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**Supervised Visitation and Exchange Centres for Domestic Violence:  
An Environmental Scan**

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by

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**Report Prepared for the  
Alberta Ministry of Children's Services**

**March 2006**

## **Acknowledgements**

This Environmental Scan was funded by the Alberta Ministry of Children's Services. A Research Advisory team composed of Christina Tortorelli, Jane Holliday, Russ Pickford and Angela Kerr assisted in the design of the project. Jane Holliday is from the Alberta Ministry of Justice; Angela Kerr is also from Justice in the Maintenance Enforcement Division. Russ Pickford and Christina Tortorelli represent Alberta Children's Services, We are grateful for their input and information.

Many thanks to the representatives from supervised access and exchange centres and government departments who took time to share not only their program strengths but also their challenges. With their input, our hope is that this environmental scan can be a valuable resource for jurisdictions considering developing their own visitation centers with the critical goal of safeguarding all family members touched by domestic violence and supporting parents and children in continuing to have positive relationships.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Supervised visitation and exchange programs are utilized with estranged families in which contact between the former spouses could be highly abusive or dangerous to either party or to the children. Such programs are relatively new and little research has been conducted on their efficacy.

In 2004, a Provincial Roundtable of Family Violence and Bullying was held across Alberta. One recommendation that emerged from the roundtable process was to assess the provincial need for supervised visitation and exchange programs for families at risk because of domestic violence.

To determine the current landscape in the province related to safe visitation and exchange programs, the primary goal of this project is to conduct an environmental scan of supervised visitation and monitored exchange programs both within Alberta and across Canada. Across Canada, how are supervised visitation and exchange programs structured? What standards of practice do they maintain and how do they ensure safety? How many have been evaluated and what best practices do these suggest?

While Alberta has few supervised visitation and exchange programs specific to the unique needs of families in which domestic violence has been the core concern, a variety of private, for profit and not for profit agencies already exist in Alberta, that coordinate, and supervise access visits as agreed upon by the parties involved or through condition of a court order (either a family matter or a Solicitor General matter) or as arranged at the request of Alberta Children's Services caseworkers. The second phase of the environmental scan will identify these agencies, their programs and the scope of their mandate.

Collating the descriptions of different models of programs and identifying what programs exist across Canada, how these programs are conceptualized and what are considered best practices could be significantly helpful to those developing new programs in Alberta and across North America. Such information could allow children to visit with non-custodial parents in the least stressful manner possible. It could ultimately safeguard lives.

### **The Need for Supervised Visitation and Monitored Exchange Programs**

When courts and/or mediators do not adequately attend to the presence of violence in a couple's marital relationship, child exchanges to fulfill a joint custody arrangement can be seriously problematic for both parents and highly dangerous for victims. A number of researchers have noted that the most perilous time for women in a violent relationship is after they leave (Geffner & Pagelow, 1990; Favreau, 1999; Stahly, 1999; Jaffe & Geffner, 1998). Under a joint custody order, women are forced to renew contact with the batterer on a regular basis during child visitation. Such continued contact leaves women at significant risk of further physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, not to mention homicide.

Schaffer and Bala (2003) contend that when there has been a history of significant spousal abuse, unsupervised access places children at risk of further emotional and physical harm from the perpetrator. Furthermore, access provides the perpetrator with opportunities to question the child about the mother, and to attempt to continue to exert

control over her life. The primary safety risk for women who must encounter their ex-partners to exchange children is further physical and emotional abuse.

Unfortunately, private visitation agreements can still be problematic for all parties involved. Organizing the visits requires the cooperation of both divorced parents in arranging appropriate times for exchanges, a task that may not be possible for couples where one partner has a history of violence, intimidation and control. Furthermore, the parents must be able to find a “neutral” relative who is willing to dedicate a significant amount of time to supervise the visits. A family supervisor may not believe that such close monitoring is necessary and may be reluctant to maintain vigilance in protecting the child. Conversely, the supervisor may become hostile to and hyper-vigilant about the visiting parent, making the environment uncomfortable and antagonistic for both the visiting parent and the child.

Often, the elected individual has no experience dealing with power differences and may become subject to the manipulation and control of the abusive parent, thus creating a safety problem for the supervisor, the child and the victim. Finally, private visitation arrangements are still not guaranteed to be safe, as the abuser may use the private arena to further abuse his partner, often by sending messages to her via the children (Favreau, 1999). The reality is that any exchange without professional supervision when severe domestic violence has impacted families offers the abuser the opportunity to inflict physical and emotional harm on his victim and children (Shepard, 1992).

### **Supervised Visitation and Monitored Exchange Centres**

Straus and Alda (1994) describe two services typically offered by supervised visitation centres. Intense one-on-one supervision is used when the parent poses a distinct risk to the safety of the child. In these cases, staff members monitor the parent-child visits closely. The primary role of the staff is to protect the child’s safety while still allowing the child and the parent to have a meaningful interaction.

The second service is that of exchange supervision, also known as monitored exchange. In these cases, the program staff member provides a secure location for parents to conduct child exchanges. The arrival and departure of parents is staggered so that they do not have face-to-face contact. Theoretically, the services offered by supervised visitation centres appear ideally suited to separated families in which a parent has been abusive to his spouse.

Tuckman (2005) suggests that supervised access is warranted when one or more of the following factors are present in a divorce situation: serious mental illness accompanied by behaviour damaging to children; history of physical abuse with lack of remorse; vindictive behaviour towards the children or custodial parent; arrests for violence against people; abuse of children, including sexual abuse; active alcohol and substance abuse; persistent violations of custody orders; threats or past acts of abduction; attempts by a non-custodial parent to impose religious views on a child against the custodial parent’s wishes; ongoing parental conflict caused by a non-custodial parent; attempts to re-establish contact between the child and the non-custodial parent after a long period of time i.e. 6-12 months; and, an alienated child who is strongly allied with the custodial parent, and who views the noncustodial parent as dangerous and damaging.

Schaffer and Bala (2003) argue that in domestic violence cases, unsupervised access should only be granted if 1) the child is not afraid of the father and 2) it is unlikely that the perpetrator of abuse will continue to abuse the mother or child. They further contend that the court should ensure the exchange of the children will not place the mother and/ or children at risk of further harm from the perpetrator.

The evaluations conducted on supervised visitation and monitored exchange programs have reported positive impacts, with particular respect to the non-custodial parent's relationship to the children and the safety reported by the custodial parent.

### **The Canadian Summary Overview**

The following section describes the current availability of supervised visitation programs in each Canadian province and territory. It provides a brief overview of the history, funding and the development of standards nationally, before examining the organizational details of the 32 programs that were included in the environmental scan.

#### **British Columbia**

Between 1996 and 2002, the British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General established three supervised visitation programs to assist the Family Justice Counselors to conduct their work more effectively. The Supervised Access and Exchange Program was designed to provide 6-12 supervised visits upon referral from a Family Justice Counselor. However, after they became operational, a decision was made to stretch the same budget designated for three locations to nine locations to support services to the 28 existing Family Justice Centres. In doing so, they reduced the time available to each family to approximately 8 visits for all nine locations.

The Family Justice Centres actively work with clients to resolve custody access issues. The goal of the service is conciliation and mediation in families that might reconcile, whereas, most other supervised access programs are for couples that have separated, with no intention of getting back together. Child welfare cases, in which children had been apprehended, are deemed to be incompatible in nature with the program intent.

As of March 31, 2006 (end of the fiscal year) all program funding was withdrawn and the contracts with the nine agencies was terminated. This is primarily because the programs were all significantly underutilized. Several centres had only five clients in the past year and, in 2005, only 110 clients were served across the nine locations. The decision was made to re-profile the dollars to other services. The Elizabeth Fry organization may continue to provide supervised visitation, but their program representatives were not available to meet with the researchers for the environmental scan.

Two experienced supervised visitation pioneers, both situated in Vancouver, continue to provide their expertise for domestic violence cases through their private agencies. Jane Grafton provides a structured on-site service whereas Hollyburn Family Services is primarily an off-site service. Jane Grafton is well connected with the Safe Visitation Network and has consulted with many other provinces who were initiating their programs.



## Alberta

Currently, Alberta has only one on-site program that is formally committed to providing services to domestic violence families, the YWCA Calgary Sheriff King Community Safe Visitation Program. Child welfare referrals are accepted but only if accompanied by domestic violence concerns. The program is funded largely by corporate donations, with a portion being matched by municipal funding. It has a budget in excess of \$310,000. In the past three years, they have provided services to approximately 350 participants, an average of 117 participants per year. The program has been formally evaluated by RESOLVE, Alberta. It was modeled most closely after the Winnipeg Children's Access Agency with consideration as well to the models in Ontario and Duluth, USA.

An on-site supervised visitation program offered through the YWCA in Edmonton was closed this year because of underutilization. The program had been funded by the provincial government.

The Men's Education and Support Network in Calgary provides supervised visitation to non-custodial parents with domestic violence issues. Their service is primarily off-site; although they have access to a church basement should safety concerns warrant it. The supervisors are volunteers who have experienced separation and divorce. The program provides service to only a few families per year because they accept only one active family at a time. When the supervised visitation is complete with this family, they accept a new referral.

## Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, the provincial Justice Department funds two supervised access programs – one in Regina and one in Saskatoon. These programs receive about \$30,000 - \$40,000 per year to deliver services to approximately 30 families per centre per year. Social workers with the Department of Justice coordinate the program and manage the cases, while the space and visit supervisors are contracted out. In Saskatoon, the visitation takes place at a counselling agency, while in Regina the YWCA provides the facility.

Aboriginal Family Services in Regina also provides supervised access and exchange services for some families affected by domestic violence (8-10 supervised visits per week). Most of their clients are child protection cases, however many of these cases involve domestic violence. The program receives block funding from the Department of Community Resources, but also provides assistance on a fee for service basis to clients who are referred from other sources, such as the Department of Justice or private clients. Clients or referring agencies (Child Protection or Justice) pay \$15.00 per visit at the agency's Visiting House.

In Prince Albert, supervised access and exchange for domestic violence cases are provided to about 60 families per year by Children's Haven, a 24 hour crisis centre for families and children. The supervised visitation and exchange is one of many services that the agency provides to families. The Children's Haven is funded by Health Canada, the provincial department of Community Resources, and other local funding sources.

In Moose Jaw, the Victorian Order of Nurses provides supervised access and exchange services to about three of four families per year. The services are for both child welfare clients and families referred from the family courts. With child welfare clients, the Department of Community Resources contracts with family support workers on an hourly basis, while those referred from the family courts are charged a fee for the services of the visitation staff.

## Manitoba

In Manitoba, the provincial Family Service and Housing Department (Family Violence Prevention) funds supervised access and exchange services in the province. They provide \$176,000.00 per year to the Winnipeg Children's Access Agency, a large facility that provides services to 35-45 families in any given month. The province also provides \$65,000 to the Brandon Access / Exchange Service, which serves approximately 40 families per year.

The province has attempted to support rural services in the province, having opened facilities in both Selkirk and Thompson. Due to under-utilization, both services closed. According to a provincial representative, the government hopes to re-establish services in these rural areas, since community agencies have identified supervised access as needed in these regions.

## Ontario

Supervised visit programs were first conceived in 1991 when the Ministry of the Attorney General consulted with the Ontario Women's Directorate and the Ministry of Community and Social Services with the resultant Supervised Access Pilot Project. Fourteen centres were established as test sites across the province.

In 1994, The Institute for Child Studies at the University of Toronto conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the program, which resulted in on-going funding from the Ministry of the Attorney General. In 1999, the Ministry of the Attorney General expanded the Supervised Access Program to 22 additional court districts across the province and in 2000, funding was further provided for province-wide expansion to provide supervised access services in each court district across Ontario for a total of 52 sites. Agencies serving one court district are funded \$83,500 and agencies that serve two court districts receive \$115,000. This funding is stable year to year.

All sites were selected through an RFP process, with the criteria that all programs must be administered by a not for profit agency with a board that would ultimately be accountable. As well, not for profit organizations need to offer fees on a sliding scale.

In 2003-2004, Ontario programs served 20,523 families, 21, 550 children and provided 23,949 supervised visits and 22,602 monitored exchanges. It is estimated that Ontario programs deal with 5% of the 15% of high conflict families posing the greatest challenges. There is recognition that both men and women may be the non-custodial parent. Programs are to be judgment- and assumption-free and should be about fairness and balance. The Ministry of Attorney General set a number of mandatory practices for service delivery.

Regional differences are inherent and during the pilot project, 14 sites were encouraged to develop their own models. When funding became permanent, the province did not select one model, but instead suggested that the regions build on what was already working for them. Program personnel know their community and can be creative in responding to any unique needs. Each has their own written policies and procedures. Each region sets its own fees within the parameters noted above by the Ministry of Attorney General. Some regions use volunteers to monitor visits, some do not. With respect to court reports, some programs do a summary report while others simply provide the per visit notes with a covering letter. Each program is encouraged to be culturally sensitive and the Ministry of Attorney General will compensate programs for any required use of interpreters/translators.

Most families are involved with supervised visit programs in Ontario for between 8 months and 1½ years, however some families use the program for years and children are allowed supervised visits until the age of majority. The age group that most commonly uses services is between four and nine years, followed by toddlers, then children aged 9 to 12 and a small number of teenagers.

The strengths of the Ontario model are that the provincial Ministry of the Attorney General funds the programs, has set reasonable standards for practice, and allows the province-wide programs to remain community-based, with a strong emphasis on collaboration. There appears to be little competition; the programs are accessible to everyone; the coordinator is available for consultation to anyone across the province and the programs build on strengths.

## Québec

Québec has 34 supervised visitation and access programs in organizations in 14 areas in the province. The agencies are all community and non profit organizations providing services for families. Half of the family-oriented community organizations (FCO) are “Maison de la famille,” (family houses) which offer prevention services and activities to improve family well-being. The majority of FCOs are supported by the “Quebec federation of family-oriented organizations” (“Fédération Québécoise des Organismes Communautaires Famille).

In 2005, the Minister of Families, Seniors and the Status of Women (Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition Féminine) was entrusted with determining the standards to oversee the organizations’ practices and required training and drawing up a plan of action to implement the 54 report recommendations, in collaboration with the Minister of Health and Social Services and the Minister of Justice. That process is ongoing. The Centres of Health and Social Services (95 through Québec) are responsible for signing a service agreement for Supervised Access Rights (SAR) in their area.

Seven service representatives of supervised access programs in different areas in Quebec were interviewed for the environmental scan. The funding amount to deliver the service varies from 0 to \$226,000 (average \$80,000). All of the program representatives raised concerns about funding levels. Over the last four years, at least eight organizations have stopped offering supervised visits.

With the exception of one program, “Service familial d’accompagnement supervise,” which serves a number of families referred for child welfare concerns, all are onsite programs. With respect to their mandate of family services, those organizations accept referrals for family violence, child welfare, parental disagreement, contact renewal, parent incapacity. The service is oriented to the child and family well-being rather than women’s or men’s services.

The clients are mainly referred by an order of Provincial Superior Court, Family Division (Cour supérieure du Québec, chambre de la famille) which has jurisdiction to hear requests for divorce and child custody. Some clients are also referred by Youth Centres (Centres Jeunes), which provide psychosocial services or rehabilitation for young people, mothers and families in difficulty.

#### The Maritime Provinces

There are no supervised visitation/ exchange programs in either Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick. A representative from the government of PEI commented, “I wish I could tell you something different. It has been an identified area of concern for some time.”

In New Brunswick, a provincial government representative explained that, “The Department of Family and Community Services has no formal policy or practice on safe visitation /monitored exchange programs involving domestic violence and/or custody access issues...visitation/monitoring exchange in private custody/ access orders may be handled by families themselves privately”.

In Nova Scotia, the provincial Department of Justice contracts three agencies to provide supervised access and exchange programs: the Cape Breton YMCA, Veith House in Halifax, and Family SOS in Halifax. Representatives from Veith House and the YMCA were interviewed for this environmental scan, but Family SOS declined.

Veith House provides services to approximately 35 families per year. Their supervised access and exchange service is provided as one of many programs for families, so the funding amount designated for the visitation program cannot be calculated. The agency, itself, is funded by the provincial department of Community Services, however the justice department is invoiced for clients referred from the court – at \$40.00 per hour.

The Cape Breton YMCA (Sydney Nova Scotia) provides services to approximately 15 families at any one time, and when families are referred by the court, the YMCA invoices the provincial department of justice \$35.00 per visit.

In Newfoundland, the only supervised access/ exchange program is in St. John’s. A service of the Unified Family Court, the program provides services to approximately 40 families per year. Funding is from the provincial Department of Justice. Court social workers manage the cases, but use contract professional staff to provide the actual supervision. Supervision of families takes place in court rooms in St. John’s.

Northwest Territories, Nunavut and the Yukon

There are no formalized Supervised Access Centres in these Canadian Territories and even agencies providing supervised visitation services are rare. Many child welfare workers volunteered that they were responsible for providing any visitation services needed by their clients because resources were simply not available to them in the North.

### **Summary of the Canadian Context**

Across Canada, the provinces have responded differently to the need for supervised visitation and access for families in which domestic violence is of significant concern. Six provinces currently fund such centres (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia), although the centres in British Columbia will no longer be funded after March 2006. Both Ontario and Quebec have developed provincial standards that include a number of mandated features.

The British Columbia centres are unique in that they were established to assist couples where reconciliation was a distinct possibility. The under-utilization of the programs may reflect this focus. In provinces where there were either limited or no supervised visitation programs, several social workers contacted by the research team identified a need for such services to be established in their region of the country.

Six provinces fund the programs through their Department of Justice/Ministry of Attorney Generals. The two exceptions are Manitoba and Quebec. Manitoba has a specific Family Violence Prevention branch of its Family Service and Housing Department. The province of Quebec funds their supervised visitation programs through their Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition Féminine. (Ministry of the Family, Elderly and Status of Women). Two of the three programs currently operating in Alberta do not have provincial government funding. The final program (YWCA in Edmonton), is now closed but had received provincial justice funding.

### **The Alberta Context**

Alberta has only one currently operating supervised visitation and access centre specifically developed to facilitate parent child visits and exchanges when domestic violence is a core concern. The Sheriff King Home opened in 2002 and has been evaluated (Tutty, Barlow & Jesso, 2004). The YWCA in Edmonton developed a similar program which was closed in 2005 because it was seriously underutilized. Both programs, as well as Calgary's MESA program, were included in the national analysis of supervised visitation and access programs specific to domestic violence described in the previous chapters.

While few programs specific to domestic violence have opened in Alberta, a variety of private, for profit and not for profit agencies exist that serve the needs of primarily child welfare cases. These agencies coordinate, supervise access visits as agreed upon by the parties involved, through condition of a court order (either a family matter or a Solicitor General matter) or at the request of Alberta Children's Services caseworkers.

Five larger agencies have existing infrastructures that offer additional programming, budgets and strong administrations (YWCA Calgary, YWCA Edmonton,

Saamis Children's Centre, McMan and Aetas). The other programs were smaller and more local in nature. Spectrum, in Calgary, is a private, for profit agency.

Three programs (Calgary Home Support, Four Directions and Big Brother and Sister in Wetaskawin) are fee for service to Alberta Children's Services, meaning that no upfront funding is received. These programs generally bill the government between \$17 and \$20 for a supervised visit. Two programs received contract funding including Lethbridge (\$50,000) and McMan in Red Deer. In the Medicine Hat program, the supervisors are provincial employees receiving a wage between \$18-20 an hour.

Three programs receive no government funding. Spectrum in Calgary bills the client directly for most of the amount, MESA uses casino funds to subsidize the greater amount with a token annual charge to the client and the Sheriff King receives private, community and corporate dollars so that services can be provided free of charge.

### **Emerging Trends in Supervised Visitation/ Exchange Services in the US**

In contacting several key programs in the United States, we became aware of a number of shifts in the provision of supervised visitation and exchange made in response to an audit of programs in four U.S. sites. These shifts seem to better take into consideration the safety needs of both adults and children impacted by domestic violence when using the services of supervised visitation and access centre.

According to three project directors, the audit process has led to significant changes in the way that services are delivered in the supervised visitation centres for which they were responsible. These centres originally developed according to the guidelines of the Supervised Visitation Network, an organization geared primarily to providing supervised visitation in child abuse cases. The audit process revealed that, while the staff of the Safe Havens supervised visitation centres were skilled and competent in working with families, the design of the programs presented inherent challenges to effectively helping families affected by domestic violence.

The audit team found that the connection between the domestic violence that occurred, or is still occurring, and the work of the centre, was unclear. Centre staff did not incorporate an attention to domestic violence into its interactions with families. They were not prepared to address the dynamics of power, control, intimidation and violence, and rather treated all cases generically – whether or not there was domestic violence in the family.

Staff voiced that they were experiencing tension in their roles. They struggled with goals that appeared to be conflicting – goals of neutrality, offering children quality time with their non-custodial parent, improving relationships between children and their parents, undoing the harm of abuse to children and their relationships with their parents, not colluding with batterers' manipulation of children, and protecting battered women from further abuse (Praxis International, 2004).

According to a project director in the U.S., in many visitation centres, perpetrators of violence were using their participation in supervised access centres to their advantage by gaining unsupervised access to their children, even though there had not been any changes in their abusive behaviours.

The audit found that courts were referring batterers to the supervised visitation centres to the exclusion of other needed programs. For example, courts were expecting abusive parents to make changes in the supervised access facility, and to progress towards unsupervised visitation, without making additional referrals to treatment programs such as alcohol/drug treatment facilities, batterer intervention programs, and parent education.

Another problem experienced by supervised visitation centres was that they were receiving court referrals with little or no information about the nature or extent of the domestic violence. Consequently, with inadequate information about the safety concerns in a particular family's situation, the supervised visitation centres were often ill prepared to address critical safety issues.

Families did not always receive clear information about the safety precautions put in place around arrivals, departures, and visits. The battered parent was often afraid to be at the visitation centre in such close proximity to the batterer, yet the mechanisms were not in place to actively address her safety concerns.

Beyond the visit itself, the audit found that the centre's safety objectives were ambiguous. In domestic violence, the period after separation is particularly dangerous for battered women, and abusive tactics may be intensified. Batterers use a variety of strategies to control both the mother and the children, such as threatening to harm the mother, or seeking custody of children. According to the author(s) of the Praxis International (2004) report on the audit of the Michigan demonstration sites, the assessment helped the team to be able to better articulate the ways that children are harmed in cases where one parent is battering the other parent. Although centres were paying careful attention to preventing children from being harmed in the visits, they were not adequately organized to respond to the above risks to safety of the adult victim and children.

The audit concluded that the training, preparation and skill level of the monitors was inadequate for supervision and exchange cases involving battering. Directors voiced that they felt the monitor's role was underpaid and undervalued, and centres continually struggled with a high turnover of staff. The recommendations of the audit were considered in the issues and recommendations that conclude this environmental scan as follows:

### **Program Structural Issues**

#### *The Role of Supervised Visitation/ Monitored Exchange Programs*

There are conflicting views about what the role of the visitation centre should be with respect to families impacted by domestic violence: should they be observers, assessors, facilitators, or agents of family change? On one hand, is a view that programs should primarily provide an opportunity for access between non-custodial parents and their children. On the other hand, is a view that supervised visitation centres should be established as part of the domestic violence service continuum, playing an important role in promoting the safety of the adult victim and children affected by domestic violence.

There are also differing perceptions about the roles of supervised visitation centres vis à vis the court and child protection systems. Some researchers argue that

supervised visitation programs present opportunities for caseworkers to gain information about parenting abilities and a parent's bonding with the child, and that such information can be used to guide decision-making regarding child placement (Ansay & Perkins, 2001). Ansay and Perkins (2001) state that "the observation reports from supervised family visitation centres are underused and could provide much-needed background information for child protection workers and the courts in deciding family outcomes on a case-by-case basis" (p. 4).

Generally speaking, however, most centre representatives interviewed for the environmental scan did not see their role as conducting formal assessments for the courts or child protection. Nevertheless, many centres do provide court reports and their observation notes may be subpoenaed. In fact, some directors of visitation centres noted that courts have come to depend on these observation notes to assist them with custody and access decisions.

In cases of domestic violence, this use of observation notes by the courts for influencing custody and access decisions is controversial. While most practitioners attempt to ensure that their notes are neutral and objective, others argue that even "objective" notes may create a safety risk for adult victims and children. Their concern is that, because batterers often present well in the controlled setting of a visitation facility, observation notes seldom contain anything noteworthy, and so courts may award unsupervised visitation prematurely to men who continued to act violently or abusively to their ex-spouses and children outside the two hour supervised visit.

Furthermore, adult victims may be afraid or angry about attending the supervised visitation facility with the perpetrator of violence, so they may not present in a favourable light. Without the context of domestic violence, some argue that "objective" notes have the potential to be misused – with grave consequences to adult victims and their children.

Views differ on how actively supervisors should work with the family. Some argue that visitation centre staff should focus solely on observing and monitoring of the visits and intervening only if they see the child's emotional or physical safety to be at risk. With this approach, facilitated interaction with family members is generally only considered if parents have never before met their children and supervisors assist in suggesting activities such as games to help break the ice. Parents are generally only cued and assisted with parenting strategies if there is a perceived risk to the child.

Others, however, question how this "hands-off" approach assists a family to grow and make positive changes, so instead they actively engage each member of the family with a view to increasing their safety over the long term. Actions by staff includes making considerable efforts to develop rapport and trust with each family member, actively connecting them to resources and treatment programs, modelling parenting behaviours, and intervening to promote respectful relationships within the family.

#### *Neutrality and Program Affiliation*

Related to the above debate about the role of the visitation centre is the debate about whether programs should operate with a foundational principle of "neutrality". Programs that strive for neutrality see themselves as a "neutral" third party whose role it is to promote safe access between the child and the non-custodial parent, without getting



involved with relationship issues between the parents. On the other hand, some programs have recently moved away from neutrality as a core value, and have taken the stance that they are not neutral to violence. Keeping the context of domestic violence in the forefront, the core value of these programs is to promote the safety of the adult victim and the child over the long term.

For the most part, supervised visitation and exchange programs in Canada appear to be operating with “neutrality” as a foundational principle. As such, the research team frequently heard comments that programs ought not be affiliated with women’s shelters, Children’s Services, men’s support groups, or the Courts, since the facility is perceived to be inherently biased. On the other hand, those who argue that they are not neutral to violence suggest that the supervised visitation facility should be seen as part of the continuum of domestic violence services, and the foundational principle in seeking a location should be whether or not it can provide adequate safety.

### *Offering a Continuum of Services*

One issue with service provision is whether it should be provided as a “standardized singular format” or provided as a continuum of service provision. Many supervised visitation/monitored exchange programs offer one type of service such as block group supervision times from 12:00-2:00 or 2:00-4:00. Clients need to adapt to this schedule regardless of any unique presenting situation or an evolution of client progress over time. The other possibility is to look at supervised visitation services as a continuum of services that a client can progress through: i.e. individual onsite supervision; structured onsite group supervision; “loose” onsite supervision; offsite supervision; monitored exchange; and the use of a community member to assist in the exchange. A number of program representatives noted that if, after one year, non-custodial parents and children are still required to attend structured group onsite visits, the visits begin to wane, with neither children nor parent wanting to continue.

Some program representatives were concerned about the courts not differentiating between supervised visitation and monitored access, resulting in some families being “stuck” with court ordered supervised visits when cases should be taken back for review with a view to monitored access instead. This allows families to experience progress.

The issue of client progress is controversial, however, in that some parents with a history of domestic violence may appear to be doing well in the two hour visits, yet may still be stalking their ex-partner or engaging in abusive behaviour off the grounds of the supervised access facility. Granting unsupervised visitation or exchanges to perpetrators who continue to abuse poses significant safety risks to adult victims and their children. Furthermore, some would also argue that if the role of the visitation centre staff is primarily to observe, remain neutral, and not to engage with the family members, then it is not clear how a parent would progress from supervised visitation to unsupervised visitation. Some researchers argue that in addition to supervised visitation, batterers need to be ordered by the courts to concurrent treatment programs, such as batterer intervention programs and alcohol/ drug treatment programs. They also suggest that the role of the supervised visitation staff ought to be one of more actively engaging with each family member, developing rapport with each member, checking in with the family members on a regular basis, and connecting them with needed resources.

### *The Exclusion of Child Welfare Clients from Supervised Visitation Facilities*

Many programs (i.e. all of Ontario) exclude any clients that have child welfare status. The research team noted that many of the safe visitation and exchange programs are funded by Justice Departments rather than Children's Services, and wondered if the differing mandates of these two departments led to these policies. Since most provincial child welfare acts recognize domestic violence as a form of emotional abuse, it stands to reason that a high percentage of domestic violence families will have child welfare status. There appears to be a perception that if child welfare is involved with a family, the family is intact and supervised visitation would be unnecessary, however this is often not the case. In fact, child welfare is involved with many families in which the parents are not able or willing to live together and domestic violence is a factor.

Since there is a strong overlap of clientele, the question arises whether supervised access centres could also serve clients with child welfare status, particularly if their centres are underutilized. Certainly some centres were struggling to keep up with the demand from the justice system, so they would likely not be able to expand their mandate. However, if centres do have space – particularly in rural areas – perhaps this is a possibility.

#### **Staff Issues**

##### *Volunteers versus Paid Staff as Supervisors*

The differing perceptions of the roles of supervised visitation centres have implications for the training and education required of supervisors. If the supervisors are to engage and intervene in families, the educational and knowledge requirements would be higher than if the supervisor is expected to primarily assume an observational role. In the latter, minimally educated staff or volunteers could assume the role of a supervisor. On the other hand, if supervisors are to intervene with families and be attuned to the complexities inherent in families affected by domestic violence, they need post-secondary education and knowledge of domestic violence. They need to develop rapport, develop trust, provide resources and referrals to meet the individual needs of family members, and they need to be highly attuned to the safety needs of the adult victim and children. In this latter perspective, it is argued that the role of the monitor is complex and challenging, and, therefore, requires a thorough knowledge of domestic violence in addition to knowledge in areas such as parenting, child development, substance abuse, diversity issues, and communication.

