

THREE YEAR HIGHLIGHTS

OCTOBER 2005 TO MARCH 2008

Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres

Report to the Ministry of Children's Services

Together, we have
made a difference!

Working towards an Alberta free from sexual violence

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Letter to the Minister

Dear Minister:

Together we have made a difference! In the 2005/2006 provincial budget, Alberta Children's Services made a commitment to children and families in Alberta. They announced that two million dollars over three years would be dedicated to developing a comprehensive provincial approach to the reduction of sexual abuse and assault.

Since that time, Alberta Children's Services recognition of and response to sexual abuse and assault in the province of Alberta has provided valuable resources to victims and their families.

Alberta Children's Services recognition of and response to sexual abuse and assault in the province of Alberta has provided valuable resources to victims and their families.

- **Alberta's sexual assault centre prevention programs reached 23, 676 individuals in the province of Alberta (2007);**

Core services were provided to Albertans including crisis response, counselling, education and outreach

- **Alberta's sexual assault centres provided crisis intervention to 2,699 individuals and counselling services to 1,268 individuals (2007);**

In regions where services were particularly lacking, we were able to provide the support to develop and strengthen service coordination. We engaged communities in all corners of the province in consultation to identify and address their needs.

Our belief that sexual assault and sexual abuse can happen to anyone was affirmed:

- **84% of counselling clients were female; 16% were male.**
- **40% of counselling clients were under the age of 25 (2007).**

We learned that sexual violence is family violence.

As we feared, the most vulnerable Albertans, our children, are at the greatest risk.

- **64% of counselling clients were struggling with the effects of child sexual abuse.**
- **59% of client assaults occurred before the age of 12 (2007).**

We learned that sexual violence is family violence.

- **51% of offenders of counselling clients were family members.**
- **42% of offenders lived with the victim at the time of the assault most often in the roles of parents, step-parents, siblings and partners (2007).**

And we know, sexual violence like family violence is everybody's business. Through the delivery of these services, Albertans gained awareness that we are all affected by sexual abuse and sexual assault in some way.

- **Alberta's sexual assault centres provided child sexual abuse awareness presentations to 18,424 parents, children and youth (2007).**

Sexual violence, like family violence, is everybody's business.

Raising awareness about sexual assault and sexual abuse means that victims and their loved ones are encouraged to come forward for help; it means that sex offenders are held accountable for the crimes they have committed; it means that parents and children understand the risks of child sexual abuse and know what to do if it happens to them...or a neighbor...or a friend.

Alberta Children's Services support of sexual assault centres in Alberta has made a difference. This report will outline in detail the tremendous accomplishments that have been achieved over the past three years. We believe that governments, businesses and communities working together is the answer and we are very grateful to the government of Alberta for their leadership and support towards a world without sexual abuse and assault.

Respectfully submitted,

Annemarie Tocher, Executive Director
Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres

The Issue of Sexual Assault and Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse and adult sexual assault have harmful consequences for all children and families in Alberta.

In addition to the debilitating effects of the trauma of sexual abuse and sexual assault, experiencing sexual abuse often means living with other serious illnesses and self-harming behaviors.

- Addictions (Pirard, 2004; Schafer, 2000);
- Child and youth sexual exploitation (<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com>);
- Child and youth suicide (Molner, Berkman et al, 2001; Browne et al, 1999; Fergusson et al, 1996);
- Depression and anxiety (Browne et al, 1999; Johnson et al, 1999)
- Increased use of medical services, hospitalization, medication and emergency visits (Burgess et al, 2003).

If left untreated, these consequences can become chronic. A community's response or neglect of these issues can make a tremendous difference to the overall health and wellness of us all.

