

## SECTION THREE

# LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND WOMEN'S VOICES

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## Women's Safety As A Community Issue

We often think of the great costs to an individual of being a victim of crime. Less often do we think of the collective costs to us all, as a community.

Financial costs alone are staggering. Statistics Canada estimates that the direct costs of crime each year is \$10 billion, spent on police, courts and corrections services. Policing takes up over half of that \$10 billion, and represents a significant part of the budget of many municipalities.

If the indirect costs are factored in - e.g. pain and suffering, days lost at work, etc. - it is estimated that crime and violence costs Canadians \$46 billion each year.<sup>20</sup>

- The physical and sexual abuse of girls and women in Canada costs our economy approximately \$4.2 billion a year - this includes the costs of health care interventions, lost work days, social services and criminal justice.<sup>21</sup>
- Health-related costs of violence against women alone amount to \$1.5 billion per year.<sup>22</sup> This is not surprising given that 43% of women injured by their partners had to receive medical care; violence is a major cause of injury ranging from cuts and bruises to death.<sup>23</sup>

Children who witness abuse are significantly more likely to:

- develop aggressive behaviour (bullying, fighting)
- experience emotional disturbances (depression, continual fear, anxiety)
- engage in criminal activity (destroying property, theft and vandalism)
- experience negative effects on social and academic development.<sup>24</sup>





All of these effects will be associated with great social and economic costs both now and in the future. People's fear, lessened mobility, and distrust of neighbours, result in enormous costs to the vitality of the community. When women and other vulnerable groups experience physical and social environments as unsafe, they cannot freely participate in community activities, engage in employment or educational opportunities, or become involved in local decision-making processes. This comes at a high cost both to the individual and to the community.

### What is a Safe Community?

The defining feature of a safe community is the ability of all of its citizens - regardless of gender, race, age, income, sexuality, language or ability - to participate fully and freely in all of its environments. This requires that citizens both feel, and are, safe, and that they have meaningful opportunities to participate in local decision-making processes.

Each community will develop its own vision for a safe community. For example, the Boundary region of BC's southern interior decided that:

A safer community is one that works towards a standard of safety in the home, in school and in the community based on mutual respect, acceptance and valuing of everyone.<sup>25</sup>

Toronto's community safety strategy is based on the understanding that:

- In a Safe City - crime, as measured by reports to Police and victimization surveys, is on the decline.
- In a Safe City - the number of people who feel safer in their neighbourhoods and downtown is on the increase.
- In a Safe City - people know their neighbours and use neighbourhood services.
- In a Safe City - people have confidence in their municipal services, such as police, maintenance of public spaces, public transit and City Councillors.
- In a Safe City - people are tolerant of diversity and feel that all people are treated fairly.
- In a Safe City - people are optimistic about the future of the city.<sup>26</sup>

### ACTIVITY 3: Visioning A Safer Community

Present participants with the following scenario and ask them to work in small groups of three to six people, recording their answers on flip charts: "Tomorrow morning you wake up and a miracle has happened. Your community is now perfectly safe. You don't know how this miracle happened, you just know that the community is different. How is it different? What are you doing differently? Don't record what's NOT happening (e.g. there's no violence against women), but what IS happening (e.g. the women's shelter is now a neighbourhood house)." Your observations can form your goals for a safer community.

Communities have identified hundreds of goals for a safer community. On the following page is a list of the broad range of categories derived from the workshops conducted as part of the Women and Community Safety Project.

**People's fear, lessened mobility, and distrust of neighbours, result in enormous costs to the vitality of the community.**

**When women and other vulnerable groups experience physical and social environments as unsafe, they cannot freely participate in community activities, engage in employment or educational opportunities, or become involved in local decision-making processes.**

**This comes at a high cost both to the individual and to the community.**

Municipalities are the closest level of government to the citizen, so they are in the best position to work with local groups to establish effective community-based programs.

*Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2000*



### Examples of Goals for Safer Communities

- A safe community is one where we feel safe
- A safe community is one where we feel safe out in public, both day and night
- In a safe community, women, children, seniors and other vulnerable people would finally be safe from violence and abuse from the people they know as well as from strangers
- A safe community is a vibrant and diverse community
- A safe community is accessible
- A safe community has good services and infrastructure
- A safe community has adequate housing for all
- In a safe community our work places are free from violence and harassment
- A safe community is one where everyone is valued and there is no discrimination
- In a safe community, all resources – human, physical and social – would be freed up for more productive uses

## The Safer Communities Approach

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Women's fear and experiences of violence, and the impact of these on women's participation in community life, was the catalyst for the first safe city initiatives in Canada.<sup>27</sup> The Safer Communities approach to crime prevention was built on the recognition that focusing on women's personal security issues was not only necessary, but would lead to safer communities for all citizens.

That is, in order to address the full spectrum of crime, victimization and fear, and in order to build communities which offer equitable opportunities to women and other vulnerable groups in our society, issues specific to women must be fully acknowledged and be a formal and integral part of a comprehensive community approach.

Focusing on issues specific to women will ensure that communities will ultimately be safer for everyone. It is important to understand that the reverse does not hold true. For example, if we make all public buildings accessible for people with disabilities, we will also make them easier to access for seniors,

people with baby strollers, and people with mobility challenges. However, if we only make public buildings accessible for those without disabilities, then we will not make them easier to access by these groups. A gender-neutral approach to safer communities will fail because it does not recognize that particular groups are particularly vulnerable, and that it is from their perspective that communities need to be assessed.

The safer communities approach enables us to effectively address the complex nature of women's personal security issues through integrating a range of physical, social and institutional measures. This approach recognizes that:

- the community is the focal point of effective crime prevention;
- the community needs to identify and respond to both short and long term needs;
- efforts should bring together individuals from a range of sectors to tackle crime;
- strategies for preventing crime should be supported by the whole community; and
- inclusion of gender is necessary for a full analysis of crime, fear and victimization.





There are two broad categories of crime prevention strategies:

**Situational Crime Prevention -**

strategies that attempt to reduce opportunities for crime, victimization and fear;

**Crime Prevention Through Social Development**

strategies that attempt to focus on the root causes of crime, victimization and fear.

The safer communities approach incorporates a mixture of both short-term and long-term strategies from each of the two categories. In this way, a comprehensive safer community initiative would include a range of measures to make physical, social and institutional changes (such as those discussed in detail in Sections Four and Five).

It is essential that this work is carried out at the local level, and be guided by a collaborative community-based process. Local

governments are uniquely placed to provide the leadership necessary for a sustainable, integrated community safety strategy that addresses women's personal security issues.

Indeed, all across Canada, local governments are increasingly recognizing that community safety is a fundamental quality of life issue - a safe community is a livable community, a healthy community, and an economically viable community.

## Local Government and Safer Communities

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Local governments can and do play an enormously important role in providing for safer communities and contributing to prevention of violence against women, through their roles as providers of services and as community leaders.

Local governments have authority over, and are responsible for, a range of community services. These vary from province to province, and according to whether it is a municipality, or regional district.<sup>28</sup>

Almost every function of local government has some relation to public safety and access; the more obvious of these include policing, fire protection and emergency planning. However, other responsibilities and services of local government that have a strong impact on personal safety and access include:

- street lighting;
- roads and sidewalks;
- signage;
- traffic controls;
- parks and recreational facilities and programs;
- public transit; and
- land-use planning and development design.

Local governments may also form partnerships with other levels of government, non-profit organizations, and private interests. Examples include:

- Joint-use agreements for facilities and programs that might not be provided by one agency alone, such as local neighbourhood recreational and educational programs
- Public transportation
- Emergency planning
- Affordable housing co-operatives
- Day-care programs
- Providing meeting space and other resources to support volunteer groups

**Local Government can make a difference through:**

**direct action;**

**advocacy, influence and linkage;**

**partnerships and collaboration;**

**community leadership and vision;**

**policies to guide development.**



Local governments may also:

- support, in principle, actions and initiatives to assist community and other organizations;
- advocate, on behalf of their community, with other institutions at the local, provincial and federal levels;
- provide leadership through making broad value-statements in support of a safer community.