Interviewees from rural programs, in particular, identified that they face considerable challenges with recruiting and retaining reliable volunteers or staff without personal unresolved emotional issues (college or university towns/cities have greater success if they have access to students)

#### **Accessibility Issues**

##### *Providing Safe Visitation and Monitored Exchange in Rural Areas*

One of the issues identified in this process was, given that fee for service charges to clients augment minimal funding, how do programs in rural areas survive when they don't have a large population from which to pull clientele? How do the numbers justify a program's existence for a few? We interviewed several representatives from programs in

more rural settings that had been closed due to underutilization. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions to this problem. One interviewee identified that the issue of anonymity was a factor in underutilization. For example, if the local day care is used for safe visitation and everyone in the community knows that the day care is open on Sundays for abusive parents to have visitation with their children, families do not want to be seen accessing the day care on a Sunday.

### *Multiculturalism and Supervised Visitation /Monitored Exchange*

Many of the program representatives interviewed for the environmental scan did not face the issue of providing services to clientele who did not speak English. However, there was recognition among programs that, when the need arose, serving diverse clientele poses inherent challenges to supervised visitation and exchange centres. Some programs only offer translation/interpreter services if the language of the child is not English. Others asserted, though, that if interpreters are used, an interpreter may violate a client's confidentiality if he or she is from the same ethnic community. Furthermore, the visit supervisors are unable to monitor conversations if they do not understand the language, so there are opportunities for the child's well-being to be endangered. Many programs simply will not take the risk, so if the clients do not have a basic command of English, they are not accepted into the program. An interviewee from the Safe Havens project in the United States also identified challenges in serving diverse clientele, especially since their centres were located in a highly multicultural area of the U.S. The project director commented that, while the ideal solution is to find staff from diverse backgrounds with sufficient skills and training, she was finding this challenging.

### **Environmental Scan Recommendations**

This section contains a number of recommendations for consideration by Alberta's Ministry for Children's Services with respect to whether and in what format supervised visitation centres could be developed in the province. These recommendations were developed in response to the literature review, the environmental scan of Canadian supervised visitation programs, the Alberta environmental scan of visitation centres primarily with respect to child welfare referrals, and the new directions proposed by the audit of programs in the United States.

**Recommendation 1:** That the government of Alberta develop and fund supervised visitation/monitored exchange centres that support non-custodial parents' access to children in a setting that addresses the safety needs of families impacted by domestic violence.

**Recommendation 2:** An on-site model (visits are offered in a centre/building) best addresses the safety concerns of the victims of domestic violence. An on-site centre also accommodates the needs of children who may have been abused by the parent. Only a model that allows on-site visits can offer the security that is unanimously agreed is essential in these circumstances. No other programs reviewed for the environmental scan had developed reasonable alternatives to on-site services that would ensure needed safety. Such safety features as having separate exits/entrances, staggered drop off and pick-up times and security cameras acknowledge the potential for injury or lethality that simply cannot be assured with off-site visits in the community.

However, developing a facility that accommodates on-site visits does not imply that this is the only option. Agencies providing supervised visitation could offer a continuum of services through which a client can progress including individual onsite supervision; structured onsite group supervision; “loose” onsite supervision; offsite supervision; monitored exchange; and the use of a community member to assist in the exchange. Such a continuum addresses the unique needs of different families, as well as the changing needs of families as they improve in response to supervised visits.

On-site facilities of any kind are expensive. A supervised visitation and monitored exchange program could be one of the services in a family or child-centred facility. The Quebec models of family houses that offer prevention services more broadly or Thunder Bay’s adding the centre to other social services located in a shopping mall, would not only ensure more cost-effective use of the services, but could also improve confidentiality for all family members. Again, strict guidelines with respect to implementing safety features are critical.

It is always more difficult to develop on-site facilities in rural/remote communities, so this recommendation may need to be adapted for those locations. The Canadian centres contacted for the environmental scan were all in cities, although sometimes small cities. We did not locate a rural model that adequately addressed the safety needs for couples where one adult has been seriously abused by the other. What is essential in any variation of an off-site setting is that the safety precautions be both paramount and comprehensive.

**Recommendation 3:** Implement the recommendations from the US audit of services, including: moving beyond neutrality, more actively engaging with families, considering information about on-going domestic violence/threats beyond what is observable in the centre, and being judicious in documentation practices, keeping the context of domestic violence in the forefront of any record keeping. The US has a longer history of offering supervised visitation programs than most Canadian provinces. The demonstration sites are also taking part in a national evaluation of the project, spearheaded by internationally renowned domestic violence researchers, Dan Saunders, Rich Tolman, and Chris Sullivan. Conducting an in-depth investigation of the centres from researchers with long-standing experience working with the abusers and victims of domestic violence was long overdue and the results provide important feedback and suggestions for revisions to the standards previously developed for supervised visitation centres.

**Recommendation 4:** Prior to establishing supervised visitation and exchange programs in the province, ensure that the necessary groundwork has been carried out. Experienced providers in Canada and the United States highlighted the intricacies involved in setting up this kind of program, making comments such as “there often isn’t the acknowledgement of the complexity of Safe Visitation programs...on the surface it seems easy, but in fact it is very complex”, and, “be thorough, learn from others, gather lots of information before setting up a program...there is much crucial preparatory work that needs to be done in order to provide this service to people”.

**Recommendation 5:** Staff the supervised visitation centre with well-qualified professionals. The complexities of the dynamics in families impacted by both domestic violence and child abuse are commonly acknowledged. In Alberta, professionals are

contracted to supervise child abuse visitations. In contrast, while many of the programs contacted for the environmental scan have professional staff, much of the monitoring of visits fall to trained volunteers or minimally trained staff. Surely, children impacted by domestic violence deserve the same consideration as victims of child abuse.

Staff turnover has been a significant problem in supervised visitation/ access facilities across the country. To help alleviate this problem, remuneration of supervisors should reflect the complexities and demands of this important role.

Professional staff, with at least bachelor and preferably Masters level training in professions such as social work and psychology, could be trained to assess the readiness of children/parents to change the nature of the visitations (for example from supervised visits to monitored exchanges) by conducting extra-visit assessments (not using the observations from the visitation sessions). Such staff could refer parents/children to other resources (such as parenting programs, counselling) should these become necessary.

Well-qualified staff with an in-depth understanding of domestic violence should be involved in establishing these visitation centres in the province.

**Recommendation 6:** Open the supervised visitation centres to child protection clients: either to non-custodial parents whose children still reside with a natural parent or to parents whose children have been placed in care. Not only would this have the advantage in smaller centres of ensuring that the centre has a sufficient client base to remain open, but it provides a suitable venue for parent-child visits when visiting in the community is premature. Consideration could also be given to accommodating supervised visits for extended family including siblings or grandparents.

In the environmental scan, many domestic violence supervised visitation centres refuse to take child welfare referrals. This appears to be based on the premise that the role and safety considerations for supervisors in child abuse visits are different from the role and safety considerations for supervisors in domestic violence visits. While some of the dynamics may indeed be different, this does not necessarily mean that the roles and considerations are incompatible. This premise also tends to be based on the assumption that “typical” child welfare clients using the service would have had their children placed in government care and custody. It does not consider the many parents who have their children living with them, as in the case of a Supervision Order addressing issues of domestic violence under the emotional abuse section of the Child Youth and Family enhancement Act. Due to continued safety concerns regarding the non-custodial parent, supervised visitation may be necessary. The dynamics in such a situation as this may not differ significantly from the dynamics of another family with domestic violence issues that may not have children’s services involvement.

However, professionally trained staff would have the background and skills to adapt to the differential needs of these clients. Furthermore, given the overlap of many child abuse and domestic violence cases, including child welfare referrals could provide safety to the adult victims in a manner that was not previously considered.

With the inclusion of exposure to domestic violence in Alberta’s Child Welfare legislation, many of the families eligible for supervised visitation fit within the child welfare mandate.

**Recommendation 7:** Provide extensive training with respect to the dynamics of domestic violence to any program supervisors, staff and volunteers (if utilized). One possible training resource will be available from Praxis International, one of the organizations in the US involved in the audit of supervised visitation centres. According to one of the project directors interviewed, Praxis International will have training monographs available in the coming months for agencies wishing to set up their own visitation programs. The Michigan report, referenced in this report (Praxis International, 2004), also provides a list of training topics that should be provided to staff working in supervised visitation centres (p. 17).

**Recommendation 8:** Consider associating with other programs that have experience in supervised visitation through such organizations as the “Supervised Visitation Network” or Florida’s Supervised Visitation Institute for Family Violence Studies.

**Recommendation 9:** Establish mechanisms for supervised visitation centres to work closely with the courts and child protection, to ensure the safety needs of adult victims and children are prioritized and documentation practices do not jeopardize their safety. Also, it is recommended that mechanisms be established to link supervised visitation centres with other domestic violence service providers, such as batterer intervention programs, women’s shelters, counseling agencies, child protection workers, community-based outreach follow-up workers, and the courts. For example, it may be important for supervised visitation centres to have advisory boards with representatives from these different service providers. These agencies may also be able to share domestic violence training resources with one another.

## **Chapter One: Custody and Access in the Context of Domestic Violence**

*“Josif Fekete had been separated from his wife, Betty, for about a year. They had an ongoing custody dispute over their three-year-old, Alex. Josif Fekete had the boy for a court-ordered visit Sunday, and brought him home about 6:30 p.m. When Betty Fekete came down from her third-floor apartment to pick him up, her husband pulled out a shotgun and killed her, his son and himself, police say.” (CBC News)*

Tragedies in Alberta such as this 2003 double murder/suicide and the 2002 murder of Cole Harder by his father who then committed suicide exemplify the necessity for significantly increased safety during child visitations when intimate partner violence has been a critical issue. Only two examples of a number of such homicides around the world, the death of even one child or spouse in the context of a parent-child visit speaks to the risk of violence and need to promote the safety of all family members. Such safety is the major goal of the supervised access and exchange programs now relatively common across North America. These programs are utilized with estranged families in which contact between the former spouses could be highly conflicted or dangerous to either party or to the children.

In 2004, a Provincial Roundtable of Family Violence and Bullying was held across Alberta. One recommendation that emerged from the roundtable process was to assess the provincial need for supervised visitation and exchange programs for families at risk because of domestic violence.

To determine the current landscape in the province related to safe visitation and exchange programs, the primary goal of this project is to conduct an environmental scan of supervised visitation and monitored exchange programs both within Alberta and across Canada. Across Canada, how are supervised visitation and exchange programs structured? What standards of practice do they maintain and how do they ensure safety? How many have been evaluated and what best practices do these suggest?

While Alberta has few supervised visitation and exchange programs specific to the unique needs of families in which domestic violence has been the core concern, a variety of private, for profit and not for profit agencies already exist in Alberta, that coordinate, and supervise access visits as agreed upon by the parties involved, through condition of a court order (either a family matter or a Solicitor General matter) or the request of Alberta Children’s Services caseworkers. The second phase of the environmental scan will identify these agencies, their programs and the scope of their mandate.

Collating the descriptions of different models of programs and identifying what programs exist across Canada, how these programs are conceptualized and what are considered best practices could be significantly helpful to those developing new programs in Alberta and across North America. Such information could allow children to visit with non-custodial parents in the least stressful manner possible. It could ultimately safeguard lives.

## The Context of Intimate Partner Violence

This environmental scan documents the goals, organization and programmatic success and challenges of supervised visitation centres across Canada with reference to several key programs and new directions in the United States. Primarily, the programs have been developed to ensure the safety of women abused by male intimate partners and their children. While a smaller proportion of men are abused by women intimates, the nature and consequences tend to be less severe. In fact, men often describe their partner as being abusive solely in the context of post-separation custody disputes (Tutty, 1999a; Tutty, 2005a).

In contrast, the abuse of women by male intimate partners is recognized as a serious and significant issue worldwide. Respected international organizations including the World Health Organization, the United Nations Development Program, and the United Nation's Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and Amnesty International have highlighted violence against women as of significant concern (Tutty, 2006).

Woman abuse takes many forms. Psychological abuse entails degrading comments and sexual slurs that target the most private and personal aspects of a woman's life. Psychological abuse also includes death threats that elevate the risk of harm to a new level (Campbell, 2001; Tutty, 1999b). Abusive men may sexually coerce or assault their partners (Bergen, 2004). Physical abuse often results in serious injuries and, for some, life-long disabilities. At the extreme, the assaults are brutal and result in death (Tutty & Goard, 2002).

In Canada, over a 22 year period (1978 to 1997), Fitzgerald (1999) noted that spouses were the victim in 18% of all solved homicides and 48% of family related incidents. Consistent with Wilson and Daly, Fitzgerald found that, "Over the two decades, three times more wives than husbands were killed by their spouse (1,485 women and 442 men)" (1999, p. 35).

As noted by Cooper (1994), children are also at risk of being murdered after marital violence and separation. In a file review of family homicides in B.C. from 1984 through 1991, she wrote that:

*Children, in fact, constituted more than one-quarter of victims killed by men whose partners had left them, often following chronic violence against the women. In this group of cases, the children had rarely previously been abused by the homicide perpetrator and their mothers were not killed. (p. 22)*

When a woman decides to leave an abusive partner, the perpetrator often continues his abuse during a bitter, high-conflict divorce. Leaving the abuser and petitioning for sole custody provides many opportunities for the abuser to continue to instil fear into the victim. According to Stahly (1999), the abusive partner often struggles with the loss of control. Having previously relied upon intimidation, physical threats, and harm to control his partner, abusive men often contest their partner's petition for child custody, leading to long and tumultuous court battles. Continued access to the partner when picking up and dropping off children during child visits affords further opportunities to abuse her.



Although the major violence is by the adult batterer toward the adult victim, children often experience the abuse vicariously, if not directly. The effects of children's exposure to spousal violence and/or being abused in one's family are often far-reaching. After divorce, continued exposure to the actions of an abusive parent can further impact children.

The typical interventions to assist parents in arranging child visits, mediation and unsupervised child exchanges, are, at best, questionable when intimate partner violence is a factor. Supervised visitation centres and child exchange programs have recently been developed as alternatives for these families. While such programs have become widespread across North America, there is a paucity of research on their effectiveness.

This chapter describes the issues for parents and children when intimate partner violence has occurred, and presents the rationale for developing supervised visitation and exchange centres.

### **The Impact of Domestic Violence on Women**

The effects of having been abused by one's intimate partner can be traumatic, especially if the threats and physical abuse continue over time (Tutty & Goard, 2002). Serious abuse commonly results in women experiencing anxiety, depression, panic attacks, suicidal ideation, or abusing substances (Gondolf, 1998; Tutty, 1998). Each of these reactions could suggest the need for psychiatric intervention, implying that the abused woman is mentally unbalanced: a position that ignores the context of her situation.

Rather than looking at the symptoms in isolation, a number of authors have identified a cluster of symptoms that are similar to those experienced by other victims of violence such as rape, robbery and physical assault (Tutty, 2006). The symptoms include "anxiety, fears, recurrent nightmares, sleep and eating disorders, numbed affect, flashbacks, hypervigilance and increased startle responses" (Houskamp & Foy, 1991, p. 368). Women who experience this pattern of symptoms may be diagnosed as having Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a condition that was recently included in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-IV (Ristock, 1995).

An advantage of the trauma perspective is that, by definition, these reactions are seen as "normal responses to abnormal occurrences in the lives of these victims" (Gleason, 1993, p. 62). More importantly, the trauma model moves away from an individual perspective that perceives abused women as responsible for having created their symptoms. Rather, her responses are seen as reactions to a larger event over which she has no control: the abusive behaviours of her partner. This context also supports the argument that women who have been assaulted by their partners are not necessarily in need of therapy, since anyone in such a situation would respond with similar reactions.

### **The Impact of Exposure to Domestic Violence on Children**

The impact on children of being exposed to intimate partner violence has been of concern for a considerable time (Hughes, 1988; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990). In the 1980's, a number of authors (Davis & Carlson, 1987; Jaffe et al., 1990; Moore, Pepler, Mae & Kates, 1989) commonly observed that children who witnessed family violence at home often resorted to either the use of physical aggression or withdrawal to deal with conflict. Research by Jaffe and colleagues (1986) and Hughes (1988) concurred that children who are

exposed to inter-parental abuse commonly exhibit heightened anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, problems at school, self-abuse, aggressiveness, dependency, somatic difficulties, and poor sleep habits.

Exposure to domestic violence and physical child abuse often co-occur. Several researchers have reported that in 60-75% of homes where the mother is abused, children are also abused. Fathers in co-occurrence families are much more likely to maltreat a child than fathers in families of non-battered mothers (O'Keefe, 1995; Stark & Flitcraft, 1988).

The child abuse commonly occurs in several ways. Children may be subject to separate assaults by the male perpetrator; they may be accidentally injured in the cross-fire; they may attempt to intervene in violent episodes or they may be at risk of physical harm/disability during pregnancy (Doherty, 2003). When children who have witnessed woman abuse have themselves been abused, Hughes and Luke (1998) note that they are significantly more likely to show more serious symptoms.

James (1994) reported a strong association between domestic violence and fatal child abuse. Children exposed to interparental violence are physically abused and neglected at 15 times the national average in the U.S. (Osofsky, 2004). Farmer and Pollock (1998) found that 55% of sexually abused children came from homes in which domestic violence also occurred.

Considerable research has documented that whether children have experienced violence at the hands of their parents or witnessed physical intimate partner violence between their parents, the effects can be serious and long lasting. Witnessing abuse or being the target of child abuse places youth at risk for serious emotional and educational problems that may continue to negatively affect them long after the abuse has stopped.

A meta-analysis conducted by Wolfe, Crooks, Lee, McIntyre-Smith and Jaffe (2003) concluded that 40 of the 41 studies they examined reported negative emotional and behavioural outcomes for children of being exposed to domestic abuse. Furthermore, the authors noted that the effects of witnessing violence can be similar to being a direct victim of child abuse. Sox (2004) conducted an integrative review of recent literature on the effects of exposure to violence, and reports similarly that such exposure is associated with an increased risk of behavioural and emotional problems, social dysfunction, cognitive delays, and physical injuries in children. Jacobus (2005) concluded from her meta-analysis of children exposed to violence that these children report worse outcomes than non-exposed children on measures of externalizing and internalizing behaviours, as well as social competence.

While the earlier research on children exposed to domestic violence focused on externalizing (aggressive) or internalizing behaviours (depression or anxiety), since the mid-1990's, researchers have more recently conceptualized these behaviours as symptoms of a trauma response. The existence of PTSD symptoms in child witnesses of domestic violence has been commonly noted. Chemtob and Carlson (2004), for example, reported that a high proportion of abused women and children in their study had symptoms of PTSD. Even though women and their children had been out of the abusive relationship for an average of two years, 50% of women and 40% of their children had PTSD.

The developmental stage of the child influences his or her experiences of traumatic events. Children's reactions to trauma tend to differ from those of adults, although researchers have also noted similarities (Osofsky & Scheeringa, 1997). The reactions of children include generalized nightmares about monsters, threats to self or others, or rescuing others. Young children often engage in repetitive play, not consciously aware that they are re-enacting the events that they have witnessed. Children may also believe in their own impending doom and express their fear and helplessness through disorganized and agitated behaviour. Physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomach-aches, are also common to traumatized children (DSM-IV-TR, 2000). Preschool children exposed to violence in the home have been identified as at risk to develop PTSD symptoms. Lieberman and Van Horn (1998) reported that preschoolers who had witnessed abuse between their parents exhibited behaviours consistent with a PTSD diagnosis.

Importantly, though, not all child witnesses develop PTSD. Two studies by Lehmann (1997) and Devoe and Graham-Bermann (1997, cited in Rossman & Ho, 2002) found rates of diagnosable PTSD at 56% and 51%, respectively. This means that the other half of the sample did not show symptoms at a level consistent with a trauma diagnosis.

Other researchers have focused on factors that may protect children from the negative consequences of witnessing domestic violence. Children who believe that they are in control of their lives and who have higher self-esteem may be less affected by violence that they witness (Grych et al., 2000, cited in Guile, 2004). Conversely, children that perceive the conflict between their parents as more threatening and blame themselves for the conflict report higher levels of internalizing problems (depression, anxiety). Researchers have also suggested that a nurturing, supportive mother-child relationship and/or positive sibling relationships may protect the child and minimize the negative effects of the violence (Moore et al., 1990 & Osofsky, 1999, cited in Guile, 2004).

In summary, while not all children exposed to domestic violence develop PTSD and some develop PTSD symptoms after exposure to what might seem traumatizing experiences, the trauma perspective contributes to our understanding of the array of behaviours and feelings expressed and exhibited by children exposed to domestic violence.

### **Child Custody and Access in the Context of Domestic Violence**

In the last 65 years child custody disputes in North America have reportedly been resolved with "the best interest of the child" in mind (Poirier, 1991). In the past, this typically resulted in children being placed with their mothers under the "tender years" doctrine, which assumed that mothers were better suited to raise younger children than fathers due to their 'nurturing tendencies' (Neilson, 1997).

In the past 20 years, the courts have considered joint custody as the solution that best addresses the child's interests (Poirier, 1991) in both non-contested and high conflict divorces. According to Jaffe and Geffner (1998), the courts appear to have been influenced by research conclusions that children of divorcing couples benefit from continued contact with both parents (Lee, Shaughnessy, & Bankes, 1995; Stahl, 1999). Straus and Alda (1994) recommend that, unless there are concrete reasons, children should have regular

visits with the non-custodial parent because, for example, they may feel abandoned if denied contact. Stahl (1999) suggests that developing a relationship that is reasonably free of hostility and fear with both parents is essential to children's psychological and social well-being. Even when a parent has been abusive, a child may develop a realistic picture of this parent and may avoid repeating similar abusive behaviors in future (Straus & Alda, 1994; Perkins & Ansary, 1998; James & Gibson, 1991).

However, advocates for abused women have expressed strong concerns that, in contested custody cases in which domestic violence has occurred, awarding custody to perpetrators of partner violence endangers the safety of both women and children (Shalansky, Ericksen, & Henderson, 1999; Jaffe & Geffner, 1998; Stahly, 1999; Favreau, 1999). Unfortunately, literature on the harm to children of being exposed to parental violence has developed independently of the divorce literature that promote maximum contact with both parents. Jaffe and Crooks (2004) argue that the debate has not been informed by comprehensive, quality research.

When the courts determine custody, the victims of intimate partner violence are often disadvantaged, the major reason being the trend to award joint custody to parents. With joint custody as the acceptable standard, courts have awarded this to an overwhelming number of contested divorce cases. Sorensen (1995) noted that in Florida, between 1988 and 1990, 84% of judges awarded joint custody to divorcing parents.

To parents with a history of domestic violence, joint custody allows abusers ongoing access to victims and the potential to continue terrorizing them. During custody battles, victims face often-controlling, threatening, and manipulating abusers. The woman is often responsible for proving that she was abused, which may entail disproving her partner's lies about her. Such experiences are both frustrating and stressful according to research conducted by Shalansky, Ericksen and Henderson (1999) who noted that women perceived their partners as using the legal system to continue to control them. The women further believed that the courts did not pay sufficient attention to the abuse. Such experiences are daunting to women whose feelings of self-worth may already have been damaged by abusive partners. Facing such obstacles in court while fighting for sole custody against a partner who has disproportionately more power than she, places her in a vulnerable position.

Even when evidence of a perpetrator's intimate violence exists in the criminal justice system, family courts may not be aware of this history. Kernic, Monary-Ernsdorff, Koepsell and Holt's 2005 retrospective cohort study on child custody determinations concluded that family courts were made aware of a perpetrator's substantiated history of intimate partner violence in less than 25% of custody cases both because of poor coordination between legal systems, and because family courts do not screen adequately for domestic violence.

When the courts had substantiated information about an abuser's history, such as police and court records, they were more likely to place restrictions on the father in custody cases by, for example, limiting access to children, limiting father's decision-making power, and requiring some form of treatment as a condition of access (Kernic et al., 2005). However, 83% of fathers with a substantiated history of family violence were

still granted access to their children and were no more likely to be given supervised access than the comparison group of non-violent fathers.

Similarly, Shaffer and Bala (2003) reviewed Canadian court cases between 1997 and 2000, in which domestic violence was documented as an issue in the trial proceedings. Most of the men that abused their wives were granted access to their children, and, for the most part, this access was unsupervised. Access was denied only in seven of the 31 cases in which the court accepted the mother's allegations of spousal abuse. In these seven cases, the mothers were victims of extreme physical violence, and the children were also at risk of serious physical harm. Some of the cases reviewed by Shaffer and Bala were especially troubling, in that courts refused to order supervised access to highly abusive men. For example, unsupervised access was awarded to a man who was a serial wife abuser (having physically abused four of his female partners), who refused to seek treatment, refused to acknowledge that he had a problem, and had been deemed by the Child Welfare authority as at risk of abusing the children.

In 1994 in the United States, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges promulgated the Model Code on Domestic and Family Violence. With respect to custody and access decisions, the Model Code contains provisions including a rebuttable presumption that "it is detrimental and not in the best interest of the child to be placed in sole custody, joint legal custody, or joint physical custody with the perpetrator of family violence", and a presumption that, "visitation by a parent who committed domestic or family violence be awarded only if adequate provision can be made for the safety of the child and the parent who is the victim" (Morrill, Dai, Dunn, Sung, & Smith, 2005). State legislatures are free to adopt any or all provisions of the Model Code.

Morrill et al. investigated the impact of the above domestic violence presumptions in custody and access court orders, examining 393 custody and/ or access orders where the father had perpetrated violence against the mother. In states where the Model Code was adopted and there were no competing statutes (i.e. a presumption favouring joint custody, with no exception for DV, or a 'friendly parent' provision), it was less common for fathers to be awarded joint custody than for mothers to be awarded sole custody. But, even with the presumption, perpetrators of intimate partner violence were awarded joint custody in 40% of cases.

When there were competing statutes, joint custody was awarded four times more often than sole custody to the mother. Furthermore, the DV presumption had no effect on physical custody orders, but the competing presumptions had a strong effect in favour of fathers. A finding that warrants concern is that when there were competing presumptions, sole physical custody was awarded more often to the perpetrators of intimate violence than to mothers (Morill et al., 2005).

In summary, while legislative reforms, such as the Model Code, have been developed with the best of intentions (i.e. to protect the safety of abused women and their children) there are often negative and unintended consequences to victims of abuse. In the case of the Model Code, these legislative reforms sometimes have had a negative impact on victims. The rebuttable presumption has led to an increased scepticism in the courts about allegations of abuse. It has also sometimes led to increased delays and costs

of litigation – causing victims to compromise and settle for joint custody or unsafe visitation plans.

Several researchers have argued that the failure of family courts to protect women and children from perpetrators of intimate violence in custody and access cases constitutes a violation of their human rights, as well as a failure to act in the best interests of the child according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Silverman, Mesh, Cuthbert, Slote, & Bancroft, 2004). In their Massachusetts study of child custody outcomes of domestic violence cases, in 46% of all cases the judges recommended physical custody of children to men that had used violence against the mothers or both the mothers and their children. Similarly, 46% of judges recommended unsupervised access to fathers who had been violent towards their female partners and/or children. All of the women possessed some documentation of domestic violence (e.g., police reports, witness affidavits, restraining orders, child protective service reports), with or without child abuse. However, for two thirds of the women, the family court state actors failed to accept or consider the documentation as relevant to child custody. Most of these cases (24 of 27) involved the judges' refusal to accept or consider such documentation when it was presented by women or their counsel. This is troubling given that Massachusetts' own laws include the presumption that children should not be placed in the custody of an abusive parent. Silverman et al. (2004) concluded that the state actors were complicit in ongoing acts of harm against women and children.

Busch and Robertson (2000) describe similar circumstances in New Zealand, where courts have also tended to ignore the importance of spousal violence. The accepted logic is that a parent who has been violent towards his partner but not the children can still provide a safe environment for those children. Such policies seem counter-intuitive given the previously presented research examining the effects of exposure to domestic violence on children.

As Stahly (1999) notes, even children who have not been directly abused by a parent may suffer psychological distress when having witnessed domestic violence. Furthermore, the abuser's style of parenting may not be adequate even if he has not abused his children. According to Bancroft and Silverman (2002), abuser's parenting styles are often authoritarian, controlling and rigid. These parents may be under-involved, neglectful, and avoid situations requiring parental responsibility. By creating a home environment fraught with violence and fear, the abusive parent has already disregarded the psychological needs of his children. Ironically, the victim's attempts to deal with the effects on her of the abuse, which can include counselling and medication, may make her appear even less stable than the individual who acted abusively, despite the fact that the abusive partner created the environment that led to the need for these coping strategies (Stahly, 1999).

Unfortunately, this logic appears to have evaded the legal system and mothers who petition for sole custody must often find other means to convince the courts that the abusive parent is unfit. In the absence of child abuse, joint custody appears to be the norm in determining childcare arrangements, further disadvantaging the abused parent in court decisions.

## **Unsupervised Visitation Arrangements**

When courts and/or mediators do not adequately attend to the presence of violence in a couple's marital relationship, child exchanges to fulfill a joint custody arrangement can be seriously problematic for both parents and highly dangerous for victims. A number of researchers have noted that the most perilous time for women in a violent relationship is after they leave (Geffner & Pagelow, 1990; Favreau, 1999; Stahly, 1999; Jaffe & Geffner, 1998). Under a joint custody order, women are forced to renew contact with the batterer on a regular basis during child visitation. Such continued contact leaves women at significant risk of further physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, not to mention homicide.

Schaffer and Bala (2003) contend that when there has been a history of significant spousal abuse, unsupervised access places children at risk of further emotional and physical harm from the perpetrator. Furthermore, access provides the perpetrator with opportunities to question the child about the mother, and to attempt to continue to exert control over her life.

The primary safety risk for women who must encounter their ex-partners to exchange children is further physical and emotional abuse. It is not unusual for both parents to use custody exchanges as opportunities to continue airing their grievances and the stress of this situation may often erupt into further violence (Sheeran & Hampton, 1999). In fact, 88% of the women surveyed by Favreau (1999) responded that they had been emotionally or psychologically abused during custody exchanges, and 55% had been abused physically. Furthermore, half of the women surveyed did not feel safe exchanging their children with their spouse. Shepard (1992) reported that one quarter of the women in her study were raped at some point during the exchanges, 9% of the women were physically assaulted, and one-third reported some form of psychological abuse.

In order to comply with court ordered visitation arrangements, women who may have successfully separated from their abusive spouse are forced into regular contact with them. This can sabotage the strategies that she has developed for her own safety. For example, restraining orders become pointless if the victim must see her spouse regularly to comply with the custody order. She may face further legal action if she decides not to allow her partner access to their children.

In an effort to make such precarious situations safe, victims typically choose highly visible locations to conduct custody exchanges such as local fast food restaurants or police stations. While the public nature of these locations may deter further abuse, the opportunity for child abduction and further violence still exists (Favreau, 1999; Newton, 1997; Stahly, 1999). Clearly, safety during child exchange between parents is of great importance.