The effects of sexual abuse and sexual assault are widespread and far-reaching:

- In a 1991 Canadian study, about 4% of boys and 10% of girls experienced severe sexual abuse before the age of 17 (MacMillan, Fleming & Trocme et al, 1997). In this study, severe sexual abuse is defined as an adult threatening to have sex with a child, touching a child's sex parts, trying to engage in sex with a child, or sexually attacking a child.
- In 2003, 61% of all victims of sexual assault that reported to the police were children and youth under 18 years. Reports of girl victims were highest at ages 11 to 19 and reports of boy victims were highest at 3 to 14 years of age (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics).
- Males made up 29% of child victims, 12% of youth and 8% of adult victims of sexual assault reported to 154 police agencies across Canada. (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 2003).
- In 1993, 39% of Canadian women had experienced at least one incident of sexual assault since the age of 16 (Statistics Canada, 1993).

In 2003, 61% of all victims of sexual assault reported to the police were children and youth under the age of 18.

(Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics)



Comprehensive sexual assault services must be available for all Albertans.

A Provincial Response

7 core services are needed for a comprehensive provincial response

AASAC identified seven core service areas that we believe are essential in each region of Alberta in order to provide a comprehensive, coordinated approach to service delivery for victims of sexual violence and their families.

1 Coordination & Collaboration/Agency and Community Leadership

To ensure that communities respond to sexual violence in a manner that represents local autonomy, this service is designed to support and encourage communities to take action on sexual violence as part of family violence. Victims of sexual violence benefit not only from the supports offered by sexual assault centres but also from the strong networks and alliances between the centres and other agencies that conjointly provide them with comprehensive and coordinated services. This core service ensures that the needs of sexual violence victims and their families are always included and considered in the development and ongoing operations of all family violence, legal, law enforcement, medical, child protection and victims' services and programs. Activities within this core service will include the executive director functions within an agency or developing/emerging agency, coordination and collaboration of all sexual and family violence services, leadership and advocacy activities that ensure sexual violence remains a visible and vocal issue within communities and service development activities in response to needs and gaps in service as identified by each community and/or region.

2 Crisis Response

One of the most critical and essential services provided by sexual assault centres is crisis services, which includes in-office crisis response and access to twenty-four hour crisis lines. Crisis workers provide sexual assault victims with support, stabilization, risk assessment, information, referrals and hospital accompaniment.

3 Counselling

Treatment options available through the sexual assault centres include both individual and group counselling for children, women and men. The counselling focuses on helping female, male, adult and child survivors cope with the effects of the trauma they have experienced. Both short-term (up to 12 sessions) and long-term (up to one year) counselling are provided.

AASAC has determined this framework of core services constitutes a minimum standard of service response.

4 Police & Court Support

Through police and court support programs sexual assault centre staff and volunteers assist victims as they navigate their way through the criminal justice process including police investigations, preliminary hearings and trials. It can often take up to two years for a sexual assault trial process to be completed and frequently longer for the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder to abate. With adequate intervention support, victims of sexual assault can proceed through the criminal justice process and recover from the effects of trauma. Services are offered in the following areas: options counselling, police accompaniment for reporting, court preparation and accompaniment, advocacy for victims through the court system and follow-up, including debriefing, information and referral counselling.

5 Education

Critical to the decrease of the crime of sexual assault in Alberta are the education, prevention and public information services provided by sexual assault centres. Currently, professional educators with the ten sexual assault centres throughout Alberta deliver interactive and informative presentations to children, teens and adult audiences in their local communities and surrounding areas on issues related to sexual assault prevention and information. Specialized education and training services are also delivered to key professional groups, such as RCMP, Victims Services, Addiction Counsellors, Child Welfare Workers, Prison Staff, Doctors, Nurses, Shelter Staff etc.

6 Outreach

Outreach services focus on removing client barriers and ensuring that services are available and accessible to diverse populations, rural communities and previously un-served or under-served areas within the province. This is an essential element for effective delivery of services. Outreach services work to ensure that partnerships and collaborations are developed with new groups, organizations and communities. These services are based on a community development model that seeks to engage diverse and previously un-served and under-served groups, organizations and communities.

