. This recognition in turn led LAWS to develop a process for effective collaboration between police, individuals, communities, and community safety organizations. Motivated by a desire to change the climate of fear and distrust into one of understanding, collaboration and increased safety for women, children, families, and communities, LAWS began laying the foundations of the *Together for Justice* initiative. Investing in an action plan and assuming a leadership role, LAWS drew together key community groups to improve relationships – Liard First Nation Elders, Kaska women, the RCMP, Help and Hope for Families, teachers, elected leaders, justice workers, social justice activists, women's coalition members, community members, men, and community service providers, among others.

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<sup>1</sup> See "What We Heard" and "Sharing Common Ground" at [www.policereview2010.gov.yk.ca](http://www.policereview2010.gov.yk.ca)

## The Journey

With funding from the Status of Women Canada, the RCMP Family Violence Fund, Government of Yukon Women's Directorate, Justice Canada, and the Canadian Women's Foundation, LAWS organized and facilitated a series of gatherings representing pan-community interests in developing a shared understanding of 'Response-based Practice'<sup>2</sup> (RBP) in addressing violence, and in developing lasting, positive relationships with the RCMP.

To support the process, LAWS utilized skilled professionals, Dr. Allan Wade and Dr. Cathy Richardson from Centre for Response-based Practice, Mr. Jeff Cook from Beringia Community Planning Inc. and Ms. Kita Billington.

Members of the RCMP and key participants from communities and organizations gathered in Watson Lake and Whitehorse over a two year period to learn, share, and discuss strategies to address violence against women. Gatherings provided opportunities for interactive and participatory discussion, opportunities to gain new knowledge, share experiences and stories, and to listen, ask questions and build personal relationships.

### **Over the two years, the gatherings explored:**

- Social responses and the experience of victims and offenders showing that positive social responses support disclosure and recovery from violence;
- Police and criminal justice actions as social responses;
- Victim strategies to avoid negative social responses;
- Responses and resistance to violence;
- The deliberate and unilateral nature of violence;
- How language is used to conceal violence, reduce perpetrator responsibility, and blame victims in justice system responses to diverse forms of violence;
- The connection between colonialism and violence against Aboriginal women; and how men can participate in addressing violence against women;
- How RCMP can improve relationships with individuals and communities through just and effective responses in cases of violence;
- Past and present day racism and negative responses to Aboriginal individuals and communities.
- The ever-present resistance of Aboriginal people to diverse forms of violence and to ineffective social responses that continue today;
- Signs of progress, singling out areas for improvement and highlighting initiatives involving the RCMP and other social justice providers.

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<sup>2</sup> With its foundation in the Centre for Response-based Practice, RBP is widely known as an innovative approach to therapy and community work, providing and promoting socially just and effective responses to violence and other forms of oppression and adversity. For more information, see: <http://responsebasedpractice.com/>

## A Historic Milestone

The *Together for Justice* gatherings culminated in a historic event marking the way forward in relationship building. On March 8, 2013 the RCMP Watson Lake Detachment and Kaska women celebrated the signing of a *Together for Justice Community Safety Protocol* agreement.

As the journey continues, LAWS, and other groups remain guided by this protocol as they work together collaboratively to improve relationships and address the issue of violence in Yukon communities.



## About this Document

Part One of this document highlights the application of *Response-based Practice* (RBP) to the issue of violence and social justice services – the primary subject of numerous gatherings held over the period prior to the signing of the *Together for Justice Community Safety Protocol* in March, 2013. The emphasis on RBP in Part One is deliberate since it provided the underlying guidance and principles – the navigation – for the journey, and it is thought to be of particular value to other communities and groups with similar needs.

Part Two looks at the conversation as it turns its attention toward a protocol. The conversation represents a decisive point in the journey where the influences of advocacy, new knowledge, and relationship based on common ground come together. Part Two also provides a brief insight into the community process followed to reach a formal *Community Safety Protocol* agreement between LAWS and the Watson Lake RCMP detachment.

Part Three summarizes the progress of the *Together for Justice* initiative and allied social justice services as they seek to address the issue of violence and create safer community.

## Acknowledgements

The women of the Kaska Nation acknowledge and thank the Yukon RCMP for their commitment to the process. Also remembered with gratitude are the many Elders, leaders and participants who attended the numerous gatherings. Special acknowledgement is also due to the following organizations for their contributions to the gatherings and to the successes made and felt along the way.



- \* Yukon RCMP M Division Commanding Officer
- \* Whitehorse & Watson Lake RCMP Officers
- \* Government of Yukon Victim Services
- \* Government of Yukon Women's Directorate
- \* Daylu Dena Council Justice, Social and Education
- \* Liard Aboriginal Women's Society
- \* Liard First Nations Council
- \* Liard First Nations Justice
- \* Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle
- \* Dease River Band Council – Social Department
- \* St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen – Watson Lake
- \* WCC Elders Advisory
- \* Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council
- \* Yukon Status of Women Council
- \* Kwanlin Dun Justice
- \* Kwanlin Dun Council
- \* Ross River Dena Council Social
- \* Elders, Ross River
- \* Elders, Watson Lake
- \* Elders, Carcross
- \* Elders: Whitehorse
- \* Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues
- \* Transition Home, Kaushee's Place: Whitehorse
- \* Help & Hope for Families, Watson Lake
- \* Many Rivers Counselling Centre
- \* Elizabeth Fry Society
- \* Les EssentiElles
- \* Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre
- \* Grass-roots women and men from Yukon communities



## Part One: Response-Based Practice and Social Justice

### Introduction

It is important to emphasize that the progress of the Together for Justice initiative is built upon an evolving process of persistent advocacy, knowledge sharing, and building common ground. The same process running through the formal gatherings is also running through the community, day to day, meeting the same challenges, resolving to continue and returning to feed the gatherings and be fed by them over and over. The process is successful because it is grounded in life.

What follows is an abridged version of conversations from the gatherings on *Response-based Practice* as it applies to the issue of violence and social justice. The conversations were distilled from *Together for Justice* gatherings held prior to the signing of the *Together for Justice Community Safety Protocol* between LAWS and the Watson Lake RCMP Detachment in March of 2013.

Comments attributed to practitioners from the Centre for Response-based Practice are identified as **RBP**. With the exception of the RCMP, comments by other participants are identified as **Participant**. The **RCMP** are specifically identified due to their prominent role in many of the conversations and in ongoing exchanges with RBP practitioners.

As there were many gatherings over time covering a broad range of topics, the cumulative text has been organized under subject headings. Subjects are presented in their original order, with some subjects being raised more than once over the series of gatherings. The text of conversations has in some cases been shortened from the original and edited for grammar, but is otherwise thought to be accurate.



## Social Responses and the Experience of Victims

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*“The term “social responses” refers to the ways in which friends, family members, child protection workers, police, judges, lawyers, news, and media and others respond when violence is disclosed or witnessed; how they respond to the victim, offender, and family.” (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Research shows that a majority of victims of violent crimes (e.g., sexual assault, rape, and even armed robbery) report negative social responses when they disclose. Imagine that an abused woman who goes to her parents is told by her father that, “We told you about him. You’ve made your bed, now lie in it.” This response says, “It’s your own fault, we won’t help, and you’re on your own.” Now imagine that a woman reports a sexual assault, and the nurse administering the rape kit asks the woman, “What were you doing in that part of town?” This is an example of a blaming question.

Another example is a police officer who has been called to an assault that is referred to as a ‘domestic dispute.’ While taking down information, the officer innocently asks a woman who has been abused by her partner, “How long have you been having this kind of marriage problem?” The officer is not trying to be accusatory, but the woman says, “This is not a marriage problem; it’s a violence problem.” The police officer accidentally implied the violence was mutual, part of a marriage problem, in which case the woman, the victim in this case, would be partly to blame.

Inaccurate use of language, as in this example, can lead to negative consequences. In this case, inadvertently blaming a woman who is a victim of violence, perhaps showing her that she will not be adequately understood or respected.

We need to create positive social responses to those who disclose violence because the quality of social responses is directly linked to recovery from violence and the extent to which people experience a sense of justice. Social responses are particularly important when violence is still taking place.

The word ‘post’ in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is sometimes misleading: Negative social responses often continue long after the violence or trauma. For example, if we look at a particular family where a child was sent to a prison camp (referred to as a ‘residential school’), and their name was changed, and this same person is now trying to get their old age pension. The federal government says this person does not exist, because their name was changed. Members of some bands are considered extinct or exterminated, and as they are not seen to exist anymore, they are not recognized. Legally, many things changed for people. Family relationships between siblings changed and



became strained. This influences the here and now of daily life. In a very real sense, the "trauma" is not "post", it has only changed form. The "trauma" is no longer the prison camp but the ongoing racism and denial of the state.

Although we have generally been taught to think that the more severe the violence, the greater the level of the victim's suffering, we now know that the level of suffering is actually directly related to the kinds of social responses the victim receives. Victims who receive negative social responses tend to experience more intense and lasting suffering. They are more likely to receive a diagnosis of mental disorder and be placed on medication. This approach does nothing to address the violence. It also protect authorities by failing to consider how their responses can induce further and more intense suffering.

### The Importance of Social Responses to Disclosure

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*"If someone discloses violence once and receives a negative social response, they are less likely to disclose again." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** If someone discloses violence once and receives a negative social response, they are less likely to disclose again. Research shows that women who are assaulted by a male partner, especially if they have a history of being sexually abused as children, are less likely to tell an authority figure again, because life gets worse when they tell someone. Most people we work for have had repeated negative social responses from authority figures. Research also shows that people who receive positive social responses are more likely to disclose in the future, to show up in court, to cooperate with authorities, and to work with child protection services.



## Example of the Power of a Negative Social Response

**RBP:** A woman who was said to have ‘psychological problems’, who had had 55 ECT treatments (electroconvulsive shock therapy) over an 8-month period, causing her to lose her long-term memory and forget much of raising her babies, came to see me. When she was 8 years old, her older brother molested her. She told her mother one night when she was in the bathtub. Her mother responded by forcing her daughter’s head underwater, then asserting, “Your brother would never do that”. This enabled multiple assaults by her brother and his friends. She never told anybody. The greater burden – even greater than the burden of the violence perhaps - was the response she received when she told her mother about the abuse. This response added a layer of intense grief and isolation to the experience of violence by her brother. If we’re a teacher, nurse, or police officer it’s very useful to know if someone has reported violence before, and how other people responded at the time., and . It’s crucial information, and tells us how we have to work with them.

## Offenders and Social Responses

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*The most effective way of stopping violence is changing the social responses given to offenders.  
(RBP)*

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**RBP:** The most effective way of stopping violence is changing the social responses given to offenders. Research shows that when offenders are in court, within two weeks when they’re told about no contact orders and to attend programs, and when the court monitors their attendance at the program for up to six months, the effectiveness of male offender programs increases dramatically, perhaps as much as 20%. If these measures are put in place, and if the criminal justice response is swift and certain, men begin to make changes and become less violent, or desist from violence, in future.. This kind of system response shows victims it could be safe and useful to disclose.

