

Building A Bigger *Wave*

ONTARIO NETWORK FOR
VAW COORDINATING COMMITTEES

Advancing the Renfrew Inquest Recommendations:

How to implement the Renfrew jury recommendations at a local level is the focus for our first newsletter since COVID. The submissions will highlight the leadership of VAWCCs and allies so far, with stories, advocacy and actions to spark ideas and inspire others to join us.

Much can be done at a local level as you will see in the following pages. We also need government leadership and action with a clear mandate to move beyond the death spiral of our current crisis-driven response. This means new investments and a non-partisan long-term commitment to prevention.

At the time of this writing, the Ontario Government has yet to respond to the recommendations. They have been asked to respond within six months of the release of the Jury findings. That date is December 28, 2022. Silence and inaction are unacceptable. 52 women and girls were killed in Ontario this year. These are preventable deaths. A substantive response from our elected officials is reasonable and warranted.

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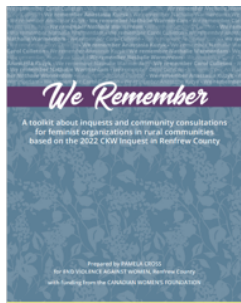


**BUILDING A
BIGGER WAVE**
Ontario Network for VAW
Coordinating Committees

VOICES FROM RENFREW COUNTY

We Remember: A toolkit about inquests and consultations for feminist organizations in rural communities based on the 2022 CKW Inquest in Renfrew County

– Pamela Cross



(excerpt) For those involved closely with the inquest, the process was demanding and exhausting. Most of us were ready for a break from the intensity of reliving the tragedy of the murders of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam and the many systems that failed both them and the perpetrator in the decades leading up to September 22, 2015. We needed time to reflect, refresh and heal, and, back at our offices, we faced daunting piles of work

we had set aside for the duration of the inquest.

We also knew we needed to get to work quickly to advocate for implementation of the jury's recommendations, if our work before and during the inquest was to have any meaning. By late summer, organizations at the community, regional and provincial levels had begun conversations about how to move the recommendations

forward. While there is no official strategy, organizations are in regular communication with one another to minimize duplication and gaps and to ensure we send a common message.

We have loosely organized advocacy efforts into five pillars:

- Political
- Law reform
- Media
- Community engagement and initiatives
- Art initiatives

On Oct 13th, EVA Renfrew and BBW hosted a meeting to bring VAWCCs together to talk about the potential for provincial coordination of our combined efforts. Another meeting will be held in the new year.

You can find the We Remember toolkit: <https://lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/WeRemember-2022.pdf>

"We Need A System That Isn't Just For Catching Monsters"

– Malcolm Warmerdam, as told to Sarah Boesveld, Chatelaine, Sept 2022 (excerpt)

After my mother was killed by her ex-partner, an inquest into her death deemed intimate partner violence an epidemic. Why I believe a more empathetic justice system is the first step to solving the crisis.

I heard about the potential for an inquest in the months after the murders. It would study the ways the systems involved in dealing with victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence are supposed to respond, both in moments of crisis and more generally. It would be like a court case, with a jury—called in a similar way to criminal cases—delivering a verdict with recommendations for change. And there was a greater chance the inquest would occur if the affected families got behind the idea.

At first, I was hesitant to get involved, unsure what I could bring to the process. But I knew Mom, were she still with us, would use every lever available to make changes to the systems that allowed this to happen. I also thought it might help me make better sense

of what had transpired. Had she lived, I don't have any doubts Mom would've taken part in the inquest herself. So I decided to be involved; I didn't want to watch from afar and then be left thinking, "God, they fucked it up; I should've taken part."



As a party with standing in the inquest, I had the power to get up and ask witnesses questions, which I did often. I wanted to know about what's currently in place for perpetrator rehabilitation—namely, the Partner Assault Response program Basil was ordered by a judge to attend in 2012, after he was charged with assaulting

Mom, but never did. When I learned there are nearly 80,000 victims of intimate partner violence in the Ontario court system annually, my jaw dropped. The scale of the problem was beyond what I had imagined. I was also shocked to learn that there is zero

VOICES FROM RENFREW COUNTY

funding in Ontario for programs that would help someone who is violent and concerned about their behaviour but hasn't been placed under arrest. You have to be charged with a crime in order to access help.

