



Rising Strong: Disability, Abuse and Prevention II

A Town Hall Forum

Report on Action Recommendations

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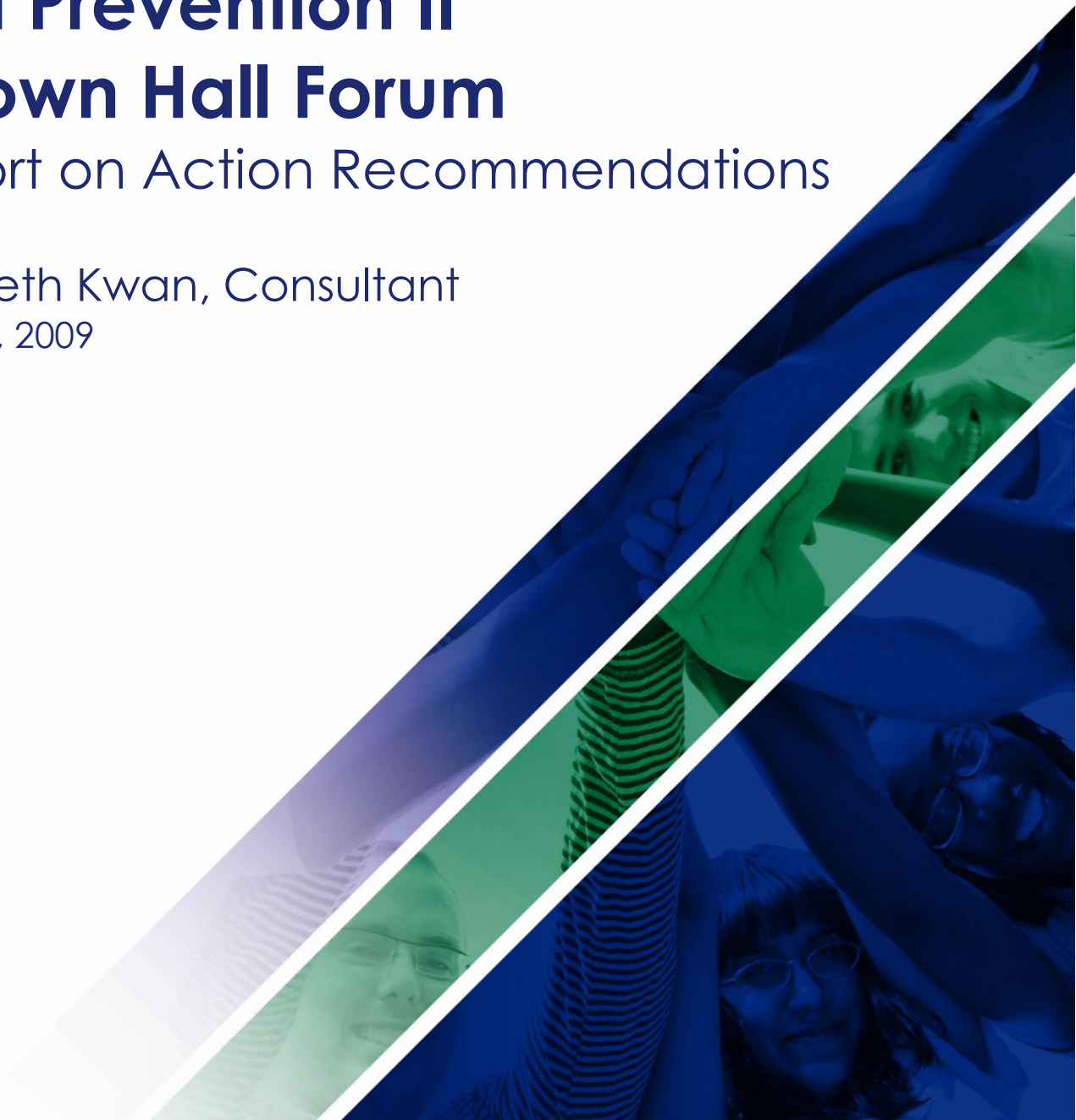


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"We wish to acknowledge the funding receiver from the Department of Justice Canada – Victims Fund"

Introduction

The **Rising Strong: Disability, Abuse and Prevention II** town hall forum took place on April 30, 2009 in honour of National Victims of Crime Awareness Week.

People with disabilities face multiple challenges in society including frightening levels of violence and abuse. This town hall forum provided the opportunity for persons with disabilities (PWD), service providers and politicians to discuss this important issue and to start working together for a safe City and safe institutions for all in the community.

Close to 120 people were in attendance, among them persons with disabilities, academics, police personnel, service providers and politicians. Ms. Hallie Cotnam from CBC Ottawa chaired the town hall. Ms. Christine Murphy, an advocate in the persons with disabilities (PWD) movement, and Ms. Fran Odette from Springtide Resources in Toronto were the two keynote speakers.