7 Volunteers

Under the supervision of professionals, community volunteers operate many of the services provided by AASAC members, especially 24-hour crisis intervention services. Key to the delivery of effective services is the recruitment, training and supervision of these volunteers. To this end, volunteer coordinators across the province work to engage new volunteers, ensure effective and ongoing training, supervision and recognition.

With the support of Alberta Children's Services, core services have been expanded across the province.

Funding Report

Guideline for Provincial Funding

Together the Ministry of Children's Services and the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres agreed that all sexual violence initiatives funded by the Ministry of Children's Services would:

1. Include a coordinated and collaborative response to family violence from a sexual violence perspective.
2. Work towards achieving the goal that individuals and families affected by sexual violence in Alberta have access to seven core sexual violence services within a coordinated, collaborative community-based continuum of service.
3. Ensure that family violence services, sexual violence and other victims' services in each Child and Family Service Authority region of Alberta are coordinated and collaborative.
4. Be based on the priorities identified in the Alberta Roundtable on Family Violence and Bullying.
5. Build on AASAC's existing provincial investment plan, "The Building Blocks of Change".
6. Establish a three year granting relationship between sexual assault service providers and the Ministry of Children's Services.
7. Take into consideration that there are differing levels of coordination and collaboration already existing in the community and that these will continue to be strengthened.
8. Ensure that the core services developed and implemented within this funding framework are sustainable.
9. Ensure that all services demonstrate impact and accountability.
10. Ensure that sexual assault centres take a leadership role in facilitating community coordination and collaboration.

How Funds Were Allocated

Between October 1, 2005 and March 31, 2008 funding was allocated to provide direct client service in Individual Regions (\$1.45M), the Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres (\$225,000) and Special Projects (\$325,000). Details of these commitments begin on the next page.

Together, we have made a difference!

Retaining qualified staff

The specialized knowledge/skills of staff from sexual assault centres are critical to adequately address the serious and profound needs of individuals that have been sexually assaulted and/or abused.

“Provincial government support has enabled us to compensate and retain qualified staff and this had made such a difference to our clients and the services we are able to provide. “

(A sexual assault centre Executive Director)

Prior to 2005, retaining and adequately compensating qualified staff was problematic across the province (Tutty et al, 2005). In the larger cities, the issue was having the funding to pay staff at the level that other agencies can pay staff with identical professional qualifications. In rural and more remote centres, a limited number of professionals are available to hire into positions dealing with child and adult sexual assault/abuse cases. High staff turnover comes at a great cost to sexual assault centres and to the quality of service to clients.

Sexual assault centres are now hiring and retaining qualified staff and in some cases registered psychologists and child therapists. They report that client numbers are growing. Centre directors are able to spend less time applying for operational finances and fundraising and are able to focus on expanding and consolidating their successes.

Increasing access to service

The ability for a sexual abuse victim to access service when needed is paramount. Access to service can increase the likelihood of police reporting as well as the overall health and wellness of victims and their families. Prior to 2005, even regions with sexual assault centres only primarily served the municipalities. Stakeholders in these regions frequently noted the need for services for their rural areas (Tutty et al, 2005).

“Now we are able to send out brochures and information packages throughout the region, and be confident that when the call comes, we will have the resources to be able to go.”

(A sexual assault centre Executive Director)

Over the past three years, the geographic scope of the services delivered has increased significantly. The following are examples of only some of the previously un-served communities now receiving crisis, counselling and education services:

Pincher Creek	Taber	Oyen
Eagle Butte	Drumheller	Ponoka
Sun Child Reserve	Wainwright	Vermillion
Brooks	Okotoks	Rocky Mountain House
Banff/Canmore	Cold Lake	Bonnyville
Fort Chipewyan	Peace River	Onion Lake First Nations
Didsbury	Olds	Carstairs

“The challenge always is – when we educate and reach out to new communities, victims come forward – some who have never spoken out before, and we need to be ready to respond”.