So many of Canada's systems set up to deal with intimate partner violence are broken. Our carceral system is another one.



Oftentimes, sending abusers to prison is like placing a hornet in a jar, shaking it up and then opening the jar and setting it free. Basil already had a twisted pattern of thinking his ex-partners were the source of his problems. But that twisted thinking couldn't be fixed by throwing him in prison and then letting him out, angrier than ever... If you actually want to rehabilitate somebody, you need to have a community around them who can hold them accountable and support them while they try to do better—a community they may still want to make proud. If you uproot them from their community and move them elsewhere, they have nothing. There should also be more work to help perpetrators while they're in the corrections system, so when they do come out, they have some new skills to manage their anger and stressors in healthier ways, some new insights into their behaviour, and supports, so they don't offend again.

The inquest lasted 17 days and had four parties with official standing, including the Province of Ontario. Three of us—the coroner's counsel, the lawyer for End Violence Against Women Renfrew County, a local group of violence against women advocates, and me—came up with a slate of 72 recommendations that we presented to the jury during closing statements. They were directed to the provincial and federal governments, as well as the coroner of Ontario. The jury accepted all of our recommendations and added 14 of their own. Their recommendation to call intimate partner violence an epidemic made headlines across the country. It gave me hope going through this process and hearing from people for whom eliminating intimate partner violence is their life's work. It was clear from the testimony that there are enough ideas and expertise to rethink and rebuild the systems we currently use to respond to and prevent intimate partner violence.

I know if Mom were here today and had seen me go through this inquest and all of its related advocacy, her comment would be: "Goddamnit, rest." I mean, she'd probably be proud of me, but her main thought would be, "You need some self-care." There was a recommendation that inquest participants reconvene in a year to track the progress of the jury's recommendations. I'm going to return with them then and I'm going to try to be involved long term in whatever form that takes, because there is still a fuckload of work to do.

You can read the full article here: ["We Need A System That Isn't Just For Catching Monsters"](https://www.chatelaine.com/2023/01/we-need-a-system-that-isnt-just-for-catching-monsters/) ([chatelaine.com](https://www.chatelaine.com))

VOICES FROM RENFREW COUNTY



Songs for Murdered Sisters

– Joshua Hopkins

(The 2015 Renfrew murders devastated the rural Ottawa Valley community where baritone Joshua Hopkins grew up – his sister, Nathalie Warmerdam, was one of the women killed.

Hopkins has since set out on a journey to use his voice to wake people up to the global epidemic of gender-based violence – and their part in it. His call to action was answered by two exceptional creators. Jake Heggie, hailed by the Wall Street Journal as “the world’s most popular 21st-century opera and art song composer,” agreed to write the music, and Margaret Atwood, the Booker Prize-winning author of more than 50 books of fiction and poetry, including *The Handmaid’s Tale*, wrote the searing words.

The result is a set of 8 songs, collectively titled *Songs for Murdered Sisters*, which have now been released as both a film and a JUNO-nominated digital album in 2021. In partnership with co-commissioner Houston Grand Opera, the chamber version premiered in March 2022 at Rothko Chapel in Houston. The orchestral version receives its live world premiere with co-

commissioner the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa, Ontario, in February 2023, with subsequent performances in Toronto and Kingston.

February 9 & 10, 2023 | National Arts Centre in Ottawa
<https://nac-cna.ca/en/event/30530>

February 11, 2023 | Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto:
<https://www.tso.ca/concerts-and-events/events/naco-songs-for-murdered-sisters/>

February 14, 2023 | Isabel Bader Centre in Kingston
<https://www.queensu.ca/theisabel/content/national-arts-centre-orchestra>

The film has been released and can be seen here:
<https://youtu.be/1vvjPKJi5S0>

VOICES FROM RENFREW COUNTY

EVA Renfrew

– Joanne Brooks



Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Carol Culleton were killed in an act of femicide on September 22, 2015. After many delays an inquest into their murders was held in Renfrew County in June 2022.