In divorces affected by domestic violence, courts may order private supervised visitation of the children to prevent further physical harm to the child and the child's mother during exchanges. In such cases, seemingly neutral family members of the child are shouldered with the responsibility to supervise visits between the child and the abusive parent. These arrangements are intended to relieve the potential danger of child abduction and reduce further abuse to either the parent or child (Clement, 1998).

Unfortunately, private visitation agreements can still be problematic for all parties involved. Newton (1997) recently drew attention to the impracticality of such arrangements. Organizing the visits requires the cooperation of both divorced parents in arranging appropriate times for exchanges, a task that may not be possible for couples where one partner has a history of violence, intimidation and control. Furthermore, the parents must be able to find a “neutral” relative who is willing to dedicate a significant amount of time to supervise the visits. James and Gibson (1991) noted that the family supervisor may not believe that such close monitoring is necessary and may be reluctant to maintain vigilance in protecting the child. Conversely, the supervisor may become hostile to and hyper-vigilant about the visiting parent, making the environment uncomfortable and antagonistic for both the visiting parent and the child.

Clement (1998) mentions another problem with these arrangements: the lack of professional training on the part of the non-family member supervisors. Often, the elected individual has no experience dealing with power differences and may become subject to the manipulation and control of the abusive parent, thus creating a safety problem for the supervisor, the child and the victim.

Finally, private visitation arrangements are still not guaranteed to be safe, as the abuser may use the private arena to further abuse his partner, often by sending messages to her via the children (Favreau, 1999). The reality is that any exchange without professional supervision offers the abuser the opportunity to inflict physical and emotional harm on his victim and children (Shepard, 1992).



## **Chapter Two: Supervised Visitation and Access Centres**

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the need for professional involvement in some child custody exchanges became apparent in family courts across North America. Supervised access centres meet the needs of the distinct population of families in which the safety of the victims and/or the children cannot be guaranteed by traditional child custody agreements (Carlson, 2000). This chapter describes the common characteristics and differences inherent in supervised visitation and access centres, and research with respect to their effectiveness.

According to Straus (1995), “Supervised visitation is contact between a child and adult(s) (usually a parent) that takes place in the presence of a third person who is responsible for ensuring the safety of those involved. Supervised visits are necessary when contact with the adult(s) may present a risk to the child or to a parent” (p. 229). Rather than relying on a private arrangement, centres for the prevention of family violence across North America provide this service in a controlled and safe environment (Clement, 1998; Straus, 1995).

Straus and Alda (1994) describe two services typically offered by supervised visitation centres. Intense one-on-one supervision is used when the parent poses a distinct risk to the safety of the child. In these cases, staff members monitor the parent-child visits closely. The primary role of the staff is to protect the child’s safety while still allowing the child and the parent to have a meaningful interaction.

The second service is that of exchange supervision, also known as monitored exchange. In these cases, the program staff member provides a secure location for parents to conduct child exchanges. The arrival and departure of parents is staggered so that they do not have face-to-face contact. Theoretically, the services offered by supervised visitation centres appear ideally suited to separated families in which a parent has been abusive to his spouse.

Tuckman (2005) suggests that supervised access is warranted when one or more of the following factors are present in a divorce situation: serious mental illness accompanied by behaviour damaging to children; history of physical abuse with lack of remorse; vindictive behaviour towards the children or custodial parent; arrests for violence against people; abuse of children, including sexual abuse; active alcohol and substance abuse; persistent violations of custody orders; threats or past acts of abduction; attempts by a non-custodial parent to impose religious views on a child against the custodial parent’s wishes; ongoing parental conflict caused by a non-custodial parent; attempts to re-establish contact between the child and the non-custodial parent after a long period of time i.e. 6-12 months; and, an alienated child who is strongly allied with the custodial parent, and who views the noncustodial parent as dangerous and damaging.

Schaffer and Bala (2003) argue that in domestic violence cases, unsupervised access should only be granted if 1) the child is not afraid of the father and 2) it is unlikely that the perpetrator of abuse will continue to abuse the mother or child. They further contend that the court should ensure the exchange of the children will not place the mother and/ or children at risk of further harm from the perpetrator.

Johnston and Roseby (cited in Rossman, Hughes & Rosenberg, 2000), recommend that batterers who continue to stalk or harass their partners, threaten violence, or continue to be physically abusive towards their partners should receive either supervised visitation or their visitation should be suspended by the courts. They caution that unsupervised visitation should only resume when the batterer is no longer physically or psychologically abusive to the custodial parent, and has successfully completed treatment programs such as batterer intervention programs, parenting education, and substance abuse programs.

What are the benefits of supervised visitation and access centres? James and Gibson (1991) observed that regular visitation can reduce negative parent-child interactions as the visits are organized specifically to avoid this. As such, the child maintains regular positive contact with the abusive parent, which may have happened only sporadically before the program. Supervised visitation can offset the child's fear that the non-custodial parent has abandoned him or her. Finally, supervised visitation can offer children the opportunity to be cared for positively by a parent who may have previously instilled fear and distrust. According to Bancroft and Silverman (2002), children exposed to domestic violence need predictability, structure, and limits in their environment if they are to overcome the effects of living in chaotic, disorganized and unpredictable homes. By their very nature, supervised visitation programs offer these consistencies and children's feelings of safety and comfort may greatly increase.

In summary, the goals of supervised visitation centres are clearly and commonly aimed at bettering the experiences and emotional well-being of children visiting their non-custodial parent. Stocker (1992) noted that non-custodial parents are spending up to two hours of uninterrupted time with their children in a supervised visitation centres. Furthermore, in these centres, children can relax without having to worry about their safety and the safety of their parents, as both the child and the parent know that the visit is closely monitored.

### **Standards of Supervised Access and Exchange Programs**

A significant portion of publications on safe visitation centres for domestic violence cases has been devoted to suggestions and recommendations for developing new centres. Visitation centres appear to meet the needs of their clients; nevertheless, this group remains under-served, requiring more centres. Supervised visitation centres are steadily becoming more common (Straus, 1995; Clement, 1998) and those that have operated for a number of years can provide expert suggestions for newer centres, as follows.

Successful, well-established supervised visitation centres provide a wealth of suggestions and practical advice. Visitation centre staff must be trained to understand and deal with the coercive nature of violent family dynamics (Straus & Alda, 1994). As Bancroft and Silverman (2002) discuss, abusers are adept at performing well under observation, often appear loving and caring towards their children in a supervised setting. Skilled observers must intervene at any signs of child distress. Because the visits take place in controlled, supervised settings, the child often feels safe with the abusive parent and may greatly enjoy the visit. Supervisors must be careful not to misinterpret this as

indicating that the child will be equally safe and happy alone with the parent outside the centre.

A common recommendation is that supervisors maintain a neutral stance in engaging with both parents. James and Gibson (1991) stress the importance of the supervisor reporting facts and stating his or her own opinion only when asked by courts or judges. The supervisor should be protecting the child as their primary client. Supervisors monitor the parent during visitation, attending to both the behaviour of the visiting parent and the subsequent body language and behaviour of the child to ensure that the visiting parent is behaving appropriately. In the interest of protecting the child from further abuse, parents are prohibited from whispering to the child, making negative comments about the child's other parent, and forcibly touching the child in any way. Such behaviours are vigorously controlled and when they occur, are recorded both to protect the child and educate the parent about effective child-rearing practices (Clement, 1998; Park et al., 1997; Straus, 1995). The children can consequently visit the non-custodial parent in a safe atmosphere without fear of being hurt themselves or having their custodial parent hurt further.

Parental safety during exchanges is another important issue. When the reason for referral to safe visitation centres is primarily the violence by one parent towards the other, monitored exchanges may be the only service required. In these cases, the centres provide a safe, neutral place for parents to exchange children without ever having to see each other. It is anticipated that these programs reduce the potential for further violence and abusive language that is stressful for both victims and children. The parents' drop-off and pick-up times are staggered and security is a visible presence that discourages violent outbursts and stalking behaviour of either parent. Many centres have separate entrances for each parent and even separate parking lots in an effort to increase the safety of the abused partners and children. Appointment times are rigidly adhered to, and consistent late or early arrivals may result in cessation of visits between parent and child (Clement, 1998; Hess & Mintun, 1992; Park et al., 1997; Stocker, 1992).

Favreau (1999) surveyed clients of a visitation centre (mostly abused partners) and reported that the women were primarily concerned with the safety and accessibility of the centres. They recommended having the centre located centrally and easily accessible by public transportation, as the lack of reliable transportation was a major impediment to their use of the facility. One significant problem is that funding is often limited, so that the courts and community agencies struggle to adequately support battered women and their children (Jaffe & Crooks 2004).

### **Service Delivery Standards of the Supervised Visitation Network**

As supervised visitation and exchange programs have been launched across the Western world in the past decade, standards and protocols for the provision of these services have been developed. The Supervised Visitation Network is one organization set up to provide such protocols, with member organizations in Canada, the United States, Australia, Japan, and Scotland.

The association has developed standards for practice of child access services, maintains a directory of supervised child access providers, provides public education regarding the role and importance of child access programs, collects and disseminates

research on children's access services, gathers and disseminates training and program materials, holds professional conferences and forums for networking and sharing of information, and advocates with funding bodies to support child access services.

The standards developed by the Supervised Visitation Network (SVN) cover a wide range of practical issues in setting up a supervised access and exchange service. They provide protocols on the structure of service delivery, administrative functions, preliminary issues to consider in operations, security issues, supervisor-to-child ratio, responsibility for the child, fees, staffing, training, referrals, intake procedures, conditions for participation in the program, familiarizing children with the program, preparing staff for monitoring the visits, intervening during supervised visits, terminating supervised visits, special considerations in situations involving domestic violence, record-keeping, reporting to courts and/ or referring agencies, confidentiality, procedures for arrival and departure of clients, checklist of suggested information to be obtained during intake, and guidelines on report writing and observation notes. The following section summarizes some of these standards – for a complete list please refer to the website of the Supervised Visitation Network (<http://www.svnetwork.net/StandardsAndGuidelines.html>).

The services that may be provided by a Supervised Visitation Program are outlined in the standards, as well as a recommendation that providers not perform child custody evaluations, since they believe that the visitation setting ought to be characterized by objectivity. The SVN specifies that the only conditions where it would be permissible for agencies to perform custody evaluations would be if the court or referring agency specifically requested that they provide this service, if the supervisor is trained to perform such evaluations, if the parents are aware in advance that this will be occurring, and if the supervisor follows standard protocols with respect to custody evaluations.

The SVN makes recommendations about staff caseloads, suggesting that time be allotted for intake, supervision of visits, report writing, testifying, training, and staff supervision. Recommendations are also made for the premises of the supervised access, considering factors such as accessibility, appropriateness for children, and safety issues. For example, it is suggested the facility be child friendly, be accessible to disabled people, and also be on a public transit route. It is also recommended that the waiting areas for parents be separated, so a waiting parent cannot be seen by a parent entering the facility, and that the waiting parent cannot hear the proceedings of the parent-child visit.

The SVN specifies that there should be written security arrangements in place, the staff should refuse to accept any case if they cannot reasonably ensure the safety of the child(ren) and adults, and they should always take reasonable precautions to ensure safety. They outline precautions to take with custodial and visiting parents and other adults, such as designing the premises so the parents are apart at all times – both visually and physically. They also suggest that there be security personnel on site. The SVN standards suggest that agencies develop their own protocols for emergency situations, such as dangerous behaviour of adults or children, and medical emergencies.

The SVN outlines the criteria an agency should use in selecting staff, and the qualifications staff should have, including the coordinator, the case managers, the Visit Supervisors, and the drivers (if applicable). For example, it is recommended that all staff have experience in caregiving of children, sensitivity to diversity issues, an understanding

of child development, interpersonal skills and abilities, and an understanding of divorce, separation, and child welfare issues. Surprisingly, there is no mention of domestic violence training. It is recommended that the Program Director have the equivalency of a certified mental health director, that the Case Managers have training and experience in supervised visitation services, and that Visit Supervisors have substantial experience working with children and writing proficiency.

The SVN outlines the expected outcomes in training Visit Supervisors, specifies the topics that should be covered in such training, and also recommends that staff receive between ten and fifteen hours of training on particular issues such as family violence, the emotional and economic effects of divorce, observation of parent/ child contacts, and the recording of contacts. They further specify that Visit Supervisors receive a further 3-10 hours training on a selected list of topics such as court testimony, structuring the visits, and psychiatric/ psychological disabilities. For managers and independent Providers, the SVN recommends at least 10 hours of additional training, covering topics such as receiving referrals and the intake process, establishing a visitation contract, setting fees, and relations with courts, police, attorneys, and referring agencies.

The SVN recommends the types of information that should be gathered with respect to families referred to the supervised visitation program, including the reasons for the supervision of visits, any details related to domestic violence, the requested frequency of the visits, the types of services requested, and special needs of the children. They also specify the circumstances that would warrant a Provider declining a referral, such as not being able to provide the service requested (i.e. a custody evaluation), or if the program cannot adequately ensure the safety of the family due to the risks involved in the situation.

The SVN recommends that client intake include separate face to face interviews with each of the parents and the children prior to the visits, and assessing for family violence. In the appendices to the Standards and Guidelines is a checklist of suggested intake questions and information that should be provided to the family. Recommended intake questions include information such as current court involvement and orders, risk of abduction and family violence, history of parental dysfunction, substance abuse issues, and any issues that might arise during the visitation with the child(ren). Information that should be provided to clients includes the safety guidelines of the centre, the lack of tolerance of abusive behaviour, a description of the records kept by the agency, the types of reports that may be provided to the courts or other referring agencies, and the limits of confidentiality.

The SVN standards and guidelines include a list of 17 rules covering issues such as punctuality, expected behaviour, procedures that ensure the parents will not see each other on the premises, policies regarding cancelling visits, expectations about the parent-child interactions, and the agency's practices regarding observation notes. It is recommended that the details of the visit schedule, such as the frequency, duration, and number of visits, be documented. It specifies that court orders should be made available to the provider. Examples of some of the rules are: "a non-custodial parent may not make negative comments to a visiting child about the custodial parent, his/ her partners or family members"; "No participant in the Supervised Visitation Program may follow or harass another party before or after a scheduled supervised visit"; "No client may make

any threat of violence or threat to break any Court order during a supervised visit, including the transitions before and after the visit”; and, “Written records of observations during supervised visits will be maintained and reports according to Provider practice submitted to the Court.”

The SVN recommends that the provider ensures that children are aware of the purpose of the supervised visits, and the safety arrangements that are in place. They list eight recommendations for addressing safety issues if there is known or suspected family violence. One such recommendation, for example, is that “If there is evidence that a child has been abused or is afraid of the visiting parent the Visit Supervisor should arrange a sign with the child(ren) if s/he wants the visit to end. In this prearranged way the child(ren) can signal discomfort with less risk of angering a parent perceived as powerful and/or scary.”

The SVN makes recommendations for Visit Supervisors in preparing themselves for visits. These include being briefed by the case managers on any recent developments in the family, and being familiar with the conditions and policies of visits, including rules about no alcohol or drugs. The Visit Supervisor should also be aware of the types of activities that are acceptable during the visits, whether there are any other visitors allowed during the visit, the guidelines in place about conversations with the children, and factors relating to medication, diet, and discipline.

The SVN outlines when a visit should be terminated, for example, when a child becomes significantly distressed, when the child is deemed by the supervisor to be at emotional or physical risk, or if the non-custodial parent acts inappropriately towards the child or agency staff.

Finally, the SVN outlines the conditions under which an agency may decide to terminate the services to a family, for example, “if safety or other issues involved in the case that cannot effectively be addressed by the Provider”; “One or both parties have failed to comply with the Conditions for Participation in the Program; “The parties agree that they can manage visits without assistance. Both parties may notify the appropriate referral source”; “The case is placing an undue demand on the Provider’s resources”; and, “The Non-Custodial parent continuously refuses to pay fees for services”.

### **Controversies about Safe Visitation Centres**

Supervised visitation centres appear to be an ideal solution to the complex problem of custody and access in the context of domestic violence. While visitation centres provide a service that previously has been unavailable to many families, several ethical and organizational issues have yet to be resolved. Barnum (1987) identified the first of such problems; how to interpret a child’s problem behaviour. Sometimes children regress to an earlier developmental stage when faced with the non-custodial parent during visitation. It is generally unclear whether this is a result of internal processes, such as grief or anxiety, or whether the child is experiencing harm. Without a clinical assessment of the child, the origins of such problems are difficult to determine, but the consequences can be severe.

Placing too much emphasis on a child’s behaviour in a contrived and limited situation can be over-zealous. To control for this, Barnum recommends professional

assessments of the child in a number of contexts (such as home and school) before making any recommendations about custody. Furthermore, Johnston and Straus (1999) point out that the children who come to supervised visitation centres are among the most vulnerable in our population, so it is essential that staff do all they can to protect children's psychological safety. This includes working with other community agencies and the courts to ensure that referrals to the supervision centre are appropriate, responding to children's distrust and their need for hypervigilance, supporting the child's ability to appraise reality, addressing the child's needs for safety and a sense of control, and recognizing and intervening when a child is distressed. These are fundamental to operating a visitation service.

A second controversy in visitation is requests to program supervisors/staff to provide reports to courts and judges regarding the visiting parent's behaviour and parenting abilities. Such reports suffer the same limitations as judgments about a child's well-being that were discussed above. The observations are based on behaviours made in a highly controlled and contrived setting and may not reflect the parent's behaviour and attitudes outside the centre. Straus (1995) recommends that centres provide strictly factual data to courts such as arrival times, serious incidents, and observable behaviours. Straus warns supervisors not to give opinions about the visiting parent's parenting abilities, and especially about whether or not future contact should occur. The role of the visitation centre is to record behaviour, not advise on future custody decisions.

There is also controversy about the type of behaviour that should be recorded by supervised visitation centres. Some researchers argue that visitation centre staff need to pay attention to behaviour in the context of domestic violence and battering, and to remove the focus away from recording only behaviours related to the parent-child visit (Safe Havens California Demonstration Site Audit Review, 2005). Several researchers have recently argued that reports of violence or intimidation off the grounds of the visitation centre ought to be documented in the notes, since such behaviour is relevant to the safety of both the adult victim and the child (Praxis International, 2004).

A fourth controversy in visitation is whether or not to offer additional services such as parent education, groups for abusers, and counselling for victims. These are seen by some as conflicting with the neutral stance that is the foundation of visitation programs. Poirier (1991) commented that when clinicians work with families that have experienced abuse, they lose their neutrality to make recommendations about custody arrangements. As such, some critics believe that visitation centres should not offer counselling, to maintain the strict neutrality of the programs.

However, as Poirier points out, providing needed counselling to abusive and abused parents is paramount in ending the cycle of violence. Carter, Kay, George and King (2003) determined that treatments for victims and abusers are often effective and reduce fear and psychological symptoms following the cessation of the relationship. MacMillan and Harper (2003) concur, having determined that clinically significant psychological symptoms were reduced in victims of violence that were provided appropriate treatment. In order to ensure that visitation centres are properly serving victims, counselling may well be necessary. To resolve the conflict of interest that counselling may create, Poirier suggests that clinicians need to be clear about their involvement with the family if called as expert witnesses. Specifically, they must ensure

that they do not purport to have a neutral stance towards any clients that they also counsel.

Despite these conflicts regarding the role of supervised visitation centres, McMahon and Pence (1995) define what they consider the most appropriate position for visitation centres to assume. In examining the centre's beliefs and policies, the researchers determined that, "the Centre's role was to intervene in and influence the process of reordering family relationships from the standpoint of those who had been harmed by violence" (p. 192). This reaffirms that the child and the adult victim are the most important clients: their well-being must be protected and enhanced as much as possible through the work of the centre.

### **The Effectiveness of Supervised Visitation Programs**

The literature on supervised visitation primarily examines the policies of different centres and provides recommendations for creating new centres. Although there is little research on the effectiveness of these programs, some recent studies have explored the psychological and social outcomes of families who have attended these programs. Other researchers have examined program satisfaction from key stakeholders and parents who regularly use supervised visitation programs.

Pearson, Davis and Thoennes (2005) evaluated supervised visitation and neutral exchange programs offered in 30 of California's 58 counties. Ninety percent of the 970 parents reported that the program provided a safe environment for themselves and their children. Two-thirds of the non-custodial parents reported being either somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the services they received at the supervised visitation centres. Supervised visitation users reported a significant increase in the number of days of contact with their children, from 39% that saw their children at least once a week to 50%, and those with no contact dropped from 36 to 25%.

Fewer non-custodial parents characterized their relationships with the other parent as "hostile and angry" following program participation, with the percentage dropping from 54 to 26% of supervised visitation clients. Similarly, the percentage of custodial parents that characterized their relationship as "hostile and angry" dropped from 45 to 14% for supervised visitation clients. At least some of the improvements for supervised visitation clients were due to their ability to avoid one another during visits, as the proportion of parents reporting "no contact" increased following program participation. One encouraging result was that 39% of participants stopped using the service because the court determined that it was no longer necessary, and another 15% of parents no longer required the program, suggesting that the had service enabled them to safely manage visitation and exchanges themselves.

The Pearson et al. 2005 study also reviewed child support records for 173 program users in three states. Child support payments improved following participation in the supervised visitation centres, with 38% of the users increasing their child support. In cases in which the noncustodial parent entered the program paying less than 100% of what they owed, payment gains were even more significant, with 53% of supervised visitation clients registering gains. The increases in child support payments was especially relevant for never-married parents, in which cases the non-custodial parent paid a significantly greater proportion of what they owed in child support in the 12



months after than in the 12 months before receiving services, with the average percent paid rising from 59 to 79%.

In exploring whether a supervised visitation centre had an impact upon parental attitudes and beliefs with respect to their children, Dunn, Flory, and Berg-Weger, (2004) were surprised to find no differences between custodial and non-custodial parental beliefs and attitudes about their roles as parents, their expectations of children, and their understanding of their children's needs. It is important to note, however, that the study measured parenting attitudes, and not practices. The parenting attitudes of both sets of parents also fell within the normal range. The researchers speculate that this group of separated parents with histories of domestic violence may be "less pervasive and entrenched" than non-separated families. They also suggest that, since most of the violence by parents with domestic violence histories occurs during child exchanges, children from homes where there has been domestic violence may be no more at risk than the general population if contact with the abusive ex-partner is minimized and if access takes place in a controlled, protective setting. The parents that participated in this study did report significant reductions in attitudes that favour corporal punishment over a six month period in which they were involved with the supervised access and visitation centre.

At the beginning of the program, non-custodial parents tended to rate their children's adjustment as better than the custodial parents, but the perceptions of non-custodial parents became more congruent with the custodial parents over the course of their participation in the supervised visitation program. The authors speculated that since the supervised access centre enabled more regular visitation with the non-custodial parent, the increased contact led children to feel more at ease with the non-custodial parent, and, hence, less concerned about being on their best behaviour. It is also possible that children were more relaxed when visiting with the non-custodial parent in the supervised setting, with an absence of inter-parental conflict. The authors suggest that congruent parental perceptions will make it more likely that the parents manage child-rearing responsibilities in a similar fashion (Dunn, et al., 2004).

The children maintained normal levels of adjustment over a six month period, despite having increased contact with the non-custodial parents. This suggests that children are less likely to exhibit symptoms of maladjustment when needed intervention is in place. Dunn and colleagues concluded that their study suggests that supervised access and exchange programs can help prevent child abuse by reducing the contact and exposure to the actions of the abusive parent during the children's transfer.

Peterson-Badali, Maresca, Park and Jenkins (1997) elicited the opinions of 14 lawyers and 13 judges with respect to 14 supervised visitation programs in Ontario. The lawyers had all referred families to such programs, believing that the service met a need in their communities. Both judges and lawyers were concerned that the demand for the service was greater than the service's capacity, and recommended expanding the programs. Furthermore, the majority of judges and lawyers believed that supervised access programs decrease the amount of time parents spent in court; specifically, these programs reduced hostility between parents and consequently reduced the frequency of court visits. Judges were of the opinion that their custody orders were more likely to be upheld by parents when supervised visits were available. They believed that the centres

greatly increased the safety of the children who attend them. Finally, judges and lawyers were satisfied with the nature of the reports prepared by centre staff about parental behaviour during visits. Both judges and lawyers found this neutral information helpful in both court appearances and for making further recommendations regarding custody and access.

On the other hand, some researchers have reported that judges and supervised visitation centre staff need to collaborate more effectively to develop better ways of responding to the needs of families affected by domestic violence (Praxis International, 2004). In a recent audit of U.S. visitation centres, problems were identified with the ways these two systems worked together, creating safety risks for adult victims and children of domestic violence. Supervised visitation centres were often provided little information by the courts about the reasons for an order to supervised visitation. The lack of detailed information about the nature and extent of violence committed by a perpetrator left the centre staff ill-prepared to effectively address the safety risks to the adult victim and children. Another safety risk reported by the audit was that observation notes of the parent-child visit, containing information of little relevance to the domestic violence in the family, were being used by the courts to prematurely award unsupervised visitation to parents whose behaviours remained abusive (Praxis International, 2004).

In a national U.S. survey of administrators of 94 supervised visitation programs, 51 family court judges and 40 child protective services administrators, Thoennes and Pearson (1999) determined that 70% of the judges were concerned that supervised visitation services were not widely available, although they were satisfied with the purpose and goals of these organizations. Without sufficient referrals, many programs struggle to survive. However, the courts were also requesting program reports for consideration in custody and access decisions, a role that most programs do not find appropriate.

Parental perceptions of the visitation experience are another evaluation focus. Flory, Dunn, Berg-Weger and Milstead (2001) examined the experiences of parents attending a supervised visitation centre. Over a 6-month period, interparental conflict as measured by the Modified Conflict Tactics Scale, decreased significantly. Flory et al. speculated that this is because parents feel more accountable for their behaviours and the need to conform to the high standards of behaviour that the supervised visitation centre expects of them. Similarly, Peterson-Badali et al. (1997) reported that parents attending a supervised visitation program experienced less interpersonal conflict.

However, the parents' perceptions of their ex-partner's behaviour in general did not necessarily change (Flory et al., 2001). The custodial parents estimated that their ex-partners had made fewer visits than were documented by staff, suggesting that even with attendance at a visitation centre, parents continue to use "he said/she said" communications that may drive further court visits. Such distorted perceptions of the ex-partner's behaviour suggest the necessity of strict documentation on the part of the visitation centre staff.

On a positive note, Flory et al. (2001) noticed that the more frequent the visits, the greater likelihood of parents complying with court-ordered parenting programs. This conclusion is supported by Pearson and Thoennes (2000) who noted that parents were

more satisfied with visitation centres when they attended frequently and received helpful comments from staff.

Jenkins, Park and Peterson-Badali (1997) examined the experiences of both parents (121 interviews) and children (29 interviews) attending the same 14 Ontario supervised visitation centres mentioned previously (Peterson-Badali et al., 1997). Ninety percent of custodial parents and seventy percent of non-custodial parents were satisfied with the program. Furthermore, both custodial and non-custodial parents were satisfied with staff and the safety offered by the program. However, only half of the parents were satisfied with the centre's policy on providing courts with reports obtained from visits, and non-custodial parents were dissatisfied with being restricted to the centre for their visits (custodial parents were satisfied with this policy).

Jenkins et al. (1997) found no evidence that attending a supervised visitation centre reduced hostility between parents. Rather, the researchers reported that parental attitudes towards the other remained stable over time. Thirty-one parents also completed behaviour ratings on their children's behaviour on entry into the program. These children were eight times more likely to present internalizing behaviour disorders than a sample of children from the general population. In interviews with the children, the majority did not understand why they were coming to the visitation centre, although older children understood this more clearly. The children disliked some rules at the centre, felt uncomfortable without other children around, and did not understand the supervisory role of staff.

While attending a supervised visitation centre may be confusing for some, Lee et al. (1995) concluded that children exposed to domestic violence do fare better when permitted to visit their parent in a supervised centre. This research followed 70 children over a six-month period, examining a comprehensive number of variables including depression, self-esteem, aggression, learning and perceptions of their parent's conflict. After attending the visitation centre, there was a significant pretest posttest improvement in children's' perceptions of interparental conflict. With regular, good quality relationships with both parents, the children were better adjusted overall and at school, and were less depressed.

Research conducted by Dunn (2002) examined the adjustment of children attending a supervised visitation centre. Forty-one children between the ages of two and 15 participated in the study. Most had been attending supervised visits for only a short time and had received few services; however, a small group had attended the centre for longer, receiving more services over the course of their involvement. Parents completed the Achenbach Child Behaviour Checklist reflecting their perceptions of their children's behaviour. The children were tested only once, so this research does not document changes in behaviour as a result of supervised visits, but describes the adjustment of children whose parents utilize such services. Dunn reported that most of the children's behaviour scores fell within normal range, with only five of the forty-one falling within the clinical range. Impressively though, 13 of the 41 children had fewer problems than would be expected of a typical child.

In this study, the parents rated their relationships with their children positively. Dunn also examined reports of conflict between the former spouses, finding that neither

parent reported significant conflict. Parents with positive relationships with children reported less conflict between themselves and their ex-partner, however Dunn noted that the results of the parental surveys of their relationships with their children may have been heavily biased, as parents “engaged in active impression management” in the course of the research.

Dunn found no significant differences between custodial and non-custodial parental reports of their children’s internalizing behaviours, but non-custodial parents reported fewer aggressive and offending behaviours than custodial parents did. This is not surprising, as custodial parents live with their children and have the opportunity to see the child’s entire range of behaviours, whereas the visiting parent may only see his or her child once per week under strict supervision, thus mediating the child’s negative behaviour. While the research indicated that a parent’s positive self-report of their relationship with their child were associated with a better adjusted child, the result is important as the primary goal of visitation centres is to help parents develop realistic and positive relationships with their children. When children are not exposed to violence and constant arguing about access, they can relax and develop better relationships with both parents.

An evaluation of the Supervised Access Program in Saskatchewan and Regina (Langer and Associates, 1996) reported that the majority of adult clients found the program either very or somewhat successful in meeting its goal of ensuring the safety and security of children (57%). Eighty-two percent of clients indicated that the program was either very or somewhat successful in reducing the trauma, stress and/ or conflict experienced by children. Fifty-six percent believed that the program provided safe contact with the non-custodial parent, and 52% believed that the service promoted the children’s best interests. The study did not distinguish between the responses of custodial and non-custodial parents.