(A sexual assault centre Executive Director)

“Because of limited resources, we’ve only ever been able to respond to schools that called us and requested our service – for the first time, we are sending out information packages to all the schools in our region to book education presentations for fall and winter 2008 – 2009.”

(A sexual assault centre Executive Director)

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Responding to the needs of Albertans

With increased access to service comes increased demand. Centre Executive Directors report that counselling programs are full and waiting times are increasing. In response to this increased demand, some centres are offering more group interventions – an effective method of increasing client load without increasing staff resources and time. Another innovative approach to meeting increased demands is from the sexual assault centre in Grande Prairie who partnered with the women’s shelter in Peace River to offer crisis telephone support – an effective and accessible method of providing service without incurring travel costs and time.

Increasing awareness through education

Education, prevention and public information have always been a central part of the mandate of sexual assault centres in Alberta. Like the counselling programs however, the waiting lists for education presentations are increasing. In Calgary, in response to a four year wait among elementary schools, the sexual assault centre is licensing and marketing their child sexual abuse education program (called Who Do You Tell™) as a train the trainer package for other community agencies to deliver. To date, pilots have taken place in Medicine Hat and Grand Prairie.

Saffron sexual assault centre in Sherwood Park focused their education activities on internet safety and cyber-bullying. In the past year, they mounted a play with local youth actors in the communities of Sherwood Park and Fort Saskatchewan on cyber-bullying called “CTRL ALT DELETE”. The play engages youth audiences by stopping the action and inviting audience members to come on stage and change the outcome of the story line. Feedback from youth has been very positive.

The Lethbridge community directed their energies very successfully on sexual assault community and professional education. Together with their community partners, they have sponsored several workshops and public presentations. Their “First Responder Training” prepared all types of professionals to respond effectively to disclosures of sexual assault and abuse. Community awareness presentations held in the public library included a panel on sexual assault and the viewing of a documentary film on the sexualization of children. The partners found that engaging community members and professionals through education creates a more welcoming and understanding community environment – one that encourages victims to disclose and receive help.

Province-wide statistical data on programs delivered and clients served helps to inform public policy and create an effective community response to sexual abuse and assault throughout Alberta.

Together, we have made a difference!

Ensuring we meet standards of excellence

Understanding who our clients are enables us to not only provide better service but also to develop a provincial profile of sexual assault issues and responses in Alberta. Province wide statistical data on programs delivered and clients served helps to inform public policy and create an effective community response to sexual abuse and assault throughout Alberta.

Over the past three years, the sexual assault centres in Alberta collaborated to create a common core data set and common outcome measures. Our core data set enables us to report provincial aggregate statistical data on sexual assault centre clients. We can now accurately describe our client demographics, including useful information about victims and offenders such as demographics; the type of assault; and how long ago the assault occurred.

In addition, AASAC members developed a common approach to evaluation and data collection including the development of standardized outcome measures and measurement tools for each of the seven core programs. Two outcome measurement pilots were instituted including the selection and implementation of measurement instruments for children who have been sexually abused and a new measurement instrument to determine the effectiveness of sexual assault centre outreach programs. The Canadian Outcomes Research Institute Homes database was customized for use by the sexual assault centre in Alberta and a database manual was developed. This is the first provincial sexual assault service outcome measures database in Canada!

Increasing our knowledge base

More research is greatly needed if we are to reach our vision of an Alberta free from sexual violence. An important part of ensuring standards of excellence is identifying what constitutes best practice and knowing where we must prioritize the need for additional knowledge. Through participation on a national committee of sexual assault service providers, AASAC has been able to identify and work towards filling the many gaps in knowledge in this area. Over the past three years, AASAC produced three pieces of research.

AASAC's research identifying the key elements required for sexual assault service provision in rural and remote communities is frequently requested from colleagues across Canada. A second piece of research aimed at understanding, comparing and contrasting the service delivery needs of women's shelter clients and sexual assault centre clients is currently under review for publication in a refereed academic journal. And finally, a position paper on the use of sexual assault nurse examiners will be useful as we embark on piloting a new method of forensic evidence collection in Region 3.