## Negative Social Responses and Safety in Concealing Violence

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*“For too many people it is safer not to tell anyone about violence.” (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Many women stay with men who are violent because, if they try to leave, they’re at higher risk. Men often become more violent to their wife and kids during and after a separation, so it is safer for her kids if she stays with a violent man. In the current system, it is seen as unsafe for children when their mother does not leave an abusive partner. If the couple remain together,

she's accused of having psychological problems or poor boundaries, and charged with the responsibility of keeping children away from the man. As a result, she is seen as an unfit mother.


When they "lawyer up", a custody-and-access assessment might be ordered by the court. If the mother says the children are unsafe, and tells professionals that abuse is happening, she may well be accused of "parental alienation". This involves a misuse of attachment theory. The father is seen as having rights to their children regardless of his actions. The court takes the children from the mother and places them with their father. This happens too often in Canada. There are current research studies that show this is happening in Canada and in other countries.

### Influencing Social Responses through Knowledge-Sharing

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*"We have to communicate to new members that it is about building individual relationships." (RCMP)*

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**RBP:** If a new RCMP member comes to town, what do you think they should know to work successfully in the community?

**Participant:** Knowing house numbers.

**Participant:** Knowing culture.

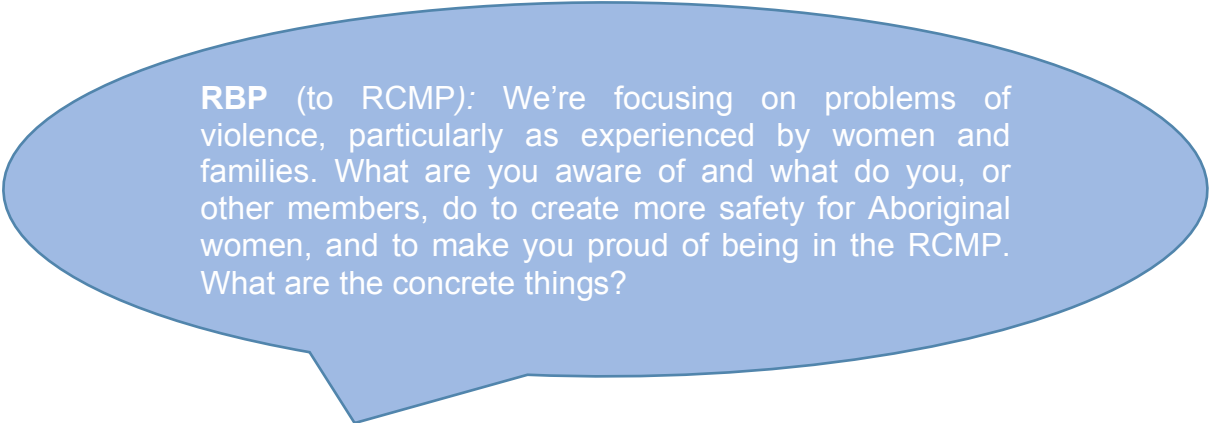
**Participant:** Knowing how residential school affected the people, and knowing why people are the way they are. If you know the history you can do the job better. Know their pain, what they're trying to cope with, like fragmented families.

**Participant:** Know the food in Kaska culture. If there is a meal in the community, it's a very important cultural activity. If you're offered food it's more than food, it's an invitation, a bond.

**Participant:** RCMP can't help but bring their own knowledge and culture into the community, but they must leave it behind as much as possible and be open to being taught and learning about the culture of where they are.

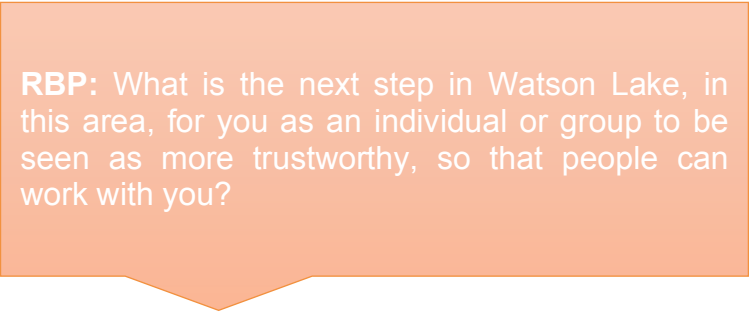
**Participant:** The RCMP need to get out and be part of the community. I knew an Elder who was quite smart, he was from Lower Post, and he told the RCMP to get out of the car, to walk with him and get to know his people.

**RCMP:** As RCMP, we can be there to assist, but we can't be the driving force because once we leave there's a vacuum, or the program falls apart. RCMP can assist, but we can't be the ones running the program. We have to get the trust of the community first.



**RBP (to RCMP):** We're focusing on problems of violence, particularly as experienced by women and families. What are you aware of and what do you, or other members, do to create more safety for Aboriginal women, and to make you proud of being in the RCMP. What are the concrete things?

**RCMP:** We work with Housing and Social Services to ensure the victim stays in the residence with the kids instead of the accuser or suspect. The relationship between RCMP and the community can be tense, but if you buy into the community, it changes things. In the *Review of Yukon's Police Force*, it says that the police are not integrated into the community quickly enough or at all. We are working on a mentorship program, where people in the community introduce the new member into the community within the first couple weeks, whether to meet Elders, or go fishing.



**RBP:** What is the next step in Watson Lake, in this area, for you as an individual or group to be seen as more trustworthy, so that people can work with you?

**RCMP:** As part of Review of Yukon's Police Force, the next step forward is to have community consultations and participation. We want to see that in the next few months. If a strong community member gets involved, the younger people get involved. Constables are now promoted to be supervisors earlier than before. A few years ago, promotions came at twelve-years of service. Today it is much earlier. We have younger members training younger members. We have to communicate to new members that it is about building individual relationships. You have to talk and get to know everyone, recognizing that everyone's got a voice and different views. It's also getting past the stereotypes - because of what we do, people may be hesitant about talking to us.

**Participant:** Ongoing workshops every three months on Kaska culture awareness for our community and RCMP members.

**Participant:** When there are new members, have more one-on-one interactions, like maybe they have tea with an Elder. They're eating bannock, going to a feast. If we use mentors in the community, younger members are going to blossom as police and as people.

**Participant:** Structured training on a regular basis for our Kaska members here.

## Language Conceals Violence

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*There has been a long history of violence in many societies for a long time, and we've become very good at concealing – in language – various forms of violence. (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Land theft becomes 'civilization' and 'settlement'. Prison camps become 'residential schools' and 'education'. Just about everyone uses language in this way to some extent. Look at how language misused in courts and media changes the meaning of violence. Problems of violence are widely concealed in language and then misunderstood. This must be addressed.

## Resistance is Ever-Present

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*"One of the reasons victims feel re-victimized is because of poor social responses that make it seem like they didn't do enough..." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Wherever there is violence, there is resistance to violence. The professions of psychology and psychiatry have a lot of bad ideas to be accountable for, like the idea that victims of violence are passive. There are a lot of theories based on the notion that the victim did not do the right thing, did not have boundaries, or had low self-esteem. These are victim-blaming notions, because they fail to notice the direct and indirect ways victims resist violence.

One of the reasons victims feel re-victimized is because of poor social responses that make it seem like they didn't do enough to stop or escape the violence. In work with families and



communities, we challenge these assumptions. We have found it important to talk with people about how they've responded to violence and oppression as it occurred and even long after.

The manner in which victims respond to and resist violence reveals their spirit, history, skills, strength - and the never-ending desire for safety and justice. The healing work here is to consciously and deliberately help people articulate their own histories of determined resistance to violence. For us, this is an essential part of working for, and upholding the dignity of, victims of violence. But honouring resistance can also be a part of practice in high schools, doctor's offices, and police interviews.

Many victim-blaming ideas are part of professional culture and are written into professional practice. Current models portray victims as passive or duped, not as thoughtful and responsive, and don't acknowledge the awareness and skills in how they've addressed the circumstances. So-called "strengths-based" models are a step forward but do not necessarily involve honouring victims' resistance to violence and negative social responses.

Current models also tend to view offenders as out of control, which is very problematic. It is through professional practices that we replicate colonialism, by trying to fix the 'deficits' in victims. It is the same set of ideas that led to the prison camps.

## Stories of Resistance



**RBP:** I want to share a story of a woman who was imprisoned in one of the camps. When she was little, she and a group of 4-8 years old girls were sitting in the main room of the facility, and a priest walked in carrying a basket. He put the basket down in front of the girls. It was full of socks, and he told them to sew up the holes in the socks. The girls did it, and when the priest came back and looked at the socks, the girls had sewn up all the holes, so there was nowhere to put your feet in. They had collectively decided they would do this together.

**RBP:** A man in a talking circle talked about how he'd been brainwashed in the prison camp, how he had been trained to think like a white person, to believe that he was bad, a heathen, a savage. He said they made him scrub the entrance hall with a toothbrush every weekend. If it was not totally clean, he was beaten. So we asked him if he made sure that he did the best job he possibly could every time, and he said, with a small smile on his face, "You know, they never checked in the corner of the closet." This is resistance. If the man had truly been brainwashed, he would have cleaned that corner too. We all have these kinds of secret corners in our lives, things we wouldn't do, or don't do, to keep our dignity. So what are we going to pay attention to? To most of the floor or the corner? You must make that choice when you talk to people. These are things that reveal the beauty of the human spirit in the context of violence.

**RBP:** A little boy in this area was taken to a facility, and did not see his family until Christmas. When he had to leave home, his mother laced his boots for him. When he returned to the school, he was successful - through a whole series of strategies - to make sure no one untied his boots for several months, and to make sure no one untied his mother's work. Because his mother tied the laces when he left home, he refused to untie them. In this way, he resisted the isolation of being put in the prison camp and maintained some sense of closeness with his mother

**RBP:** Children would bring Moose hide pouches with a marble in it and hide it. This was resistance. Old kids gathered around new kids because they smelt like the bush, smelled like home. All these ways children had to maintain these connections; we need to pay attention to those kinds of things.

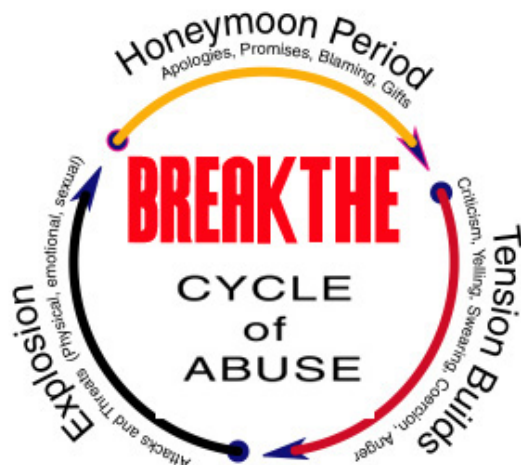
**RBP:** To understand the nature of women's resistance, it is necessary at every point to look closely at the violence. You can then reflect back, "Wow, you did well. What other ways did you make yourself safe?" The person will then be much more likely to talk to you later. That conversation creates more safety. It is not a complicated process. It is very straightforward.

## Repeated Violence

**RBP:** The answer for us is to ask who is doing what to whom and who is responding. We want an accurate description. Violence is something that happens over time. It is not a one-time explosion. We need to see all the decisions the perpetrator made. There is typically thinking going on. Violence is rarely a thoughtless explosion.