Tutty, Jesso and Barlow (2004) evaluated the first Safe Visitation centre of its kind in Alberta, the YWCA Calgary Sheriff King Community Safe Visitation Centre. Parents and children completed a number of published standardized measures at pretest (either before starting or within one week); at 6 months and/or upon leaving the program). The parents completed the Parenting Stress Index, Brief Symptom Checklist, Test, Strengths and Difficulties Test (describing their children).

Three statistically significant t-tests differentiated custodial from non-custodial parents with respect to their perceptions of their own stresses and symptomatology and parenting stresses at the Supervised Visitation service start. Custodial parents reported more Hostility (feelings of annoyance, irritability and anger) and Phobia (being fearful in a variety of situations such as open spaces, crowds and feeling nervous when alone). They also were significantly more likely than non-custodial parents to perceive their children as behaving in difficult ways. This finding is consistent with Dunn (2002) who reported a similar pattern.

Also at the start of the program, custodial parents perceived their oldest children as demonstrating significantly more conduct problems than did the non-custodial parents, however neither parent perceived the behavioural issues at a level that was of clinical

concern, again consistent with Dunn (2002). As such, at program start, the children, on average, were not perceived by the parents as behaving in particularly problematic ways

Both at program start and at six months, 45% of twelve parents fell in the clinical range on the Brief Symptom Inventory. None of the research reviewed examined pretest post-test differences on parental functioning, so this result is unique. While some parents moved out of the clinical range on the Brief Symptom Inventory after 6 months, this improvement did not reach statistical significance, partially because of the small sample size and because one parent evidenced more clinical distress at post-test. Since many custodial and non-custodial parents appear to be in need of counselling, the program might consider being more pro-active about offering referrals or supplementary support.

Two Brief Symptom Inventory subscales rated by parents improved to a statistically significant degree after 6 months: the BSI Interpersonal Sensitivity subscale and the BSI Positive Symptom Distress Index. Interpersonal Sensitivity refers to feelings of personal inadequacy, particularly in comparison with others. Self-deprecation, self-doubt and significant discomfort dealing with others are characteristic.

With respect to parent's perceptions of their children, at the beginning of the program, parents did not perceive their children's behaviour as falling within the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire's clinical levels, consistent with Dunn (2002). All S&D subscales improved in the desired direction by 6 months or when the program was completed and there was improvement evidenced in one statistically significant increase in prosocial behaviours on the part of the second oldest children, as perceived by their parents.

As noted previously, at the beginning of the Supervised Visitation service, parents (both custodial and non-custodial) did not perceive their relationships with their children as problematic. After participating, parents reported statistically significant improvements in two areas: Parental-Child Dysfunctional Relationship and PSI Total Stress, both critical factors in their daily lives. None of the reviewed research focused on stress related to parenting. This finding is congruent with the major goals of Safe Visitation: to decrease stress for parents and to improve parent's relationships with their children. This conclusion is also supported by Dunn's research (2002).

Children aged six and older completed one of two packages of standardized measures depending on their age. One package was designed for children aged 6 and older; the other for children aged 8 and older. Common measures in both packages were the Children's Depression Inventory and the revised Manifest Anxiety Scale for Children. Older children completed the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children.

A small sample of children completed self-report measures at both the start and 6 months or completion of the program. The scores for the entire sample at pretest indicate no depression (T-scores in the average range) on the CDI, no clinically significant scores on the RCMAS or on the Trauma Symptom Checklist. This finding supports the parent's perceptions of their children as not showing any problematic behaviour, on average, and is congruent with the research of Lee et al. (1995) and Dunn (2002).

The children self-reported two significant improvements from start to finish in the program: three children aged 8 years or over reported statistically significant

improvements in the Depression and Dissociation subscales of the TSCC. By inspection, the average changes are in the improved direction at the end of the program. However, this sample is so small that the results should only be considered as suggestive. More data collection of the children's self reported feelings and behaviours is recommended. Positive changes after involvement in a supervised visitation program were also reported by Lee et al. (1995).

In addition to answering the standardized measures all program parents were invited to be interviewed within one month of starting the program and again at 6 to 8 months or upon leaving the program. The interview questions inquired about how the parents had been referred to Safe Visitation, how they found the program, what was working well and whether they were experiencing any difficulties. In total, 22 parents were interviewed.

The parents' expectations of Safe Visitation were typically met. Feedback from parents suggests that the program decreased their fears of or their experiences of violence towards either women or children. The parents generally regarded the program as safe due to the safety measures employed; however several parents of younger children expressed some concerns about their child's safety in the busy playroom. That parents were mostly satisfied with the program and felt safe concurs with the 1997 evaluation conducted by Jenkins et al. in Ontario.

Generally speaking, the parents considered both Supervised Visitation and Monitored Exchange to have had a positive impact on their children. Both non-custodial and custodial parents believed that participating in Safe Visitation benefited them in terms of court, custody and access. Their most commonly noted concerns were timing and scheduling.

While some parents, mostly non-custodial fathers, perceived the program as biased in favour of custodial parents and felt a stigma in attending, an equal number of parents noted the staff's neutrality and efforts to not be perceived as judgemental or as siding with either parent. Although some non-custodial parents were stressed by the visits being monitored, similar to the parents interviewed by Jenkins et al. (1997), this is a central premise of supervised visitation programs.

Parents were impressed with Safe Visitation staff. In general, they considered the intake process appropriate and approved of the location and building. Overall, they considered the program to have met their needs in providing safe access for non-custodial parents to visit with their children. They believe that the program has prevented further incidents of domestic violence and recommended expanding the program with respect to hours of operation and other sites for the program. All parents, both custodial and non-custodial, stated that they would recommend the program to a friend who was experiencing domestic violence with a spouse or ex-partner

To summarize the quantitative findings, the results make sense when considering the potential impact of a once-or-twice-a-week program focused on parent-child relationships. Although non-custodial parents received frequent coaching from Safe Visitation staff, individual counselling with parents is not part of the program's service plan. The fact that the parents changed on two subscales related to personal sensitivity and overall distress is impressive. Perhaps even more importantly, their perceptions of the

functionality of the relationships with their children improved and they reported less stress related to being a parent. While they did not report significant problems with their children, either at the start of the program or later, parents did report improvements in the prosocial behaviours of their second oldest children. The self-reported symptoms from a small number of children concurred with the parents, that their depression, worry, anxiety and trauma symptoms were not at clinical levels.

## **Conclusions**

In a society that has deemed joint custody between parents as the fairest option for all parties involved after divorce, the special needs of families that have experienced domestic assault have been forgotten or ignored by courts. Supervised visitation centres are an attempt to resolve this gap and provide a critical service that attempts to ensure the safety of both parents and children, while preserving the integrity of the parent-child relationship. Despite several questions surrounding the neutrality of visitation centres towards parents, supervised visitation centres appear to offer the safest and most practical way to ensure that children maintain a relationship with both parents.

Considering the research overall: the interviews with parents, self-reported functioning levels from both parents and children on the quantitative standardized measures and the interviews with program representatives, Safe Visitation is fulfilling its mandate to safeguard children and custodial parents when domestic violence has significantly affected parents' ability to negotiate and compromise. The findings are congruent with the literature describing the challenges and successes of offering supervised visitation. Parents who have been court-mandated to such services may have significant stresses, which, at the very least, are reflected as parenting stress. Safe Visitation provides the opportunity for non-custodial parents to have regular access to children without compromising the safety of the custodial parents. It offers a "win-win" solution for families that have been unable to routinely and safely accommodate parent-child visits.

This quote from one of the parents perhaps sums up the findings most appropriately:

*Now I know there's not going to be a fight when I drop them off. The kids don't need to see mom and dad fighting. They've seen enough of that when we were together. I think they're happier. They're still happy when they go home. I hope this program stays around for a long time.*

## **Chapter Three: The Canadian Environmental Scan of Supervised Visitation Centres**

As noted previously, this environmental scan was developed in response to a recommendation from Alberta's 2004 Provincial Roundtable of Family Violence and Bullying to assess the provincial need for supervised visitation and exchange programs for families at risk because of domestic violence. The primary goal of the project is to conduct an environmental scan of supervised visitation and monitored exchange programs both within Alberta and across Canada. Across Canada, how are supervised visitation and exchange programs structured? What standards of practice do they maintain and how do they ensure safety? How many have been evaluated and what best practices do these suggest?

This chapter presents the research methodology utilized and the environmental scan results, including descriptions of different models of programs that exist across the country, how these programs are conceptualized and what are considered best practices.

### **Environmental Scan Methodology**

Information about programs was solicited through internet, academic literature searches and telephone book searches, contacting agencies and government organizations that support or refer to such services. A semi-structured interview guide was developed in consultation with the Research Advisory team (see Appendix Two). The research was approved by the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board at the University of Calgary.

Using snowball sampling, representatives from the agencies/services were contacted by telephone to invite their participation in a research interview. The program descriptions developed from the interviews were returned to the program personnel for review to ensure accuracy.

In total, interviews were conducted with representatives from 32 Canadian supervised visitation and exchange programs (three of which are no longer in operation). Representatives from every province/territory were contacted to inquire whether such programs existed. In addition, we interviewed four representatives from three programs in the US, either because they were central in the development of program models or were innovative in some manner.

Because the number of programs in two provinces, Ontario (52) and Quebec (34) were substantial, we interviewed only a subset, attempting to capture diversity in location (urban versus rural), and centres that had high concentrations of different groups such as clients of Aboriginal or immigrant backgrounds.

### **The Canadian Summary Overview**

The following section describes the current availability of supervised visitation programs in each Canadian province and territory. It provides a brief overview of the history, funding and the development of standards nationally, before examining the organizational details of the 32 programs that were included in the environmental scan.



## British Columbia

Between 1996 and 2002, the British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General established three supervised visitation programs to assist the Family Justice Counselors to conduct their work more effectively. The Supervised Access and Exchange Program was designed to provide 6-12 supervised visits upon referral from a Family Justice Counselor. However, after they became operational, a decision was made to stretch the same budget designated for three locations to nine locations to support services to the 28 existing Family Justice Centres. In doing so, they reduced the time available to each family to approximately 8 visits for all nine locations.

The Family Justice Centres actively work with clients to resolve custody access issues. The goal of the service is conciliation and mediation in families that might reconcile, whereas, most other supervised access programs are for couples that have separated, with no intention of getting back together. Child welfare cases, in which children had been apprehended, are deemed to be incompatible in nature with the program intent.

As of March 31, 2006 (end of the fiscal year) all program funding was withdrawn and the contracts with the nine agencies was terminated. This is primarily because the programs were all significantly underutilized. Several centres had only five clients in the past year and, in 2005, only 110 clients were served across the nine locations. The decision was made to re-profile the dollars to other services. The Elizabeth Fry organization may continue to provide supervised visitation, but their program representatives were not available to meet with the researchers for the environmental scan.

Two experienced supervised visitation pioneers, both situated in Vancouver, continue to provide their expertise for domestic violence cases through their private agencies. Jane Grafton provides a structured on-site service whereas Hollyburn Family Services is primarily an off-site service. Jane Grafton is well connected with the Safe Visitation Network and has consulted with many other provinces who were initiating their programs.

## Alberta

Currently, Alberta has only one on-site program that is formally committed to providing services to domestic violence families, the YWCA Calgary Sheriff King Community Safe Visitation Program. Child welfare referrals are accepted but only if accompanied by domestic violence concerns. The program is funded largely by corporate donations, with a portion being matched by municipal funding. It has a budget in excess of \$310,000. In the past three years, they have provided services to approximately 350 participants an average of 117 participants per year. The program has been formally evaluated by RESOLVE, Alberta. It was modeled most closely after the Winnipeg Children's Access Agency with consideration as well to the models in Ontario and Duluth, USA.

An on-site supervised visitation program offered through the YWCA in Edmonton was closed this year because of underutilization. The program had been funded by the provincial government.

The Men's Education and Support Network in Calgary provides supervised visitation to non-custodial parents with domestic violence issues. Their service is primarily off-site; although they have access to a church basement should safety concerns warrant it. The supervisors are volunteers who have experienced separation and divorce. The program provides service to only a few families per year because they accept only one active family at a time. When the supervised visitation is complete with this family, they accept a new referral.

#### Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, the provincial Justice Department funds two supervised access programs – one in Regina and one in Saskatoon. These programs receive about \$30,000 - \$40,000 per year to deliver services to approximately 30 families per centre per year. Social workers with the Department of Justice coordinate the program and manage the cases, while the space and visit supervisors are contracted out. In Saskatoon, the visitation takes place at a counselling agency, while in Regina the YWCA provides the facility.

Aboriginal Family Services in Regina also provides supervised access and exchange services for some families affected by domestic violence (8-10 supervised visits per week). Most of their clients are child protection cases, however many of these cases involve domestic violence. The program receives block funding from the Department of Community Resources, but also provides assistance on a fee for service basis to clients who are referred from other sources, such as the Department of Justice or private clients. Clients or referring agencies (Child Protection or Justice) pay \$15.00 per visit at the agency's Visiting House.

In Prince Albert, supervised access and exchange for domestic violence cases are provided to about 60 families per year by Children's Haven, a 24 hour crisis centre for families and children. The supervised visitation and exchange is one of many services that the agency provides to families. The Children's Haven is funded by Health Canada, the provincial department of Community Resources, and other local funding sources.

In Moose Jaw, the Victorian Order of Nurses provides supervised access and exchange services to about three of four families per year. The services are for both child welfare clients and families referred from the family courts. With child welfare clients, the Department of Community Resources contracts with family support workers on an hourly basis, while those referred from the family courts are charged a fee for the services of the visitation staff.

#### Manitoba

In Manitoba, the provincial Family Service and Housing Department (Family Violence Prevention) funds supervised access and exchange services in the province. They provide \$176,000.00 per year to the Winnipeg Children's Access Agency, a large facility that provides services to 35-45 families in any given month. The province also provides \$65,000 to the Brandon Access / Exchange Service, which serves approximately 40 families per year.

The province has attempted to support rural services in the province, having opened facilities in both Selkirk and Thompson. Due to under-utilization, both services closed. According to a provincial representative, the government hopes to re-establish services in these rural areas, since community agencies have identified supervised access as needed in these regions.

## Ontario

Supervised visit programs were first conceived in 1991 when the Ministry of the Attorney General consulted with the Ontario Women's Directorate and the Ministry of Community and Social Services with the resultant Supervised Access Pilot Project. Fourteen centres were established as test sites across the province.

In 1994, The Institute for Child Studies at the University of Toronto conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the program, which resulted in on-going funding from the Ministry of the Attorney General. In 1999, the Ministry of the Attorney General expanded the Supervised Access Program to 22 additional court districts across the province and in 2000, funding was further provided for province-wide expansion to provide supervised access services in each court district across Ontario for a total of 52 sites. Agencies serving one court district are funded \$83,500 and agencies that serve two court districts receive \$115,000. This funding is stable year to year.

All sites were selected through an RFP process, with the criteria that all programs must be administered by a not for profit agency with a board that would ultimately be accountable. As well, not for profit organizations need to offer fees on a sliding scale.

In 2003-2004, Ontario programs served 20,523 families, 21, 550 children and provided 23,949 supervised visits and 22,602 monitored exchanges. It is estimated that Ontario programs deal with 5% of the 15% of high conflict families posing the greatest challenges. There is recognition that both men and women may be the non-custodial parent. Programs are to be judgment- and assumption-free and should be about fairness and balance.

The Ministry of Attorney General set a number of mandatory practices for service delivery including:

All visits must be onsite.

All sites must offer a large room for interaction with the opportunity to both see and hear everyone.

No individual supervision is offered to family unless the program is underutilized. Group supervision is cost efficient and the environment is less threatening than when a supervisor sits one to one in a room observing the family's every move and taking notes. Programs are **not** to assess families but to be observational in nature

All programs must have staggered arrival and departure time and there must be no opportunity for contact of any kind between parents.

All programs must be open for operation on a Friday, Saturday and Sunday, at least once per month.

All programs must offer a sliding scale of payment to clients and that no one will ever be turned away due to an inability to pay.

The maximum amount that can be charged per supervised visit is \$25 or if charging an annual fee, no more than \$300.

The maximum amount that can be charged for a court report is \$250.

Some staff training is mandatory.

No program is permitted to accept child welfare clients with an open file.

With respect to safety, no recording devices or cell phones are permitted.

All programs must have an intake process that requires a copy of the court order, endorsement or agreement for supervised access. Both parents will be asked to participate in separate interviews at the centre before service is offered. Each parent will be asked to sign an agreement with the centre, including release of information forms. Payment of fees will also be discussed at this time.

Regional differences are inherent and during the pilot project, 14 sites were encouraged to develop their own models. When funding became permanent, the province did not select one model, but instead suggested that the regions build on what was already working for them. Program personnel know their community and can be creative in responding to any unique needs. Each has their own written policies and procedures. Each region sets its own fees within the parameters noted above by the Ministry of Attorney General. Some regions use volunteers to monitor visits, some do not. With respect to court reports, some programs do a summary report while others simply provide the per visit notes with a covering letter. Each program is encouraged to be culturally sensitive and the Ministry of Attorney General will compensate programs for any required use of interpreters/translators.

Most families are involved with supervised visit programs in Ontario for between 8 months and 1½ years, however some families use the program for years and children are allowed supervised visits until the age of majority. The age group that most commonly uses services is between four and nine years, followed by toddlers, then children aged 9 to 12 and a small number of teenagers.

The strengths of the Ontario model are that the provincial Ministry of the Attorney General funds the programs, has set reasonable standards for practice, and allows the province-wide programs to remain community-based, with a strong emphasis on collaboration. There appears to be little competition; the programs are accessible to everyone; the coordinator is available for consultation to anyone across the province and the programs build on strengths.

## Quebec

Quebec has 34 supervised visitation and access programs in organizations in 14 areas in the province. The agencies are all community and non profit organizations providing services for families. Half of the family-oriented community organizations (FCO) are “Maison de la famille,”<sup>1</sup> which offer prevention services and activities to improve family well-being. The majority of FCOs are supported by “Fédération Québécoise des Organismes Communautaires Famille<sup>2</sup>” (FQOCF).

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<sup>1</sup> “Family houses”

<sup>2</sup> “Quebec federation of family-oriented organizations”

In the report, “Rapport du Comité interministériel sur le service de supervision des droits d’accès<sup>3</sup>” published on Sept 15, 2005, the “Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition Féminine”<sup>4</sup> was entrusted with determining the standards to oversee the organizations’ practices and required training and drawing up a plan of action to implement the 54 report recommendations, in collaboration with the “Ministère de la Santé et des Services Sociaux<sup>5</sup>” (MSSS) and the “Ministère de la Justice”<sup>6</sup>. That process is ongoing. The “Centre de Santé et des Services Sociaux<sup>7</sup>” (CSSS) will be responsible for signing a service agreement for Supervised Access Rights (SAR) in their area.

Seven service representatives of Supervised Access Rights in different areas in Quebec were interviewed for the environmental scan. The organizations consulted are funded by “Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition Féminine”, “ASSS”, “Centres Jeunesses”, “Centraide”<sup>8</sup>, “Ministère emploi et solidarité sociale”<sup>9</sup>, donation and alternative funding arrangements. The funding amount the program received to deliver the service is variable from 0 to \$ 226,000 (average \$ 80,000).

All of the program representatives raised concerns about funding levels. Over the last four years, at least eight organizations have stopped offering supervised visits. One agency estimated that it needs at least \$85,000 per year to cover salaries of \$13/hour. According to the economic study<sup>10</sup> of the “Fédération Québécoise des Organismes Communautaires Famille” \$ 200,000 is needed to offer the supervised visit service to the 40 first families and then \$110,000 per year to offer the service following a responsible approach.

With the exception of one program, “Service familial d’accompagnement supervise,” which serves a number of families referred for child welfare concerns, all are onsite programs. With respect to their mandate of family services, those organizations accept referrals for family violence, child welfare, parental disagreement, contact renewal, parent incapacity. The service is oriented to the child and family well-being rather than women’s or men’s services.

The clients are mainly referred by an order of “Cour supérieure du Québec, chambre de la famille”<sup>11</sup> which has jurisdiction to hear requests for divorce and child custody. Some clients are also referred by “Centres Jeunesses”<sup>12</sup> which provide psychosocial services or rehabilitation for young people, mothers and families in difficulty.

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<sup>3</sup>“Report of the interdepartmental committee on services for supervised access rights”

<sup>4</sup> “Minister of families, seniors and the status of women”

<sup>5</sup> “Minister of health and social services”

<sup>6</sup> “Minister of justice”

<sup>7</sup> “Center of health and social services, 95 through Québec”

<sup>8</sup> “Centraide”: Private, autonomous and large non profit organization. It makes a vast annual fundraising campaign and helps community resources which helps people in need or in difficulty.

<sup>9</sup> “Ministère emploi et solidarité sociale” (MESS) contributes to Quebec’s social development and economic prosperity and provides familial support to economically-disadvantaged people.

<sup>10</sup> The FQOCF economic study about services supervised of access right cost will be available on May 2006 at: [www.fqocf.org](http://www.fqocf.org).

<sup>11</sup> “Provincial superior court, family division”

<sup>12</sup> “Youth centers, 17 through Quebec”

## The Maritime Provinces

There are no supervised visitation/ exchange programs in either Prince Edward Island or New Brunswick. A representative from the government of PEI commented, “I wish I could tell you something different. It has been an identified area of concern for some time.”

In New Brunswick, a provincial government representative explained that, “The Department of Family and Community Services has no formal policy or practice on safe visitation /monitored exchange programs involving domestic violence and/or custody access issues...visitation/monitoring exchange in private custody/ access orders may be handled by families themselves privately”.

In Nova Scotia, the provincial Department of Justice contracts three agencies to provide supervised access and exchange programs: the Cape Breton YMCA, Veith House in Halifax, and Family SOS in Halifax. Representatives from Veith House and the YMCA were interviewed for this environmental scan, but Family SOS declined.

Veith House provides services to approximately 35 families per year. Their supervised access and exchange service is provided as one of many programs for families, so the funding amount designated for the visitation program cannot be calculated. The agency, itself, is funded by the provincial department of Community Services, however the justice department is invoiced for clients referred from the court – at \$40.00 per hour.

The Cape Breton YMCA (Sydney Nova Scotia) provides services to approximately 15 families at any one time, and when families are referred by the court, the YMCA invoices the provincial department of justice \$35.00 per visit.

In Newfoundland, the only supervised access/ exchange program is in St. John’s. A service of the Unified Family Court, the program provides services to approximately 40 families per year. Funding is from the provincial Department of Justice. Court social workers manage the cases, but use contract professional staff to provide the actual supervision. Supervision of families takes place in court rooms in St. John’s.

## Northwest Territories, Nunavut and the Yukon

There are no formalized Supervised Access Centres in these Canadian Territories and even agencies providing supervised visitation services are rare. Many child welfare workers volunteered that they were responsible for providing any visitation services needed by their clients because resources were simply not available to them in the North.

### **Summary of the Canadian Context**

Across Canada, the provinces have responded differently to the need for supervised visitation and access for families in which domestic violence is of significant concern. Six provinces currently fund such centres (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia), although the centres in British Columbia will no longer be funded after March 2006. Both Ontario and Quebec have developed provincial standards that include a number of mandated features.

The British Columbia centres are unique in that they were established to assist couples where reconciliation was a distinct possibility. The under-utilization of the programs may reflect this focus. In provinces where there were either limited or no supervised visitation programs, several social workers contacted by the research team identified a need for such services to be established in their region of the country.

Six provinces fund the programs through their Department of Justice/Ministry of Attorney Generals. The two exceptions are Manitoba and Quebec. Manitoba has a specific Family Violence Prevention branch of its Family Service and Housing Department. The province of Quebec funds their supervised visitation programs through their Ministère de la Famille, des Aînés et de la Condition Féminine. (Ministry of the Family, Elderly and Status of Women). Two of the three programs currently operating in Alberta do not have provincial government funding. The final program (YWCA in Edmonton), is now closed but had received provincial justice funding.

### **The Structure of Canada's Supervised Visitation and Access Programs**

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the environmental scan program interviews per province and additional interview with key representatives or government officials. This section outlines the commonalities and differences in program components with respect to funders and host agencies, whether the program is onsite or offsite, the hours of operation, proportion of families affected by domestic violence versus child welfare referrals, the length of visits, maximum involvement, cost to clients.

#### **Program Funding and History**

Most programs receive operating funds from such provincial government departments as Justice/Attorney General (13), Prevention of Family Violence (4 – Winnipeg, Selkirk, Thompson, Brandon) , Community Resources (2 -Prince Albert, Halifax), and the Ministry of Families, Seniors and the Status of Women (all 7 Quebec programs). Only one program, Prince Albert, appeared to receive any federal dollars, provided by the Department of Public Health. Three programs, (Moose Jaw, Jane Grafton and Hollyburn Family Services) receive all revenue from fees for service charged directly to the client whereas several other programs also charge fee for service dollars directly to the government on a per client basis (Halifax, Cape Breton). The Sheriff King Visitation Program in Calgary receives almost all of its revenue from private corporations with some additional match funding from the municipality.

It is important to distinguish between the funding provided and the finances that programs require in order to operate. Generally that gap was filled by client fees and private fundraising endeavours including casinos, bingos and private donations. Twenty percent of the programs operate on less than \$40,000; 10% of the programs identified receiving between \$40,000 and \$85,000; 20% identified receiving between \$85,000-\$130,000; 10% received between \$130- \$225,000 (including one program that receives funding on a matching basis for a total budget of \$310,000). In Ontario, funding dollars are based on the number of court jurisdictions served being either \$83,500 for one court jurisdiction or \$115,000 for more than one court jurisdiction so that funding is quite standardized. This did not appear to be the case in other provinces. There were comments from eight programs that the funding provided to them was inadequate.

Table 1: Environmental Scan Interviews (N=32)

Location	Supervised Visitation Programs	Other Key Informants
British Columbia (2)	Vancouver: Jane Grafton (private agency) Vancouver: Hollyburn Family Services	Kathryn Platt, British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General
Alberta (3)	Calgary: YWCA Sheriff King Men's Education and Support Association (MESA) YWCA Edmonton, -(closed)	
Saskatchewan (5)	Prince Albert: Children's Haven Regina: Family Justice Services Regina: Aboriginal Family Services Saskatoon: Family Justice Services Moose Jaw	
Manitoba (4; 2 closed)	Brandon: Brandon Access Exchange Service Winnipeg: Winnipeg Children's Access Agency Thompson- (closed) Selkirk (closed)	Marlene Bertrand, Family Violence Prevention
Ontario (8)	Belleville: Supervised Access Services for Hastings & Prince Edward Counties Brantford: Supervised Access Centre Midland: Simcoe/Muskoka Simcoe/Muskoka Supervised Access Orangeville: Dufferin Child and Family Services Owen Sound: Grey-Bruce Supervised Access Program Stratford/Huron: Emily Murphy Centre Thunder Bay: Lakehead Regional Family Centre Welland: Supervised Visitation and Exchange Niagara	Judy Newman, Ontario Ministry of Attorney General
Québec (7)	Baie-Comeau: Service de supervision de droits d'accès Chicoutimi : Maison de la famille de Chicoutimi Deux –Montagne: S.O.S Jeunesse Montréal: Petite-Jonction/Little-Junction Québec City: Service Familial Saint-Hyacinthe: Le Petit Pont Sherbrooke: La ligue pour l'enfance de l'Estrie - Maison Calm	Marie Réhaume, Fédération Québécoise des Organismes Communautaires Famille



Nova Scotia (2)	Glace Bay: Supervised Access and Exchange Program Halifax: Veith House	
Newfoundland (1)	St. John's: Unified Family Court Supervised Access Centre	

Almost one-third of programs (31.8% or 7 of the 23 programs that provided cost information) do not charge clients for services although in several cases the provincial government is billed on their behalf. More than two-thirds (68% or 16 of 23 programs) charge a fee for service. Programs funded by provincial governments generally offer a sliding fee scale ranging from \$2 to \$25 per family per visit.

Two programs (Sherbrooke and Orangeville) charge an annual fee only (\$10 or \$300 respectively) regardless of the number of visits. Another program (Niagara) charges a monthly fee of \$25 regardless of the number of visits.

A general consensus among the program representatives is that even a minimal fee encourages commitment from the parents and helps to ensure follow through. A number of interviewees stated that when clients truly could not pay, the fee was either waived entirely, or the parent was encouraged to bring an “in-kind” donation to contribute such as toys, or cookies. Most were clear that fees should never be a barrier to service provision. For some centres, fees are another strategy to raise additional funds to subsidize basic core funding that is not totally adequate.

In private agencies, however, accepting fees for service is generally not negotiable. Fees in private agencies range from \$17/hour to \$35, with one program also charging initial intake fees of up to \$75.

In Ontario, host agencies are selected by the Ministry of Attorney General through the competitive process of submitting an RFP (Request for Proposals). Successful host agencies are required to be not-for-profit charitable organizations with an accountable board.

Many of the programs that have been able to sustain themselves financially are attached to larger agencies with existing infrastructures, budgets and strong administrations. whereas smaller host agencies described such difficulties as trying to pay for coordinators who could not perform other agency functions when the program was underutilized or not having the financial capital to sustain themselves while waiting for government payments.

Many of the program representatives were not aware whether their program had been modelled after another, as the original staff no longer worked there. Others indicated that their programs had simply evolved over time, building on experience to become what they are today. Several Ontario programs acknowledged modeling their site after the initial pilot sites established in that province a number of years ago. Three programs, one outside of Manitoba, used the success of the Winnipeg Children's Access Agency as a base. Another program considered the Cape Breton program model, another a program from the United States and one of the Quebec programs had consulted with a similar organization in France.

The interviewees were asked whether there had been any significant changes to their programs. Three representatives indicated that, over the years, they have had to become more formal and clear with respect to the rules, roles and policies. Two programs have been developing more effective training. Other changes noted by representatives from individual programs include increasing the perception of neutrality given the affiliation with a women's shelter; including a child orientation component; moving to onsite visitation from offsite; having greater promotion and publicity within the community; hiring a full time coordinator; changing hours from weekends to seven days per week; changing from volunteer supervisors to only paid staff; reducing services due to budget cuts; developing a Best Practices Manual; creating an onsite visitation centre for an off-site program (dual services) and implementing a maximum 18 month time frame for service provision.