As an adjunct to the inquest a community-based project to create a public artwork was commissioned with funding from the Canadian Women's

Foundation and MyMainStreet which offered family, friends and community opportunities to make meaning of the femicides through design visioning and hands-on monument building.

The project included community art-making workshops and the permanent installation of a pebble mosaic monument in order to mark the impact of this tragedy. This work was led by ReDefine Arts with lead artist Anna Camilleri creating the process and leading the installation of the monument.

Community members were engaged in a variety of ways;

- Community partnership building with EVA – the Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee, Women's Sexual Assault Centre, Victim Services, Killaloe Community Resource Centre, Ottawa Valley Community Arts and the Township of Madawaska Valley
- Art engagement workshops for community
- Hands-On community monument building
- Fireside chats/story engagement
- Mentorship program with local artists to join the production team
- Unveiling event on the 7th anniversary of the femicides



Comments and quotes:

- 'Making art together gives people an opportunity to put into practice the kind of consent culture we are talking about building when we talk about anti-violence work
- 'This experience offered space for community and to uncover and give voice to the silences and isolation of rural violence'



VAWCCs AND LOCAL ACTIONS

VAWCCs (Violence Against Women Coordinating Committees) are the only multi-sector tables with (some) funding to support the mandate and focus on gender-based violence. By aligning our efforts across the province, we can have collective impact in moving the violence response eco-system toward prevention. The Renfrew recommendations can be a guide. Below are a few examples of actions communities are taking.

Lanark County



'An important step': Lanark County is first rural county to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic

Declaration is the first recommendation in the inquest into the 2015 deaths of 3 Renfrew County women.

The resolution was made Dec. 7 during the county's community services committee meeting. Unanimously endorsed, it's expected to be formally passed at the Dec. 14 council session.

"This means you are making a statement, as a rural community, that you recognize it (intimate partner violence) is an epidemic that's going on with 4,815 calls to your local anti-violence agency in a year," said Erin Lee, executive director of Lanark County Interval House and Community Support. "The best show of support for the victims of violence in this community is for you to make this declaration ... This is an important step for our community to make."

Read the full article: <https://www.insideottawavalley.com/news-story/10807599--an-important-step-lanark-county-is-first-rural-county-to-declare-intimate-partner-violence-an-epidemic/>

Other Actions in Lanark County

– Erin Lee, Stephanie Gray

Since the inquest, Lanark County has shared the recommendations with several groups including our staff, board, police services, ministry representatives, United Way representatives and our Community Safety and Well-being Advisory Committee.

Other activities to date and in the works include:

- A local radio station in Lanark County, Lake 88, is featuring a recommendation once a week as a part of the news. They will include it on their socials as will LCIHCS to be aligned and keeping the conversation public. Once every few months an In Focus segment will be featuring the recommendations, any actions and or updates.
- We participated in a 6-part series on the inquest and VAW via Ottawa City News radio, hosted by Sam Laprade.
- Lanark County hosted a What Now Lanark County post-inquest panel and discussion related to content, recommendations, action, as well as reflections and impacts of the inquest.
- We met with the Lanark County Community Safety and Well Being Plan Advisory Committee had a recent meeting and discussed the recommendations as IPV is already a part of our local plan.
- Our local coordinating committee has had a first-step discussion related to the inquest recommendations.
- Our local anti-violence agency has met with the Crown's Office to discuss recommendations, as well as to take steps to work alongside each other to improve victim system experience.
- Lanark County Interval House relaunched the See It Name It Change It campaign at our local Take Back The Night event. The origins of this campaign are directly connected to rural eastern Ontario murders in 2015 and 2016. Originally launched in 2017, this campaign has been relaunched with more curriculum to focus on community, businesses and children/youth

VAWCCs AND LOCAL ACTIONS

Windsor-Essex:

Preventing Femicide: Developing a Community Response in Windsor/Essex



VAWCCWE partnered with the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children (CREVAWC) to host a one-day workshop on November 9th with community partners to look at strengthening community coordination, using the Renfrew recommendations as a guide. Windsor has suffered two femicides in the past year.

A composite femicide case was developed to anchor discussions in a family's experience through multiple services as the case escalated, examining the opportunities for intervention and what is needed for effective response, at individual, organizational and community levels. Upwards of 150 people participated.