### **Local Governments and Safer Communities: Cowichan Valley Regional District Resolution to the Union of BC Municipalities**

*“WHEREAS national, provincial and community-based research has documented the extent and effects of crime and violence against women and children in their homes, at their places of work and in their communities;*

*AND WHEREAS municipal leadership is essential to achieve equality and end violence;*

*THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Union of British Columbia Municipalities urge its membership to commit to ongoing efforts to prevent violence in communities, and to promote communities where all people can freely use public spaces, day or night, without fear of violence, and where people, including women and persons with special needs, are safe and free from violence through:*

- a) ensuring that all municipal and regional programs and policies, including Official Community Plans, support personal and public safety, and*
- b) adopting development guidelines respecting issues of safety and security and apply those guidelines in its review of Official Community Plans.”*

COWICHAN VALLEY REGIONAL DISTRICT,  
BOARD MINUTES, JUNE 23, 1999

## Women's Safety and Local Government Responsibilities

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Traditional responsibilities of local governments, such as safe water, traffic control and street design for vehicular and pedestrian safety, acquiring land for parks, and providing recreation programs, are all justified on the grounds of ensuring the well-being of community residents.

As community requirements change, steps are taken to expand and/or improve these services as necessary. For example, recent awareness of the needs of people living with disabilities is leading to the removal of barriers on public property, in particular, streets (i.e., curb cuts) and public buildings (i.e., fully wheelchair accessible).

These changes have been the result of a growing acknowledgment of the needs of people with disabilities, and an understanding at the local government level that this needs to be a priority.

Supporting community safety for women is very similar to supporting access for people with disabilities. It is a matter of understanding and acknowledging that the personal safety of women and other marginalized groups is an essential part of community

living, and that local government, along with the rest of the community, has an important role to play.

For example, the policy (shown in the sidebar) adopted by the District of North Vancouver, illustrates both an acknowledgement of, and commitment to, women's safety as a community priority.

It is also important to integrate this priority into the mechanisms that guide how decisions are made. The direct steps that local government takes, the processes through which decisions are made, and the allocation of staff time, reflect the priorities and standards set out by Council through the Official Community Plan, and other by-laws. These are discussed on the following page.

### **NORTH VANCOUVER ZERO TOLERANCE OF VIOLENCE POLICY**

**"The District of North Vancouver recognizes that violence is an insidious problem with devastating costs that affects all residents and that violence against any person is unacceptable.**

**Moreover, the District recognizes that the group most at risk of being abused is women and that among women, the most vulnerable groups are visible minorities, aboriginal women and women with disabilities."**

***District of North Vancouver, August 26, 1996***

## The Official Community Plan

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“Town planning affects the way people live their lives and can help determine people’s quality of life, health and well-being.

It plays a key role in determining where people can live, work, shop and spend their leisure time.

Planning can help either to create or to remove barriers to access in relation to jobs, housing, shopping, community, education and leisure facilities.”

*Royal Town Planning Institute  
Advice Note No. 12  
“Planning for Women”  
January 1995*

The Official Community Plan (OCP) is the document that sets the framework for decisions about future development in a community, and, as such, represents a place for the community to express its standards and priorities.

Planning can influence economic development, housing development and design, parks and recreation program provision, public transportation, the design and maintenance of public facilities, as well as the management of programs that local government is responsible for.

Provincial Acts set out required content for Official Community Plans, and this varies between jurisdictions. BC’s Local Government Act, for example, currently designates required content that includes: location, amount, type and density of residential development; proposed commercial, recreational, institutional, agricultural and public utility land-uses; and public facilities, including schools, parks and waste treatment and disposal sites.

It sets out requirements for policies respecting affordable housing, rental housing and special-needs housing as well as allowing for inclusion of policies relating to social needs, social well-being and social development.

The OCP can recognize and address many aspects of women’s personal security, and play an important role in supporting, both directly and indirectly, all of the elements that contribute to the social well-being of communities.

