

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Prepared By: Lynn S. Lavery MSW. RSW

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

INTRODUCTION

As part of the participation process for Bernadette McCann House, a series of six focus groups were held throughout Renfrew County. These focus groups which involved a variety of participants; women, men and service providers were conducted to gather information regarding what individuals knew about the Bernadette McCann House (BMH), if they referred anyone to BMH and what suggestions they would make to improve BMH services. The groups were convened between October and November 2018.

To obtain a variety of responses, each of the focus groups was comprised of different users. Four groups were exclusively women and two were exclusively men. One of the groups of women were representatives from The Algonquin's of Pikwakanagan. The location and group constellation are listed below.

Location	Constellation
Renfrew	Men
Arnprior	Women
Renfrew	Women
Pembroke	Women
Golden Lake (Pikwakanagan)	Women/Service Providers
Eganville	Men

In addition to participation in the group sessions, BMH staff also obtained Focus Group Question forms completed by women who were unable to attend the sessions but wanted to provide feedback.

All participants were recruited by the BMH. There was no screening mechanism used in the selection of participants.

Discussion guides (Questionnaire) to aid the facilitator during the focus group sessions were prepared. All participants were asking questions specific to the BMH and what they knew about the BMH, if they had referred anyone to BMH, what suggestions they would make to improve BMH services and the final question was open ended.

OVERARCHING THEMES

While many of the discussion guide questions generated mixed responses, there were points of agreement and themes that arose during the focus groups. The men, women and First Nations groups did have different needs and perspectives which I will address later in this report.

In response to the question, “**What do you know about BMH**” the following responses were generally noted and are reported from most frequent to least frequent;

- Shelter
- Housing Support
- Counselling
- Crisis Line
- Safe Environment
- Groups
- Outreach Programs
- Children’s Outreach
- Donation “place”/Clothing Bank
- Help with Court
- In Pembroke
- Offer help navigating Services
- Safety Planning
- Been here a long time
- Supported by Charity Organizations
- Home for the homeless
- Only resource of its kind in the area

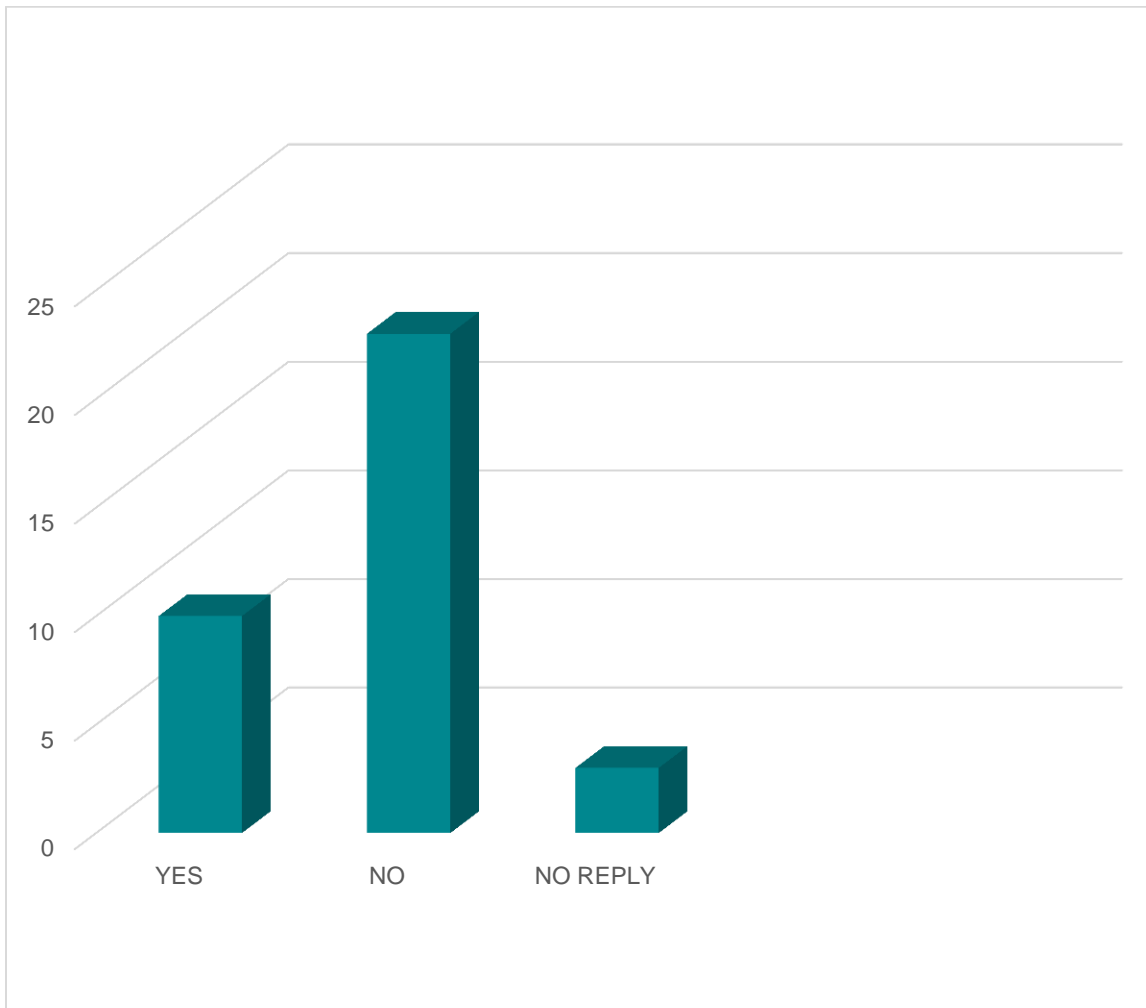
The responses from the two men’s groups in regard to same questions were the following;