### Sources of Referrals

While 30 programs take referrals from the courts, sixteen also take referrals directly from parents or lawyers as long as both parties are in agreement. With the exception of a violent or threatening parent or a sexual offender, most programs have few exclusion criteria. Unless a parent's violent reputation precedes him/her, most families were given a chance.

Seven programs raised concerns about accepting sexual offenders, particularly if the supervision was offered in a group environment. Ontario is in the process of developing protocols to assist programs in knowing how to best handle the referral of sexual offenders. Child welfare clients are excluded from a number of programs (this will be discussed in more details later. Other exclusion criteria were mentioned as follows:

*Behaviours such as these might exclude a family from participation in the program: refusing to provide requests for information in order to complete the forms; not following through with the required steps of the intake process, unstable mental health condition, a substance abuse issue and possession of weapons on his/her person. (Calgary Sheriff King)*

*If someone is really angry, they're going to have to wait until they can come here without being angry. It's not good for the kids to see that. Most of the time they're cooperative. In all the years, I've only had to call the police once. (Halifax)*

*The exclusion criteria would be high risk. We don't have a risk assessment model, but they are screened. For example, if there is sexual abuse, and there are concerns that the staff cannot handle the situation, then they would be excluded. The parents have to sign an agreement. If they don't abide by the safety and security policies we have in place, then we will not provide the service. (Brandon)*

*The job of the court counsellors (supervisors) is to carry out the visitation order. Therefore we do not screen families. (St. John's)*

*There are situations whereby we have felt that, for the safety of all the other families in the program, we've had to go back to court and say that we just don't have the provisions to be able to provide the service to this family. (Saskatoon)*

## Proportion of Domestic Violence and Child Welfare Cases

Because we did not define the term “domestic violence” for the purposes of the environmental scan, those interviewed commented on reports of violence ranging from “verbal conflict” to intimate partner “terrorism”. Most respondents believed the reports of lawyers and the courts of past violence whereas there tended to be a large discrepancy between male and female ex-spouses reporting on the type and nature of violence perpetrated, with men reporting significantly less violence. The program representatives generally err on the side of believing the most serious reports so that risk issues are considered and safety plans developed.

Almost two-thirds of the program representatives specified that the majority of their clients have experienced domestic violence (62% or 12 of 19 programs that provided the information). Another five programs (26%) only take such families. In contrast, two programs in Quebec reported that only 25% of their clientele has been referred because of domestic violence (Chicoutimi, Saint-Hyacinthe). The other clients were referred because of substance abuse, mental health, mentally challenged, parental alienation, and renewed parent-child contact after a period of absence.

Three quarters of the supervised visitation programs included in the Canadian environmental scan (75% or 16 of 24 programs that provided information on this) do not accept child welfare clients. There appears to be a correlation between the funding source and whether child welfare cases were accepted. When funding was through Justice or Law initiatives, child welfare cases were more likely to be declined. In the province of Ontario, for example, this is mandated by the funder, the Ministry of the Attorney General. The eight programs that will take child welfare cases were from the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Quebec, although the Saskatchewan program commented that they receive few referrals because Child Welfare has other services available. The two programs in Nova Scotia will take child welfare referrals – but, similar to Saskatchewan, they don’t get many. When they do, most often child protection has their own contract staff and the program provides the setting and back-up support.

Of programs that will not consider referrals from Child Welfare, most cited the reason as a difference between the needs of clientele experiencing domestic violence and parents involved with Child Welfare authorities who were attempting to get their children back due to child abuse. Most programs made the assumption that visitation would focus on children placed in foster and residential care and their parents. In contrast, in Alberta, a province in which exposure to domestic violence is included in the Child Welfare legislation, visits between children and a non-custodial parent are common in support, enhancement or supervision cases. These are likely indistinguishable from the domestic violence cases accepted by most of the programs across Canada.

### **Program Characteristics**

The following section describes the supervised visitation and monitored programs across Canada looking at such characteristics as whether the program is on or off-site, hours of operation, and physical premises.

## On-site or Off-site Programs

In the environmental scan, 25 programs (of 32 or 76.1%) offered on-site visits. Two programs (Sherbrooke and Regina Aboriginal Services) had both a designated onsite centre and provided off site supervised visitation. One program (Moose Jaw) only provides on-site services for exchange but not for supervised visits which are off-site. Another two programs offered off-site visitation to the non-custodial parent (Quebec, Service Familial (weekends only) and Hollyburn, Vancouver). Edmonton's program (no longer in operation) did not specify whether the service was on or off-site.

## Hours of Operation

To accommodate visits and exchanges, at a minimum most programs are open Friday nights and Sunday afternoons (although sometimes only once per month). Those programs that appear to be fully utilized try to be available Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. These times are the ones most preferred by families.

Although the administrative component of the programs were most often open from 8:30-4:30 during the week, visitation and exchanges generally occur on weekdays after school until approximately 7:00 PM, approaching a child's bedtime or on weekends when children are not attending school. In onsite programs, the hours of operation are established and families must work within these identified parameters. The hours of service for offsite programs are more flexible, generally accommodating the needs and availability of families. While some service providers indicated a high demand for service during Christmas, summers and statutory holidays, many of the programs in Ontario close during these periods because of under-utilization.

## Location of Physical Premises

Thirteen programs appear to have been specifically developed as visitation sites. These include houses in Simcoe/Muskoka, Hastings and Prince Edward County, Hollyburn in Vancouver; Aboriginal Regina, and Sherbrooke. A number of these centres are located in buildings including Calgary's Sheriff King, Orangeville; Jane Grafton in Vancouver, Brantford; Halifax, Chicoutimi, and the Family Services building in Winnipeg; Thunder Bay's use of space in a shopping mall is unique.

Looking at the entire sample of 32 programs, the physical premises selected for supervised visitation centres are varied and include: daycare centres (8), agency offices or free standing buildings (6), residential homes in the community (5), churches (2), kindergartens (1), community centres(1), the courthouse (1), an orphanage (1), or a storefront location in a mall (1). There are economic advantages to cost-sharing a location such as a daycare centre, kindergarten, community centre or church, plus these locations come well equipped with child friendly facilities and resources such as toys and books.

The security issues for families affected by domestic violence, however, are significant, and such settings may not offer enough safety for high risk cases. Furthermore, some community agencies may be reluctant to be involved with a supervised access facility that serves families affected by domestic violence. Day care or kindergarten settings may not be conducive to visits with older children. One program representative cited the minor problems that can occur when the primary tenant arrives

the next morning and does not find everything in its place as expected. Normally these settings also tend to be open settings, which some directors considered problematic in terms of noise levels and lack of privacy for families. Others, however, saw open settings as necessary and conducive for group observation.

A primary disadvantage of these venues is that they lack the security measures recommended by other programs. However, portable safety measures such as cell phones, or panic buttons or pendants could be utilized in such settings.

Those most satisfied with their facility are in residential facilities in the community that they can equip to support their needs, desired philosophies, and need for security. Representatives from these programs report that clients remark on how “normal” it feels to visit with their children, rather than in an office or institutional environment. The staff believe that part of their success comes from not being obviously associated with a delivery system that may have negative connotations for one of the parties such as a women’s shelter, child protection, men’s group or mental health facility. They purport that a home/facility in the community has no stigma associated with it and promotes neutrality.

*The new environment will be a mall where a number of human service programs will co-exist. We hope this new facility will have less of a stigma given the normalized mall environment. There is greater security for all parties in addition to the community policing. The layout of the new facility will allow for greater accessibility. There are three visitation rooms so three visits can occur simultaneously. They are equipped with couches and one room has a kitchen. After having had three previous locations, we are hoping that this is closest to the ideal. (Thunder Bay)*

*The past location was a Victorian two story house, with an upstairs, downstairs and playground. We are moving to a new location that has a large family visitation room plus an additional interview room. We have learned that we cannot handle more than three families at a time on the premises – five or six families have proven to be too much. (Orangeville)*

*If the visit is onsite, we use an old house which is on church property. The program offices are upstairs and the entire basement is a large visitation centre. There is only ever one family at a time. (Hollyburn, Vancouver)*

*We can have up to four visits at one time, so there could be up to twenty people at any given time. In terms of providing services, wide open spaces are a bit easier except there can be problems with hearing because there is lots of noise. For the supervisors, there is a lot more going on. (Winnipeg)*

Other program representatives mentioned aspects of their physical location with which they were not pleased:

*I wish I could describe a wonderful setting but I can’t. It is an office space. (Saskatoon)*

*In the court building, the room set aside for visitation is small. The room is directly underneath a courtroom so the kids can’t wander around because of the noise levels. The court building is also intimidating for kids and there is no play*

*ground. The set up is not the best in the world and certainly isn't recommended. (St John's)*

*One of the concerns parents have raised is that the preschool site overlooks the main street so they are concerned that the non-custodial parent is watching them leave. They are also concerned about the preschool site not being conducive to older children. (Cape Breton)*

#### Physical Premises (Interior)

One of the requirements for any program operating in Ontario is that each site must offer a large room for interaction with the opportunity to both see and hear everyone without barrier walls, for example. One large room is particularly conducive to the group supervision context where two or three families may be visiting simultaneously. Some programs that offer individual supervision of families describe having two or three visitation rooms that open into a common area with washrooms, a refrigerator and sink.

Eight program representatives have kitchen facilities in which families are encouraged to engage in baking activities, meal making or snack preparation. One program provides only a microwave because of the liability issues of having a stove around small children.

Several program representatives commented that VCR's and televisions are not included in their centres because these activities do not lend themselves to interaction between the parent and child. Nine program sites stress the importance of an outdoor play area for children, especially in summer.

*The fourth site is a church basement but unfortunately there is no access to a playground (Huron)*

*It would be nice to have a playground. (Saskatoon)*

One of the most significant challenges reported by a number of programs was activities that appeal to older children and adolescents such as including foosball tables or outside basketball nets. One program is fortunate to have access to gymnasium in their building, which works well indeed. The interviewees recognized that most facilities are geared to small children. Adolescents need more activity based options in order to keep their interest, which may be a limitation to some program sites.

*The facilities offer large L shaped areas. Staff supervise **areas**, not families. If a family goes outside, they are then supervised by another worker. If they go upstairs, another supervisor would observe them. The documentation form goes with the family. (Simcoe/Muskoka)*

*One site involves a daycare with a kitchen and the other is a normal house. Families continually stress how fabulous it is to have a regular house that feels so comfortable where they can bake cookies together and it doesn't feel institutionalized. (Brantford)*

*It is a house that has been re-done. The office is open – with 3 see through walls looking into the 3 visit rooms. (Aboriginal Regina)*

*There are two rooms, one is very large and the other one is smaller. They are fitted with toys for all ages, decorations and do-it-yourself materials. There is also a kitchen and an outside balcony. The place is as large as a 7 room apartment. (Saint-Hyacinthe)*

### **Safety Features and Policies**

Given the potential risk that the abuser will further threaten or be violent towards the victim when the children are exchanged for visits, a number of safety considerations are utilized including having two separate exits: one for custodial and one for noncustodial parents, staggered drop-off times and a panic button that can activate emergency services.

Twenty programs have two exits for their onsite programs; however five of these only utilize one of the two exits. A number of the program representatives explained that with staggered arrival and departure times as a feature of the supervised visitation process, there is no need for a second exit.

*The program has never had a problem with one exit, given their staggered arrival and departure times. In our new facility, we also plan to try one exit, although there is the provision for two exits if we choose. (Orangeville)*

*Yes there are two exits but everybody uses the same one. (Saint-Hyacinthe)*

*We do have two exits, but we have the parents arrive and leave at different times. Normally they use the same entrance and exits. (Brandon)*

Fifteen programs use two exits to secure safety for everyone involved. Four programs not only have separate entrances/exits but also separate parking lots. In some programs, once each parent enters the building via separate entrances, she/he enters a separate waiting room which is protected from the rest of the facilities via a locked and coded door to ensure complete safety.

*Yes, separate entrances and separate waiting rooms (Hastings and Prince Edward County)*

*Yes, there are also different parking lots associated with each entrance to ensure NO contact between parties. (Jane Grafton)*

Two-thirds of the programs (21) utilize staggered arrival and departure times to ensure that parents have no opportunity to observe or meet one another, thus ensuring the safety of both children and the abused parent. Most ask the non-custodial parent to arrive early so that the child never has to wait, supervisors can inspect bags and check for substance use and the custodial parent will not leave the child if the non-custodial parent fails to show up. There are some variations whereby the custodial parent will arrive first with the children and the non-custodial parent arrives later so that the children have the opportunity to experience the centre for a few minutes in order to feel more comfortable. While nine programs specified staggered arrival and departure times of 15-20 minutes, one program utilized only a 10 minute time frame.

Two programs indicated that whether staggered arrival and departures were arranged was case dependent and not always necessary.

*Parents arrive and leave at different times – 15 minutes early and the other arrives 15 minutes late. There is NO excuse for anyone to be where they shouldn't be. (Jane Grafton, Vancouver)*

With respect to child transportation, none of the onsite programs transport the children to and from the facility. This is considered a parent responsibility and both risk factors and liability issues are further deterrents to transporting. Two-thirds of the offsite programs transport children to and from the visit.

### Safety Policies

Fifteen program representatives indicated that staff either have alarm pendants hidden around their neck (not in plain view for safety purposes) or central panic alarm buttons. When the pendants are activated, an alarm company will subsequently call 911 if there are concerns. The central panic buttons used by six programs seem to activate the police directly. Seven programs also noted that supervisors carry cell phones and four programs use walkie-talkies. Two programs identify a system of codes, locks and buzzers so that if a parent became violent he would not have access to the entire centre. Eleven centres have “working alone” policies that ensure that supervisors are never alone. One program also stated that there is always a manager on call in addition to at least two staff in the facility.

*Cameras are installed in the parking lots; parents cannot stay on site and staff never work alone even when they conduct intakes. Staff have alarms and walkie-talkies. Program pagers are given to the non-custodial parent in case there is a need to reach them such as in the case of a child needing to be picked up. (Huron)*

*There are two exits and two separate parking lots, with two separate waiting areas. There are coded keypads through the building so that people cannot wander inappropriately. Video surveillance cameras monitor both doors. There are pendants with panic buttons to access help if required and walkie talkies that have both call assistance features within the facility and outside contact features to call police if necessary. There are not the same security features at our other site. (Owen Sound)*

Other safety precautions identified by program respondents include refusing to allow parents within a three block radius of the facility if the other parent is there; security systems and cameras at the facility door, and eight-foot high outside gates to prevent children being abducted. In two programs, parents are not permitted to take children to the bathroom because appropriate supervision of the children cannot be guaranteed in these circumstances. Supervisors take the children instead.

*The program is listed as a “hazard” with the police and is identified as having the potential for domestic violence on site. Beyond this, there is an abduction protocol, for example in cases where children are not returned from an exchange. There are a lot of policies and procedures in place that relate to safety. The supervisor is a facilitator of non-violent crisis intervention – all staff have that training. (Winnipeg)*



*Parents are not permitted to take children to the washroom. Staff do, but in order to avoid any accusations of child abuse, the door is left open and another staff member made aware. (Orangeville)*

### Criminal Record Checks

Six programs require criminal record checks be completed before they proceed with supervised visits. This did not imply that a criminal record precluded a family from receiving services but that it was important to consider any criminal offences that had been committed.

Twenty- one programs do not require a criminal record check for parents for a variety of reasons. For some, it was a practical consideration since it can take from three to six months to receive the results and it is simply not feasible to have families wait that long. In other cases, program representative believed that the information provided by the other partner (who is generally more than willing to disclose negatives about them) ultimately results in full disclosure. Other programs found that both lawyers and child welfare workers share information about abuse and violence which assists them in assessing risk. Two programs only require criminal record checks for parents about whom they were concerned.

### **Supervised Visitation and Exchange Centre Program Processes**

The following section describes the processes through which a family traverses as they request services, are screened and oriented to the service, as well as portraying the nature of the visits offered.

#### Intake and Orientation

The process of intake or accepting a client referral varied throughout the programs, ranging from accepting a telephone referral or court order and subsequently scheduling of a supervised visit (one program); to much more detailed intake processes. Ten programs either require a formal referral or a court order. Nine programs clarified that the intake would not be initiated unless a telephone call was received from both parents, reflecting a commitment to the process.

The program representatives noted that a considerable amount of energy is invested in trying to contact unwilling or unmotivated parents for intake interviews, which translates to wasted dollars. Two programs are willing to launch the intake process as long as the non-custodial parent has initiated contact. They then offer an interview to the custodial parent. This may be a problem if the custodial parent perceives the program's philosophy as supportive of the non-custodial parent (such as MESA in Calgary, which is a men's support agency). Several programs charge an intake fee ranging from \$10 to \$75.

Twenty programs have a policy of separate intake interviews with each parent to ensure safety for both. They can then adapt the interview to the parent's needs for information and support. Nine programs mentioned that they insist that parents bring in copies of court orders to ensure that the program has accurate information and so that they do not inadvertently contravene an order that might specify the maximum length of visits for example or perhaps a no contact order for children under the age of 14 years

other than their biological child. Thirteen programs specifically mentioned they request that parents sign a release of information form (for example, to share information between parents, lawyers and case review auditors) and five programs also have parents complete medical authorization forms. Twenty-four programs have both parents sign a service agreement, however, two programs require that only one parent sign the service agreement. Three of the program representatives emphasized that contracting during intake is critical so as to avoid misunderstandings at a later point.

*The intake process will NOT begin until both parents have initiated contact with the program. Separate intake interviews are set up...both parties must bring in their order or agreement. This is important to ensure that both parents and program are working from the same, most recent order. The program needs to be clear on bail orders, probation and conditions of release. The custodial parent is expected to provide health card information along with physician contact information and emergency numbers. Each parent is also asked about the reason for referral and inevitably the different information provided by each is very informative. No risk assessment tools are used. Protocols may soon be developed with respect to dealing with parents with histories of alcohol or mental health. Service agreements are signed and the Program Family Handbook is reviewed with them. A visitation schedule is provided. A consent form is also required allowing for disclosure and sharing of information between parties, legal counsel and children's lawyers. It is also clarified that the file may be reviewed by auditors. The fee form is completed and cheque provided by parent. (Orangeville)*

*After receiving the court order, or agreement from clients or lawyer, the non-custodial parent is interviewed first in the office and term, rules and conditions are spelled out. These must be signed. After the contract is signed, the custodial parent and the children meet in the office with the program director and the supervisor chosen to monitor the family. This helps allay the concerns of generally the mother and children. The program director visits the home of the non-custodial parent first before visits are permitted, to ensure it is appropriate. (Hollyburn, Vancouver)*

Eleven programs have a special orientation for children, ranging from informal discussions with the child to build trust and create a feeling of safety to more formalized orientations that involve tours of the facility, presenting gifts or watching a video presentation about parent estrangement and safe visitation.

*A tour of the facility is arranged for the children prior to visits occurring. The children's orientation includes the provision of a colouring book as well as an "Access Bear" which has been donated by the community. (Huron)*

*The staff ensure that children understand why they are at the programs. They also gather information from the child such as how long it is since they have seen their dad. They explain the role of the supervisor, frequency of visits, length of visits they emphasize safety. The children choose a stuffed toy, and receive a colouring book about estrangement of the family. Many children appear to feel safe in the program, and are often assertive in expressing their needs and feelings to their non-custodial parent. (Sheriff King, Calgary)*

*There is a one hour meeting with the child before meeting the parent. A confidence and security link is established so the child may express his emotions without value judgment and with the feeling of being protected. The child goes back with a doggie that he/she chooses in a welcome bag. (Deux Montagnes)*

The one program that formally addresses safety planning and uses a risk assessment tool, Campbell's 2004 Danger Assessment, is part of a women's shelter infrastructure (Sheriff King in Calgary). While other programs representatives were interested in utilizing a risk assessment tool, they were not certain how to select a valid and reliable measure to predict violence recurring in future.

### Lengths of Supervised Visits

Supervised visits between non-custodial parents and children generally range from one to three hours, considering such factors as program demand (visits may be shorter if the program is fully utilized or has waiting lists), the relationship between the child and the parent (shorter if it is a re-introduction to a parent), and the age and wishes of the child. Re-introduction to a parent occurs when a child has been separated from one parent at a young age and no bond has been formed between the two. In such circumstances, the child often feels an understandable sense of fear at being left alone with a "stranger."

The custodial parent, too, is often worried about such visits, both because they can upset the child and because of the possibility of a second "rejection", should the absent parent fail to follow through with regular visits. Supervision may be advisable in these situations to reassure the child (as well as the custodial parent), but for some children it could lead to even greater anxiety. The following is a comment from a program representative with respect to a re-introduction visit.

*We have had some fathers who all of a sudden find out that they are the father of a 5 month old baby. We are teaching all along in the visits. They ask a lot of questions – we teach the dos and don'ts. We incorporate education into the visit but it is not mandatory. (Prince Albert)*

Most programs that have a structured schedule, set visit lengths that become non-negotiable; whereas programs that offer off-site visits (such as Hollyburn Family Services in Vancouver) are more likely to offer longer visits, often the entire day, if funding permits.

Somewhat more than half (55.6%) of the 27 programs that reported this information, offer visits from one to two hours, while 30% scheduled visits between one to three hours. One program (St. John's) offers visits of only one hour. Four programs did not specify visit length.

### Staff Interaction versus Observation

The majority of the program representatives (75%) acknowledged that the formal mandate of their program is primarily observing family interaction without intervening, unless required to ensure the well being or safety of a child. Having said that, however, a number of respondents clarified that in some cases, such as when parents are at a loss knowing how to play with their child, or during family reintroductions when parents and

children have no history with one another, the monitors may, for example, direct the parent to games, with minimal intervention.

Two programs have both interactive supervised visits and non-interactive supervised visits depending on the skills and experience of the parent and two other programs embrace a more facilitated interactive approach and questioned the ethics of simply watching parents flounder without offering more effective strategies to them. Other program representatives indicated that, when the need for parenting assistance was apparent, they make referrals to either parenting programs offered as a part of their agency infrastructure or to another agency altogether. In one program funded by justice, supervisors are obliged to provide information on mediation and separation as well.

*Generally supervisors are encouraged to be hands off, but will become more active in those cases where parent and child are struggling. In these cases, supervisors may suggest activities and facilitate in the development of a relationship. The focus is on observation and NOT assessment. (Huron)*

*Monitoring is encouraged to be observational unless a specific request is made by the client. They generally try to assume more of a “hands off” approach. They are cautious about giving feedback lest they end up being quoted in a parent’s affidavit. They have to be very careful in giving encouraging remarks. (Orangeville)*

*Supervisors do not actively educate: they are primarily there to observe and blend into the woodwork. However, staff are instructed that they are still to be human and if a child is excited and comes up to show off their art work, the staff are encouraged to praise and participate but then to redirect it back to Dad or Mom by saying, “Go back and show your mom what a great job you are doing.”  
Niagara*

### Group or Individual Visits

Programs differ in whether the staff supervise in a group context or in an individual context in which only one family is supervised by one supervisor (note that 11 programs did not provide information on this variable). For programs that offer group supervision (8 programs or 42.1%), the staff perceived advantages including a more normalized environment that did not feel as uncomfortable as being observed by one staff member watching and taking notes. A group environment allows non-custodial parents to observe and learn from one another, which can be a powerful modeling experience. In centres with large demand, more families can be accommodated in a group context and there is also the consideration of cost-effectiveness.

Proponents of the individual supervision approach (57.8% or 11 of the 19 programs that specified) believe that it is more feasible to monitor and observe behaviours and conversations without the distractions and noise involved in a group environment. They propose that individualized visits allow more parent – child interaction, whereas children in group visits tend to gravitate to each other to play, rather than interacting with the parent. One private program representative (Judy Grafton from Vancouver) uses loose or intermittent supervision in which one family visits relatively privately in a room with only periodic checks from the monitor.

## Dealing with Clients that Don't Attend

The fact that some clients do not regularly attend scheduled supervised visits is a problem noted by a number of programs. Most programs require a minimum of 24 hours notice if cancelling visits, although several will accept even a few hours notice. Clearly for programs with high demand, not showing up for visits takes away the potential to serve other families seeking supervised visitation services.

Approximately half of the programs terminate or suspend services once there have been three visits which have been unattended without notice (one program only allows for two visits). Two programs recognized, however, that in some cases, the custodial parent will not show for visits in the hope that the non-custodial parent will be refused services (and thus access to the children). In these cases, program staff are careful not to terminate visits in order to support the non-custodial parent in pursuing access and visitation.

About one-third (36.7%) of the programs deal with no show visits by charging fees that range from \$10 to \$50. Another program deals in a more proactive way and insists that parents phone to confirm the visit 48 hours in advance. If this call is not received, the visit is cancelled early so that children do not have to be transported and subsequently disappointed. The literature clearly speaks to the distress suffered by children who are excited in their anticipation of a visit and so are terribly disappointed where they are let down, particularly on a regular basis. Three other programs simply document the no show visits and leave it to the courts to deal with upon review while one other program advises the caseworker of the problem and waits for direction about how to proceed.

*Technically if there are three no show visits, or a strong pattern of non attendance, client services are terminated. Generally there is a warning and notification to lawyers first. However, if the custodial parent consistently misses the visits, different considerations come into play. Rather than the program being strictly neutral, they may have to be a neutralizing agent to balance the situation. It may be important to assist the visiting parent by NOT closing the file in this case. (Owen Sound)*

*When a parent fails to show up for a visit, he or she is charged \$50 and are not allowed to schedule any further visits until this amount is paid. They are also requested to pay the next visit in ADVANCE, so that if they do not show up again, they will forfeit the money and the agency will not be scrambling to track them down. (Jane Grafton, Vancouver)*

## Terminating Visits

Representatives from 22 programs commented that the primary reason for terminating visits prematurely is violence or threats of violence that jeopardize the safety of anyone. Programs have a zero tolerance for abusive behaviour. Sixteen interviewees also indicated that if continuing the visit was not in the best interests of the children, such as if a child became inconsolably upset or refused to see the parent, the visit would be terminated.

*Visits will be terminated for breaches of the service agreement such as a parent questioning the child about where they live or questions about the custodial parent. If the parent doesn't stop when asked, the visit will stop. Visits will also be terminated if the parent is intoxicated. Children can terminate visits early - the program always respects whether or not children want to visit so that if kids don't want to stay, we don't force them to stay. (Winnipeg)*

*Sometimes the children express that they don't want to see their parent. If the children are not communicating at all, or they're visibly scared, then we will just ask, "Can we try this again next week?" (Prince Albert)*

Three programs mentioned they have developed a "code" word or signal for the child so that the supervisor can discern a child's discomfort without alarming the non-custodial parent. One of these three programs experienced this strategy as too "phoney": for example, a child said "apple" (the code word) out of the blue in a context that was not appropriate. They have changed it so that children are simply encouraged to use the washroom and staff will escort them, discussing any concerns then in private.

The other common reasons for terminating visits are breaches of the program rules and regulations such as whispering or discussing forbidden topics such as an upcoming court case (18); using any drugs or alcohol (14); using of inappropriate language (5); complaining by the non-custodial parent about the custodial parent (4); inviting unauthorized visitors who refuse to leave (1); mental health issues (1); a parent's obvious lack of interest in the visit (1) or either a parent or child becoming ill in the visit (1). With respect to inappropriate discussions, most supervisors warn and cue the parent about their behaviour but terminate the visit if it continues. With respect to the use of drugs or alcohol, one program insists that no-one may enter the centre wearing any perfume or cologne as some of these scents contain alcohol or because the perfume may be being used to mask alcohol. If any odour is detected, the visit is terminated.

*Termination occurs if there are any form of threats or verbal abuse, any intimidating behaviour, more than three cancellations; any indication of alcohol/substance use and any weapons. (Thunder Bay)*

*Visits will be terminated if there are drug/alcohol issues; threats of violence or hostility or if parents continue to ignore cueing provided by staff and do not modify their behaviour accordingly. Generally it is very rare that visits are terminated. (Brantford)*

*Generally termination happens when there is violence, alcohol or substance abuse or a disregard for program conditions. Parents are warned first with a "throat clearing" followed by clear non-verbal cues and then a private discussion about the need to terminate a visit. In some cases, police are called prior to termination if it is anticipated that the termination will not be well received. Police have been very subtle and appropriate, other families are not even aware of their presence. (Owen Sound)*

If staff are concerned about safety, a parent is asked to leave. Generally all staff are aware of the termination before the parent is told and safety precautions are put into place. One program invites the police to wait in a back room just in case problems arise

when requesting that a parent leave. Another program provides the custodial parent with a program cell phone for situations such as this when they require him/her to return for the children.

### Maximum Length of Involvement

Almost two thirds of the programs (64% or 17 of the 26 programs that provided this information) do not have a maximum length of involvement because, for some children, supervision is necessary until the child reaches the age of majority. The average length of service involvement in Ontario programs is about 18 months. Some program personnel commented that, if supervised visitation is not offered as a continuum of service progressing from full supervision, to intermittent supervision, to monitored exchange and finally un-supervised offsite visitation, after approximately a year, both children and the non-custodial parent begin to lose interest and start missing visits. One program representative noted that a supervised visitation order should never be an order in itself: it should always be an interim step to a more permanent order

The challenge for many programs has been working with judges who may not be informed about when to order monitored exchange versus supervised visits. There are generally no review mechanisms built into access orders, which unfortunately leaves many families hanging needlessly, when they could proceed to less intrusive monitored exchanges. In several jurisdictions, the length of involvement was not based on a time frame but on the number of visits. For example, after 8 or 12 visits, no more visitations would be provided unless a further order is received from the courts. This is sometimes problematic because there are long delays between the end of one court order and the issuing of another order – during which time the non-custodial parent is unable to see the child.

### Record Keeping

The majority (93.3%) of the program representatives noted that record keeping was an important administrative function with 76.6% specifically identifying that each visit was systematically documented. Several program representatives (8.7% of those who recorded each visit) commented on using a checklist approach to documentation rather than a narrative approach. Only one program representative indicated that per visitation documentation was not necessary and cited the case of regular long term clientele who were consistent in their behaviour.

The respondents articulated mixed reviews about using a log book between parents, primarily for monitored exchanges. Those in favour of the practice reported that the log book exempted staff from getting caught between parents by being asked to relay messages. However, those opposed to its use found that it became yet another way for the perpetrators of violence to continue using power and control tactics through the written messages.

Without exception, all of the program representatives stressed the importance of writing observation notes in a factual, observational manner without expressing any opinions, biases, assessments or recommendations. Not only did program coordinators believe that their supervisors lacked the skills to do so, but that anything other than observation notes compromised the neutral integrity of the program.