Official Community Plans are reviewed periodically, and the OCP Review Process provides an opportunity for women’s voices to be inserted into the local government arena. This can be done in different ways. For example, OCP reviews done in the Cowichan Valley Regional District have used the results of community safety audit projects as a basis for developing Community Safety and Social Policy sections in the new plans.

The topic of community health and safety was integrated directly into the OCP review process in the District of North Cowichan. The process included a background study on “Community Health and Safety”, and the inclusion of community health and safety questions in both their community survey and public neighbourhood meetings.

In an area of the Cowichan Valley Regional District where it was not anticipated that the OCP would be reviewed for some time, the Regional Director initiated the development and adoption of a by-law amendment to the existing plan.<sup>29</sup>

The following resources will be particularly useful when you want to address community safety through the OCP and other by-laws:

City of Toronto, *A Working Guide for Planning and Designing Safer Urban Environments*

Cowichan Women Against Violence Society, *Planning for Safer Communities: a guide to planning for safety of women and children in small and rural communities* (see reference section).

## Plan Policies

Policies are the vehicle by which Council, in its Official Community Plan, expresses its intent as to how the community should develop in the future, based on existing conditions and community objectives. They are included in the OCP and other sub-plans that may deal with specific issues (such as recreational priorities, environmental health) or parts of the community (such as neighbourhoods).

Policies can address goals and objectives for community safety through:

- Establishing criteria and guidelines to ensure that the type and location of developments promote individual and community safety, and that all development is accessible to all segments of the population (for example, see the checklists in Appendices F and G).
- Encouraging partnerships with other levels of government, private companies and community groups in the provision of facilities and amenities that can foster affordable housing, parks, recreational facilities, affordable day care and other social services.
- Directing priorities for the provision of services and facilities, to ensure that all areas and all user groups are served in an equitable manner. For example, by recognizing that recreation is essential for healthy youth and also supports crime prevention, priorities can be developed for more facilities and programs in areas where families have affordability and accessibility issues.
- Providing for public input from specific user groups to ensure adequate representation in decision-making processes.



The Development Control by-law can address specific elements of, and establish criteria for, landscaping and screening, signage and parking standards, to ensure safety and accessibility.

For example, it can require that parking be provided in such a way as to reduce opportunities for crime by providing adequate lighting and eliminating hiding and entrapment areas.



- Prohibiting exclusion of certain types of land-uses in other by-laws to reduce barriers to provision of essential and other social services such as shelters and transition houses. For example, the zoning by-law for Area E of the Cowichan Valley Regional District states: "Notwithstanding any other provision of this bylaw, the following uses are permitted in any zone: (a) utility use (b) public park (c) group home for the mentally and/or physically handicapped and/or persons over 55 years of age (d) residential shelter operated by a non-profit society or licensed or operated by a Provincial or Federal Agency".<sup>30</sup>

## Regulatory Mechanisms

Regulatory mechanisms can include Zoning, Development Control, Subdivision, Nuisance and Noise by-laws.

The Zoning by-law controls types of land uses and activities for particular areas, and regulates building size, height, densities and set-backs. It can support particular uses such as small

suites that provide affordable housing, and home-based businesses that foster employment opportunities. It can allow uses such as group homes and transition homes in certain areas, to foster prevention of violence, and can designate lands for particular uses such as residential or parkland.

The Subdivision by-law regulates the standard of services provided to land as a condition of subdivision, setting out requirements that provide for quality of roads, provision of water supply, sewage, and drainage conditions. It can ensure that residential development provides for accessibility and personal safety of particular groups, including people with disabilities, women and children.

The Development Control by-law can address specific elements of, and establish criteria

for, landscaping and screening, signage and parking standards, to ensure safety and accessibility. For example, it can require that parking be provided in such a way as to reduce opportunities for crime by providing adequate lighting and eliminating hiding and entrapment areas.

Other by-laws can address issues and direct actions with regard to such things as unsightly premises and graffiti removal, noise and nuisance, and dog control (a serious safety issue for some people in rural areas).