Elements of community coordination discussed included:

- Early intervention
- Culturally integrative approach for family safety
- Sharing information
- Risk assessment
- High risk case management

Evaluations from the day showed strong support for next steps that include convening a leadership table to address system level issues, resolving privacy issues using the Privacy Commission protocols, cross-sector training on risk assessment and public education.

Huron, Perth, Grey & Bruce Counties:

A Rural Response to the Renfrew Recommendations



On November 30, three VAWCCs in four counties in the southwest partnered with the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children (CREVAWC) to host a conference in Clinton to look at developing a project approach to local implementation of the Renfrew recommendations. The committee chairs felt the opportunity to develop a multi-county rural response to support Renfrew was a unique opportunity to highlight the importance of community coordination and the need to work together across county lines. The neighbouring counties work collaboratively, and organizations often overlap in their jurisdictions. Senior leaders from member organizations

were invited to listen to speakers and to discuss how to move the needle collectively toward prevention.

From the conference, next steps include each committee identifying priorities for their community and setting goals for the coming year. Priorities discussed include addressing privacy issues, convening a leadership table to enable system level decision-making, a community training plan that includes cross-sector training on risk assessment and sorting out high risk case conferencing and management. The committees will reconvene in one year to look at what has happened across the counties.

VAWCCs AND LOCAL ACTIONS

London and Middlesex County



Recommendation 41: Investigate and develop a common framework for risk assessment in IPV cases, which includes a common understanding of IPV risk factors and lethality.

LCCEWA has been investing annually in cross-sector training on risk assessment since 2019 to develop a common language around risk and to support increased awareness and understanding across the service system. MRAEVAW partnered in 2021 to sponsor trainings and extend the reach into the county. Tracey Marshall has facilitated the trainings and is a threat assessment expert who recommends the B-SAFER tool because it is a validated Canadian tool that uses structured professional judgement. Organizations do not have to formally adopt B-SAFER

to participate in the workshops. The importance of using a validated tool speaks to widely shared concerns about privacy that often act as a barrier to information sharing. Validated tools provide the evidence-base that is needed to share information with confidence and consistency.

Recognizing that training is only one component of building community capacity to recognize and assess risk, a B-SAFER community of practice was convened by the member agencies to support ongoing learning and development. The community of practice has included further training on how to talk with the abusive partner about their specific risk for violence as a strategy to intervene earlier and to engage them in taking action to reduce their risk and keep their family safe.

This past March, the B-SAFER training was expanded by a half day to incorporate a Culturally Integrated Family Safety Response (CIFSR) that has been developed by the Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration in London.

More trainings will take place in 2023.

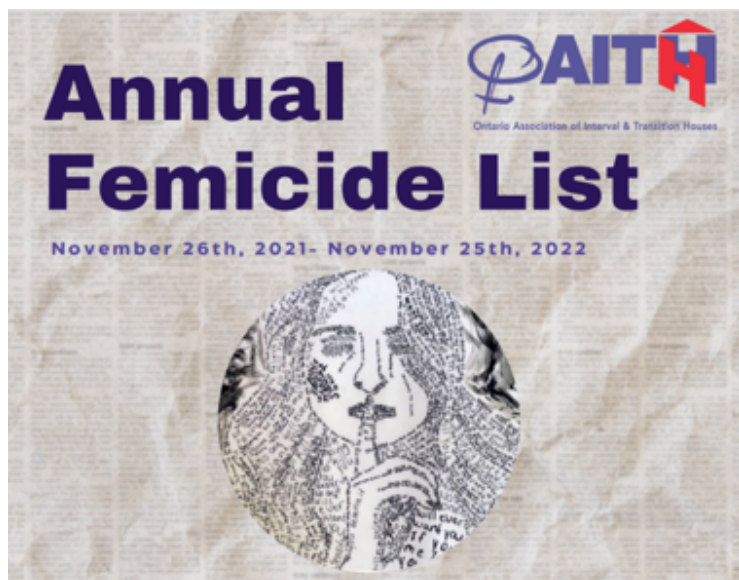
Oxford County

The Domestic Abuse Resource Team (DART) of Oxford County, in light of the Renfrew County recommendations, has launched a county wide campaign called Here & Now; because IPV is happening here, and it is happening now. The purpose of the campaign is to shed light on the realities of gender-based violence and to work collaboratively by providing education initiatives and creating prevention strategies. The campaign launched on November 17th 2022, and has been shared at recent community events, with city council, and various community partners. The hope is to share it more widely across the county in the new year.