The pattern of repeated violence by men against women has often been called "The Cycle of Violence", consisting of an "explosion", a "honeymoon", and a phase of "tension-building" leading to the next "explosion". This is a very well-known model.

But this model fails to mention any of the social responses that make it difficult for the woman to find safety and escape the violence, such as negative police and child protection system responses.



This model also fails to acknowledge women's on-going resistance. Women are said to suffer from "learned helplessness" and other mental problems.

This model became popular because it preserves the status quo. It bridged the tired ideal of patriarchal and colonial psychology to the then new reality of violence against women.

If we are to talk about a "cycle", we should speak of a "cycle of violence and resistance".

## Violence is Unilateral

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*"Violence is unilateral, an action by one person against another, in which the other person resists. It should not be misconstrued as a mutual or joint action." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Violence is unilateral in that it consists of actions by one person against the will and well-being of another. In contrast, mutual actions entail consent, co-action, and co-agency. Unilateral means one direction. Violence is a one directional action by one person against another, in which the other person resists. It should not be misconstrued as mutual violence. This distinction is important.

Just as a bank robbery is not a financial transaction, a wife-assault is not a fight, or argument, or "abusive relationship".

**RBP:** Resistance is not just self-defense or fighting back. It is any part of the body, mind, and spirit that maintains dignity and safety. Resistance doesn't always create safety because you can be overpowered. But it is a movement towards safety and to try to maintain dignity.

**RBP:** Actions can be unilateral or mutual. For example, you can be dancing on your own or in a room, which is unilateral, or with another person, which is mutual. You can dine with another person, which is mutual, or someone can shove food down your throat, which is unilateral.

Shaking hands is mutual, but grabbing and shaking someone's arm is unilateral. Boxing is another example. You are punching each other in a ring because you agreed to do it. There are rules, and a referee. It is aggression but not violence because it is mutual. But then one person bites the ear off the other. Then it switches from the mutual act of boxing to unilateral violence.

It is not a boxing match that turned violent, because that implies violence on both sides. In the same way, when a man and woman argue, then the man punches her in face, it's not an argument that got out-of-hand. If we use language that way, we make it seem like the argument is the cause. This removes responsibility from the offender.

## Mutualizing Language in the Courts

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*“As soon as we mutualize, we start to attribute blame to the woman, and reduce the responsibility of the aggressor.” (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Language makes a difference: it translates into sentencing decisions in court. In one study, we found that when the court used more mutual terms, it resulted in lighter sentences. For example, forced oral contact, when one person forces their mouth onto the mouth of another person, is often called ‘kissing.’ Many of the terms we use every day tend to blame victims.

People sometimes refer to ‘abusive relationships’ and say, “it takes two to tango”. This is a mutualizing notion, and completely misleading. It is a victim blaming cliché used all the time. Would you say that to a nine year old who was raped by her uncle? There can be no unwanted or forced intercourse. That is a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron.



If it is a bullying situation, it is aggression and self-defense, not a fight or relationship problem. When you put children together to talk to each other, as in ‘conflict resolution’ or ‘mediation,’ this misrepresents the event as a mutual problem. So-called ‘sex tourism’ is not what this terms suggests. When someone gets onto a chartered plane and flies to another country and serially rapes children, it has nothing to do with sex or tourism. We are misrepresenting the actions in question. We talk about the children as co-agents to sex when that is impossible, even according to Canadian consent law. To talk in these terms mitigates the responsibility of offenders and blames children.

Our normal and taken for granted language works against victims in many ways, and is prejudicial. As soon as we mutualize, we start to attribute blame to the woman, and reduce the responsibility of the aggressor. The Criminal Code has all sorts of mutualizing language, so if the Crown uses this language, they misrepresent the events from the very beginning. The crown council makes the case for the defense, in a way, by using the language of defense. We need

to have prosecutors object and clarify the event, using accurate language.

The extent to which RCMP members have been trained to address domestic and family violence and sexualized assault varies widely, as does who is available at any given time to respond... This means the quality of the support can vary greatly. Police are starting to pay lot of attention to interview training and language strategies. Professionals throughout social and health-related services also need to pay attention to interviewing skills.

## Violence is deliberate

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*“Wherever we find particular acts of violence, we find a broader pattern.” (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Victims will talk about how they resisted, and how perpetrators planned to overcome that resistance. For example, they steal a bag from an old lady unable to run and plan out how to get away with this. Another example is wife assault cases. We know that violence is an act of power and control that starts far in advance, and is rarely a split second decision. We often see that the perpetrator has started well in advance to destroy the reputation of the victim. For example, he already told friends or family that she’s got mental problems. These attacks on her reputation happen well in advance.

**RBP:** The prison called residential schools was a military-industrial strategy for colonization. This applies to wife assault as well. Wherever we find particular acts of violence, we find a broader pattern. In court, the broader pattern of control and attempts by the offender to suppress the victim's resistance is often not brought forward. For example, how threats made against the woman or children were used to facilitate the violence.

Strangely, people who perpetrate violence seem to operate on a more accurate set of assumptions about victims than do many mental health professionals. If an adult wants to abuse a child, they have to figure out to get access to that child, convince parents that they’re trustworthy, isolate the child, and shut the child up. They use specific strategies to accomplish this. Control and deliberation is apparent in virtually all forms of violence.

This isn’t always obvious, however. We used to think of violence as explosive and out of control, but if you begin to pay attention to how deliberate people are even in the middle of an “explosive” situation, you see that they chose not to use an axe, to hit the victim in their home rather than in public, to hit the body and legs and not the face. And if the pizza guy comes, the offender can go from “out of control” to polite and nice in a split second.

Instead of describing violence as controlled and deliberate, professionals and the public talk about it as if something – some sort of force - makes them lose control and behave that way. Alcohol is a good example. Alcohol is not the cause of violence. It is a tool of assault, part of the weaponry of violence. Decisions are made when people are sober too. People are not made dangerous by alcohol, but are dangerous when on alcohol. They are made dangerous by their decision to drink. It is a responsibility problem, not an alcohol problem. Many offenders are



sent for alcohol treatment, when they should be sent for violence treatment. If someone only 'loses control' in the privacy of home, they are exercising choice and control. Many people who experience violence in childhood do not go on to be violent to other people. It is not true that people who have been abused are doomed to become abusers. If that were true, the majority of abusers would be women. It is also not just the violence that is happening, but the ineffective social responses surrounding it. This is an important issue.

**RBP:** In wife assault, we look closely at the details over time. We virtually always find the offender had the space to stop the abuse, to get help, to show remorse, but did not. He exercised violence at every point.



**RBP:** Some men threaten to kill themselves or the victim: As Nick Todd points out, if they did not know they were in control of their behaviour, they would not make such threats. If someone says they are out of control, that they do not know boundaries or how to communicate, ask what they were like in the beginning. Typically you will find he was kind, loving, a good communicator, a good lover. So he was sensitive, kind, and knows how to communicate. This shows that men who are violent already know how to be respectful and non-violent. We need to base treatment on the knowledge that they know how to communicate, as they do at the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter. Men will say that they know how to

control their behaviour, in the right context, and they appreciate it when we acknowledge they know how to control their own behaviour. Men aren't robotic, or cans of pop that explode when shaken. This kind of description is offensive to men. It is inaccurate, and it does not lead to effective interventions. Anger management implies a person has lost control of his anger, but that's generally not what's been happening: The offenders already know how to control their anger. Work with them on goal setting and how they want to behave, or how they want their kids to think of them. This last one is a great tool. Men generally do not want their children to be afraid of them. We can begin working on concrete things by discussing these types of issues. How you interview, sentence, advocate, support, counsel, will be by using language that acknowledges violence is deliberate.

## Social Responses to Aboriginal Women

**RBP:** A big part of the problem is the social response they receive once they disclose the presence of violence. Too often, life gets worse, not better.

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*"Of all the people in Canada, it is Aboriginal women who are most likely to receive negative social responses." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** If someone experienced violence and got no help, they could learn that violence is a viable social tool that can get them what they want. In this context, they can become more likely to use violence. If there is a quick and effective social response, on the other hand, they learn that others will step in and help, that there is safety in the world, and that they may not get away with violence. We need to respond more effectively to disclosures.

**RBP:** A person's history of social responses is very important: If a woman has experienced a whole series of negative social responses, she knows that if she goes to court and testifies, her partner will only become more dangerous. In the aftermath of violence, if they separate and have a child and cannot agree on custody, there's a custody-and-access report. The husband has more money because he keeps the money, so she has to get Legal Aid, which is underfunded. Her lawyer, who is underpaid and often less experienced than opposing counsel, cannot aggressively pursue the case and advocate for her in a custody-and-access case.

Some lawyers in British Columbia tell women whose husbands are violent not to say that they think their husband has or will abuse their children, because a psychologist could tell the court that they are an 'alienating parent', and then they will lose their children. Right now in BC, many defense lawyers tell their clients who have been accused of violence not to settle out of court, because the Crown is so underfunded, and the delays so long, that the charges will be dropped or Crown and Defense will agree on a civil no-contact order, with no criminal record.

On an almost continual basis, victims take into consideration the actual and possible social responses they will face. They have to think that way - especially if there has been more than one incident of violence. This thinking is integrated into how victims respond to violence, even as it is happening. People think through what will immediately happen next. Offenders manipulate these social responses all the time. They take into account whether the victim is isolated, or if they're 'credible'.



There are real reasons why Aboriginal women are disproportionately raped by non-Aboriginal men than are non-Aboriginal women. It's because those men know Aboriginal women are less likely to have the social supports necessary to report the violence and to be believed.

Both offenders and victims are aware of the actual and perceived social responses. This is visible in the strategies used to commit violence. This is crucially important information, because for most victims, what matters is whether they will be blamed and left exposed in the aftermath. It is very difficult to get over. When professionals do not look at the role of negative social responses, they too easily interpret victim responses and distress as signs of mental disorder. This leads to the medication of women, especially Aboriginal women.

## Resistance is Ever-Present

**RBP:** *Why is it important to acknowledge resistance?* Victims are described in a language of effects and impacts, which conceals their responses and resistance to violence. Violence is often described as an effect of forces that 'overwhelm' the offender and compel him to violate

others, and denies his responsibility.



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*“All victims of violence respond to and resist violence in some shape or form.” (RBP)*

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All victims of violence respond to and resist violence in some shape or form. Open physical resistance to violence is dangerous much of the time, and is therefore the least common response to violence. So resistance is not always apparent. Not seeing how victims resist violence is a huge social problem and one reason so many victims receive negative social responses.

## Responses vs. Effects

**RBP:** When we talk about effects, we start talking about symptoms. But what is an effect? If you had your land taken away because of the Indian Act, and became landless, that is an effect. If you can't get a bank loan because you have no land, that is an effect. Your feelings about it, and the actions you take as result, are responses. Responses are often misunderstood as

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*“The language of the effects of violence on victims actually tends to obscure the responsibility of offenders.” (RBP)*

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effects.