*We take notes based on factual observations and for each visit. The reports are NOT assessments and are only observational in nature. (Thunder Bay)*

*Because the family is supervised by the location in the house and thus different monitors, the documentation record follows the family – therefore one visit may have noted observations by three or four monitors. Before each visit, monitors must read the cards in the cardex to get a brief summary about each family. We created a log book so that parents can note instructions for the child without putting staff in the position of having to pass them back and forth. Staff do not want to get involved in the “He said, She said” dilemmas. (Simcoe/Muskoka)*

## Reporting to Court

Two programs (Calgary, Quebec City) clarified that they do not provide court reports. A relatively small proportion of programs (16.7%) submit their observation notes directly to the courts while others (36.7%) synthesized the notes into a professional, formal report. A range of fees is charged for synthesized reports depending on a number of factors including whether there is one administrative fee for all reports (\$25-\$125 flat fee), whether an hourly rate is charged for the reports (\$15 to \$90 per hour), whether or not sufficient notice for the report has been given (late penalties can be assessed) or whether photocopying charges were levied by the page or by the report.

About one-third of the programs (30%) insist that, regardless of who requests and pays for the report, the document is provided to all parties free of charge to ensure neutrality. Other programs charge each additional party. One challenge experienced by a number of programs was the lack of notice given to them for a court report request. Some programs deal with this by insisting on adequate notice (such as 10 days) or by significantly increasing the report fees for last minute requests.

## Staff Qualifications

Most programs have a case manager that conducts intakes, oversees the case, handles any crises, and supervises the visit supervisor. Across Canada, 13 programs use only paid supervisors whereas another 12 programs use volunteers as supervisors.

Hiring supervisors is a recurring problem for many of the centre’s representatives interviewed. Programs that fared better in recruiting were located in larger urban centres, and nine sites set their qualification standards as post-secondary education. Seven centres benefited by being located near a college or university where they could utilize students in practicum placements, as volunteers to improve their resumes, or as part time paid supervisors.

In smaller centres, appropriately qualified supervisors are difficult to hire, which impacts the programs’ ability to serve the number of families seeking assistance. A number of coordinators expressed concern at the quality of the supervisor they were able to attract, especially individuals that have unresolved personal issues. Several coordinators commented that they had virtually lowered the bar to adults that were “breathing”. In contrast, one program, MESA, uses only supervisors who have experienced divorce and separation. This is notably a very small program that might work with one family a year.



Supervisor retention is another significant issue for programs. A number of program representatives stated that it is virtually impossible to keep staff that are paid a mere \$15-\$19 an hour (or volunteers donating their time) to work irregular shifts, on a part time basis, with evening and weekend hours. One can understand the lack of appeal of the positions when one adds the complication of working with adults who may be potentially difficult or aggressive.

### Staff to Family Ratio

The ratio of staff to family is correlated to program philosophy about the value of either individual or group supervised visits. Not surprisingly, the 12 programs that believe in individual supervision have a one to one staff/family ratio, whereas the families to each staff person increases in a group context. Six programs offered a staff ratio of up to three families per supervisor whereas one program increased the ratio to four and another to seven families. The cost effectiveness of service provision, availability of supervisors, the size of and the needs of the families are all considerations when establishing staff/family ratios.

*I don't believe in a group approach to supervised access. It is too difficult to monitor conversations that need to be monitored, especially when there are allegations of sexual abuse. However, for families that have had visits for a long time and there are no apparent issues, occasionally "loose supervision" can be used where staff monitor the parent from a distance with an open door. (Judy Grafton, Vancouver)*

*Sometimes we have people available but no visits, at other times we have so many visits and not enough supervisors. The clients are sometimes unpredictable. (Saskatoon)*

### Staff and Volunteer Training

Ontario has the most formalized and comprehensive training for their 52 Program Coordinators: twice per year for three days each to ensure that coordinators are current and well trained on supervised visitation issues.

With respect to the training provided to supervisors and monitors, all but two programs have some formalized training program. The remaining two programs engage only in informal orientations with new supervisors. Seven programs provide 10 hours or less of formal training, another provided 18 hours or less, another 30-40 hours of training and another as much as 40-60 hours. A representative from Ontario stated that they are currently attempting to develop a Best Practices for Training manual for their 52 locations so that there will be greater consistency in the training offered. Interestingly enough, only eight programs mentioned providing any training specific to domestic violence. Instead, training focused topics such as a non-violent crisis prevention and intervention; observation notes and neutrality, parenting and child development.

A number of programs utilize existing training on supervised visitation that is offered by such organizations as the Supervised Visitation Network, (which offers monthly telephone conference training on rotating topics as well as sponsoring an annual International Conference) through the Florida's Supervised Visitation Institute for Family

Violence Studies or through a 4 month Continuing Education Program (5 hours per week) that is offered in Vancouver. Training on related topics such as parenting and crisis intervention have been accessed from The Crisis Prevention Institute, The Preventive Management of Assaultive Behavior and For the Sake of Children Society.

Other programs used training resource materials developed by the above organizations to assist them in their in-house training. Ten programs used Best Practices Manuals as a basis of training. Owen Sound has adopted the Competency Based Supervision for Visitation Providers from Florida State University and Visitation Centre. There is also training information available from the Institute for Family Violence Studies with designated chapters on visitation. The Best Practices Manual from the Ministry is used as well as resources from the Supervised Visitation Network. Special Visitation Protocols also exist from the Institute on Visitation involving sexually abusive families

### Special Program Considerations

Although it is hoped that the parent child visits feel as natural as possible, given the unique circumstances of abusive relationships most programs have developed policies to address gifts, food, letter, videos, cell phones, medication and guests. If these issues have not been fully clarified and contracted for at the outset, endless problems may be created. There should be clear program policies outlined at intake and families are often given copies of the rules and regulations to take home. Under no circumstances should special requests be considered at the time of the visit – previous staff approval must have been received previously, otherwise the request will not be entertained.

*All of these terms need to be agreed upon by the parents at intake as to whether or not photographs are permitted. Food issues can be a problem due to child allergies. It is important not to allow the scenario of a Disneyland parent so gifts are permitted only at Christmas or birthdays unless other times are previously negotiated. One guest is permitted per visit. (Jane Grafton, Vancouver)*

*Custodial parents here are not permitted too much power, unless medicals support their requests that certain foods for example are unacceptable. We try to give the non-custodial parent as much permission as possible to be a regular parent. (Owen Sound)*

Eighteen programs permit gifts for the child from the non-custodial parent but ten of these require that the gifts be placed in gift bags for inspection by staff before being given to the child. Three programs only permit gifts on special occasions such as birthdays or Christmas. Eight programs take their direction with respect to gifts from the custodial parent – if she/he is not prepared to allow this, gift giving will not occur. There must be agreement between the two parties at intake. One program will not allow gift giving under any circumstances in sexual abuse cases.

The policies on food are derived similarly to that of gifts. Twelve programs have no problem with snacks or food being brought by the non-custodial parent. In fact, many facilities have kitchens and encourage parents to create a normalized environment by preparing and sharing a meal together with their children. Nine programs insist that the custodial parent has the right to refuse food choices with which they are not comfortable.

The custodial parent may prefer that the child be given fruits or vegetables as a snack, but the non-custodial parent may have prepared a dessert or brought some chocolate.

Unfortunately, food issues can become a battleground used by angry ex-partners to fuel their conflict and disagreement. Some programs are adamant that the custodial parent should not have the right to dictate food choices during visits unless children allergies. One program does not permit anyone to bring in peanut products.

*Food is allowed but snacks should be nutritional in nature. (Hollyburn, Vancouver)*

*Yes to gifts and food because for the children's sake we try to keep an environment "normal" for the child...unless a court order specifies otherwise. Hopefully food allergies such as peanuts are identified. Generally the children we work with are too young so we don't have to deal with the note issue. (MESA, Calgary)*

*The custodial parent generally brings baby food if applicable. The non-custodial parent is responsible for the meal, if a meal is needed. (Saint-Hyacinthe)*

Most programs are quite cautious about any note-giving in the context of a supervised visit. Seven programs allow no notes whatsoever; whereas another eight programs permit notes and letters as long as they have been inspected by staff. One program only permits standard store-bought greeting cards restricted to a signature. Three programs insist on photocopying any notes and placing copies on the files.

Other issues that must be clarified relate to electronic devices including cameras, video cameras, and cell-phones. One of the most important reasons for not allowing cameras is concern for the confidentiality of others in the centre, particularly when in a group supervisory context. Several programs permit photos being taken but only by staff. Video cameras are also a potential breach of security and are generally not permitted. Both digital and video cameras have the potential to be "altered" and used for questionable purposes and are usually disallowed.

Many cell-phones can now also be used as cameras and are forbidden by some programs. Further, there is the risk that a parent might display his forbidden phone number on call display for a child to view. Text messaging can also be a problem because the staff would generally not be able to read what was written. One program refuses laptop computers because the staff cannot guarantee what children may be shown during a visit.

Two programs reported thoroughly inspecting backpacks on entry into the premises to ensure that everything being brought to the centre is permitted and approved.

*All backpacks brought to the visit are checked. There are agreements that gifts are to be placed in gift bags for viewing. No notes are permitted. Photographs and videotapes are allowed only with the consent of the custodial parent but must be taken by the supervisor. There are no cell phones to be used. (Thunder Bay)*

With respect to medications, none of the Ontario programs permit staff to administer medication to a child during a visit: it is expected that the custodial parent will

either have given the medication before the visit, or will provide the medication and the instructions to the non-custodial parent.

*Another issue is diaper changing and maybe the noncustodial parent has never changed a diaper in his life. We help him learn. Same thing with washrooms – Is the noncustodial parent allowed to take the child to the washroom? All these need to be looked at. Same with telephone calls. Can the noncustodial parent make calls to the grandparents, or aunts? Who is he allowed to call and have the kids talk to? Does the noncustodial parent have the telephone number and address of the custodial parent or are they supposed to keep that a secret? (Halifax)*

## Translators

Almost one-third of the program representatives (30%) indicated that they are prepared to offer translator services but most stated that this is rarely requested. The majority of programs offer services in English (or English and French in Québec) and other languages tend to be the exception. In Brantford, the program has worked to offer services in the local Aboriginal language, a move that has been applauded by the Ministry.

Most programs recognize the challenges that present to supervising visits when a translator is used, including whether or not the translation is accurate (in both directions), whether or not biases or threats from the abuser or by the translator are transmitted particularly if the translator is a member of the client's ethnic community. Confidentiality can be compromised and it is also difficult to know whether the interpreter is responsibly monitoring any inappropriate discussion around past offences, or forbidden topics such as in the case of upcoming court trials. In summary, while some programs do not offer translation services because they have not asked, others refuse to do so based on their philosophy that children cannot be protected by supervisors if conversation cannot be directly monitored.

*In Orangeville there is no need for interpreters. In other centres such as Peale, multiculturalism is a feature. There they do recruit volunteers who speak other languages but still the general rule is that families should be speaking in English. Technically the Ministry for the Attorney General does pay for translators if required.....over and above the grant money. (Orangeville)*

*In the past, I have tried to have volunteers with some Asian languages and have had Hindi, Punjabi and Cantonese supervisors. One attempt to utilize a translator for a middle-European family was a disaster, with no one being able to monitor the conversation. I have had very positive experiences using court translators for the deaf, using sign language. Translators and interpreters have to be agreeable to both parties. (Jane Grafton, Vancouver)*

*The program provides interpreters because the largest non-English speaking population is First Nations. When provided, it has been quite successful - children should be able to have a visit in their native tongue. If it became regular, an Aboriginal staff person would be recruited. (Brantford, Ontario)*

*Services are provided in English only. Interpreters introduce too many variables that are not conducive to a supervised visit. For example, it is difficult to have a*

*spontaneous conversation when an interpreter is needed. The interpreters may also have different values and beliefs that are not in accordance with the program philosophy. It also introduces confidentiality issues – the family’s private affairs become known by a member of their ethnic community. This is particularly a problem when the client comes from a community where families affected by domestic violence are shunned by the community. The program does their best to help clients with limited English, however, if they don’t have any English at all, then services cannot be provided to them. (Calgary)*

*There is a concern that at some point there could be a constitutional challenge by families who want service in their own language. However, this challenge would likely be more successful if supervised visits were a mandated service. (Judy Newman, Ontario)*

### **Recurring Problems**

While there was quite a range of recurring problems identified by the program representatives, most consistently agreed upon was the challenge of finding and retaining good staff. Some rural sites do not have access to students to recruit for their program. However, even programs that recruit supervisors easily, had difficulties retaining them, either because of unresolved personal issues; inadequate financial compensation, poor shifts and violent clientele. Staff come and go quickly and there is little return on the investment of training and familiarizing them with safe visitation.

*A big challenge has been ensuring the staff are adequately trained and experienced. There are so many challenges – it’s so tricky when you’re dealing with domestic violence. You have to watch out for different things. Staff must be knowledgeable about domestic violence.*

Eight program representatives commented that they do not receive adequate funding to deliver the services and that more financial support was required:

*The need for funding is a recurring problem. The agency had a problem producing legal reports when such short notice had been given. Nowadays, the agency demands a 10 day warning period.*

*The funding is insufficient. The two paid workers sometimes have to work as volunteers because there is a lack of funding.*

*The biggest challenge has been a financial one. Do not count hours. Keep going by conviction.*

Five program respondents were most unhappy with their locations citing them to be too formal, too small, cold and sterile, too “old” to maintain; or simply not child friendly such as the court house:

*Space is an ongoing issue. We need a more adequate space for the program and an agency that we can contract with. It is an intense program. Daycares don’t want anything to do with the court. I’ve been fighting for this the past seven years – we’ve changed locations three times*

Five program representatives expressed frustration with aspects of the court process such as judges making inappropriate orders without fully understanding the best

option; a lack of adequate notification for the submission of court reports, and court delays and adjournments in the case of orders being reviewed. For example, if visitation is ordered for three months with an expectation of review, it can be months between the end of one order and the granting of another where no visitation takes place whatsoever.

*There have been challenges that arise from court orders that aren't appropriate: For example, a judge ordering telephone access when a dad was waiting for a murder trial. How can we supervise over the phone? Another challenge is supervising a kid when a child is in protection of the Ministry. This situation would also arise from an inappropriate court order.*

*Some big challenges include staff retention and educating the legal profession to have them understand the exact role of the program. At the onset, some lawyers thought it was a place where clients could be assessed and others thought of it as a glorified babysitting service.*

Three programs have experienced challenges related to the aggression or personal functioning of parents which have added to problems experienced by the staff.

*One of the challenges is building a working relationship with upset parents. The custodial parent has difficulty trusting and the non-custodial parent is generally angry that visits will be supervised. Getting both parents on board is a challenge. It takes time and on-going good communication to develop those relationships.*

*There was one abduction that was quickly resolved.*

Three programs were closed due to underutilization and a serious lack of referrals. One program only received one referral over its entire existence. These programs were surprised at their lack of success. One interviewee wondered about a “stigma” being associated with the program. Yet another program interviewee raised the challenges of trying to offer service in a rural area because of the decreased referral numbers, distance, the problems of transportation and the poor cost effectiveness of a program with only sporadic referrals. It was also noted that some families in rural areas will not use a rural service, fearing a lack of anonymity. Many simply drive to an urban visitation program.

*The biggest problem has been underutilization (and ultimately closure). We had key representatives from the community talk about the need and how they envisioned the program would work. There was a high Aboriginal population and a high charge rate for domestic violence. We thought it would be used. One thought may be that Aboriginal families use their own families to supervise visits and are hesitant to use the services. The coordinator went out and met with judges, lawyers, sent out pamphlets – we had lawyers on the original working group. All the key agencies, Crown attorneys, were on the committee and informed of the program. To be honest we struggled with why this happened.*

*The Supervised Access service has to cover such a huge area – in reality, the service can only be provided for people close to the centre. Rural areas are entitled to the same service, but don't get it. It is too difficult for families living three hours away to be able to come to the program. The geographical area is simply too big.*

## **Unanticipated Events or Challenges**

With respect to unanticipated events, one program representative expressed surprise at the increased number of female non-custodial parents, particularly those with mental health or substance abuse problems.

Two programs respondents noted the growing number of grandparents involved in visitation and access and three commented on the increased number of non-custodial parents meeting their children for the first time and establishing relationships through the supervised visitation program.

One program interviewee was surprised that, despite their safety precautions, parents would still find ways to engage in power struggles, such as one parent delivering the child in a new car seat and the same child being returned in an old seat and arguing over food. Another program failed to anticipate the needs of teenagers in the development of their site.

*There are unusual situations, for example, we had to manage the visit schedule for two children from a same mother but from two different fathers.*

*The unanticipated events have been the money available and the priority and importance of the program. We have no say in this. I don't know exactly where the priorities lie. Decision makers have to make choices, and I don't know how those are being made. Because we don't have the space availability, we can't accommodate requests for several visits per week. For the judiciary, knowing this is all we have available, this is all they order. I don't know if the demand would increase if we had more space and times available for supervised access or exchange.*

## **Program Strengths**

When asked to comment on what works best for their program and to describe positive attributes, four programs noted the relaxed and comfortable environment of their site. The eight Ontario programs appreciated that the coordinators meet twice a year for three days each to train and share information. Because all of these programs are funded by the Ministry of Attorney General, there is no competition for dollars or “turf”. Ideas are openly shared and the relationships are collaborative.

Representatives from two programs commented that the program neutrality, which had similar rules for everyone, was their strength, while conversely, three other program respondents believe that their ability to adapt the rules for different family needs and their flexibility was the key to their success. Yet another interviewee believes that because their program was physically attached to the premises of a women's shelter, women victims of domestic violence felt safer. Three programs indicated that clear policies and regulations were critical and another added that policies that are developed from the experiences of working in the “front lines” are much more successful.

*We allow the parent to regain his/her educational role, power of reference and allow day to day activities with the child. (Québec Service Familial)*

*Despite the 18 month limit, we can sometimes keep the kids in the program a little longer, because we know the reasons why they've been ordered supervised*

*access. We're fairly sure that if there wasn't this service for the child, the child wouldn't be seeing the parent. We've observed the attachment between the child and the parent. It breaks our heart to see that relationship end. (Saskatoon)*

*What works best is the combination of the structure and the environment. Our program is structured enough that policies are followed and it is safe. Families feel comfortable. They realize it is not a place where they are being judged. This is a good combination of a community environment with policies to ensure safety works well. (St. John's)*

*The best is that people that are in the program are appropriately there. We have an agreement with Dispute Resolution so they can refer people and get mediation free of charge. It sets a pattern for people, and once people get into a pattern of showing up for pick-up and exchange, they can continue this on their own. (Regina)*

*What works best about our model is that we do our best to accommodate so that children can see their parents. We recognize that it takes two to tango and try not to be judgmental. The program is child focused and works towards what is in the best interests of the child. We recognize that it is often the adults who are responsible for creating the chaos in the children's lives. He encourages them to take the "high road". (Hollyburn, Vancouver)*

*All of the program comes together well. I like the clear contract/rules. The groundwork with the family to establish a relationship before the visits start is very helpful. The reporting process is good. It is objective and helpful to both parents. We try to teach each family as unique and to work with their interests to ensure the quality of the visit for the children. (Moose Jaw)*

### **Advice to Agencies Planning Supervised Visitation**

A final question to the program representatives was what advice they would give to agencies planning to set up their own supervised visitation programs. The piece of advice receiving the greatest consensus was the importance of recruiting and retaining qualified skilled staff that are reliable and conscientious (13). Ten mentioned the need for having clear rules, policies and regulations because it is difficult to change community expectations once you have started (1).

*From a funder's perspective, ensure that you have qualified individuals and that they follow certain standards and policies and adhere to them. Also have a good working relationship between the funder and the agencies. Having a steering committee or a board for the agency is very important.*

*The agencies have to have enough funding to cater for a potentially large clientele and to maintain that clientele and to make sure the staff has appropriate training to be able to work with both parents and children in this kind of service.*

*You have to maintain the rules and parameters of operation that you've set up. You can't be "wishy washy". As soon as you start bending the rules, it comes back to bite you. Communication is a top priority. The more staff with the program, the more chances there are for some piece of information to not get to that person. It is important not to give opinions to clients.*



Staffing and funding are, of course, inextricably linked. Six representatives noted the importance of new programs being well funded in order to provide quality service delivery. A further six stressed the importance of knowing your program limitations and “not biting off more than you can chew”. They recommended, for example, that a new program not start ten new sites at once.

*When accepting clients for supervised visitation, programs must assess whether they can meet the needs of the family by considering their facility, their staffing and the demands being made of them. (Judy Newman, Ontario)*

They stressed that new programs should not reinvent the wheel but should “build on the backs of giants” by visiting existing programs and inviting experienced consultants to help design a new program.

*Be sure to have enough starting funding and recurrent funding and to make sure staff have strong qualifications and experience because it is a demanding work. The initial training is very important. Start with enough money. \$10,000 is not enough.*

*Get a permanent site from the beginning with everything needed (telephone, electricity and heating expenses). Then a minimum of \$50,000 per year for wages: two full-time workers are needed. Avoid offering a service linked to women or men. The service has to be offered to the child with neutrality.*

Six centres, including the three that had closed, emphasized the need to understand well the community in which the safe visitation will be offered. Five programs reinforced the importance of safety and security considerations, with one program reiterating the need for two exits. Three programs suggested having a comfortable and family oriented location.

Further advice, from one program representative each, included being clear that the program must be child-centred; having a strong and well qualified board of directors; only doing factual assessments; being careful not to become involved in the litigation issues of the family; being vigilant – eyes and ears – during visits; connecting with the Safe Visitation Network and believing in the personal power of families.

## **Chapter Four: The Alberta Context**

Alberta has only one currently operating supervised visitation and access centre specifically developed to facilitate parent child visits and exchanges when domestic violence is a core concern. The Sheriff King Home opened in 2002 and has been evaluated (Tutty, Barlow & Jesso, 2004). The YWCA in Edmonton developed a similar program which was closed in 2005 because it was seriously underutilized. Both programs, as well as Calgary's MESA program, were included in the national analysis of supervised visitation and access programs specific to domestic violence described in the previous chapters.

While few programs specific to domestic violence have opened in Alberta, a variety of private, for profit and not for profit agencies exist that serve the needs of primarily child welfare cases. These agencies coordinate, supervise access visits as agreed upon by the parties involved, through condition of a court order (either a family matter or a Solicitor General matter) or at the request of Alberta Children's Services caseworkers. This chapter presents literature with respect to supervised visits for child welfare concerns and compares the dynamics to supervised visits when domestic violence is the core issue. The environmental scan of Alberta programs and their scope is then presented as baseline information to support best practice regarding safe visitation and exchange.

### **Family Visitation Centres in Child Protection Cases**

Because supervised visitation services for child abuse have been available for a number of years, it is reasonable to ask whether they might be appropriate venues to provide supervised visits when the concern is domestic violence. As such, the focus of this section is on supervised visitation between children under a child protection order and their birth parents, highlighting the similarities and differences with supervised visitation in families in which domestic violence is the core concern. In addition, the impact of visits on children when separated from their biological parents may be similar whether the reason is child welfare or divorce.

For a number of years now, child welfare family visitation centres have provided supervised visitation between children living in foster care and their birth parents subsequent to child welfare apprehensions because of parental child abuse. They also provide visitation to families where there is a supervision order due to the abuse of the children by one parent. The children may remain with one parent while the other parent is mandated to treatment and supervised visitation. While many parent-child visitations occur in foster homes or in child protection offices, parents referred to visitation centres have been assessed as high risk and in need of supervision for the safety of the child (Ansary & Perkins, 2001). Such visits are more likely when family re-unification is a possibility.

In these family visitation centres, trained observers monitor the visits, supervise the exchanges between the foster parents or caregiver / agency personnel and birth parent(s), and document what occurs during the visit. Although detailed observation notes are often taken by staff at these centres, the records most often requested by the courts or caseworkers when considering family re-unification are the number of visitations, no-

shows, and cancellations for the purpose of considering family re-unification (Ansary & Perkins, 2001).

The role of family visitation centres in child protection cases is quite different from cases involving separated parents where domestic violence is of concern. In domestic violence cases, the abuse of one parent by the other parent is the salient issue that brings the family to the visitation centre, and there are substantial risks to the adult victim as well as the children. In child protection cases, one parent is not necessarily violent toward the other. The parent-child contact issues are centred on protecting the child from abuse, especially when family reunification is a possibility. In child welfare cases, the government agency involved is a child protection agency, whereas in domestic violence cases, the government agency is most often the court (Straus & Alda, 1994).

It is important to note, however, that recent changes to child protection legislation have led to the acknowledgement of the overlap between a proportion of domestic violence cases and child protection cases. Alberta's Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, for example, states that children who are exposed to domestic violence may be considered in need of protection, whether or not they were themselves directly abused:

“For the purposes of this Act, (a) a child is emotionally injured (i) if there is substantial and observable impairment of the child's mental or emotional functioning that is evidenced by a mental or behavioural disorder, including anxiety, depression, withdrawal, aggression or delayed development, and (ii) if there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe that the emotional injury is the result of ...(C) exposure to domestic violence or severe domestic disharmony.”

Most of the research on supervised visitation in child abuse cases has focused on the impact of visitation on children's emotional well-being and family reunification in cases where children are in foster care. Families that participate in visitations at these centres are more likely to have visits occur, and the families with the greatest number of visitations were significantly more likely to reach a permanent placement outcome of either reunification or adoption (Perkins & Ansary, 1998).

Supervised visitation between children in foster care and their biological parents seems an important factor in children's emotional well-being. In cases in which the goal of foster care placement is family re-unification, children who have more consistent and frequent contact with their birth parents have stronger attachments than children who have less contact (McWey & Mullis, 2004). Other researchers support the importance of visitation with parents in promoting attachments (Weinstein 1960; Aldgate, 1977; Triseliotis, 1989; O'Higgins, 1993; Poulin, 1992, cited in Browne & Moloney, 2002). In addition, children with higher levels of attachment appear to have fewer behavioural problems, are less likely to take psychiatric medication, and are less likely to be considered “developmentally delayed” than children with negative levels of attachment (McWey & Mullis, 2004).

A number of factors may influence a child's reaction to parental visitation, including the frequency of parental visits, the type of relationship between the parent and

child, the foster parents' views of visitation, and the length of time the children have been in care. In Leather's (2003) study with 12 and 13 year old foster children, parental visiting was not directly related to the emotional and behavioural problems of these children, but children did have trouble maintaining a strong relationship with both foster parents and biological mothers.

In summary, parental visiting may have both positive and negative effects on children in foster care under a child protection order. Researchers support the importance of parental visitation with children who have been apprehended by a child protection agency. If the goal is family reunification, visitation appears to be associated with an increased likelihood that children will return home to their parents. Even if children are in long term foster care, and it is unlikely they will live with their parents, visits with parents appear to be important to their emotional well-being. Family visitation centres are specifically designed to facilitate these supervised visits.

While frequent visitations are a strong predictor of family reunification (Fanshel, 1982), visitation may lead to greater loyalty conflict in children and difficulties bonding with the foster family. Parents may require support to ensure that visits with their children are positive. They may need assistance in learning how to play with their child, structuring the visits, finding areas of mutual interest, learning about their child's needs and managing discipline effectively (Mapp, 2002).

Notably, though, families in which children have been apprehended by the child protection system do not necessarily share the same characteristics as families impacted by domestic violence. The problems faced by these two sets of families are often substantially different, and their needs in a supervised visitation centre may also be diverse.

The exception is families that are in the child protection system solely because their children have been exposed to domestic violence. In such cases, it is critical that the safety needs of the adult victims be addressed, in addition to attending to the children's needs in a supervised visitation facility.

### **The Alberta Environmental Scan**

The ten supervised visitation organizations that were interviewed for the current environmental scan appear to work very closely with Alberta Children's Services and often have a funding relationship that is on a contract or fee for service basis. These agencies appear to have a more positive sense of their relationship with Children's Services than was the case in many other provinces. Notably though, they are not coordinated in any way and are in competition for the funding dollar. While a number of the domestic violence-focused supervised visitation programs share similar philosophies and practices, there are no core standards other than for those organizations who are members of the Alberta Association for Children and Families (AASCF). However, those standards are with reference to supervision in the context of child welfare rather than specific considerations for the context of domestic violence. Most organizations providing primarily off-site safe visitation services do not specialize in couple domestic violence nor do staff receive any specialized training in the area with respect to the dynamics of abusive behaviour or safety planning.

In an attempt to identify those organizations providing supervised visitation and monitored access services in each region, Alberta Children’s Services contract/resource managers and supervisors in each of the Authorities were contacted both by telephone and email. Additional contact efforts were made to 26 women’s shelter organizations and eight programs in the mediation/divorce community. An extensive resource search was completed on the Internet. Thirty two agencies were subsequently identified and after numerous efforts were made to contact each of them, ten interviews were successfully completed.

Representatives from the following programs were interviewed for the environmental scan:

Alberta Programs	Location
Spectrum Youth and Family Services	Calgary
YWCA of Calgary, Sheriff King Home	Calgary
Men’s Educational Support Association (MESA)	Calgary
Calgary Home Support Services	Calgary
Four Directions Foster Parent Association	Calgary
Saamis Children’s Centre	Medicine Hat
Family Ties	Lethbridge
McMan Youth, Family and Community Services	Red Deer
Big Brothers and Sisters of Wetaskawin	Wetaskawin
YWCA of Edmonton (closed)	Edmonton

### **Alberta Supervised Visit Program Organizational Features**

The following section describes the funding, program features and program processes of the Alberta agencies that were included in the provincial environmental scan.

#### **Host Agencies, Funding and Funders**

Five larger agencies have existing infrastructures that offer additional programming, budgets and strong administrations (YWCA Calgary, YWCA Edmonton, Saamis Children’s Centre, McMan and Aetas). The other programs were smaller and more local in nature. Spectrum, in Calgary, is a private, for profit agency.

Three programs (Calgary Home Support, Four Directions and Big Brother and Sister in Wetaskawin) are fee for service to Alberta Children’s Services, meaning that no upfront funding is received. These programs generally bill the government between \$17 and \$20 for a supervised visit. Two programs received contract funding including Lethbridge (\$50,000) and McMan in Red Deer. In the Medicine Hat program, the supervisors are provincial employees receiving a wage between \$18-20 an hour.

Three programs receive no government funding. Spectrum in Calgary bills the client directly for most of the amount, MESA uses casino funds to subsidize the greater amount with a token annual charge to the client and the Sheriff King receives private, community and corporate dollars so that services can be provided free of charge.