ADVOCACY TOOLS

Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH) Annual Femicide Report



There were 52 confirmed femicides this past year between November 26th 2021- November 25th 2022.

Since 1990 we are aware of over 980 femicide victims who have lost their lives to men's violence. Every year we release our Annual Femicide List based on media reporting to ensure that we remember the lives lost, bring attention to the violence women, girls and gender-diverse people experience, and take action to move our list to zero through femicide prevention.

You can find the list here: [2021-2022 Annual Femicide List-Digital Copy \(oath.ca\)](https://oath.ca/2021-2022-Annual-Femicide-List-Digital-Copy)

Raise the Visibility of your VAWCC



OAITH has launched a new online platform to bring together all gender-based violence focused provincial crisis lines, organizations, programs and survivor groups across Ontario into one location. Mulberry has been designed as an online information hub that will contain information regarding a wide range of gender-based violence services. This online platform can be accessed by survivors, friends, family members, co workers

and service providers looking for gender-based violence focused organizations, programs and groups.

VAWCCs are invited to add their information to the platform. You can find information about how to do that here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IBzmyqMSaZRY5pe2ZMzo-RtXS4A3IZ7p>

ADVOCACY TOOLS

BBW Coordinators Network

WE COUNT FEMICIDE BECAUSE...

The BBW Coordinators Network meets monthly to share information and ideas, and to discuss strategies with respect to coordinating our efforts regionally and provincially. This past year, in partnership with OAITH, we launched the We Count Femicide Because... initiative to hold the spotlight on femicide and to build our capacity to work collectively. OAITH publishes monthly

femicide reports that BBW shares out, with a request to VAWCCS to forward the report to their local elected officials, in all parties, all levels of government. Femicide prevention is a non-partisan issue that requires committed political will and new investments. Since the recommendations were released in June, we have been asking the BBW community to forward the reports to their local elected officials with common messaging, asking for their support to advance the recommendations.

We have developed templates and tools to support implementation. If your VAWCC is not yet participating and wants to join, contact Margaret at m.macperson@execulink.com. The Coordinators Network meets the first Wednesday of each month at 1pm.

Luke's Place: Let's get it done!

– Pamela Cross

Inquest jury recommendations are non-binding, which means there is no legal obligation on anyone to implement them.

To this date, the provincial government has not indicated how or when it intends to respond to the inquest recommendations. While, of course, work may be going on behind the scenes, the history of femicide inquests in Canada has taught us that governments do not move quickly – or at all -- to provide a meaningful response. Over the next few months, spreadsheets and charts will no doubt be developed, by the provincial government in particular, purporting to show steps taken in response to the inquest, but without a public call for implementation of the recommendations, the likelihood of substantive action is minimal.

Luke's Place Support and Resource Centre is focusing its efforts to support implementation of the recommendation on creating tools to assist organizations and individuals wishing to engage in advocacy to support implementation of the recommendations.

The CKW Inquest Advocacy Toolkit is intended for those who want to play a role but lack the time or resources to develop their own advocacy strategy and tools. It's a work in progress that reflects the priorities we have identified for ourselves, based on our organization's mandate, and is certainly not meant to limit or lead the thinking about what recommendations to focus on or what kinds of strategies to use.

The toolkit will expand over time. Next up: development of one page fact sheets about each recommendation as well as templates for those who wish to write an op ed or letter to the editor. After that, we'll be sharing discussion papers on some of the law-reform-related recommendations.

You can access the toolkit through our blog at <https://lukesplace.ca/culleton-kuzyk-warmerdam-ckw-inquest-advocacy-toolkit/>. Check back regularly so you see the updates as they are added.