**“Women have a vital role to play in shaping communities. They have different perspectives and ways of communicating that are valuable in planning and public involvement processes.”**

**“Despite their expertise in creating community, women do not get consulted enough when changes are being made to communities. In fact, many aspects of municipal planning processes, besides not considering women’s perspectives, inadvertently create barriers to women’s participation.”**

***Planning Ourselves  
In Group 1994:5***



## Policy in Action

Integrating personal and public safety considerations into the OCP and day-to-day responsibilities of local government requires an understanding of the issues, as well as background information, data and public input.

The basic questions that need to be addressed are: How do women and other vulnerable groups use and need to use their communities? What are the barriers that they face and how can these be addressed through physical design and social development?

Applying a “women’s safety lens” to community development questions helps decision-makers to understand how decisions may affect not only women, but also other marginalized groups in the community. For example, the following questions can form part of a checklist for assessing new development:

- What is the context of the development (i.e., area in which it is proposed) and what is there (or not there) that will have an impact on crime and women’s safety?
- Who are the present and proposed users and can any conflicts be predicted?
- How do, and how will, women and children use this area - day and night?
- What are their personal safety concerns?
- What elements of the proposal will support or detract from personal safety?
- How will the development affect the need for community services?
- Are there plans for management and security?

## Local Government Leadership in Promoting Safer Communities

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One essential component of any community's efforts on crime prevention is the integration of women's safety into the community planning and development process. To be successful, these efforts must be comprehensive and coordinated, and local government is well placed to provide the necessary leadership.

However, the fit between the work of local women's organizations and the work of local government has not always been obvious. The checklist following illustrates some of the ways in which local governments can, and should be, actively involved in making the prevention of violence against women a priority in their communities. This checklist can be used as both a starting point and a benchmark in assessing the level of involvement of local government in your community's work for women's safety.





## Promoting Women's Safety: A Checklist for Local Governments

*Adapted from the 1993 Urban Safety and Crime Prevention Program Survey, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Building Safer Communities for Women. 1995.*

Have the following been implemented in your municipality?

### I. PUBLIC COMMITMENT

- Adoption of a principle making women's personal safety and security a priority in all municipal decision-making.
- Mechanisms to promote personal safety of women and children (e.g., committees, staff working groups).
- Public Awareness exercises to inform citizens of municipal safety initiatives.

### II. PARTNERSHIPS

- Partnerships with business and other private organizations to work toward making your municipality safer for women.

### III. HUMAN RELATIONS

- A sexual harassment policy (including training and awareness strategies for all employees).
- Employee Assistance Programs to support employees affected by domestic violence (e.g., counselling).
- Educational programs on violence issues and prevention for service staff.
- Audits of municipal jobs for personal safety where physical isolation, evening work and contact with an angry public are a consideration.
- Audits of work sites for personal safety of staff and patrons.

### IV. COMMUNITY PLANNING

- A strategy for making women's and children's personal safety and security a component of the Official Community Plan.
- Planning and Zoning by-laws that deal specifically with personal safety and security of women and children, for example: design guidelines for new developments, layout and design, lighting, signage, etc.; provisions for transit, accessibility; equity in provision of services such as recreation; and safe and affordable housing.

- A safety and security checklist for development applications.
- Training for elected officials, planners, building and by-law inspectors.
- A program for safety audits of public spaces.

#### V. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

- A public education campaign for users to promote safety features within the transit system.
- A policy to involve women in the design of bus and subway stops, routes and shelters.
- A plan to install telephones, lighting and/or escape routes at bus shelters and stations.
- A 'request stop' program (disembarking passengers upon request).
- Training for transit drivers on responding to, and reporting of, incidents of assault and harassment.
- Safety audits of the transit system/routes.

#### VI. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Local government participation in and/or support of:

- Public education program on safety and security of women.
- Programs which provide services to survivors and perpetrators of violence.
- Programs which assist those organizations that provide public education and/or services to survivors of violence (including transition homes and shelters).

#### VII. POLICING AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

- A community partnership policy with police to ensure ongoing liaison among groups and agencies providing support and services to women.
- Police guidelines and protocol covering police response to sexual assault and domestic violence calls.
- A review of disaster planning to ensure needs of victims of violence are considered.