A number of the Alberta programs that provided supervised visits for child welfare concerns do not charge clients fees, nor does the domestic violence-specific Sheriff King Home. Two offsite agencies that do not work closely with child welfare charged clients \$23/hour plus mileage (Spectrum) whereas the other program charges an annual fee per parent of \$25 (MESA).

#### Onsite or Offsite Visits

In Alberta, only two of the programs consulted (YWCA Calgary Sheriff King and YWCA Edmonton—both specific to domestic violence) offer strictly on-site visitation services (Edmonton no longer operates due to under-utilization). Five programs offer both on-site and off-site service, but the onsite locations were not of the specialized nature found in most of the on-site programs documented in the national scan. Eight of the 10 programs offer offsite services to clients.

*Where the visit occurs is always dependent on the client situation. Sometimes it can occur on parental property, sometimes in agency offices, sometimes in the two designated “agency homes” located in different towns and sometimes in public places. (McMan)*

#### Staff Qualifications and Training

Seven of the programs, all with off-site components, use paid staff to supervise visits. The only program using volunteers in some capacity is the Sheriff King Home and MESA in Calgary, although the Sheriff King primarily uses paid staff to supervise visits. With respect to qualifications, six programs require some post-secondary education; however Four Directions requires only a Grade 12 diploma.

Four programs prefer at least one year of social service experience while one of the four (McMan of Red Deer) requires five years of experience. Four Directions and MESA look for individuals that are sensible and have life experiences and Calgary Home Support Services has had good success using students. Four Directions identified the importance of having a clean criminal record and child abuse check.

With one exception (MESA in Calgary), the programs that were consulted about this issue clarified that they offer formalized training to their staff. The most commonly offered training included First Aid, information on supervised access, suicide intervention, CPR, Aboriginal sensitivity training, and training on proper observation and documentation. Other less frequently offered training included parenting skills, information on false allegations, crisis intervention, child abuse and reporting, transporting children, family functioning and FOIP.

Interestingly, the only program that offers training on domestic violence and safety planning was the YWCA Sheriff King program, which is affiliated with a women’s shelter and works exclusively with families impacted by domestic violence. In contrast, the other programs likely see themselves as responding to child abuse issues without a specialty in domestic violence.

## Proportion of Domestic Violence and Child Welfare Cases

The program representatives acknowledged that there can be disparities in the definition of domestic violence in different ways ranging from “verbal conflict” to “intimate partner terrorism”. Similar to provincial standards across Canada, the two DV-specific onsite programs had the criterion that all cases must be domestic violence. Nevertheless, the other programs also provided services to domestic violence clientele in the context of the overlap between child abuse and domestic violence. MESA noted a high proportion of domestic violence cases (although they serve between one and three families a year), Spectrum and Big Brothers and Sisters of Wetaskiwin estimated between 70-80%; Calgary Home Support Services about 50% and the rest estimated fewer than one-third.

The primary difference between the national scan and the provincial scan is that the national set of programs were specifically developed to assist families in which domestic violence is a central concern and with the exception of two programs, the Alberta provincial scan is composed of agencies that were primarily developed to assist families in which child abuse is the primary concern.

*All of the 240 cases have child welfare status (core protection concerns). It is worth noting that under most circumstances, this program does not see family enhancement clients unless specific intense services are requested within the 42 days on a short term basis. (McMan)*

## Exclusion Criteria for Families

Four programs have exclusion criteria with respect to accepting clients that may be violent or present other risk factors. One of these four will no longer accept private clients (Calgary Home Support Services) and another (Four Directions) has a mandate to accept only clients of Aboriginal background.

The five remaining programs that do not screen out referrals work closely with child welfare and rely heavily on Authority caseworkers to refer appropriate clientele. With this process they know that someone has met and initially assessed the subject of the referral.

*Generally there are no exclusion criteria for child welfare clients, as child welfare has already done some screening. However, private clients have become so time consuming and complex that they do not pay for themselves. (Calgary Home Support Services)*

*Initial clients are accepted but services may later be deemed inappropriate if there are continuing no shows, extreme mental health issues beyond the program's abilities or safety issues. (Big Brothers and Sisters, Wetaskawin)*

*There are no exclusion criteria for initial services if child welfare has requested the service. However, whenever a family is referred, the program completes a Framework for Assessment, a UK tool that the province of Alberta is considering initiating. It is based on child development and assesses developmental needs, parenting capacity and environmental context. This tool is very useful as it means that both supervisors and Authority caseworkers share a common language and*

*understanding established by the Framework regarding such concepts as nurturance need for stimulation and age bands. This has been incredibly helpful.* (Saamis, Medicine Hat)

### Hours of Operation

One notable difference between the two domestic violence specific on-site programs and the eight others was that the on-site program provided structured, somewhat inflexible hours of service with visits offered in two-hour time blocks.

The other child welfare-oriented programs determined the hours of visits for a family based on the needs and availability of the clients and the supervisors. Their philosophy was based on flexibility with the goal of providing a service designed for a particular client. The on-site locations were primarily offered during weekends and an alternate mid-day evening, whereas the others were open almost anytime. One program, McMan in Red Deer) provides overnight services as well.

### Length of Visits

As would be expected, programs that provide off-site visitation permit longer visits than on-site centres. Only one off-site program (Four Directions, Calgary) preferred to cap the length of time of visits at four hours, whereas others were prepared to accommodate whatever was requested by the caseworker. McMan in Red Deer offers overnight services and will supervise visits a week in duration.

*Guidelines are generally determined either by the court order or by the child's caseworker. Agency staff prefer longer opportunities to spend time with families as it increases the likelihood of taking advantage of naturally occurring "teaching moments".* (McMan, Red Deer)

*The maximum length of visits is 4 hours: that is all a case aid can handle at one time. If supervising longer than this, they would have to go to the bathroom and this would result in an unsupervised situation. If longer than 4 hours is required, a new case aid would be sent in.* (Four Directions, Calgary)

*For most families that the program is involved with, visits tend to be 2-3 times per week and vary between 2-3 hours in length. Direction is usually given by the caseworker. There are no specific guidelines in place: one mother has one six hour visit on Saturdays and other families might require special consideration if traveling is an issue or working around busy schedules* (Saamis, Medicine Hat)

The majority of programs with off-site components had less formalized intake processes, with six simply requiring a referral, completion of an intake form before scheduling the visitations. Sheriff King in Calgary requires personal interviews with both parents whereas Four Direction and MESA, both of which have off-site components, require that only the non-custodial parent be interviewed, although interviews were always offered to the custodial parent. McMan in Red Deer and Saamis in Medicine Hat are incorporating risk assessment tools into their intake process. Sheriff King has parents sign a service agreement and provided child orientations and safety planning



*Referral information is taken over the phone and payment arranged over the phone. Contact is generally first received from the non-custodial parent who wants visitation. A court order is not needed; however, there must be agreement by parents as to where the visit will occur, who else will attend and the activities permitted. The visit is scheduled. When the supervisor arrives, the child waits a few minutes while paperwork is signed and money collected (very discreetly so it doesn't look like the parent has to pay to see the child). Forms include an intake form, release of information and grievance sheet. Parents are provided with the rules and expectations. (Spectrum, Calgary)*

*Child welfare makes the referral and both an intake form and risk assessments are completed. The agency attempts to respond immediately when possible, often within a few hours any time of the day or night, seven days per week. (McMan, Red Deer)*

As a further contrast to the national scan, and likely due to differences in the nature of supervised visits for domestic violence versus child abuse, none of the Alberta programs conduct supervised visits in a group environment.

Congruent with the national scan of programs, most Alberta programs have no maximum length of involvement. Two programs noted a preference for working with clients for a six months to a year duration (Saamis, Medicine Hat) and one year (Sheriff King, Calgary) respectively.

*That would depend on the request of the Authority caseworker...some families have been here three years. (Four Directions, Calgary)*

*There is no maximum length of involvement...although the Association hopes that parents will begin to resolve conflict for the sake of the children so that supervised visitation is no longer necessary. Information is provided to encourage this. (MESA, Calgary)*

There was unanimous agreement that programs would terminate visits if there was any threat of violence or concern about safety. Five programs identified substance abuse as a reason for termination; another five programs would cancel if the child was inconsolably upset or if continuing was not in the best interests of the child. Four programs indicated they would terminate the visit if there was discussion of any forbidden topics such as the custodial parent or an upcoming court date. Other reasons included unauthorized guests who refuse to leave, weapons, swearing or insistent requests for a change of visitation venue.

*Visits are terminated if there are safety issues or if a parent cannot immediately provide payment at the start of the visit. (Spectrum, Calgary)*

### **Safety Features and Policies**

The concept of one or two exits is not relevant for the off-site components of the eight programs or for programs primarily addressing child abuse issues. Even programs that had both on-site and off-site components, the exits of their on-site locations did not appear to be used as part of the safety and security plan of the facility. The only program that planned for and uses the two exits as a safety precaution is the Sheriff King program

that was developed to address domestic violence safety issues, such as preventing contact between the ex-partners.

*There are not two exits per se but exiting is always considered as a part of the safety plan when considering the arrangement for ANY visit. (McMan, Red Deer)*

*Two exits are only at the Authority office if visits are arranged there. (Saamis, Medicine Hat)*

The only program that disclosed the use of built in staggered arrival and departure times was the Sheriff King program. None of the others appear to consider this necessary for their child abuse cases. Of course, when programs are utilizing the off-site components, staggered arrival and departure times are a latent function of the transportation by supervisors.

All of the programs with off-site components provide transportation, with four programs indicating that the decision regarding transportation is generally made by the Authority caseworker.

*Yes children are transported but at times there can be problems accessing or arranging car seats. If that is the case, the custodial parent is asked to transport very near to the non-custodial parent or the designated visitation site. (Spectrum, Calgary)*

Seven of the 10 programs ensure that their supervisors have cell phones to call for assistance but in the case of off-site visitation, they generally work alone. McMan noted that an additional staff member is assigned if a high risk situation is anticipated. Three programs (McMan in Red Deer, New Directions in Lethbridge and Saamich in Medicine Hat) use a risk assessment tool to assist them in identifying a parent that may be of concern. Two programs (Big Brother and Sisters in Wetaskawin and McMan, Red Deer) attempt to reduce unanticipated events by refusing any requests, such as a change of location or a guest, unless previously authorized.

A number of programs have managers and coordinators working on call in case problems arise. These programs are in stark contrast to the Sheriff King program developed to address the safety issues that can arise in cases of domestic violence by utilizing security cameras, separate entrances and exits, staggered arrival and departure times and always having at least two staff members working.

*Workers are only utilized who own personal cell phones...there is no funding to provide for cell phones. (Calgary Home Support Services)*

*Supervisors have cell phones and visits usually are not initiated in a parental home until there have been some instances in a public place so that supervisors can get a sense of the family. Supervisors are expected to check in with staff after visits to confirm their safety. Children are advised that if they need assistance to use a "cue or code word" that indicates that they are distressed. (Spectrum, Calgary)*

*Risk assessments are completed initially to determine a risk of violence. Safety is always paramount and visits are cancelled if there appears to be any risk to children or workers. Where safety is thought to be a concern, two workers may be*

*sent to supervise and in extreme cases, a security guard has been hired when it is anticipated that a parent may need to be forcibly removed from a visit. As well, the rule followed by staff is that if requests arise that have not been previously approved, the answer is always NO, until the situation is later clarified. (McMan Red Deer)*

*The program has clear working alone policies. You may work in isolation but you do not work alone. All supervisors must carry cell phones with a GPS system so that the whereabouts of the worker are known at all times. Workers are expected to position themselves to the doors for easy getaway should the situation warrant it and to always ask initially who is in the home. Supervisors and coordinators can be reached by cell phone at any time. Workers arrange to call someone to verify their safety after a visit and if they live alone and do not have this option, the supervisor will call them to double check on things. (Saamis, Medicine Hat)*

### Interaction versus Observation Staff Role

Five programs were clear that their role and mandate is primarily to observe, not to facilitate or assist the parent. Two programs (McMan and MESA) aspire to that goal if the visit is going well, but if there were problems related to parenting or relationship building, they are inclined to offer some assistance, guidance and advice. Three programs (Big Brothers and Sisters in Wetaskawin, Saamis in Medicine Hat, and Family Ties in Lethbridge) take their direction from the Authority caseworker at the time of referral and are open to considering either straight supervision or a combination of teaching and facilitation as well.

*Generally the supervised visits are observational in nature and not assessment as staff are not qualified. If in-home support is required, that is generally a different kind of contract. (Four Directions, Calgary)*

*Visits tend to be more observational but in instances where parent and child are struggling with interaction, supervisors will intervene to suggest activities for them. Sometimes parents need cuing and education: one father whose child has asthma, continues to take the child to play basketball, but does not monitor how the child is doing when he coughs and struggles. Staff will cue him to ask him how his son is doing. (Spectrum, Calgary)*

### Dealing with Clients that Do Not Appear

Sheriff King has a general policy of terminating services after three no show visits whereas three other programs (will notify the Authority caseworker and ask for direction regarding continued service. Three programs (Spectrum, McMan and MESA) note that they simply document the missed visits, but that “no shows” happen rarely.

Two programs (Saamis and McMan) address the issue of the impact of the missed visit on the child and encouraged the supervisor to try and reach the custodial parent for pick-up and failing that to support and entertain the child, perhaps by taking him/her out for lunch or giving a snack to reduce the disappointment.

*Child welfare is notified. However, child welfare only pays for one hour on a no show visit, so the agency pays staff 2 hours...they lose one hour on each no show. (Calgary Home Support)*

*Rarely has no shows because the intake process is clear and the coordinator makes reminder phone calls prior to the visit to confirm details. When clients do not show, staff must be paid a minimum of three hours. (Spectrum, Calgary)*

*The possibility of “no shows” is documented in the initial intake process and the expectations of the caseworker are documented. When a parent does not show up for a visit, there is usually a contingency plan of some sort whereby the children are taken for an outing regardless, to mitigate the disappointment. Caseworkers are notified by agency staff immediately of a “no show”. (McMan in Red Deer)*

### Record Keeping and Court Reports

Nine of the ten programs take records, with seven specifically indicating that a supervisor completes one record per visit. Four program representatives clarified that their record keeping must be based on fact and observation. Two programs (McMan & Big Brothers and Sisters in Wetaskawin) also provide cumulative reports that build on information gathered previously. Four Directions in Calgary utilizes a log book for parents to exchange written instructions with respect to the child.

*There is one record per visit and these are submitted to the Authority caseworker within a 48 hour period. (Four Directions)*

*Notes are not made during the visit but a summary report is completed with respect to observations: what was said and heard etc. This is not an assessment. (Spectrum)*

*Reports are generated after visits, with cumulative reports issued monthly. Reports are not shared with clients unless clients they are in a transitional stage leaving child intervention services. At all other times, reports are made directly to the caseworker. (McMan)*

*Contact notes are completed after each visit and monthly reports are also submitted. They are not necessarily cumulative and building on previous reports because there could be different supervisors throughout the process. These reports are forwarded to authority caseworkers or in the case of a private arrangement, the person with whom the service was contracted. (Big Brothers and Sisters, Wetaskawin)*

In Alberta, of the eight programs that discussed whether they will issue court reports, four do not provide any, including Calgary’s Sheriff King Program. The other three programs (Four Direction in Calgary, Saamich in Medicine Hat and Big Brothers and Sisters in Wetaskawin) defer to the Authority caseworker to finalize any court report.

Of the four programs that provide court reports (Calgary Home Support Services, Spectrum, McMan in Red Deer, Family Ties in Lethbridge), all prepare synthesized summary reports rather than submitting their observation notes. This is in contrast to a few programs nationally that only provide observation notes for court purposes.

*The cost is \$19 per report. For private clients this is problematic because if one part paid for the report, they would not want it shared with the other party. As well, parents would spend a considerable amount of time on the phone with agency “wordsmith” the report and objecting strenuously to the use of various verbs/adjectives and wanting things modified. At one point, an hourly rate for report writing was considered but then clients argue that the report was not reflective of two hours and should not have taken that long. (Calgary Home Support)*

*A court report cost \$20 per report with both parties having equal access to it. A copy is provided to both parties. (Spectrum)*

*The monthly reports are always “court ready” and are provided within the child welfare contract. (McMan)*

### Physical Premises (Locations)

Of the five programs with both onsite and off-site components, the four with the onsite premises use them as a back up for high risk families with the primary service delivered off-site. Such backups include a church basement, agency offices and Authority offices for Alberta Children’s Services. McMan in Red Deer has two residential homes in different towns that are designated for visitation, including overnight visits. Only one family is permitted in the home at a time and there is 24 hour coverage with a minimum of one staff person at all times (and more staff if the situation warrants it). Both homes are completely furnished.

The Sheriff King program specializing in domestic violence describes their premise as a large area, with high windows that go almost to the ceiling – the windows don’t open and no one can see in. The playroom is an arc shape and there is a mural on the ceiling. Three families can be accommodated at the same time and the room is set up for ages 10 years and under.

*A suitable space is a challenge – it is important that it meet the guiding principles such as accessibility for wheelchairs, a convenient location, and being on major bus routes. (Sheriff King)*

*These homes work beautifully for those situations where a parent needs support or guidance in their parenting and where there is enough risk to a child to warrant supervision. It is important to note however, that this is only ONE environment where supervised access can occur. Others include public places, parental property or agency offices. (McMan, Red Deer)*

*There is access to agency/church but generally visits are offsite. Offsite visits are preferred because the environment is so much more relaxed and normalized for the family experience. (MESA)*

### Special Considerations

Only Sheriff King had formal policies with respect to inspecting gifts and taking food directions from the custodial parents. Three programs permit food being brought in or gifts given and a further four take direction from the Authority caseworker. Two

programs do not intervene, whatsoever, and simply advise the custodial parent at the time of returning the child.

*We do not censor anything. We simply advise the custodial parent what has been given to the child such as a note, cell phone, or phone number for example. (Calgary Home Support Services)*

*There is usually no problem arising with gifts or food, unless there are allergies. Notes would be scrutinized, not automatically given to the child. The program uses a communication book between custodial and non-custodial parents. (Four Directions)*

*Anything is returned to the custodial parent that is given to a child in a visit...however nothing is given that would construe a message of any sort between parents. (Spectrum, Calgary)*

*These items are only allowed if permitted by child welfare and if the above are not central to the presenting referral concern. For example, if there was a concern about a sexually abusive father pressuring a child to recant, then there would be either no permission, or notes would be scrutinized first. Direction is usually provided by the caseworker at the initial intake. (McMan, Red Deer)*

## Translators

Three programs provide translators for supervised visits (Saamis in Medicine Hat, Calgary Home Support and McMan in Red Deer), with five other programs clarifying that they were rarely or never asked.

*Yes, we talked about the challenges of using interpreters...sometimes additional “unaccounted for” discussions between interpreter and client are not necessarily conspiratorial in nature. In one case, the client said something to the effect of “I see you brought the old bag with you (caseworker). There was no value in repeating that conversation to the caseworker as it would be hurtful. The subsequent conversation was the interpreter chastising the client for her inappropriate comments. (Calgary Home Support)*

*Generally speaking, every effort is made to secure these services if required. Often the family will choose to provide their own support person to assist them. Agency staff are specifically trained in Aboriginal cultural sensitivity. (McMan, Red Deer)*

*If the Authority caseworker has indicated that translators or interpreters are necessary, the Program contacts an Immigration Services for assistance. Because of a nearby meatpacking plant that offers employment opportunities, there has been a huge influx of Sudanese, with many accompanying domestic violence issues. Often in these families, the woman is the aggressor and custody can be awarded to the father. Concerns arise that most of these men are not used to being the primary caregiver. Our jurisdiction has been earmarked as a destination place for new residents and the city is seeing an increase in the number of Asian, Iraq and Afghan families. (Saamis, Medicine Hat)*

## Program Strengths and Challenges

At the close of the interview for the environmental scan, each program was asked to comment on their strengths, any recurring problems, unanticipated events and challenges. In the following section, we present these issues.

With respect to strengths, three programs mentioned the flexibility that allows program staff to meet the unique needs of each family:

*One of the best features is the program flexibility and our willingness to adapt services to the needs of the client. We focus on an unintrusive intervention when possible. That is why we try and make the “homes” a warm and comfortable and “normal” environment with washers and dryers, toys and a natural living space. One of the strengths as well is the clear contracting and intake process which clarifies many unforeseen situations in order to minimize later confusion and misunderstanding. The program has a solid strengths-based approach to practice, looking to have clients “buy in” with a focus on engagement and diffusion of hostility. (McMan, Red Deer)*

*The flexibility that allows for the most appropriate family interaction. (Big Brothers and Sisters of Wetaskawin)*

*The best thing about this program is the flexibility to provide total wraparound services that meet the needs of the client and Authority caseworker. Supervised visits can be individually tailored to provide the best support and guidance. The program comes from a “strengths-based perspective” and seeks to recognize and build on existing abilities and strengths. Staff are also well qualified. (Family Ties, Lethbridge)*

The other programs mentioned more diverse strengths, some with reference to the specific goals of their centre:

*The program facilitates cultural preservation and provides a way for foster children to have access to their biological parents. (Four Directions, Calgary)*

*The goal of the program is to help parents work towards a peaceful goal of communication, which often the lawyers and courts cannot achieve. (MESA, Calgary)*

*We have compassion and heart. It is just not about making a profit. We are an “honest” program. If a worker is paying for the program to drive a child to a location that is very close to a foster home, we will advise the worker that the arrangement is not cost efficient. (Calgary Home Support Services)*

*The best aspect of the model is that the program is directly linked to government and as such we all work on a team with Authority caseworkers. We have the same access to information such as child abuse registry checks and Information consolidation reports. We feel that because our larger organization offers a continuum of service with other programs such as Family Preservation Services, that supervised visit monitors benefit from the mentoring and knowledge of workers in those programs as well. We value a model which is flexible and can adapt to the client’s needs. (Saamis Children’s Centre, Medicine Hat)*

*I think having the policy set out so parents and lawyers read it before the visits start. We make it clear that the rules need to be followed or the visits won't happen. No doubt there will be something coming up they want to change, but the rules won't be changed. (Sheriff King, Calgary)*

## Recurring Problems

In addition to highlighting their programs strengths we also asked whether the agency had experiences and recurring problems with respect to offering supervised visitation services. Several mentioned problems with respect to dealing with parents, including controlling spouses, private clients and mental health issues.

*Private clients have been a problem. If there are no lawyers involved, there are umpteen calls back and forth between custodial and non-custodial parents to negotiate everything from places, times, conditions and there tends to be little agreement on any of it. Payment from private clients has also been extremely challenging: either they do not pay at all or the cheques bounce. We changed to a cash only arrangement based on an anticipated number of hours, but then unexpected factors would increase the length of a visit and families wouldn't pay. Either lawyers or child welfare workers are needed to pre-screen and negotiate issues with clients before referral.*

*The most significant recurring problem has been the human violence and aggression factor which we perhaps underestimated. A number of parents have mental illness issues and unanticipated violence is always a stress and risk. In one case, an attempt was made to run a staff member's vehicle off the road while she was transporting a child. Another concern has been with respect to Aboriginal reunification and repatriation and political agendas can at times interfere with what is in the actual best interests of the child around visitation.*

*The only recurring problem is one parent trying to control the strings of another. We have had to deal with the perceptions that we are biased toward the male point of view when our goal is not this at all. We are child oriented and wanting both parents to work for the best interests of the child. Neutrality is important to this program. We have had to overcome the stereotypes that men are violent.*

Two programs mentioned staff retention as ongoing concerns while a third program had issues around funding.

*Another problem is that of retaining staff. The reality is that this job pays approximately \$12.50 an hour; it is not full time and has safety risks and requires evening/weekend work. With this economy, all organizations are having difficulty finding staff. It is too competitive even in retail. Most recently, one ad that we placed in the paper only netted six resumes and only two that could be considered at all.*

*The biggest issue has been the high staff turnover. Staff are recruited from a casual wage pool but often staff leave when extensive hours cannot be guaranteed or they find full time employment. Coordinators can be challenged in their attempts to bring everyone together for meetings because many have other jobs as well, thus decreasing their availability.*



*The recurring problems have consisted of the hot bone of contention around no show visits and if/how staff get paid and the inconsistent/long time frame for the agency to receive funds from the Authority. The bank has been very flexible in allowing them to draw on funds that will be coming but have not been received*

Several program representatives mentioned difficulties with the process of referrals and being able to respond in a timely manner.

*One challenge is that family court is scheduled for Friday afternoons and at times as many as four orders granting supervised visits are made. This often leave the program scrambling to arrange an immediate request for access with only a few hours notice, given the lack of lead time between Friday afternoon and the weekend visitation.*

*One of the most interesting events has been related to the introduction of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. As expected, there was a sharp increase in the number of referrals received because of the shorter time frames for parents to demonstrate parenting capacity and thus more visits would be required. However, surprisingly, a year later, there is a decrease. One hypothesis is that with only 42 days to work with a family, the program now provides intense family work but there is a quicker resolution and a more speedy use of natural supervisors from within the clients' own networks. In short, the program is now doing a better job and offering more intense services within a shorter time span.*

### Significant Changes

Representatives from some programs also noted significant changes to their programs over time:

*No, the program has been in existence in its basic form for approximately 12 years and there has been a continuous evolution of ideas based on practice.*

*Yes, by combining the Family Preservation Program under the same umbrella as the Supervised access Program, staff have direct access to some very skilled and experienced personnel who can informally assist and mentor them.*

*The program has become much more aware of the difficulties in managing challenging behaviours – they have become more proactive, have instituted better screening processes, have been better about being clear with their expectations, better at addressing concerns immediately. We are getting more in tune with the needs of children (a greater sense from kids as to their emotional well being, and even though they work within the narrow definition of neutrality, program staff have had to extend themselves by providing additional services to children who are in need, such as making referrals for children to counselling.*

### Advice to New Programs

A final question in the environmental scan asked programs representatives what advice they would give to organizations developing a supervised visitation program. Their responses were diverse and touched on many aspects unique to the centres such as safety, access, funding and engaging clients.

*It is highly recommended that any program have safe, clear working alone policies whereby staff safety can be guaranteed and lots of support systems are in place. The provision is supervised visits is hard, hard, work and are undertaken in a climate that is volatile and emotionally charged.*

*Avoid hiring staff with their own unresolved emotional issues. You need staff who are level headed with a common sense approach. They need to be strong enough to confront a situation or to terminate a visit if required*

*Programs should be well funded by a government body so that children can have strong relationships with their parents.*

*Make sure that when a referral is received, that there is full disclosure by the Authority caseworker so that risk factors and case expectations are fully identified. Also remember that supervisors are not there to provide an assessment. Staff must understand the importance of clear boundaries.*

*Be clear about the roles of supervisors in relation to the visit. Supervisors need to be confident in terminating visits when required. Supervisors must be in control of the visit at all times (not driving in the car of the non-custodial parent) or allowing themselves to be intimidated. Do not relinquish control of the visit. Do not permit sidebar conversations. Don't be drawn into the pull to affiliate with one parent or another. Strongly listen to the words of the custodial parent when she describes the behaviour or risk issues related to the non-custodial parent.*

*Supervised visitation programs are not cost effective if offered as stand alone programs because there are not the number of clientele required to support it through the legal system and, thus, financially. It would be best run in conjunction with another community partner such as Children's Services. They need to be part of a program that runs additional services as well, so as not to be dependent on these referrals alone. A Supervised Visitation/Monitored Exchange Program would be most successful if run within the community and not as an adjunct to a women's shelter. There is an inherent bias in this arrangement that favours the woman when the mandate should truly be about safety for all parties, including the father. The facility should not be in a formalized organizational environment but should simulate a normal, comfortable family situation. An effective monitored exchange program should also have flexibility with respect to when and how it is offered. Programs that only offer a model of availability such as Wednesday evenings, Friday evenings and Sunday evenings, does not provide the flexibility that many families need, leaving them without services. The service should be able to "wrap around" the client, responding to their needs rather than trying to fit them into a pre-existing structured model.*

*Good communication is critical. It is important to have information clearly contracted by all parties so that expectations are set. Do not hold visits at a swimming pool!!*

## **Chapter Five: New Directions**

In contacting several key programs in the United States, we became aware of a number of shifts in the provision of supervised visitation and exchange made in response to an audit of programs in four U.S. sites. These shifts seem to better take into consideration the safety needs of both adults and children impacted by domestic violence when using the services of supervised visitation and access centre. These shifts are presented in some detail in this chapter and are incorporated into the final analysis and recommendations.

### **Emerging Trends in Supervised Visitation/ Exchange Services in the US**

Recently in the United States, supervised visitation centres in four states took part in a comprehensive audit of their services, funded by the U.S. Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). Part of the mandate of the OVW is to provide national leadership against domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. In 2002, the Office initiated a program entitled, “Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Exchange Grant Program”, to support supervised visitation and safe exchange of children in the U.S., by and between parents, in situations involving domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault, or stalking.

Four sites, including the Bay area of California, Kent Washington, Michigan, and Chicago received Safe Havens grants to examine different aspects of providing supervised visitation and exchange services. The audit themes included, “the role of the visitation centre” (Michigan); “how the work of a supervised visitation centre produces or does not produce safety for everyone involved” (California); “culture and its impact on supervised visitation”, (Chicago) and, “how families get to the supervised visitation centres” (Washington).

The demonstration sites are also involved in a national evaluation of the project, spear-headed by Drs. Dan Saunders and Richard Tolman of the University of Michigan, School of Social Work and Dr. Chris Sullivan of Michigan State University. Praxis International (Ellen Pence, Duluth Minnesota), a non-profit research and training institute, and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges provided technical assistance to the Safe Havens grant recipients.

To date, the only site that has completed their final report is the Michigan site, although preliminary data is available from several others. In Michigan, fifty practitioners at four sites participated in interviews, observations and case studies that enabled the audit team to identify key role decisions that centres must make in order to respond effectively to families affected by domestic violence. The audit team also reviewed intake and observation notes, phone logs, case files, and family court records. They conducted focus group interviews with parents, visitation centre staff, judges, attorneys, legal experts, batterer treatment group facilitators, victim advocates, administrators, and a fathers’ group organizer. Similar processes were used in other demonstration sites to gather information for the purposes of the audit.