We welcome constructive feedback, suggestions and contributions from anyone who shares our goal of seeing the inquest recommendations get implemented, which you can direct to kathrynb@lukesplace.ca

Femicide, including intimate partner and domestic homicide, remains at high levels in this country: according to the Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability, 233 women were killed by men in Canada in 2021. In only 5% of those homicides was the killer a stranger to the woman he killed.

The CKW inquest leaves behind a public record of three acts of femicide as well as a rich body of expert evidence and thoughtful recommendations for system change.

It is now up to all of us to ensure that the hard work and heartache of the parties, their lawyers, the witnesses, the jury and others who supported the inquest was not in vain.

ADVOCACY TOOLS

Infographics for 16 Days of Action

November 25th is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. It also kicks off the global 16 days of activism to end gender-based violence campaign, which runs until World Human Rights Day on December 10th. Many violence against women advocates in Ontario are using the 16 days this year to call for implementation of the CKW inquest recommendations.

Working collaboratively, a number of shelters in northern Ontario and Luke's Place developed a series of infographics for the 16 Days of Action. They were looking for inquest-related messaging to use on social media and at events. 24 of the 86 recommendations were featured with suggestions for where advocacy could be directed and links to other information and tools.

People can access the infographics directly at:

(English): <https://lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/16-days-of-action-English.pdf>

(French): <https://lukesplace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Des-16-jours-dactivisme.pdf>

16 Days of Activism

16 of the 86 Recommendations from the June Inquest into the triple femicide of Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam



Recommendation #1

Formally declare intimate partner violence as an epidemic.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is the most common form of violence against women in the world, with nearly 1 in 3 women age 15 or older experiencing physical or sexual IPV. Intimate Partner Violence occurs in all settings, amongst all socioeconomic, religious and cultural groups. A recent Statistics Canada Report reveals the 7th consecutive year of gradual increase in intimate partner violence.




STOP protecting perpetrators with SILENCE



STOP VICTIM BLAMING & START LISTENING



IPV is a PREVENTABLE PUBLIC HEALTH EPIDEMIC

COST

\$0.00 to declare IPV an epidemic.

Implementing programming to give the declaration meaning will require a financial commitment.

\$7.4 billion per year to do nothing.

CALL FOR ACTION:

- Community & Regional Officers of Health;
- Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health;
- Canada's Chief Medical Officer of Health;
- Federal & Provincial Politicians.



For more information visit:

<https://lukesplace.ca/culleton-kuzyk-warmerdam-ckw-inquest-advocacy-toolkit/>

Government of Canada legislation targets intimate-partner violence - Canada.ca

Victims of police-reported family and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2021 (statcan.gc.ca)



STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY COORDINATION

Ideas for VAWCCs

– Margaret MacPherson

I have watched the ebb and flow of community coordination for almost 20 years. My commitment to VAWCCs comes from an appreciation for the complexity of the work and for the dedication of those doing it. VAWCCs have meagre funding and little recognition for the importance of collective action. Community coordination happens off the sides of very busy people's desks. Many VAWCC coordinators subsidize a few paid hours with hours of volunteer time. Too often I hear people criticize VAWCCs as not effective, without purpose, adrift. It is true that many VAWCCs have struggled to find purpose beyond information sharing. What matters is that Inquests and Domestic Violence Death Reviews consistently find that robust community coordination is essential to prevention. We need strong VAWCCs because they are the only multi-sector tables that have the expertise and the focus on gender-based violence. They are essential to prevention.

Implementing the Renfrew recommendations at a local level can strengthen and align coordination efforts locally and provincially. The recommendations offer clear actions. Spend time at your next meeting reviewing them and identifying priorities for your community. To support this discussion, I have gone through the recommendations and listed potential VAWCC actions. I will post it to the BBW website and send it with the newsletter.

There are also a number of suggestions for consideration that have been gleaned from years of regional discussions about how to strengthen VAWCCs.