#### VIII. INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON AND COORDINATION

- Interdepartmental means to coordinate municipal efforts to reduce violence against women and to address fragmentation of services and funding.

#### **"Goal Statement**

It is a goal of the Board to promote communities where all people can freely use public spaces, day or night, without fear of violence, and where people including women and children and persons with special needs, are safe from violence.

Accordingly, the Board shall:

- a) ensure that all CVRD programs and policies support personal and public safety, and
- b) adopt development guidelines respecting issues of safety and security and apply those guidelines in its review of Official Community Plans and development proposals."

*Cowichan Valley  
Regional District, 1999*

Existing processes often pose barriers to participation for many people.

Timing and structure of public meetings, formal language and jargon, issues around child-care and transportation, and accessibility issues (e.g. cultural, physical, language), can make participation difficult, or an intimidating prospect for many people.



## Women's Voices in Community Planning

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Section Two discussed the necessity of including women's experiences and concerns in the community's understanding of crime issues. The same is true for the community planning and development process. This requires gathering relevant data as well as ensuring that women are adequately represented in public input processes.

Background information and data that will help to provide an understanding of women's safety issues can include number of calls to crisis lines, and number of clients served in sexual assault centres and transition houses. Other sources can include the health sector, and those community organizations that serve women with disabilities, immigrant women, lesbians,

aboriginal women, senior women, teens and young women, etc.

Information on personal safety concerns and the impact of those concerns on women's ability to participate in their communities can, and should, be obtained through a range of consultation methods. These will be discussed in detail in Section Four.

## Barriers to Participation

In any community planning process, public input is recognized as a first and essential step to ensure that decisions about present and future development represent the needs and desires of the public. This means that the process is as important as the results, because it's the process that determines what questions are asked and whose needs and concerns are heard.

As we have illustrated elsewhere, when dealing with issues of community safety and crime prevention, it is absolutely essential to involve those people who are the most vulnerable to violence if we are to create safer communities for all.