Together, we have made a difference!

Building a strong provincial organization

With provincial government support, our vision of a strong provincial body, one that is able to support a collaborative, coordinated approach to sexual assault service delivery in Alberta, has been realized.

Over the past 10 years, representatives from the sexual assault centres in Alberta have increasingly recognized the need for a provincial body to support a more collaborative, coordinated approach to sexual assault service delivery in Alberta. Fragmented services, rural and urban inequities and lack of sustainable funding for programs highlighted the need for a more unified provincial effort.

It was the intent of the founding members that AASAC would act as an umbrella organization for members engaged in direct service delivery throughout the province. Rather than deliver front-line services, AASAC would act as an intermediary focused on improving the effectiveness of the sexual assault sector and facilitate its further development. With provincial government support this vision has been realized.

To achieve this vision, representatives from sexual assault centres across the province worked diligently to create a transformative province-wide strategic plan. The key priority area resulting from the strategic planning process was ensuring province wide access for all clients to core sexual assault services. Historically, provincial funding for sexual assault services differed by organization and the types of services available to clients varied by region.

As a first step towards standardization, provincial sexual assault representatives developed seven core services as outlined on pages four and five of this report. AASAC determined this framework of core services to constitute a minimum standard of service response. With a view towards long-term sustainability and access for all Albertans, a 3-year funding plan was developed with input from the ten sexual assault organizations in Alberta.

The key priority area resulting from the strategic planning process was ensuring province wide access for all clients to core sexual assault services.

In addition, AASAC restructured their membership and Board of Directors based on a model of regional representation. This new model enhanced the organization's accountability and responsiveness to all regions of Alberta as well as to the provincial government and other funders. Lastly, AASAC developed organizational policies and procedures that mandate effective internal communication and responsible and accountable regional/provincial representation.

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Forging strategic partnerships

Victims of sexual violence benefit not only from the supports offered by sexual assault centres but also from the strong networks and alliances between the centres and other agencies that conjointly provide them with comprehensive and coordinated services.

AASAC partnered with Ministries of Health and Solicitor General to explore the implementation of a protocol to guide the collection and storage of forensic evidence, which would allow victims more time to make police reporting decisions.

After an assault, victims and their families must find their way between services, attending investigative interviews and accessing resources with numerous professionals often at separate locations. To complicate matters, as victims present for service, they may work with different professionals within each system. Victims of sexual violence benefit not only from the supports offered by sexual assault centers but also from the strong networks and alliances between the centers and other agencies that conjointly provide them with comprehensive and coordinated services. With provincial government support, sexual assault centers in Alberta have been able to strengthen their relationships with police, hospitals, victim's services and other legal representatives to ensure that all service providers respond in a coordinated and systematic manner to the crisis of sexual assault. Other active community partners across the province include: women's shelters, school divisions, addiction treatment centers, mental health treatment providers, immigrant and disability serving agencies, as well as local businesses.

In many communities, this has resulted in coordinating committees that meet regularly to do case reviews and also work together on other community-based initiatives such as professional education or awareness-raising. In Medicine Hat, the sexual abuse recovery committee has grown and developed substantially over the last three years. Currently, meetings are well attended with a diverse membership, which has resulted in increased public awareness, enhanced relationships with police and local politicians as well as an increase in calls requesting information and referrals. Improved coordination of services creates increased awareness and access and with this, comes increased demand for service. Over three years, sexual assault counselling wait times in Medicine Hat has increased from 1-2 days to 3-4 weeks.

In Fort McMurray, the sexual assault center grew out of a need identified by the women's shelter. Recently, the needs of sexual assault center clients outgrew the space available at the women's shelter and a new office dedicated to sexual assault/abuse was opened. This is quite an accomplishment given the limited availability and high cost of land in Fort McMurray. Despite separate locations, the two services continue to maintain their collaborative working relationship.