**RBP:** The language of the effects of violence on victims actually tends to obscure the responsibility of offenders. It is a political discourse that is common in psychology, but tends to debase and defile victims. In the language of effects, there is a powerful negative bias. There can be no positive effect of a negative cause, like violence. We cannot say, “One of the leading effects of child sexualized abuse is that victims become alert and effective parents”. This makes no sense at all. If this were true, we should sexually abuse every child in the world once and then we would have a world full of alert and effective parents. And we would have to thank the offenders for causing it. But we can say, “Many people who were victims of child sexualized abuse go on to become alert and effective parents”. And we know this to be true, from practice and research. So the language of responses allows us to say certain things that cannot be said in the language of effects, due to the negative bias. The majority of people subjected to violence do not go on to be violent to others. Discussing responses gives us a way to talk about the victims' responses and resistance that negative causes do not.

## Resilience

**RBP:** In order to understand why one person responds to violence and adversity in one way, and another person responds in another way we must look at the whole ecology of social responses in their specific circumstances. We can see that some people seem to recover more fully after violence than others. We often say these people are more “resilient”. The problem with this is that it sets up a deficit category: If we say some people are more resilient, we are saying too that others, those who continue to struggle, are less resilient. This leads to negative assumptions and judgments about people who continue to struggle.

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*“... ‘resilience is a community achievement, the result of positive social responses, not an individual personality trait like ‘strength’ or ‘wisdom’.” (BBP)*

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Figure 1: Photo from Kaska Traditional Healing Photo Archives

Instead, the people who seem to be more resilient tend to have received more just and effective social responses from authorities and their social networks. This means that “resilience” is a community achievement, the result of positive social responses, not an individual personality trait like “strength” or “wisdom”. If we want to promote resilience, we must promote more just and effective social responses.

## Acknowledging Resistance

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*“Always get back to the interaction and get a description of how the victim resisted. This can be a very brief conversation that can last them for years because, we find, most people have not been asked these kind of questions.” (RBP)*

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**RBP:** There are still a lot of people out in the world who are okay with violence against women. Let's recognize the leadership it takes to stand and say something. Whatever it is that we do, that act of support and solidarity is important to hold up the people taking a stand and leadership on these issues.

**RBP:** It can be helpful to clarify the actions of the victim as they recount their experience. Ask, “When he started yelling, how did you respond right then?” If you don't get a description of the interaction, you do not get a full description. Then ask, “Then what did you do, how did you do that, et cetera.” Get the whole context. You might acknowledge that her resistance was visible in what she said, that you could see she tried to take control, and manage the situation as best she could in the circumstances.

You might then ask, “How did you get the strength to do that?” or “How did you remain so calm, even though you were afraid?” This can be a very brief conversation that can last them for years because, we find, most people have not been asked these kinds of questions.

**RBP:** You can also ask when they noticed that things were getting dangerous.

**RBP:** It is an interesting thing happening between this kind of response-based practice and police practice, because police depend on an accurate description of events. If you get an accurate description, you will have a much better basis on which to intervene. Always get back to the interaction and get a description of how the victim resisted.

## On Our Justice Systems



**Participant:** We need support from the community, so that if we do speak out we are not judged, or blamed, or divided.

**Participant:** Support has to be there for me as a person to feel comfortable enough to speak out. I need support for me and my children, and if the man is taken away, I need income support somehow. If the community takes you in and helps you out during that time, it will be so much more acceptable to speak out, and for people to take care of you.

**Participant:** We understand there is a western justice system, but

we have a traditional system to step forward on our own behalf and help each other out. Working back towards that history, it is important that the regular Western justice system understands the value of our past and our way of managing our own system of justice. It's important because we've seen, over the last number of years, a separation in our own communities between those that become part of the new system and have lost track of the old traditional culture.

### On The Risk of Reporting

**RCMP:** After attending a lot of victims' homes after an abusive situation, one of my biggest concerns is that women want to ensure the safety of their child and themselves but stay in the home. Often the accused are released on conditions like curfew, and the women worry about them out there in the community, and for their own safety. Nothing prevents them from showing up at all hours of the night, and it takes the police 10-15 minutes to get there when they are called. A lot can happen in that time.

### On Counselling Models: Responses and Resistance to Violence

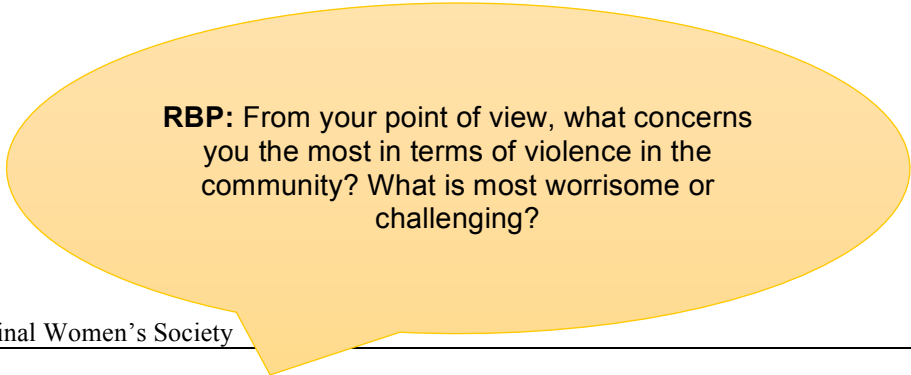
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*"The majority of counselling models do not acknowledge and cannot explain why or how people respond to, and resist violence." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** The majority of counselling models do not acknowledge and cannot explain why or how people respond to, and resist violence. The very models used to treat people are based on the false assumption that people are passive. This leads to victim-blaming. The term *victim* is seen as an insult and prejudicial term, when in fact it only describes the reality that you were wrongfully harmed. It is now used in an ugly and contemptuous way, as an accusation. The more you can help a person articulate their responses and resistance to violence, the more likely it is that the victim will be treated with the respect and dignity all people should expect.

### Q&A: On Community Safety Issues and Roles



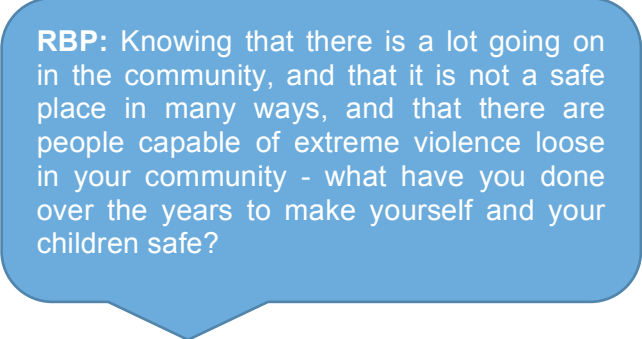
**RBP:** From your point of view, what concerns you the most in terms of violence in the community? What is most worrisome or challenging?



**Participant:** Seeing the youth going through problems of violence is worrying to me as an Aboriginal, First Nations woman. I live in Ross River, and I see the youth not believing in themselves and not knowing that they are worth being safe.


**Participant:** While there are resources in Watson Lake, everything seems to be centered out of Whitehorse. If you want to treat someone for alcohol, they get sent to Whitehorse, and when they come back there are no resources, so they fall back into the same cycle. In our town, we want to see treatment and help that is local, have more resources, and have that follow up, so we're not waiting six weeks until the worker comes back to town.

**Participant:** All the kids are drinking too much. Why are they drinking, and where do they get the alcohol? It seems to cause all the problems. We didn't used to have those problems, years ago. Why do we have it now?



**RBP:** Knowing that there is a lot going on in the community, and that it is not a safe place in many ways, and that there are people capable of extreme violence loose in your community - what have you done over the years to make yourself and your children safe?

**Participant:** The most important thing is communication. Making it a safe place so your grandchildren can come talk to you, their school, or their Elders when something is wrong.



**RBP:** How do you create a safe space?

**RCMP:** It is somewhere free of judgment, where they can talk without feeling criticized. Where you can have a discussion about where their life is going, and if it's not going right, about how to fix it.

**RBP:** If I were going to talk to the latest group of school teachers, police, or nurses, do you think they'd really understand how hard you've worked to keep your children safe, and all that you're still doing?

**Participant:** No. Unless they came from our situation they wouldn't know. You don't know what goes on behind closed doors. You don't know what's occurred.

**Participant:** Or you don't understand. You might know we do these things, but you might not know what they have to do with safety, or what culture and being on the land have to do with it.



**Participant:** Teachers might know more about what her grandchildren do in a good way, but police, doctors, and nurses only see them when there's a problem, when they're hurt or there's been an act of violence. Police get called only when there is a party three doors down. They don't see our family gather around the campfire or for turkey dinner. It's hard to see all the good things we're doing.

**RBP:** If you are working so hard and other people don't understand that, where does that leave you?

**Participant:** We have to have a strong voice as a community. Other people can walk in and float out, but this is our life and family and we have to be able to stand up for ourselves. We can't rely on them.

**RCMP:** The old members leave and new come in, and the first thing we hear is that we're not doing enough. It takes years to convince the community that we are doing things, but it never seems to be enough. It starts feeling a little hopeless - maybe we aren't doing enough or enough of the right things.

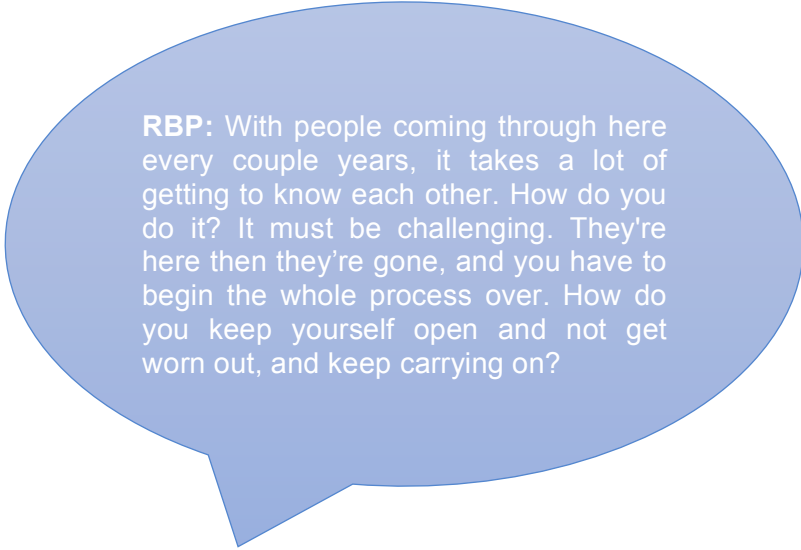
**Participant:** I never thought of it as 'making it safe', just as being with my family and extended family and therefore the community. So to be asked these questions about safety, I'm realizing that by going to camp and the trap line, I am encouraging safety for everyone. It's different to think about her culture in that way. It is a helpful idea because it gives more acknowledgment that she is doing something. If you asked me yesterday what she was doing anything for safety, I might have said I didn't know. But through this conversation, and noticing all the little things I do in life. I'm realizing it does help.

**RBP:** What I get asked is, "Where are the 'men'?" by the women that I work with. "Why are they not taking a public stand against violence against women?" I'm curious to know your feelings about that. What are their roles, and do you see men in the community stepping up to take responsibility for violence in community? Among the women you know, and your friends, does that question come up?