Proposed Steps to Enhance Community Coordination

1. Restructure VAWCCs to recognize operations and leadership as different functions – both deserving of time and attention

- Convene regular VAWCC meetings with a focus on direct service and local priorities
- Convene a leadership table that meets a few times a year, or as needed, comprised of decision-makers to focus on system-level action and priorities

(Petition government to make VAWCC participation an expectation for employees of MAG, SOLGEN, MCCSS, MOH, MCTU)

2. The leadership table:

- Develops privacy protocols for information-sharing and crisis management
- Leaders commit to training all staff in their organizations to recognize IPV warning signs and indications of escalating risk, how to respond safely and effectively, refer to services
 - This action also supports them as employers with legislated responsibility to protect their workers from IPV at work
- Leaders select qualified staff to participate and to act as point(s) of contact in the community
- Leaders protect the staff VAWCC position with time and resources. Succession planning ensures transitions are supported

3. Review Renfrew recommendations and develop action plan

Potential actions include:

- Advocacy – Ask the municipality to declare IPV an epidemic (See Lanark) with actions and funding attached to the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.
- Engage your municipality to fund community coordination and identify gender-based violence as a priority issue, inclusion of survivor voices (there are precedents, ask us about this)
- Participate in BBW provincial initiatives such as We Count Femicide, Snapshot project to produce collective picture of pressures in the community – to be used to educate and inform local politicians and the public

As community leaders, we can do our part to enhance community coordination. We do our part and then call upon others to do theirs, from wherever they are in the system. To move the system toward prevention, we need political will that is backed up with new investments, guided by three decades of research, Inquest recommendations and community experts. We have to be willing to challenge pervasive cynicism and limited self-interest to understand that the global is local, and that change is still possible. Together we are stronger. Together, we can prevent femicide