On a provincial level, AASAC also forged many key partnerships over the last three years. AASAC worked with the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters to develop a formalized partnership to enhance their respective mandates. AASAC also partnered with the Ministries of Health and Solicitor General to explore the implementation of a protocol to guide the collection and storage of forensic evidence, which would allow victims more time to make police-reporting decisions. This upcoming pilot project will be implemented in Region 3. Another partnership with Chief Crown Prosecutors and Alberta Justice resulted in a policy report containing 27 recommendations towards improving the criminal justice response to sexual assault.

Together we have made a difference!

Charting new territory – Region 7

AASAC first became involved in Region 7 in 2005 when it realized that this was one of the least resourced areas of the province with respect to services for victims of sexual assault.

The Region 7 work has been focused upon building sustainable sexual assault services across the Region with a current plan to include all Metis Settlements in Region 10 in this process.

Alberta Children's Services North Central Alberta Region 7 stretches 650 km. from the Saskatchewan Border in the East to the British Columbia border in the West. AASAC first became involved in the Region in 2005 when it realized that this was one of the least resourced areas of the province with respect to services for victims of sexual assault. In consultations conducted throughout the Region by AASAC from 2005 - 2007, a crisis Line, counsellors specialized in sexual assault, and professional and public education were identified by health and social service providers as the three greatest core service development priorities. To date a workshop for primary responders to victims of sexual assault has already been piloted in the Region, with positive feedback from the participants.

A study by Canada's Rural Secretariat (Sorenson & dePeuter, 2005) has pointed out that rural and small town Albertan and Aboriginal residents who are not near a larger "Metropolitan Influenced Zone" (city) are "perennially disadvantaged". They experience: lower personal income; lower levels of education; fewer health care providers; and, are in greater need of resources and program support to boost economic prosperity, social well-being, educational attainment and access to health care. Since there is no urban centre within Region 7 and distance is a huge barrier to service delivery, it became evident that a multi-method approach with creative strategies must be developed for service delivery.

The use of technology to communicate information and deliver professional education and counselling services through a network of service points (in combination with traditional approaches used by existing Sexual Assault Centers with resources to support the Region) has been identified as the most effective strategy for increasing sexual assault services across the Region.

The Region 7 work has been focused upon building sustainable sexual assault services across the Region with a current plan to include all Metis Settlements in Region 10 in this process. It is believed that sustainability will be most easily attained with a strong initial injection of resources into the Region to develop existing expertise and services. The Region will then have the knowledge and skills to seek additional funding and continue the process under AASAC's direction.

Any service development strategy that is piloted and proven to work in Region 7, can also be adopted by existing Sexual Assault Centers to extend their reach into rural areas of the province, thereby further meeting AASAC's goal of increasing access to services.

Next Steps

Anticipated Outcomes

By building a coordinated and integrated network of services in all regions of Alberta and sharing promising practices and learnings with all providers of sexual assault and sexual abuse services in Alberta, we anticipate:

- Improved services to Albertans
- More people reporting sexual assaults to the police
- More convictions occurring
- Incidences of sexual assault and sexual abuse declining

Moving Forward:

AASAC's Strategic Plan entitled, "The Building Blocks of Change" will be reviewed and updated in October 2008. Emerging issues in 2008/2009 include:

- Growing demand for services to rural and remote areas of the regions
- Training and support of professionals in rural communities
- Sexual violence as part of domestic violence
- Child sexual abuse education/prevention
- The correlation between child sexual abuse and addictions and prostitution
- The use of the internet by sexual offenders to access potential victims
- The use of sexual violence in school bullying

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Working towards an Alberta free from
sexual violence

For more information contact:

The Alberta Association of Sexual Assault Centres

7th Floor, 320 5th Avenue SE,

Calgary, Alberta T2G 0E5

403-730-8144

aasac@telus.net