**Participant:** Men are more behind the scenes and women are more vocal. Women have always been more outspoken on matters of family. It's always been that way. A lot of First Nations men are not comfortable in that role.

**RBP:** The Chief and Council are men. Shouldn't violence against women be equally important to the economic agenda?

**RCMP:** To make things better for women, we need to make it better for everyone. We need somewhere to gather and talk about it, and we need to be all-inclusive. If we start to help children and men as much as women, it starts to bring everyone back to the same level, and all be a part of the solution. The whole circle. If we only have one side on board, we'll never have the right balance. We all have to be more open and transparent, and discuss what's going on and how to do things. It might make things easier, and help us understand how to work together to make things better. Shutting people out does not work. Doing things without explaining why does not work either. We have to be able to discuss why we each have to do what. It could make things a little easier.



**RBP:** With people coming through here every couple years, it takes a lot of getting to know each other. How do you do it? It must be challenging. They're here then they're gone, and you have to begin the whole process over. How do you keep yourself open and not get worn out, and keep carrying on?

**Participant:** One way is having group things. We have group meetings and community events. They happen every day no matter if people are coming in and out: It's our daily life. So I would like to invite the new people to stop by and have coffee or drink tea.

**RCMP:** Getting to know individuals rather than professionals stood out for me. Also, the concern for youth, and not having treatment available here in Watson Lake. It was helpful to hear people talking about traditional activities, and when Allan asked whether people realize how hard women work, and how they are keeping their children safe.

The perceptions and assumptions people have, based on what they see, stood out for me. When they talked about where the men are, and how former drinkers have healed and taken a role in helping others, that stood out for me too. You have to be brave to do that, and I think it's pretty important for someone to start helping someone else at a stage they were previously at.

**Participant:** Officers are only here for a short time; they need to get to know community members, and be transparent. I worked with an RCMP in Ross River. Right when things were just starting to click, they had to move here. Once you start connecting, and people start getting your trust, they move, and you have to start all over again. In this community, RCMP are often on shift alone, or with one other member.

**Participant:** We all want a relationship, a community relationship with the police. It's up to us to invite them to our functions. We lose sight of the fact that police are people too, with children and family. They need to think of safety too. We're a community. We need to revise our way of thinking and really look at each other and realize we only have so much to give. If we work hard together and respect each other, I'm sure things will come together. She keeps thinking about a Father at church. He learned our Kaska language and visited people, and would take us on picnics. Stuff like that, that means something to our people.

## Observations on Social Responses to Violence

**RCMP:** Teenagers have been running away when I get out of the police car. I'm hoping that will change a little bit. I've been getting out of the car and they're bolting! But we are getting out of the police car and trying.

**Participant:** People are more open about speaking about specific examples of violence. Before, there was censorship and worry about who was in the room, but now it seems there are more open discussions and less worry about who will overhear you sharing your opinions about violence. Men are not as apt to talk about violence. Women talk about the violence that's happening.

**Participant:** One Elder, she said before the residential schools, women were revered in the Kaska nation; it was a matriarchal society. Then white men came in and started residential schools. Now women are not revered; they are very disrespected. Talking to her last night at the community dinner, I realized this is what happens when a patriarchal society dominates a matriarchal society. We need to try and return to a matriarchal society.

**RBP:** Offenders and victims take into account actual and anticipated social responses from their social networks and authorities. Offenders are more likely to use violence if they know there are few meaningful consequences. And victims are less likely to come forward or to escape the violence if they know they will not be believed and left unprotected

### How Offenders Manage through the Court Process

**RBP:** If you assault your partner, and are given the choice to plead guilty or not guilty, you have to manage the court responses. If you plead guilty, you'll possibly get a shortened sentence, and must undergo treatment. So you choose the easiest path. The system then talks about you like you've taken control and responsibility. But what does this say to victims? Does it not pressure the victims to treat offenders as though they are taking responsibility when they may only be taking the easy option?

Probation officers are practically writing offenders' resumes, while the woman is told she is a bad mother, and if she has contact with him she could have her children taken away from her. You have people going to workshops on how the new Domestic Violence Treatment Option (DVTO) is great, but women on the ground say differently. There is a lot of political pressure in favour of this option, and there are great people responding within the system, but it is something we need to be very careful about.

The woman knows that if she fights back, he will beat her up further or threaten the children, and she knows no one will help. And if you hit him, you can be charged with assault. There is confusion across systems that do not have strategies for identifying primary aggressors. The quality of social responses they have received in the past, and will receive in the future, needs to be taken into account.

The woman may not even report to police because police have to report to Child Protection, who may come take her children away. And if she hits him and is charged instead, there is no record of his violence, and she is seen as the offender, and the responsibility is turned around and placed on her. If you try to protect your children by keeping them away from violent husbands or if you report that the former husband has sexually or physically assaulted the

children, you can have your children taken away. Women across Canada are being told, “Do *not* report violence against your children because they will be taken away from you.”

The woman is responsible for the man’s behaviour because she’s trying to protect the children, and the man doesn’t have a good relationship with the children because they are scared of him, so the woman is blamed for the bad relationship. In some cases, she’s blamed for “Parent Alienation Syndrome” and being an unfit mother. Unfortunately, policy and lawmakers are very receptive to the claims of the father’s rights movement, so the social responses in cases of wife assault may become worse not better. Women in that kind of situation must be aware of the social responses they will receive if they tell someone.



## Separation and Isolation in Intimate Partner Violence

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*“One of the principal strategies used by perpetrators is separation and isolation, which we have seen is a colonial strategy.” (RBP)*

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**RBP:** When a perpetrator can separate her from family and friends, it’s much easier to erode her sense of connection. And when she does go out after, he damages her reputation and discredits her. It’s easier to make her feel like she’s crazy, and she begins to think about how people are seeing her that way.

## The Trauma Symptom Inventory

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*“This psychological test takes healthy and appropriate feelings of anxiety or nervousness out of context, and turns them into symptoms of mental health disorders.” (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Later, when charges are laid, something like this can be used against her, like the Trauma Symptom Inventory, which does not take into account the social responses she’s received. These tests are being used against women more and more in courts, and under these ‘failure to

protect' policies, she is blamed for the violence, and the children are given to the man or foster homes.

This psychological test takes healthy and appropriate feelings of anxiety or nervousness out of context, and turns them into symptoms of mental health disorders. They invent disorders in the person, say they are therefore not able to parent, and portray her in the system as an unfit mother. This is happening on an epidemic scale across northern Canada.

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*"Language and how we use it is a very important consideration for all of us." (RBP)*

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### How Language Effects Our Responses to Violence

**RBP:** One theme we will keep coming back to is language. When judges use language inaccurately, we get less effective sentencing and problems in prosecution. Language and how we use it is a very important consideration for all of us.

We have found that when we look closely, victims are always resisting and managing violence in some way, shape, or form. In the professional literature, however, they are almost always framed as being passive or having internal deficits that cause them to choose violent partners. These two ways of looking at victims do not fit together.



### Offenders Strategize to Overcome Resistance

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*"...strategies are part of the violence and reveal its deliberate nature." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** When we look closely, it becomes clear that offenders of many types of violent behaviour anticipate that the victim will resist, and use strategies to overcome that resistance. These strategies are part of the violence and reveal its deliberate nature. Yet literature suggests offenders lose control. Violence is then seen, not as deliberate, but as the result of some other force acting on the offender, such as anger or tension or stress. We began to ask why the

realities on the ground are so different from the ways in which these events are talked about. And from this we developed a framework to look at language and how it's used across the board, in different settings. When language is used to conceal violence, it also blames and pathologizes the victim.

## Violence is Unilateral

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*"I would like a policy to ensure that mutualizing language is not used." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** In mutual acts, people are co-agents and co-participants. Unilateral acts are not mutual and do not involve consent or co-action. We would not call wife assault a 'marriage problem' or an 'argument that got out-of-hand', because these terms would turn a unilateral act into a mutual act.

For example, the common term 'domestic disputes' is inaccurate because it suggests both people are co-agents and consensual participants in violence. In wife assault, stranger assault, and child assault cases, blame is shifted from the offender to victims, and it affects sentencing in Canada. This language is a huge problem. I'd like to see a policy that makes it illegal to use the language of 'sex' or 'sexual activity' in cases of child sexualized abuse. Legally, developmentally, and morally, it is not possible for a child to consent. I would like a policy to ensure that mutualizing language is not used. I think our work together in the Yukon needs to address this. It is not just the RCMP's responsibility to ensure this. It is a collective responsibility.

## Mutualizing Language in Practice

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*"Confusing unilateral and mutual actions leads to serious problems." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Our colleague Linda Coates' research shows that the Crown tends to use the language of the defense. The terms used can completely distort the actions in question, and violate the rights of the victim to equal benefit and protection of the law. Confusing unilateral and mutual actions leads to serious problems.

**RCMP:** Another frustrating thing for police is seeing the photos, doing the investigation, and being with the victim



throughout the whole ordeal, and then to sit in the courtroom and hear the lawyer articulate what happened. It's so comfortable and agreeable and away from what we saw. It's been put in there so he'll plead guilty.

**RBP:** This is what the Justice Department does not want us to address because they would have to adjust their practice. What we are saying is inconvenient.

## Violence and Responsibility

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*"Alcohol is part of the weaponry, not the cause of violence." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** People exercise careful control of their actions even during very violent attacks. They can stop when the pizza guy shows up, they choose to hit the torso not the head, and they make threats. But, as Nick Todd points out, you cannot make a threat if you do not know that you are in control of your actions. Alcohol is part of the weaponry, not the cause, of violence. Metaphors like "he just blew up", "he lost it", are inaccurate.

Men already know how to be safe and caring. So we ask men to give us evidence from the standpoint of already knowing how to be safe. It's been effective. This changes how you work with people who are violent.

**RBP:** We also know that lots of people who drink can be very violent. Just because we send them to alcohol treatment doesn't mean they will not be violent. And people who do not drink can also be violent. Violence is a violence problem, not an alcohol problem.

The biggest single predictor of repeat offending is the quality of the social response, from the justice system and community. Where there is a swift and certain response, more men tend to desist from violent behaviour.

**Participant:** We had swifter justice in our culture. Abuse wasn't as prevalent because people were held accountable by our community. We need a program that not only involves healing and responsibility, but also where men can recognize and come to a place where they recognize how responsible they are for creating and taking part in making safer communities, and taking a role in creating those communities.

**RBP:** This is a structural problem. There are not resources or funding available for support work with families before child removal. So we know we need to do prevention work. Mutualizing language is one of the most common ways of blaming the victim and reducing the responsibility of the offender.

**RBP:** Violence is often transformed into an alcohol program. The offender goes to court for an assault but is sent to treatment for an alcohol problem.

## Language Use and Sentencing Outcomes

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*“We have to be concerned with the experience of the victim, because we want more victims to come forward.” (RBP)*

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**RBP:** We have to be concerned with the experience of the victim, because we want more victims to come forward. The more mutualized the language, the lighter the sentence is likely to be. This is one of the reasons why people avoid authorities and court processes - because they feel violated again. The descriptions given in court or child protection completely distort their actual experience.