Rising Strong was organized by Crime Prevention Ottawa, funded by the Department of Justice Canada and hosted by these community partners:

- OCTEVAW
- Reach Canada
- Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre
- Ottawa Independent Living Centre
- Hunt Club Riverside Community Services Centre
- City of Ottawa
- Crime Prevention Ottawa

About this Report

This report summarizes the action recommendations made by the participants at the town hall event who discussed the following topics:

1. Does abuse occur in our community? Does it occur only with seniors with disabilities or all people with disabilities?
2. Who needs support when abuse occurs? Person with disabilities, family, care providers? What supports would be helpful?
3. How can we make services such as shelters provide more access and accommodations?

4. Is there enough being done to prevent abuse?
5. If abuse is not reported, how do we reach out to those who need the support?

Action Recommendations

Awareness Raising and Education

Persons with Disabilities

- Increase persons with disabilities' accessibility to information about resources, services and supports that are available in the community.
- Provide educational opportunities for persons with disabilities to recognize and break the "dependency cycle" that is often present in their relationship with their abuser.

Service Providers

- Educate service providers to better understand the range of disabilities, including physical, emotional and intellectual disabilities that are additionally compounded by other factors such as age, race, faith, sexual orientation and social status.
- Raise the awareness of service providers of the continuum of violence against persons with disabilities including neglect, physical, sexual, mental, psychological, emotional, and financial abuses.
- Increase awareness of service providers that violence and abuse of persons with disabilities can range from personal to structural/systemic and even criminal at times.

Community

- Increase overall public education in the community about citizenship and human rights of persons with disabilities, in particular influencing change in the future with outreach to children and youth in schools.
- Launch a vigorous public education campaign to rectify the stereotypes and social myths that devalue and demean persons with disabilities, and address the existing fears many people have of disabilities.

Training

Persons with Disabilities

- Provide workshops and courses to persons with disabilities on sex education, their rights under the law, advocacy and assertiveness training.

Service Providers

- Increase educational supports for service providers, in particular the police and shelter workers, on what constitutes abuse against persons with disabilities and how to recognize it.
- Lobby for more funding to train service providers to respond and provide appropriate services to PWD survivors of abuse and violence.
- Provide service providers with sensitization and training to meet the needs of PWD survivors of violence and abuse that acknowledges their different abilities and often their dependency on their abuser.
- Standardize the service provided by personal support workers to persons with disabilities as a deterrent to potential situation of abuse.

Service Planning and Coordination

Persons with Disabilities

- Involve persons with disabilities in the continual improvement of service planning and coordination so that they can provide insight into the nature of disabilities and the corresponding ways to meet accessibility needs.
- Develop and promote a multi-staged safety plan and services that go beyond the initial crisis stage to persons with disabilities that assures them of viable options of care and safety should they need to flee an abusive situation.
- Offer comprehensive counselling, therapy and other services to both the abused PWD and the abuser, especially given how often there is an existing relationship of dependency.

Service Providers

- Enhance physical, programmatic and service accessibility for PWD survivors of violence and abuse in shelters and other existing support services.
- Service providers to develop and/or implement protocols to ensure that they recognize and ensure a timely response to PWD survivors of violence and abuse when they reach out for help in a crisis.
- Better coordination of existing services to provide a comprehensive and multi-staged safety plan for persons with disabilities who are fleeing violence and abuse
 - It is important to integrate the needs and safety of children of PWD survivors of violence and abuse into the safety plan.
- Service providers to develop and/or better implement protocols that screen potential staff and volunteers.

Community

- Hold comprehensive consultations with stakeholders to identify needs and service gaps pertaining to violence and abuse against persons with disabilities.
- Increase the available, accessible and adaptable housing for persons with disabilities, in particular for those who have left an abusive situation and require safe and accessible housing.

Community and Government Collaboration

Persons with Disabilities

- Engage, give voice and a leadership role to persons with disabilities in any collaborative initiatives by community and/or government to address violence and abuse against persons with disabilities.

Service Providers

- Service providers to form more partnerships with advocacy groups to better address violence and abuse against persons with disabilities.

Community

- Establish a cross-sectoral interdisciplinary committee to address violence and abuse against persons with disabilities in Ottawa community.
- Break the isolation experienced by persons with disabilities and better integrate them into our community so that they can find the support and services needed, especially in times of crisis.
- Lobby the government to recognize that accessibility is a mainstream budgetary consideration.
- Increase the collaboration between different levels of government to enhance the policy support and funding to address violence and abuse against persons with disabilities.
- Lobby for more long term stable funding sources to create inclusive community services such as:
 - Physical accessibility to buildings
 - Sensitivity training for service providers
 - Service planning, coordination and programming.
- Reduce competition for funding among service providers in order to equalize dollars for better access and accommodation for persons with disabilities.
- Conduct more research regarding violence and abuse against persons with disabilities.
- Establish a strategic plan for the Ottawa community to address violence and abuse against persons with disabilities where progress can be quantitatively and qualitatively measured and evaluated.



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