- Anger Program
- Living Without Violence Program
- Caring Dad’s
- Deal with abuse crisis situations
- Work only with women and children

- Women's recovery, treatment, homeless place
- Never heard of it

Question two asked participants, **“Have you referred anyone to BMH?”**

The total number of people involved in the focus groups was N=36. The breakdown is the following.



This should not be interpreted as a resistance to referring, for those who replied “no” it was either a function of being unaware of the service, particularly for men, and simply not having the opportunity to refer. In fact, there were those who specifically stated that if they thought a woman was in need of the service, they would without question refer or suggest the person call for BMH.

The third question which asked, “**What suggestions would you make to improve the BMH Services?**” I will for the purpose of clarity break the responses down between what the women’s groups identified, men’s groups identified and The Algonquin’s of Pikwakanagan identified from their perspective.

From the Women’ Groups, the following is noted;

- More availability in Arnprior
- More training for staff
- More assistance with job finding
- More accessibility through social media
- Provide Budgeting and financial counselling
- More counselling and groups
- Couple counselling
- More assistance on how to deal with confrontation
- Group outings (library or just for a walk)
- Locks on bedroom doors (staff could have a master key)
- Wi-Fi
- Sound proof walls
- Expand in the county

Overall the women who responded were appreciative of both the staff and programs currently offered.

The Men’s Groups offered the following;

- Open discussion of abusive situations to include both men and women

- BMH should be more inclusive of men
- Men who are in abusive situations require funding to assist them
- BMH could offer co-parenting programs
- BMH could provide help for men
- BMH could focus on resolving domestic/separation conflicts
- Provide programs that help the entire family
- Talk to men
- Men need help too.

Algonquin's of Pikwakanagan would suggest the following;

- BMH could be more culturally sensitive to First Nations Women
- The shelter could be more culturally welcoming by having objects in the shelter with which First Nations Women can identify
- Provide culturally appropriate services (integrate with service delivery with a culturally sensitive approach)
- Provide a house/shelter on site at Pikwakanagan
- Work more collaboratively with First Nations

All of this being said, each group was very appreciative of the help and services provided. The women were very appreciative help they have received from BMH staff.

The final question which was open ended and asked participants if they had “**Any Additional Comments**” was either left unanswered or provided for very positive remarks regarding BMH. The following is a sample of the comments.

“I do want to say a big thank you for the services I have received. I honestly do not know what I would have done without my worker...Thank you so much.”

“This place literally saved my life and my psychological health. Has brought me to more self-awareness and healing. The ongoing workshops and support services have been and are very good and desperately needed.

“Thank you all for everything you do.”

“The children are happy and respected.”

“Keep activities going at night – it was helpful.”

“Without this service, I would not have been able to make the move on my own terms. To remove myself from an abusive relationship.”

And from the men;

“Good luck, people, women, men do really need help.”

“Funding, programs for abused men.”

The only demographic information collected was whether the groups were women, men or First Nations. No information in regard to age, ethnicity, language was collected. Nor is there a breakdown in regard to which women received services from the Shelter, shelter and outreach or just outreach.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

In consideration of the above the following is recommended:

1. BMH provide a program which helps children deal with Anxiety
2. Work with boys and girls in tandem.
3. When working with Mom provide, a children's group with simultaneous programming.
4. Provide programming for boys 16 and over.
5. Develop or partner with other agencies to provide shelter to boys who are 16 and cannot stay at the shelter with their mother and siblings. Keep families together.
6. Provide programs for men in abusive relationships
7. Have Elder volunteers available for Indigenous participants.
8. For clients with issues of DV, MH and addictions, particularly Indigenous women, collaborate with Pikwakanagan in providing the White Bison Program.
9. Consider developing "hubs" and using Health Center at Pikwakanagan, where there is access to the Nurse Practitioner.
10. Consider addressing issues of power imbalance, DV in other communities, such as the LBGTQ and transgender.
11. Add cultural components. For the Indigenous community, Tip Talk and smudging.
12. BMH to consider adding tangible cultural symbolism which increases clients' feelings of being welcomed and safe. In the words of Wabano Center, "A Place of Belonging". (Appendix A – Algonquin's of Pikwakanagan First Nations Logo as an example). As well Native Child and Family Services of Toronto have a mural on the sidewalk before one enters the building.

13. Consideration to providing mental health services on a crisis management basis as well as longer term.
14. Develop a community housing bulletin board of available housing.
15. Increased liaisons between BMH and legal services.

APPENDIX A



Algonquin's of Pikwakanagan.