**RCMP:** As police, we feel the same. We see the brutal and violent acts. We need tools to get the justice done. We need something after the police intervene that is more effective. Some matters, just by process, need to go into the system of European court law. For others, there hopefully could be a community, intermediate step, to refer those offences to the community justice model- swift, certain and community-based responses. The question then is, how do we get it from here in the workshops to out there in the community?

**RBP:** We are hoping appropriate sentencing will give women the time to become safer and the safety will trickle out from there, and other men will notice and adjust their behaviour because they know they won't get away with it anymore.

## Getting Involved in the Court Process

**RCMP:** The RCMP understands the court process and people are often upset about court outcomes. It ties back to social responses for victims and witnesses, coming forward in support of the European criminal process, and the difficulties they face because of society's perception of their involvement. Witnesses don't come for all those reasons we talked about. It's the community response in some cases.

**RBP:** The Crown can make scheduling less difficult for people coming to support the witness. Sometimes victims feel more isolated, and there's a lot of choice involved in the scheduling.

**Participant:** There is frustration in Lower Post because cases are lingering and causing havoc. When a person allegedly raped someone, it has taken 15 months to get to court, the woman goes through everything, and then the judge says they have to think about it for 30 days before they make a ruling. Meanwhile, the victim is in the community with the family, and offender, and doesn't even know when they're bringing a judgment back.

**RBP:** It would be great to have a court-watch initiative, but we don't need the whole initiative to do this. It makes a huge difference to practice on the ground. All the organizations involved

could be doing this on an ongoing basis. That would be great to get some help. If the usual structures and processes were going to work, they would have worked already.

### On Knowledge, Relationship and Moving Ahead



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*“This is also a unique opportunity for us in the Yukon to take a courageous leadership role for all of Canada, where Aboriginal people and RCMP have had similar experiences to what is happening here.”  
(RCMP)*

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**RCMP:** Feedback, social responses, language in the materials - that’s the sort of collective learning our organization is hungry for in presenting information in a different way.

**RBP:** It is the Kaska women and LAWS who have been thinking about this for the past decade, and forming a relationship with the RCMP. The role of the helping professions here is to build up the relationship between the women and the RCMP in order to make a difference on the ground for Aboriginal women and children in the community.

**RCMP:** This is also a unique opportunity for us in the Yukon to take a courageous leadership role for all of Canada, where Aboriginal people and RCMP have had similar experiences to what is happening here. The status quo is obviously not working.

From a policing perspective, the need is for the framework to encourage victims of crime to not only come forward with complaints so police can actually help them, and community structures to support victims of crime so they have follow through after the original complaint.

**Participant:** When I'm hearing a woman's story and I see what she's managing both with the offender, family, day-care, rides, and lateral violence - it makes so much sense to her why she can't come forward. I'm wanting somehow to connect the reality of that to the work that RCMP are doing, and see if we can pull those together so we are building safety together, and honouring the choice of women that sometimes they do not have the safety to go forward.

## Police Response

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*"I don't think there's enough attention to skillful police, child protection practice, or the gathering of information about really good practice." (RBP)*

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**Participant:** I want to talk about my call to the police and the amount of time they take to respond. How can there be safety when the response is so slow? It's frustrating to be referred to Whitehorse, and nobody has the courtesy to call you.

**Participant:** It came up in Watson Lake, and one of the RCMP members said he was surprised because to him there's a fast response time.

**Participant:** I would like to see something happen. Are the police serious about safety? If you want to create safety in the community, we really need to look at ourselves and do something about it. If you feel you need some response or follow-up in Watson Lake, ask us if there is anything we can do to support you.

**Participant:** Someone brought up communication as a major source of breakdown between RCMP, and victims and Aboriginal women. Could a protocol be put in place for there to be a call back time or explanation, acknowledgment, or response about why things happened in a certain way?



**RCMP:** The RCMP are working on their callback protocols, but often if someone phones in and makes a complaint, the next person on shift is left to deal with the call. The RCMP believe they do a good job of calling victims of violence, but do a poorer job of calling in cases involving simple things like a speeding vehicle. It's about priorities.

**RBP:** It's very important to document skillful police practice for the public. I don't think there's enough attention to skillful police, child protection practice, or the gathering of information about really good practice.

It is important for people in positions of power to ensure the onus for the relationship is not put on the people who are marginalized.

Women who have experienced violence have stayed alive by not forgetting where the threats originated. It's an incredible skill that has kept them alive. If we deal with that as a reality, and acknowledge it as people, we'll move forward. The worst thing a woman can do is forget where that abuse has come from and some of the things the women have gone through have been with the RCMP.

**RCMP:** There's a difference between forgetting and learning from something. We need to move past those things and get into what is not working. We can't build the kind of relationship we need without understanding, and it is hard to get that understanding without that relationship. The willingness has to be there on both sides.

**RBP:** The best compliment to get is that they don't trust you, because they have to have a little bit of trust to even say that to you.



## Violence is an Attack on Dignity

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*“Our central task when there has been violence is to redress that humiliation and restore dignity.” (RBP)*

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**RBP:** In our work over these past months, we’ve noticed dignity taking place in a lot of different ways, all the time.

**RBP:** If there wasn’t we’d have a big problem. Who here has not felt humiliation? It’s an enormously powerful tool. All forms of violence involve humiliation: Our central task is to restore the dignity of the person. It’s a very detailed, very small and micro practice. It’s often the small details that make huge differences in delivering humiliation. It’s very quick to humiliate, and in very small ways we restore dignity to people. When we have dignity restored, we can begin to heal. There are different aspects to dignity, including control over your body and mind. You know what you think and feel and if someone else tells you what you think or feel, it’s frustrating. You want to control how your body is treated. All of these things matter in terms of dignity. People will die for dignity. In concentration camps, people would accompany their friends and sing songs on the way to the gas chambers, as a way of maintaining their dignity. When there is violence, there has been an attack on the dignity of the person. Our central task when there has been violence is to redress that humiliation and restore dignity. An apology is designed to restore dignity to the person, not just to feel forgiveness. The emphasis on forgiveness can be a misuse of the apology, as a pressure strategy.

**RBP:** There is tension between contesting violence and creating safety. Speaking out against violence can make people less safe. It would be interesting to go through a particular case to see how people could address violence while staying safe.

## The Need for a Coordinated Response to Domestic Violence

**Participant:** There was a recommendation that there needs to be a framework for responding to violence and sexual assault. The first piece was establishing a multi-agency committee and there are several people here and lots of organizations that are a part of it.

**Participant:** From my perspective, we’ve seen waves of initiatives to deal with violence against women. They begin with good intentions, but because we live in such a white and colonial society, it goes sideways sometimes. One of the national policies in the RCMP that’s difficult is the zero tolerance for violence. It can be very difficult to sort out who was the primary aggressor.





We work exclusively with women and advocate for their perspectives. It was very controversial because it took what we saw as criminal act to a more therapeutic environment. We sat at tables hoping for the best, but saw lots of dual charging because the good intention was getting both of them in, giving them both support, and then dropping the charges. From the woman's

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*"There's been a lot of discussion about the consistency of responses for victims, and the coordinated effort among agencies." (Participant)*

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perspective, it put her more at risk and treated her like an offender. All good intentions, but it was really, incredibly harmful for a lot of victims. We saw across Canada that victims are being charged with assault. From our eyes, this is not responding to violence. Who guides us is the whole women's coalition.

It's very complicated from a policing perspective. The Criminal Code defines assault, so if the woman admits to the police that she assaulted her husband, the definition is black and white, so we have to charge her. We need to establish protocol because it's not an easy fix.

## Other Strategies of Perpetrators

**RBP:** When we're looking at violence, we often think of the mind of the victim. We need to back up the bus and look at things that perpetrators think and do, how they make assessments of community, context, what they can get away with, and exploit what's going on to make things

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*"Virtually every form of violence involves strategies used deliberately by the offender to isolate the victim." (RBP)*

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work in their favour, and further enable acts of violence. Once we have looked at this, we must figure out how to reverse those practices to provide positive social responses to victims in order to embolden communities to create safety.

**RBP:** There are a lot of good people involved in anti-violence movements, but in a lot of places it's hard to see that progress is made. There are great, smart, committed people involved, but still it doesn't seem to be getting hugely better. There's a gap. Why? We have to base our intervention strategies more clearly and explicitly on the ways offenders operate.

Virtually every form of violence involves strategies used deliberately by the offender to isolate the victim. And virtually every form of violence involves strategies to humiliate the victim. But you'll notice that virtually none of these things show up in court. What will show up are the physical attacks, the threats, but these deliberate strategies are seldom discussed.

**RBP:** We have a manual on responding to domestic violence, which means it is about responding to the actions of the offender. So the manual should be about that! But it deals instead with the mind of the victim, again and again. This isn't the fault of RCMP: This pattern is

widespread.

**RCMP:** We understand and know that victims are unwilling or unable to talk. But if there's evidence, we have to press charges. We understand that they don't want to talk about it! But if there's evidence of domestic violence, that person is being charged. I don't think we're trying to blame victims.

**RBP:** I am not police-bashing. This is a global problem that happens in every single area having to do with domestic violence. The ways we talk about things are really important. In these trainings, how many times have we heard, "Why don't victims come forward?" That's the wrong question. Instead, let's ask: How do structures in our society blame victims so that it is hard to come forward? What do offenders do to prevent women from coming forward?

## Social Responses to Victims and Offenders

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*"The purpose of these gatherings is to create the best possible responses." (RBP)*

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**RBP:** Social responses can be violent in and of themselves. We know this from direct consultation and from extensive research in Canada and internationally. The majority of reports say that women have received negative social responses. Negative social responses are more powerfully harmful than positive ones are powerfully helpful, and they can even be more harmful than the negative event – the violence – in the first place. When people who are supposed to care for and love you do not provide a positive response, victims are less likely to continue to disclose to others again. The purpose of these gatherings is to create the best possible responses.

**Participant:** We used to have a court system. Two clans would sit on each side and the man in the middle, he would have to say what he did wrong, and then he is held accountable for his actions. Our people know that, because our children were taught by their teachers about life. Our traditional law taught us to take a stand. If we are on the scene we have to help the victim, and at the same time talk to the person that is bringing harm.



**RBP:** So a couple of things to finish off the topic of social responses. First, what we know from studying social responses is that people that receive positive social responses tend to recover much more quickly and much more fully. So those people that we look at and say, "That person is really resilient", are generally the people who have received positive social responses – not always, but generally.

The people who we see who are struggling, who are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health issues, who are self-medicating, are generally the people who have received less positive social responses. So if you look at families where there has been a lot of violence - you've heard of intergenerational cycle of violence - that if there has been violence in your family, that maybe someone from your family is going to go on and be violent to other people. It turns out that if that if there has been violence in a family, but there has been an effective social response to that violence, so that it has been stopped, the children have been made safe, the offender has been dealt with in an appropriate manner, the chances of those children going on to be violent is no higher than other children. The social response is a powerful, if not decisive factor.