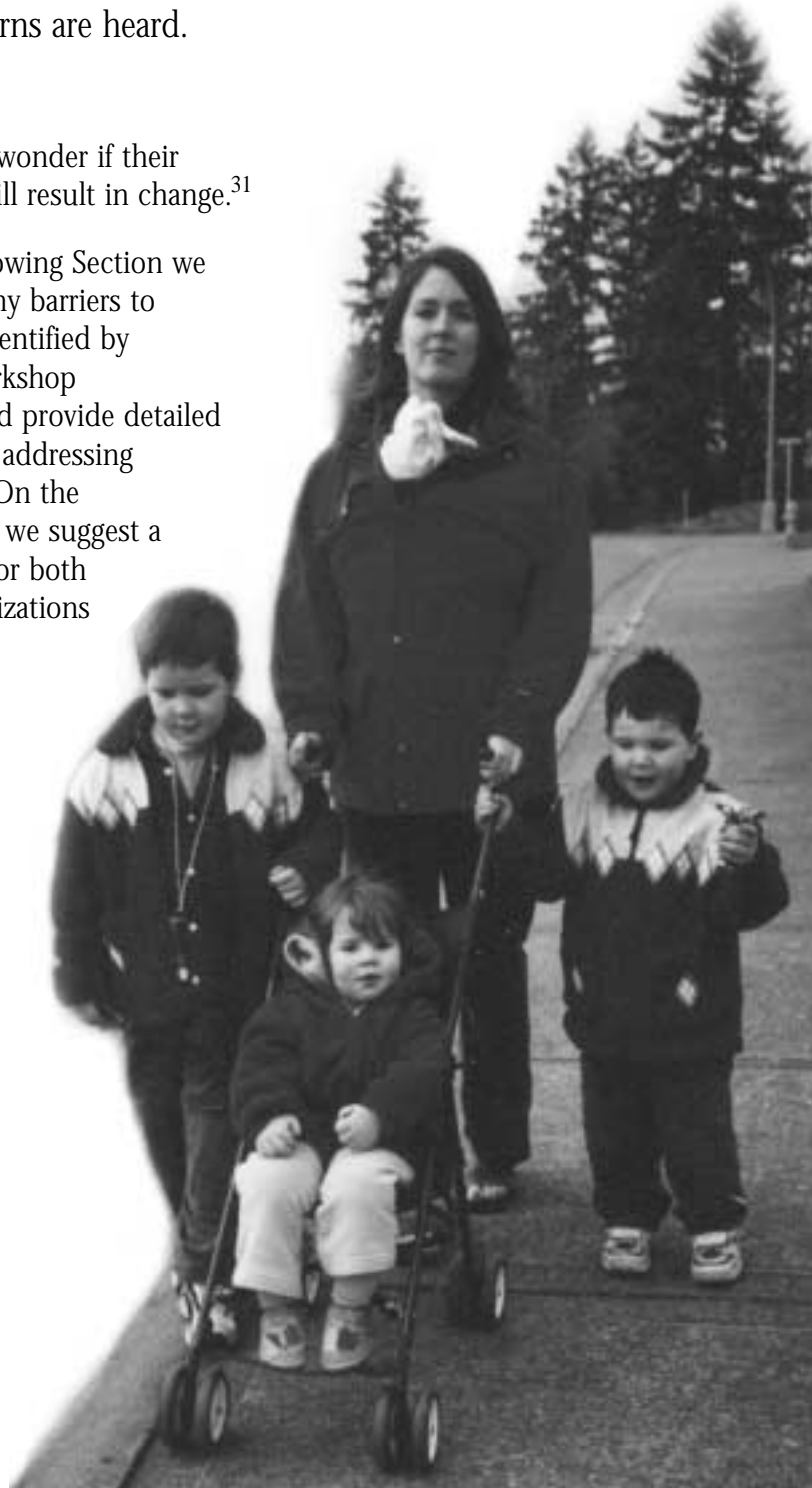
However, existing processes often pose barriers to participation for many people. Timing and structure of public meetings, formal language and jargon, issues around child-care and transportation, and accessibility issues (e.g. cultural, physical, language), can make participation difficult, or an intimidating prospect for many people.

Lack of participation is often mistaken for lack of interest. However, the reality is that people are busy, and they have a multitude of responsibilities that include family, work and volunteer activities.

They have safety considerations, which range from getting to and from meetings, to standing up in front of an audience and cameras to voice their opinions.

They may also wonder if their participation will result in change.<sup>31</sup>

In the following Section we outline the many barriers to participation identified by community workshop participants, and provide detailed suggestions for addressing these barriers. On the following page, we suggest a place to start, for both women's organizations and local governments.



The key to building an effective community safety strategy that addresses women and other vulnerable groups is meaningful community involvement.

It ensures that we look at community environments from the perspective of those who are most vulnerable to violence, and that we engage those groups in a meaningful way in the identification of issues and the implementation of solutions.

### Women and women-serving organizations can begin by:

- calling or writing your local government<sup>32</sup> and letting them know that you are concerned about the need to address women's personal security issues in your community;
- finding out about planning processes in the community and contacting the community planner;
- providing information on your services at least once a year to Councils and key staff, to make them aware of issues of violence against women; and
- talking to other people in your neighbourhood or community and forming a group that helps women to be involved.

### Elected officials and staff can begin by:

- making concerted efforts to connect with women-serving organizations to ask for their specific input in decision-making processes;
- making public input processes more accessible and less intimidating;
- considering childcare, transportation and accessibility needs; and
- producing accessible information on local government functions and planning processes (e.g., plain language, different formats, different languages).

Local governments can play a critical role, not only in being responsive to issues presented to them, but also in leading community efforts and initiatives that promote women's safety. The following sections will talk about the ways in which local governments and women-serving organizations can work together. Section Four concentrates on the process of building the partnerships necessary for cooperation, provides some guidance on how to understand women's safety concerns, and presents the Women's Safety Audit Tool as a way to assess community environments. Implementation and sustainability are addressed in Section Five.