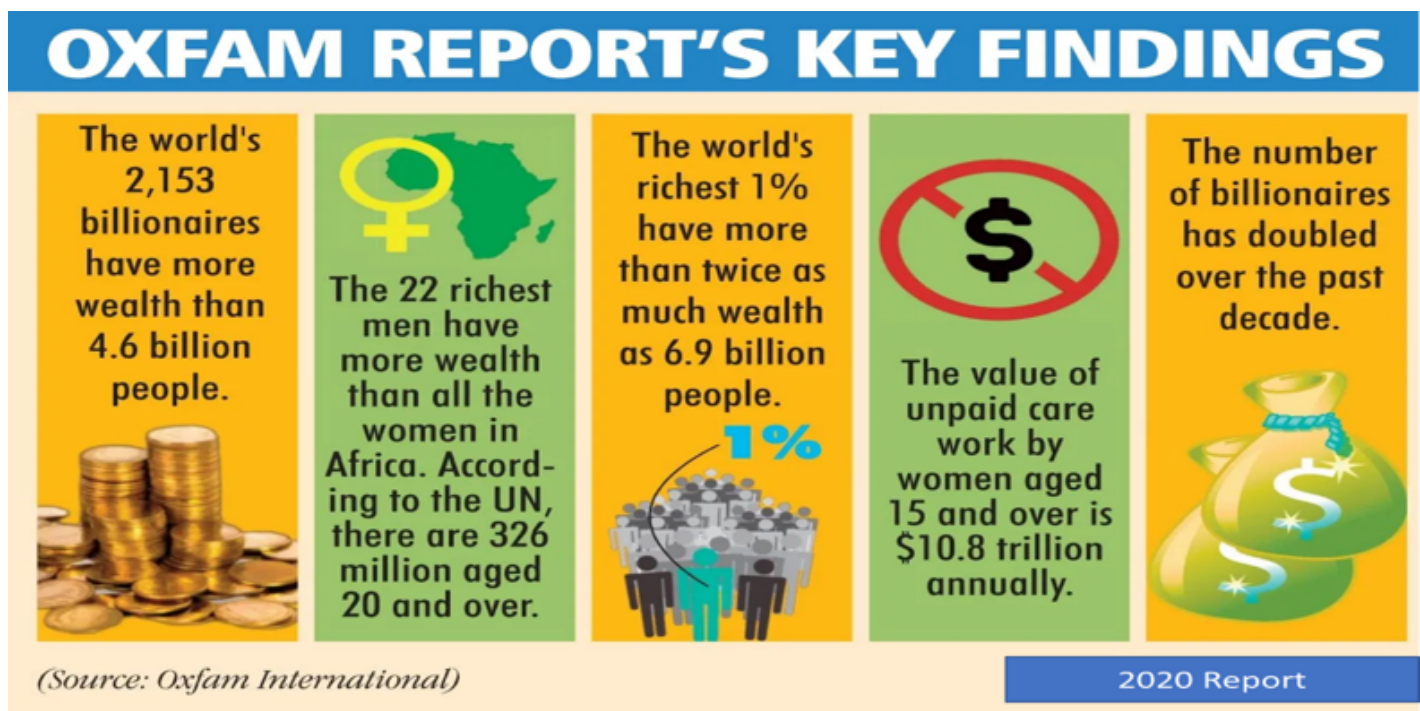
RANTS AND RAVES

Everything is connected – femicide reveals the failure of society

– Margaret MacPherson

Femicide is a logical outcome in a socio-political system that makes its wealth on the backs of women's unpaid, underpaid, undervalued care work and reproductive labour. It has always been this way in the Western world. There is a direct connection between sex-based inequity, the economy and femicide. In simple terms, our entire global economy operates as it does because there is a dominant ruling class (run mostly by men) that wants to make and keep more and more wealth for themselves. To do that, they need cheap labour and a renewable labour force.

The 2020 Oxfam report clearly shows the outcomes of the current state of capitalism:



Under the past 40+ years of neo-liberal economics and austerity measures, the middle-class and social safety net has been eroded now to the point of collapse. Despite some talk of a basic income, food security and housing as a human right, governments of all parties continue to serve corporate interests by maintaining economic and social policies that disadvantage the majority of their populations. You can see it in the Ontario government's recent attempts to undermine the labour movement, control wages of public servants, ongoing privatization of healthcare and weakening of environmental regulations. They will continue to undermine public services because they really do believe that the free market and unregulated capitalism can save us. It has certainly been good for the people with power.

RANTS AND RAVES

Governments fail to grasp that violence rates are higher when individuals have to struggle to survive. The conservative mindset insists on the blame and shame of the individual rather than looking at the true costs and impacts of social inequities. Yes, individuals are responsible for their actions. But individual choice is greatly influenced by the luck of the draw at birth, impacted over a lifetime by large global forces, social policies and economic drivers. The people on the bottom of the social pecking order always suffer first and most in a corrupt system.

In spite of the ground gained in human and civil rights over the last fifty years, women as a political class remain fixed in place as second-class citizens. Race, gender diversity, sexual orientation, geographic location, ability, and age pile up even more inequities and disadvantage. You can see the disparities in the wage gap, homeless and poverty rates, incarceration rates and femicide rates. These are the numbers that tell us exactly where and how we are failing as a society. They also point to what has to change if we are going to survive as a species.

All this to say, it's not enough for us to petition for increased funding to end gender-based violence. We need a bigger vision with long-term planning that is rooted in global equity and sustainability. As long as people have to struggle to survive, there will be violence and the cascade effects of trauma.

To be successful in getting to a prevention agenda, we need broad engagement and some common messages. We must persuade governments to invest in prevention as a sound strategy that also works within the limited scope of social and fiscal conservatism. Our current response to violence is crisis oriented, always after the fact. This is the most expensive response possible, in economic, social and human costs. If governments actually want to save money, the way forward is upstream toward prevention.

Let's be unequivocal. A prevention agenda means new investments and a non-partisan commitment to change over time that is not hampered by election cycles. We have to be creative to work-around elections without losing ground so that we are not starting over every four years. At the local level, enlist your elected officials. Meet with them, build relationships across political parties, help them understand the real-world pressures their communities are facing as a result of 20th century neo-liberal policies and thinking. Help politicians understand that it is in their interests to support every person in their community as a precious, contributing and valued member of society. Our world is interconnected, interdependent. All life matters. We are called now to adjust our systems and our thinking to reflect this truth. Ask your leaders to use their power and influence to support a prevention agenda. Attach specific 'asks' that we can articulate together.

One 'ask' for everyone to press for: ask your MPP to advocate for Recommendation 3: Immediately institute a provincial implementation committee. Without implementation, it is just another list of recommendations.

Call your elected officials into leadership. Femicide prevention is legacy work that needs doing. The Renfrew recommendations can help guide the way and identify concrete next steps.