If there's no effective intervention, the chances of the child going on to be violent are greater. The key factor is not the violence alone, but the social response to the violence. That turns out to be the most powerful variable of all, perhaps, how people respond to the violence once it has occurred. That is why it is important that we are aiming our efforts at forming just and effective social responses.

## Changing Approaches to Language and Practice

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*“From these meetings, I have learned much that I am using in my developing best practices.” (RCMP)*

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**RCMP:** We have a violence relationship form that goes with the files that is basically a checklist and on the second page is a risk assessment and it asks for example, “Is this person a very jealous person, do they control your behaviour . . .”, that sort of questioning. One category is 'other factors' that add to risk, which may be that you live in a house that is 45 minutes way from the police station. Do you have a phone, is there a language barrier? But one of the things that was on the form was “*unwilling to leave the home*”.

So that was the language on the form that was the language people were using. After being at these meetings, I realized that is not good language. So instead of “*unwilling to leave the home*”, we change it to “*wishes to remain in the home*”. It's better language and it means the same thing, but it makes a big perceptual difference.

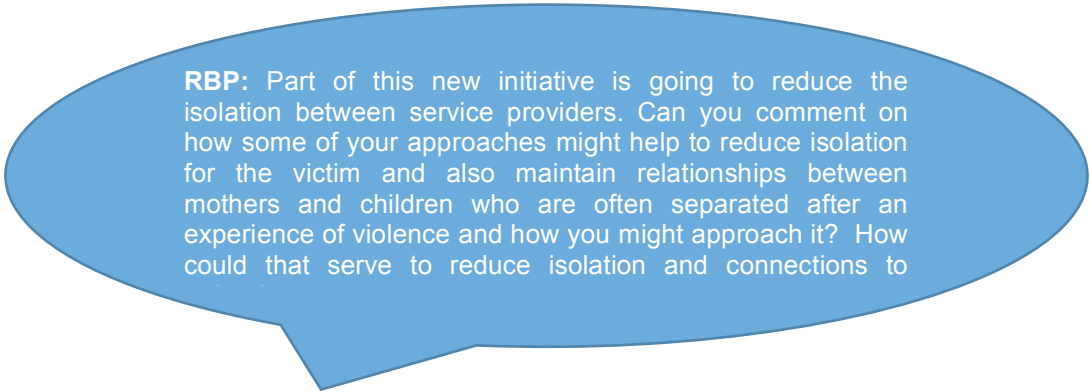
**RBP:** We have been arguing that the way that the victim has already responded and resisted is going to give you a better description of the crime because it is going to allow you to see what the offender has done to overcome and suppress that resistance and actually, what offenders do to suppress resistance is one of the best risk predictors. So I am wondering about



how these factors are coming in, if at all, into the interviewing protocols. Does the member ask, "Have you reported this before? Have you told anybody? Who have you told? How did that go? Did you get safer as result of this?" I am curious about these elements, if these are tools you are using, are these things that members are being encouraged to think about, do you talk about these tools?

**RCMP:** Members are encouraged to identify conflict even if there hasn't been any violence, and to use the form to get information from people to assess the risk. So there have been improvements in the whole idea of risk assessment investigation.

Additionally, the mandate of the Unit includes liaising with partner agencies, to correspond with anyone in Health and Social Services, Victim Services, and so on, to provide the best service we can. We recognize that there is insufficient collaboration between agencies.



**RBP:** Part of this new initiative is going to reduce the isolation between service providers. Can you comment on how some of your approaches might help to reduce isolation for the victim and also maintain relationships between mothers and children who are often separated after an experience of violence and how you might approach it? How could that serve to reduce isolation and connections to

**RCMP:** A woman who had been a victim came in, and she did not want to be involved with the police. She had experienced a police officer who said to her, "Why don't you just leave him? He is an awful, awful man", and in her mind, that felt like a blaming statement. What the police officer was expressing was that he really wanted her to leave, that this man was really awful to her and that she needed to get out. He didn't mean to blame her. So what happened was that a special investigator from the Unit went out to her home over and over again to speak with her. The woman reported that if it hadn't been for the persistence of that special investigator, coming back and knowing that she cared, she would have stayed in the relationship.

**RBP:** In that caring relationship, you would be more likely to say, "What is he doing to prevent you from leaving?" rather than, "Why don't you leave?"

One of the new social justice projects is to readjust our gaze. So we look at not why the woman doesn't leave, but what is he doing to prevent her from leaving. There are a number of perpetrator strategies that we are drawing attention to, and one of the things that we found through talking a lot with people who have been hurt - but also talking with perpetrators - is that certain strategies appear over and over.

Another thing that became apparent very early on was that the strategies used by perpetrators, or men to dominate women, parallel the strategies used by the colonial government to dominate First Nations people. The strategy of isolation is a big focus of our work, in which we think about reconnecting people. So much of the language that we hear in First Nations communities is about connection: connection to loved ones, to children and Elders, connections to the land and Ancestors and the Spirits. So in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), one of the things the



perpetrator does is isolate the victim and get her to stay away from her friends because if she doesn't have back up, it is easier to hurt her.

We often see women who self-blame as a pre-emptive strategy because women know if they say something like, 'Oh I know, it's all my fault,' they'll get less criticism from other people, more than likely because they are taking all of the blame first.



## Part Two: Moving Toward a Community Safety Protocol

### Introduction to Part Two

Part Two provides a brief glimpse into the steps leading up to the signing of the Together for Justice Community Safety Protocol between LAWS and the Watson Lake RCMP Detachment.



### Committing to a Protocol

The following conversation represents a turning point in the journey where advocacy, knowledge sharing and common ground converge, opening the way to reframe the response of social justice services and particularly those of policing, to the issue of violence against women.

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*“A protocol is a way to make sure that the things that are supposed to be happening are happening, and to provide reassurance to people in the community.”*  
(Participant)

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**RBP:** As an Indigenous woman who spends time in the North, I would love to see the RCMP become more of an ally with LAWS in being able to speak about and understand violence and how women respond to violence and resist it and some of the things we have shared in this training. You can take that with you so that when you hear victim-bashing, you are all well voiced to defend the women that resist violence, and then when other groups aren't standing up against the idea to stop violence. We have gone through a lot of conversations about this, so it



would be great for example.

**Participant:** Thank God for women bringing everyone together. This is a multi-organizational meeting. With all of the talent in the room, all of the community problems can be addressed.

**RBP:** We currently do not have the agencies with structure to support these initiatives. Violence



and sexualized violence keeps falling off the table. So this initiative breathes life into the women activists in the community and provides more safety.

**RCMP:** When we are talking about a protocol here, are we talking about RCMP and LAWS, or RCMP, LAWS and LFN? Where are the visions? We need to focus on where we are going, to be constructive.

**Participant:** It should be between the RCMP and LAWS and then when necessary, the other organizations are in the fold. I would be getting my direction from LAWS, but you would know that I am in the fold.

This is a difficult process. I think that we have to look at the organizations' and individuals' intent. I like to take small successes and turn them into large ones. An example is that a document about how the RCMP are interacting with the community, and I can't express enough how huge that was. That is definitely a success. It has to be maintained. Not only for the RCMP, but for others.

**RCMP:** Our commitment to meeting with LAWS, it is something that is right in our protocol to address our priorities for the year.

A protocol is a way to make sure that the things that are supposed to be happening are happening, and to provide reassurance to people in the community. A protocol could, in this case, be a way of saying, on paper so everyone can see it, that we are going to make sure that LAWS is included in this process, that meetings will be set and what will happen there. Then we have the evidence.

**Participant:** I used to sit on the Advisory Committee supporting the Review of Yukon's Police Force. There hasn't always been a trust for the RCMP. There are a lot of concerns with the RCMP. We need better communication with the RCMP. Perhaps a quarterly meeting with the RCMP to go over what is needed in our community would be helpful.

**RCMP:** We would welcome doing a quarterly report with people in the community. What is difficult is when we hold community meetings and people do not show up, so having a relationship with LAWS gives us a conduit between RCMP and the community at large.

**RBP:** So perhaps we were putting the carriage before the horse. People were wondering how they could evaluate a protocol if we don't know what it is or what is in it.

**RBP:** In a room like this when people are sharing stories, we must be mindful that the conversation might be problematic for some people and not for others, and we want to make sure there is enough social safety - and on the other hand, we don't want to get lost in the politics of politeness, as our friend Vikki says. There is something about the Protocol that if I had my way, I would want the relationship between Kaska women, the coalition, and the RCMP to empower and sustain Women's activism in the Yukon. They should not be separate. Not that they should always be intertwined, but that they support each other. I hope that the RCMP can make it safe enough for people to be activists in individual cases. I would like to see conversations about how to organize.



**Participant:** I just feel really excited. It is about the power of collective women and women's organizations coming together because in a community that is so small, where there is so much violence and it seems women's organizations get attacked. We have people in political power who have done wrong. It is difficult to do things because we are so vulnerable.

But power within the women's organizations, they can't target one organization anymore. Hope and activism in the community is hard because there will be attacks. You are so isolated. But the collective power is so important. I have been alone in it before. I can't speak enough about the power of collective activism.

Understanding roles and responsibilities is about understanding what we can and cannot do as organizations.

For example, media cannot get search warrants, but they can get into places and get answers to things that we can't. So, the value of coming together allows us to cover off all of those areas. When we understand what we are able to do, the better we will be able to pursue certain issues. To build understanding, we have to identify what our strengths and weaknesses are. So when, say, the RCMP comes up against a barrier, the rest of us can come up with solutions. Instead of asking the RCMP to be activists, allow them to do what they can do and accept it is our responsibility to find ways to assist them.

**RBP:** Are LAWS and other organizations feeling a difference? Does it make a difference to know that the RCMP are standing with the different women's organizations? What does that look like?

**Participant:** Yes, of course, the march yesterday showed that. Twenty years ago, there would not have been RCMP there. So that march was about them doing more and it was great.

Just knowing we have them as backup and we are all working together towards the same goal. An example would be Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council (YAWC) doing a joint release with RCMP. It is in their mandate and then they worked together and it is supporting activism.

**RCMP:** We have to acknowledge that we are not always on the same side. We will have opposing views and positions, but that can't take away from our relationship. We all have our professional duties. We have investigations to do, we have evidence to follow, a complete and thorough investigation taken to the Crown. We are at odds in different times with our community partners and so there will be times that we don't see eye to eye or we are not able to share information and we do not want this to taint our relationship.

**Participant:** I understand that these meetings are bringing the Kaska women, LAWS and the RCMP together and the proceedings here will benefit all Yukon women. Really understanding the expectations, roles of each signatory is needed and I think we are getting there. Using the media to bring this message to the rest of the Yukon public. This is an exciting time that has been a long time coming with women warriors on this road for way too long. So what are the next steps? I would like to have clarified what are the expectations, who is going to sign this, what are their roles going to be.

**RBP:** I think that is the case for all of us. I think if we haven't devised a protocol that will affect a young woman who has had all of the support she needs, goes to the courthouse, waits for three hours, and then the Judge says 'go home', then we haven't done enough. What concrete ways can this protocol support the activism necessary to aggressively investigate the individual cases on behalf of indigenous Women. It may be that not every case will be impacted, but I think it is useful to talk about that relationship.

It is great to have a Protocol, but we need to have a forum or process to ensure the maintenance of the Protocol: a forum that allows us to have these difficult conversations. The Protocol has to have the mechanism to bring us together so that when people move on, there is something that binds us to it.

We need to talk about who is going to take ownership of this, who is going to be sending out a message that it's time to get together, and who is going to



pay for it?

### The Formation of a Protocol

With the decision in the most recent Together for Justice gatherings to pursue a protocol arrangement between LAWS and the Watson Lake RCMP Detachment, negotiations for a formal protocol began in earnest at the community level in late 2012.

With the assistance of a facilitator working with both parties together and separately, the principles and details of a final agreement were worked out over several months of back and forth negotiation, reflection and review. The final *Together for Justice Safety Protocol* was officially agreed March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013.





## Part Three: Signs of Change

### Introduction to Part Three

With the passage of time following the signing of the *Together for Justice Community Safety Protocol* agreement between LAWS and the Watson Lake RCMP Detachment, it was appropriate for all involved to gather once more to reflect on the progress of the initiative. The following highlights are selected from gatherings held in March of 2014 on the progress of the *Together for Justice* initiative and allied social justice services as they strive to address the issue of violence and create safer community.



### Social Justice Services and Initiatives – A Brief List




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*“We now have allies everywhere to bring change by putting all our resources into the issues. Changes will continue to improve the situation for women because of the network of resources.” (Participant)*

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Gatherings over the several years of the project helped to create new and renewed relationships between participants, strengthening the bonds and linkages between social justice providers and broadening the understanding of social justice services and initiatives. The following briefly lists some of the social justice services and initiatives discussed, with more detailed Information being available through other sources.

#### *Collaborative Services and Initiatives:*

-  RCMP/Yukon First Nations Advisory Committee
-  The Together for Justice Interagency Working Group
-  Yukon Sisters in Spirit

- ✚ National Aboriginal Forum on Domestic Violence
- ✚ The Kaska Brotherhood Society
- ✚ RCMP Cultural Training

*Youth Specific Services and Initiatives:*

- ✚ The Aboriginal Shield Program
- ✚ Aboriginal Policing and Youth Program
- ✚ Youth and the Department of Education
- ✚ Community Youth Activities

*Communications and Community Relations Services and Initiatives:*

- ✚ Media Reporting
- ✚ Open House Conversations and Outreach
- ✚ Non-Professionalization and Community Involvement

*Justice Specific Services and Initiatives:*

- ✚ Restorative Justice
- ✚ RCMP Specialized Response Unit (SRU)

## Progress: RCMP Relationships and Involvement

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*“Something that has changed over the last couple of years is the RCMP community involvement, which is leading to a much better relationship.” (Participant)*

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**Participant:** With the implementation of the project and over time, great relationships have been built both on a personal level, and on a professional level between community members and RCMP members and their families. These relationships have enriched communications for everyone at the table bringing a cohesive and collaborative focus to new and ongoing projects and initiatives.

**Participant:** In the past, the relationship between the Women’s Transition Home and the RCMP was not good. Even the staff had issues about feeling safe. Over the last three years, and particularly over the last two years, the women have been more willing to talk with the RCMP. Now there is laughter and conversation between the home, the RCMP and women residents. It is truly amazing to see the changes in the relationship. People are more comfortable with the RCMP. The members have harmonized themselves with the community. Even when you are walking down the street you are comfortable saying, “Hey, how’s it going?” I take my hat off to all the members. There is no more ‘them and us.’

**Participant:** With the RCMP’s open door policy, members now meet one-on-one with a person to address issues head on and this has created a higher buy-in and comfort level in the



community. Concerns are no longer shuffled off to the side. Even if it's one of the members involved, they are brought in to discuss the issue.

**Participant:** Working in alcohol and drugs and some of the programs, people used to come in frustrated by the way the RCMP handled situations, and now they are opening up and saying what is on their minds. Now I can go to the RCMP and tell them, because when they are aware and willing to do something, people are feeling safer. The RCMP have opened their door and it has had a tremendous impact, that along with bringing in the right members to work here.

**Participant:** Something has changed over the last couple of years is the RCMP community involvement, which is leading to a much better relationship.

**Participant:** Together for Justice has had an important role in changing relationships with the RCMP because it involves 'active communication.' It's different to hear people speak themselves rather than seeing a report saying, "This is what we want." People said "These are some of the things that we want you to know," and the RCMP were able to tell people at the meetings what the police feel. To have that contact and those conversations is important.

**Participant:** The information from LAWS, specifically in regard to the use of language had an impact on some of the RCMP policy changes and resulted in new best practices in domestic violence investigations.

### Progress: Community Reach

**Participant:** At the Watson Lake meeting there were numerous comments made about what the community is now doing for safety toward women and how the community can do things.

**Participant:** At the Watson Lake meeting, hearing voices around the table from the community left the impression of a community that's finding its own strength, starting to look within for ways to make the changes needed and not always looking for all the answers somewhere else in some professional organization or some government agency.



**Participant:** The Together for Justice Collaborative is up and running with their focus on implementing the safety protocol with community players, and is moving along really well.

**Participant:** Just having the formalized connection with the different agencies and RCMP through LAWS has helped many of the participants do their job more effectively and efficiently. The relationships let you reach out, ask questions, get information and supportive guidance.

**Participant:** We want things to change in the courtrooms, so the new opportunities allow us to collaborate with the judges and the prosecutors. Five years ago, that probably wouldn't have happened.

**Participant:** It has strengthened the Women's Coalition overall because everybody's together identifying and addressing issues, creating mechanisms whereby even those not at the table have a means of providing input.

**Participant:** The Women's Coalition is working on a protocol and LAWS and the Together for Justice Protocol is the example upon which they are building.

### Progress: National Reach

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*"Further, this project has demonstrated that similar initiatives can have positive results." (Participant)*

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**Participant:** Together for Justice developed a model that is adaptable to other locations, particularly the model for collaboration between RCMP, the Women's Coalition and indigenous women's groups being led by an indigenous women's organization.

**Participant:** Word of the Together for Justice initiative is spreading far beyond the Yukon. The story of the Together for Justice Initiative is typically carried and presented by Ann Maje Raider from the perspective of the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, along with the shared perspectives of others equally a part of the journey.

**Participant:** A Together for Justice presentation was given in Yellowknife. Presentations have also been made in Ottawa, Toronto and Calgary. There is an interest by people in Saskatchewan and P.E.I. in adapting this kind of approach to their particular circumstances.

**Participant:** The feedback on the initiative everywhere it has been presented has been extremely positive. Participants have included police, community members and shelter workers all wanting to know more about how the project was initiated, how it works and whether they can do something similar in their community.

### The Success of the Community Safety Protocol

**Participant:** The protocol in Watson Lake is a codification or a documentation of things that had been talked about and agreed to, largely based on relationships and people. Not that the documentation is not important, because that's the legacy. But it's the people, the relationships, the tolerance of each other and the willingness to have the difficult conversations that makes the protocol successful.

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*“...it’s the people, the relationships, the tolerance of each other and the willingness to have the difficult conversations that makes the protocol successful.”*  
(Participant)

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**Participant:** There is a huge opportunity to benefit from the inspiration and leadership of the Liard Aboriginal Society that led to the development of the Community Safety Protocol. One of the reasons that the Protocol is so successful is that it allows the RCMP to relate to a group of organizations with a single focus on addressing the issue of community safety. The Protocol brings groups together opening the opportunity for the RCMP to engage with a collaboration instead having to negotiate with individuals or organizations ad hoc.



Figure 2: Signing of the Historic Agreement on Intl. Women's Day (March 8, 2013)

## Resources

### The Liard Aboriginal Women's Society

The Liard Aboriginal Women's Society (LAWS) is a non-profit, charitable, community-based, aboriginal organization providing social development services to the Kaska Nation in the Yukon and northern British Columbia. The Society is recognized for its ability to sustain 'trail breaking' social development programming in a complex social environment that includes intercultural and political resistance, gender and racial discrimination, cultural displacement, and significant psycho-social impediments including addictions and lateral violence.



Programs and services are grounded in traditional culture, while also integrating best 'western-based' practices that harmonize with traditional values. A primary example is the application of 'Response Based Practice' using response-based therapy in the healing of residential school impacts, and offering workshops in response-based principles with applications to justice, violence and language.

Programs and services follow two main themes: (1) addressing the effects of Residential School with a focus on regenerating cultural connections and on restoring individuals' memories of their own resistance to abuse; and (2) addressing violence against Aboriginal women to restore the dignity of women who have been abused; to understand how language is used to conceal violence; and to understand the impact of negative and positive social response on individuals, especially women, who have been subjected to violence. Programs and services addressing violence against Aboriginal women originate from an ongoing community-based collaborative movement led by the Society and involving the RCMP, women's organizations and Kaska women – *Together For Justice*.

Detailed information on the Society with links to related resources can be found on the Society's website: [www.liardaboriginalwomen.ca/](http://www.liardaboriginalwomen.ca/)

### The Centre for Response-Based Practice (RBP)

The Centre for Response-Based Practice aims "...to provide and promote socially just and effective responses to violence and other forms of oppression and adversity, through direct service (e.g. counselling), education, research, supervision and advocacy."



Response-Based Practice provides an effective practical and theoretical basis for understanding and addressing violence and for supporting both victims and perpetrators of violence within a



social change process. Broadly defined, response-based practice is a therapeutic approach designed to assist people in their recovery from violence. It is a way of working with individuals and groups who have experienced some form of adversity or oppression with a view to promoting recovery by creating safety, attending to dignity and by highlighting a person's responses to mistreatment. Violence and violence-related responses may include spousal assault, colonial violence, child protection and refuge/shelter work, law and policing.

RBP evolved from counselling practice and continues to evolve in scope and in detail. RBP systematically contests the epidemic blaming of victims and draws attention to misrepresentations of violence which benefit perpetrators and further social inequalities. Embedded within a social justice foundation, response-based practice also serves as an analytical tool and offers a framework for research, discourse analysis and psychological assessment.

Allan Wade, Linda Coates, and Nick Todd introduced response-based ideas into the academic and counseling world in the early 1990s as a way of better supporting those who have been harmed by violence. The work evolved to include working with perpetrators by offering them dignity, an opportunity to reflect on their context and the choices made within that context. One aspect of RBP's effectiveness is the degree to which human agency is centered and highlighted, exploring what people do or did -- in context -- and how the nature of human action and response can change in relation to the quality of the social world. For example, when conditions become safer for victims, they will engage in the world differently in terms of priorities and safety needs. Perpetrators may decide against using violence when it is less socially condoned, when there is less impunity for men's violence and when they are supported in dealing with the violence they may have experienced earlier on.

The Liard Aboriginal Women's Society integrates response-based practice into much of the Society's community work due in part to the de-pathologizing, anti-racism and non-victim-blaming orientation of RBP. The practice also celebrates Indigenous women's resistance to mistreatment and organizes safety-planning around an individual's pre-existing knowledge.

Detailed information on the Centre with links to related resources can be found on the Centre's website: <http://responsebasedpractice.com/>