According to three project directors, the audit process has led to significant changes in the way that services are delivered in the supervised visitation centres for which they were responsible. These centres originally developed according to the guidelines of the Supervised Visitation Network, an organization geared primarily to

providing supervised visitation in child abuse cases. The audit process revealed that, while the staff of the Safe Havens supervised visitation centres were skilled and competent in working with families, the design of the programs presented inherent challenges to effectively helping families affected by domestic violence.

The following are some issues that emerged from the audit of several of the demonstration sites, followed by changes that some visitation centres are making in response to the issues that were raised. The information is derived from the Michigan report (Praxis International, 2004) conversations with three Safe Haven Project directors, a preliminary Audit Review from the California Demonstration Project, and a conversation with a staff representative from the supervised access program in Duluth, Minnesota. The evaluation project is an extensive one, so the following sections cover only some aspects of the audit. The complete Michigan report can be found at: [http://www.praxisinternational.org/library\\_frame.html](http://www.praxisinternational.org/library_frame.html)

### **Issues Arising from the Audit**

The audit team found that the connection between the domestic violence that occurred, or is still occurring, and the work of the centre, was unclear. Centre staff did not incorporate an attention to domestic violence into its interactions with families. They were not prepared to address the dynamics of power, control, intimidation and violence, and rather treated all cases generically – whether or not there was domestic violence in the family.

Staff voiced that they were experiencing tension in their roles. They struggled with goals that appeared to be conflicting – goals of neutrality, offering children quality time with their non-custodial parent, improving relationships between children and their parents, undoing the harm of abuse to children and their relationships with their parents, not colluding with batterers' manipulation of children, and protecting battered women from further abuse (Praxis International, 2004). For example, one worker presented a case in which the father had a long history of physical and sexual abuse against his wife. In working with the father at the visitation centre, the staff described her dilemma:

*“(the father was) clueless as to how to play with his children. I was pretty sure he had never changed a diaper. I had mixed feelings. Should I just let him fumble around and record that he couldn't do these things or should I help him learn how to take care of his baby? If I do the latter he will use my notations that he is doing better with the children in his custody bid. If I let him fumble around as a father how can I say I am helping him undo the harm his children have experienced?”* (Praxis International, 2004, p. 6)

Some of this worker's concerns stemmed from the fact that, in the visitation centre, perpetrators of violence were managing to use their participation in supervised access centres to their advantage by gaining unsupervised access to their children, even though there had not been any changes in their abusive behaviours.

The audit found that courts were referring batterers to the supervised visitation centres to the exclusion of other needed programs. For example, courts were expecting abusive parents to make changes in the supervised access facility, and to progress towards unsupervised visitation, without making additional referrals to treatment

programs such as alcohol/drug treatment facilities, batterer intervention programs, and parent education.

Another problem experienced by supervised visitation centres was that they were receiving court referrals with little or no information about the nature or extent of the domestic violence. Consequently, with inadequate information about the safety concerns in a particular family's situation, the supervised visitation centres were often ill prepared to address critical safety issues.

Families did not always receive clear information about the safety precautions put in place around arrivals, departures, and visits. The battered parent was often afraid to be at the visitation centre in such close proximity to the batterer, yet the mechanisms were not in place to actively address her safety concerns.

Beyond the visit itself, the audit found that the centre's safety objectives were ambiguous. In domestic violence, the period after separation is particularly dangerous for battered women, and abusive tactics may be intensified. Batterers use a variety of strategies to control both the mother and the children, such as threatening to harm the mother, or seeking custody of children. According to the author(s) of the Praxis International (2004) report on the audit of the Michigan demonstration sites, the assessment helped the team to be able to better articulate the ways that children are harmed in cases where one parent is battering the other parent. The following tactics of abuse, presented in the Praxis International (2004) report, are more likely to be present in domestic violence cases than other child abuse cases:

- Male batterers typically engage in tactics that are intended to undermine children's relationships with their mothers. This ranges from put downs to abductions.
- Batterers use children in order to manipulate and control their mothers
- Some batterers directly harm children (physically or sexually) in order to hurt, punish, and control their victims.
- Almost all parents have disagreements on aspects of a child's rearing...when one parent is an abuser, however, these disagreements have a very different dynamic, both in terms of how the abuser asserts control and how the victim resists the abuser's child rearing goals or methods.
- Batterers also will attempt to use agencies such as the police, courts, and visitation centres to assist them in their goal of coercing and threatening the victims of their abuse. (Praxis International, 2004, p. 16)

Although centres were paying careful attention to preventing children from being harmed in the visits, they were not adequately organized to respond to the above risks to safety of the adult victim and children.

The audit concluded that the training, preparation and skill level of the monitors was inadequate for supervision and exchange cases involving battering. Directors voiced that they felt the monitor's role was underpaid and undervalued, and centres continually struggled with a high turnover of staff. One director explained how important it is for the monitors to have a thorough understanding of domestic violence. She stated,

*If the supervisors don't understand domestic violence, it can lead to grave consequences for battered women and their children, such as women losing their children to the batterer. It is absolutely essential that women are seen in the context of the domestic violence they have experienced, and (often) continue to experience by their partner/ ex-partner. Otherwise, supervisors can get it wrong. They may see the batterer as being a great parent. The batterer is often charming, and – unlike the mother - is not scared coming to the centre. The supervisors may write a report that is favourable to the abuser, and unfavourable to the victim. This greatly compromises the safety of the adult victim and her children. (Safe Havens Project Director)*

Another conclusion of the audit was that the visitation centres collected and recorded a large volume of information without a clear sense of its purpose or importance to safety and risk in the context of battering. For example, one director explained how record-keeping had been problematic in the visitation centres:

*We had all three centres dismantle how they did their record-keeping, and re-built it from the ground up. We recognized how centres were keeping too much information, that when we did case record audits, couldn't figure out why all this information was in there. There wasn't consistency. It was also really clear to us that in talking to all the staff that there was a huge amount of attention being paid to the parent-child interactions during the visit. This translated a lot into parenting issues. What was being delivered to the court system had nothing to do with the original reason for the referral. What was clearly missing was behaviour before, during, and after visitation (Safe Havens Project Director).*

The director further explained that:

*The court systems grew to expect visitation reports. We started to critically think with the judges, why they feel visitation reports are necessary. We did a lot of teasing out with the judges - what are they looking at and what is the significance? Batterers do very well during supervised visitations. Reports on the batterer's behaviour are that typically nothing significant happens. This is what the courts were used to getting, i.e. played games, talked, a narration of the visit. We started teasing out - when they're looking at the reports - we had them examine the impact on their decision-making when they get a batch of reports that had nothing significant to say. Does this tell them that the batterer is no longer a batterer? The judges took several months of talking through this - helping them to see the larger picture of visitation” (Safe Havens Project Director).*

Finally, another conclusion from the audit was that the visitation centres did not have an ongoing, active dialogue with any family member, neither the parent who had been battered, the children, nor the battering parent. They found that many of the contacts with the members of the family were centred on the administrative needs of the supervised visitation centre. As one project director explained:

*We determined when we did our audit that programs were doing an “intake” with parents, which was basically just fulfilling the needs of the centre. It had a business tone to it. There wasn't any relationship building with clients...not the establishment of “how can we best meet your needs.” We tore all this down, and*

*decided we needed to help programs establish a solid trust-building relationship, how can we work with families, what other resources we can refer the family to”*  
(Safe Havens Project Director).

### **Emerging Trends in Response to the Audit**

The project directors interviewed by the research team stated that the visitation centres for which they were responsible had already made changes, or are in the process of making changes, as a result of the audit. The director of another supervised visitation program in Duluth, Minnesota, suggested that these new directions are part of a trend across the United States. Some of these program shifts are as follows:

#### **Moving Away from Neutrality**

The premise of neutrality is being challenged, and is no longer considered a foundational principle of many programs. While the supervised visitation staff strive to be fair and respectful to all members of the family, in the words of one project director, “we are not neutral to violence”. She further explained that, accounting for domestic violence should not be interpreted as bias. Instead of focusing on neutrality when families with histories of domestic violence come to the program, staff are shifting to a focus on the safety of the adult victim and children. For example, the staff are spending considerably more time ensuring that the adult victim has a safety plan at home, is safe coming to the centre, and is safe leaving the centre.

#### **Expanding the Concept of “Safety”**

Rather than concentrating intervention efforts solely on safety during the two hour visit, programs are expanding their focus to actively promote the safety of each member of the family over the longer term. While staff still make every effort to ensure that the child is safe during the visit, they also work individually with each family member with a view to improving the family’s safety and well-being for years to come. The staff have become more focused on engaging members of the family, developing positive relationships with them and earning their trust, and promoting respectful relationships. Their work with family members may also include actively making referrals to programs such as batterer intervention programs, parenting programs, children’s therapeutic programs, and conducting safety planning with the adult victim. The supervised visitation centre staff have also collaborated extensively with the courts, which has resulted in the courts ordering additional services for the batterer.

#### **Shifting Roles – Engaging with Families More Actively**

The roles of the supervised visitation centre are shifting. One centre director explained that a primary role of the supervised visitation centre has traditionally been as an “observer for the court”. Although visitation centres have typically not provided formal custody evaluations to the court, observation notes from the supervised visits are frequently used by courts as part of their decision-making process in custody and access cases. The audit report raised significant concerns about the validity of the observation notes in domestic violence cases being used for this purpose. As a result, centre staff are collaborating with court officials to re-define their role vis à vis the family and the courts. They have also worked closely with the courts to revise the documentation process (see next section).

Rather than merely acting as observers for the court, some supervised visitation centres are increasingly acting as agents of change for the family, seeing the centres as an important link in the domestic violence service continuum. They have worked with the courts to have them also give necessary orders for treatment intervention such as batterer intervention programs when making an order for supervised visitation.

One director noted the lack of awareness of supervised visitation centres in the domestic violence community, which suggests the need to liaise more closely with other domestic violence professionals. Another director explained that supervised visitation centres are in a unique position in the domestic violence field of seeing everyone in the family, albeit as individuals. This position affords the staff opportunities to gain valuable insight into the family, and to “plant seeds” that could positively impact everyone.

### Changing Documentation to Reflect Domestic Violence

Observation notes are a monitor’s written account of what occurs during the visit between the non-custodial parent and the child. The safety audit, however, found several serious drawbacks to this practice for families impacted by domestic violence.

Formerly, the monitors did not report on incidents of concern outside of the supervised visit, and did not include anything that they had not personally witnessed. For example, if a batterer was stalking the adult victim during the week, and the victim reported this to the monitor, it would not normally have been recorded in the observation notes. Thus, a woman may still be terrorized by the batterer, yet the observation notes received by the court would be devoid of such critical safety information. Monitors now document incidents reported as hearsay, recording who made the report. If incidents of concern occur at any time (including before or after the parent-child visit), these will now be included on the observation notes.

According to one project director, it is simple for a batterer to conduct himself appropriately in the supervised visitation centre setting, and for the parent-child interaction to appear to be appropriate. Formerly, reports were often sent to the court with comments such as, “the father played appropriately with the child, the child appeared happy, the father brought a healthy snack, he arrived punctually, etc”. Based on these kinds of observation notes, the courts had a tendency to grant unsupervised visitation prematurely, and to lose sight of the serious nature of the violence that originally prompted a referral to supervised visitation.

The audit process questioned the relevance of such comments to cases of domestic violence. One director articulated that a positive account of the supervised visit should simply be interpreted to mean that the supervised visit is working as it was intended to work. Many centres are now minimizing the extent to which they document routine interactions between the parent and the child in visits.

Another concern was that the observation note forms previously used by supervised visitation centres contained little information about the domestic violence committed by the batterer, and lacked a format for reporting continued abusive acts. In response to the above concerns, some supervised visitation centres now use reporting forms that highlight the reasons for the referral to the supervised visitation centre, and ensure that any abusive behaviours or tactics are noted. In one demonstration site, the



supervised visitation centre staff worked closely with the courts to develop a court referral form for every family ordered to Supervised Visitation and Exchange services. This form provides the centre with detailed reasons for the referral.

When supervision staff decided to shift to more actively working with the family and protecting the safety of women and children, they were acutely aware that they must not compromise the safety of the adult victim and children in their documentation processes. Supervision centres cannot provide confidentiality to clients in their paperwork, since their records often go to court. Consequently, centre staff are becoming judicious in what they document, giving careful consideration to what they record. They now only document what is relevant to the child's visitation at the centre, and will not, for example, document information that is relevant only to the woman's own story. For example, if a woman were to share her experiences of abuse with a previous partner, or details of her childhood abuse, this would likely not be documented. This information is not relevant to the child's visitation issues with the non-custodial parent, and may lead others to make negative judgments of the mother, since unfortunately repeated victimization tends to be pathologized by many professionals.

#### Providing Comprehensive Domestic Violence Staff Training

The need for monitors to have specialized training in domestic violence was highlighted by the safety audit. As a result, many centres are now providing much more comprehensive training to staff. In general, the audit concluded that monitors lacked knowledge about domestic violence, were not necessarily attuned to women's responses to intimate violence, and lacked awareness of the manipulative and charming interpersonal styles of many abusers. Consequently, the staff may have inadvertently colluded with the batterer against the victim.

If monitors observed behaviours of the batterer and the victim without understanding the context of domestic violence, it was sometimes easy to perceive the victim as "resistant, obstructive, overly emotional, and 'out of control'" (Praxis International, 2004, p. 7), and the batterer to be cooperative and pleasant. Unfortunately, when positive observations about the batterers and negative observations about victims are presented to court, these may create further threats to the safety of women and children. Now in many centres, monitors receive 40 to 60 hours of training, covering issues of domestic violence, how the abusers' tactics shift post separation, identifying how children are drawn into battering, the responses of women who have experienced intimate partner violence, child development, parenting, crisis intervention, lesbian/gay/transgendered issues, diversity, communication, crisis intervention, and substance abuse.

#### Non-Alienating Approaches with Fathers

One of the new directions adopted by many centres is ensuring that non-custodial parents are not alienated. In fact, directors highlighted one of the most important safety features of their centres as their respectful and engaging approach with batterers. Centres are now focusing more on the way in which their staff interact with fathers, ensuring that they take time to build rapport and treat them with respect, helping them to feel part of

the service, and provide referrals and resources if needed. At the same time, staff are careful not collude with the violence.

Staff also assist fathers to understand how their violence affects their children, and to use this empathy as a motivator to change their abusive behaviours. Some centres have received a grant to assist them in working with men who are batterers. Fathering After Violence (FAV) is a national initiative of the U.S. Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPPF) and its partners to enhance the safety of women and children by motivating men to stop their violence and become both better fathers and more supportive parenting partners.

The “Fathering After Violence” Project has teamed with four agencies that are associated with the Federal Safe Havens Grant Program. They have developed guiding principles for the initiative, and tools such as video and written materials that promote non-violent fatherhood. They have also developed fatherhood non-violence educational groups and a mentoring initiative. More information about this project can be found on their website: <http://endabuse.org/programs/display.php3?DocID=197>.

### **The Duluth Minnesota Program**

The research team for this environmental scan interviewed a representative from the Duluth Family Visitation Centre, one of the oldest supervised visitation programs in the United States. Although Duluth was not part of the national audit process, they too had made significant changes to their program that were similar to those made by centres involved in the Safe Haven’s audit. The interviewee from Duluth explained that the changes in their program were characteristic of a national trend amongst supervised visitation programs in the United States to better meet the needs of families affected by domestic violence. His words provide an excellent synopsis of the audit results:

*We try to stay away from neutrality. We’re here for the children; we’re here for victims of domestic abuse. We take a fair, respectful stance, we don’t judge, but ultimately we act on the best interests of the victim. The atmosphere of respect and listening is really important. We see everyone who comes through the door as “parents”, not “abusers”, not “victims”. The key difference is the fact that we do step in, we are not just here to be eyes and ears. We’re pretty interactive as far as our visits go. We try to model behaviours; we’re not here just as reporters to the court. We’re really trying to teach skills. Dad’s going to have to leave here at some point with some skills to parent. We have to realize in everybody’s eyes, we’re a temporary solution. There’s a responsibility while they’re here to promote growth. (Duluth Family Visitation Centre)*

In summary, the audit process of supervised visitation and exchange centres in the U.S. suggests making significant changes in how centres provide services to families affected by domestic violence. Centres are changing their focus from neutrality to considering the safety of each family member. They are more actively engaging each member of the family to promote safety over the long term and are making significant changes to their documentation practices. They are increasing the level of training for staff (especially with respect to domestic violence), and are working with men in respectful and non-alienating ways.

## Chapter Six: Debates and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the environmental scan by documenting the major themes with respect to the supervised visitation and access programs included in the environmental scan, presenting issues and debates in matters concerning program structure, staffing, and accessibility. The chapter concludes by presenting the recommendations of the research team for setting up supervised visitation and exchange services in the province of Alberta.

### Program Structural Issues

*What is the role of supervised visitation/monitored exchange programs? Observation, assessment, facilitated interaction, or agents of family change?*

There are conflicting views about what the role of the visitation centre should be with respect to families impacted by domestic violence. On one hand, is a view that programs should primarily provide an opportunity for access between non-custodial parents and their children. On the other hand, is a view that supervised visitation centres should be established as part of the domestic violence service continuum, playing an important role in promoting the safety of the adult victim and children affected by domestic violence.

There are also differing perceptions about the roles of supervised visitation centres vis à vis the court and child protection systems. Some researchers argue that supervised visitation programs present opportunities for caseworkers to gain information about parenting abilities and a parent's bonding with the child, and that such information can be used to guide decision-making regarding child placement (Ansary & Perkins, 2001). Ansary and Perkins (2001) state that "the observation reports from supervised family visitation centres are underused and could provide much-needed background information for child protection workers and the courts in deciding family outcomes on a case-by-case basis" (p. 4).

Generally speaking, however, most centre representatives interviewed by the research team did not see their role as conducting formal assessments for the courts or child protection. Nevertheless, many centres do provide court reports and their observation notes may be subpoenaed. In fact, some directors of visitation centres noted that courts have come to depend on these observation notes to assist them with custody and access decisions.

In cases of domestic violence, this use of observation notes by the courts for influencing custody and access decisions is controversial. While most practitioners attempt to ensure that their notes are neutral and objective, others argue that even "objective" notes may create a safety risk for adult victims and children. Their concern is that, because batterers often present well in the controlled setting of a visitation facility, observation notes seldom contain anything noteworthy, and so courts may award unsupervised visitation prematurely to men who continued to act violently or abusively to their ex-spouses and children outside the two hour supervised visit.

Furthermore, adult victims may be afraid or angry about attending the supervised visitation facility with the perpetrator of violence, so they may not present in a favourable

light. Without the context of domestic violence, some argue that “objective” notes have the potential to be misused – with grave consequences to adult victims and their children.

Views differ on how actively supervisors should work with the family. Some argue that visitation centre staff should focus solely on observing and monitoring of the visits and intervening only if they see the child’s emotional or physical safety to be at risk. With this approach, facilitated interaction with family members is generally only considered if parents have never before met their children and supervisors assist in suggesting activities such as games to help break the ice. Parents are generally only cued and assisted with parenting strategies if there is a perceived risk to the child.

Others, however, question how this “hands-off” approach assists a family to grow and make positive changes, so instead they actively engage each member of the family with a view to increasing their safety over the long term. Actions by staff include making considerable efforts to develop rapport and trust with each family member, actively connecting them resources and treatment programs, modelling parenting behaviours, and intervening to promote respectful relationships within the family.

#### *Neutrality and Program Affiliation*

Related to the above debate about the role of the visitation centre is the debate about whether programs should operate with a foundational principle of “neutrality”. Programs that strive for neutrality see themselves as a “neutral” third party whose role it is to promote safe access between the child and the non-custodial parent, without getting involved with relationship issues between the parents. On the other hand, some programs have recently moved away from neutrality as a core value, and have taken the stance that they are not neutral to violence. Keeping the context of domestic violence in the forefront, the core value of these programs is to promote the safety of the adult victim and the child over the long term.

For the most part, supervised visitation and exchange programs in Canada appear to be operating with “neutrality” as a foundational principle. As such, the research team frequently heard comments that programs ought not be affiliated with women’s shelters, Children’s Services, men’s support groups, or the Courts, since the facility is perceived to be inherently biased. On the other hand, those who argue that they are not neutral to violence suggest that the supervised visitation facility should be seen as part of the continuum of domestic violence services, and the foundational principle in seeking a location should be whether or not it can provide adequate safety.

#### *Offering a Continuum of Services:*

One issue with service provision is whether it should be provided as a “standardized singular format” or provided as a continuum of service provision. Many supervised visitation/monitored exchange programs offer one type of service such as block group supervision times from 12:00-2:00 or 2:00-4:00. Clients need to adapt to this schedule regardless of any unique presenting situation or an evolution of client progress over time. The other possibility is to look at supervised visitation services as a continuum of services that a client can progress through: i.e. individual onsite supervision; structured onsite group supervision; “loose” onsite supervision; offsite supervision; monitored exchange; and the use of a community member to assist in the exchange. A number of

program representatives noted that if, after one year, non-custodial parents and children are still required to attend structured group onsite visits, the visits begin to wane, with neither children nor parent wanting to continue.

Some program representatives were concerned about the courts not differentiating between supervised visitation and monitored access, resulting in some families being “stuck” with court ordered supervised visits when cases should be taken back for review with a view to monitored access instead. This allows families to experience progress.

The issue of client progress is controversial, however, in that some parents with a history of domestic violence may appear to be doing well in the two hour visits, yet may still be stalking their ex-partner or engaging in abusive behaviour off the grounds of the supervised access facility. Granting unsupervised visitation or exchanges to perpetrators who continue to abuse poses significant safety risks to adult victims and their children. Furthermore, some would also argue that if the role of the visitation centre staff is primarily to observe, remain neutral, and not to engage with the family members, then it is not clear how a parent would progress from supervised visitation to unsupervised visitation. Some researchers argue that in addition to supervised visitation, batterers need to be ordered by the courts to concurrent treatment programs, such as batterer intervention programs and alcohol/ drug treatment programs. They also suggest that the role of the supervised visitation staff ought to be one of more actively engaging with each family member, developing rapport with each member, checking in with the family members on a regular basis, and connecting them with needed resources.

#### *The Exclusion of Child Welfare Clients from Supervised Visitation Facilities:*

Many programs (i.e. all of Ontario) exclude any clients that have child welfare status. The research team noted that many of the safe visitation and exchange programs are funded by Justice Departments rather than Children’s Services, and wondered if the differing mandates of these two departments led to these policies. Since most provincial child welfare acts recognize domestic violence as a form of emotional abuse, it stands to reason that a high percentage of domestic violence families will have child welfare status. There appears to be a perception that if child welfare is involved with a family, the family is intact and supervised visitation would be unnecessary, however this is often not the case. In fact, child welfare is involved with many families in which the parents are not able/willing to live together and domestic violence is a factor.

Since there is a strong overlap of clientele, the question arises whether supervised access centres could also serve clients with child welfare status, particularly if their centres are underutilized. Certainly some centres were struggling to keep up with the demand from the justice system, so they would likely not be able to expand their mandate. However, if centres do have space – particularly in rural areas – perhaps this is a possibility.

#### **Staff Issues**

##### *Volunteers versus Paid Staff as Supervisors*

The differing perceptions of the roles of supervised visitation centres have implications for the training and education required of supervisors. If the supervisors are to engage and intervene in families, the educational and knowledge requirements would

be higher than if the supervisor is expected to primarily assume an observational role. In the latter, minimally educated staff or volunteers could assume the role of a supervisor. On the other hand, if supervisors are to intervene with families and be attuned to the complexities inherent in families affected by domestic violence, they need post-secondary education and knowledge of domestic violence. They need to develop rapport, develop trust, provide resources and referrals to meet the individual needs of family members, and they need to be highly attuned to the safety needs of the adult victim and children. In this latter perspective, it is argued that the role of the monitor is complex and challenging, and, therefore, requires a thorough knowledge of domestic violence in addition to knowledge in areas such as parenting, child development, substance abuse, diversity issues, and communication.

The research team heard from rural programs, in particular, that they face considerable challenges with recruiting and retaining reliable volunteers or staff without personal unresolved emotional issues (college or university towns/cities have greater success if they have access to students)

### **Accessibility Issues**

#### *Providing Safe Visitation and Monitored Exchange in Rural Areas*

One of the issues encountered by the research team was, given that fee for service charges to clients augment minimal funding, how do programs in rural areas survive when they don't have a large population from which to pull clientele? How do the numbers justify a program's existence for a few? We interviewed several representatives from programs in more rural settings that had been closed due to underutilization. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions to this problem. One interviewee identified that the issue of anonymity was a factor in underutilization. For example, if the local day care is used for safe visitation, and everyone in the community knows that the day care is open on Sundays for abusive parents to have visitation with their children, families do not want to be seen accessing the day care on a Sunday.

The research team heard about a creative alternative utilized by a program in the United States, where a motor home travels throughout the countryside providing a facility for supervised visitation and exchange. A flag is raised to let custodial and non-custodial parents know when they are permitted to return. Although anonymity could be perceived as an issue of concern, apparently the vehicle parks in different locations such as store parking lots, and has been relatively unobtrusive.

#### *Multiculturalism and Supervised Visitation /Monitored Exchange:*

Many of the program representatives interviewed for the environmental scan did not face the issue of providing services to clientele who did not speak English. However, there was recognition among programs that, when the need arose, serving diverse clientele poses inherent challenges to supervised visitation and exchange centres. Some programs only offer translation/interpreter services if the language of the child is not English. Others asserted, though, that if interpreters are used, an interpreter may violate a client's confidentiality if he or she is from the same ethnic community. Furthermore, the visit supervisors are unable to monitor conversations if they do not understand the language, so there are opportunities for the child's well-being to be endangered. Many

programs simply will not take the risk, so if the clients do not have a basic command of English, they are not accepted into the program. An interviewee from the Safe Havens project in the United States also identified challenges in serving diverse clientele, especially since their centres were located in a highly multicultural area of the U.S. The project director commented that, while the ideal solution is to find staff from diverse backgrounds with sufficient skills and training, she was finding this challenging.

*Sexual offenders and safe visitation/monitored exchange programs:*

This appears to be an issue that warrants further research and examination. Currently most group programs (and many individual) will not accept parents with either sexual abuse allegations or convictions. The question of what types of protocols need to be in place if programs wish to consider providing visitation services to sexual offenders is beyond the scope of the current research project, however worth addressing in order to adequately protect children. One possible resource is from the Institute for Family Violence Studies in the Florida State University School of Social Work, “Child Sexual Abuse Referrals: A Curriculum for Supervised Visitation Providers”.

### **Environmental Scan Recommendations**

This section contains a number of recommendations for consideration by Alberta’s Ministry for Children’s Services with respect to whether and in what format supervised visitation centres could be developed in the province. These recommendations were developed in response to the literature review, the environmental scan of Canadian supervised visitation programs, the Alberta environmental scan of visitation centres primarily with respect to child welfare referrals, and the new directions proposed by the audit of programs in the United States.

**Recommendation 1:** That the government of Alberta develop and fund supervised visitation/monitored exchange centres that support non-custodial parents’ access to children in a setting that addresses the safety needs of families impacted by domestic violence.

**Recommendation 2:** An on-site model (visits are offered in a centre/building) best addresses the safety concerns of the victims of domestic violence. An on-site centre also accommodates the needs of children who may have been abused by the parent. Only a model that allows on-site visits can offer the security that is unanimously agreed is essential in these circumstances. No other programs reviewed for the environmental scan had developed reasonable alternatives to on-site services that would ensure needed safety. Such safety features as having separate exits/entrances, staggered drop off and pick-up times and security cameras acknowledge the potential for injury or lethality that simply cannot be assured with off-site visits in the community.

However, developing a facility that accommodates on-site visits does not imply that this is the only option. Agencies providing supervised visitation could offer a continuum of services through which a client can progress including individual onsite supervision; structured onsite group supervision; “loose” onsite supervision; offsite supervision; monitored exchange; and the use of a community member to assist in the exchange. Such a continuum addresses the unique needs of different families, as well as the changing needs of families as they improve in response to supervised visits.

On-site facilities of any kind are expensive. A supervised visitation and monitored exchange program could be one of the services in a family or child-centred facility. The Quebec models of family houses that offer prevention services more broadly or Thunder Bay's adding the centre to other social services located in a shopping mall, would not only ensure more cost-effective use of the services, but could also improve confidentiality for all family members. Again, strict guidelines with respect to implementing safety features is critical.

It is always more difficult to develop on-site facilities in rural/remote communities, so this recommendation may need to be adapted for those locations. The Canadian centres contacted for the environmental scan were all in cities, although sometimes small cities. We did not locate a rural model that adequately addressed the safety needs for couples where one adult has been seriously abused by the other. What is essential in any variation of an off-site setting is that the safety precautions be both paramount and comprehensive.

**Recommendation 3:** Implement the recommendations from the US audit of services, including: moving beyond neutrality, more actively engaging with families, considering information about on-going domestic violence/threats beyond what is observable in the centre, and being judicious in documentation practices, keeping the context of domestic violence in the forefront of any record keeping. The US has a longer history of offering supervised visitation programs than most Canadian provinces. The demonstration sites are also taking part in a national evaluation of the project, spearheaded by internationally renowned domestic violence researchers, Dan Saunders, Rich Tolman, and Chris Sullivan. Conducting an in-depth investigation of the centres from researchers with long-standing experience working with the abusers and victims of domestic violence was long overdue and the results provide important feedback and suggestions for revisions to the standards previously developed for supervised visitation centres.

**Recommendation 4:** Prior to establishing supervised visitation and exchange programs in the province, ensure that the necessary groundwork has been carried out. Experienced providers in Canada and the United States highlighted the intricacies involved in setting up this kind of program, making comments such as “there often isn't the acknowledgement of the complexity of Safe Visitation programs...on the surface it seems easy, but in fact it is very complex”, and, “be thorough, learn from others, gather lots of information before setting up a program...there is much crucial preparatory work that needs to be done in order to provide this service to people”.

Practical steps that should be taken prior to setting up these services in the province include:

**Consulting with Praxis International and the researchers from universities in Michigan, in order to be able to gain an in-depth understanding of the recommendations of the audit of supervised visitation programs in the United States. A thorough investigation of the findings of the U.S. audit and evaluation was beyond the scope of the present study, however we were impressed by the scale of the U.S. research project and its impact on the work of supervised visitation centres with respect to domestic violence. Alberta can benefit from the significant amount of**



**work that has already been carried out in the U.S., and can promote a model in the province that effectively addresses the safety needs of all members of the family. Consulting with several key contacts in Canada (suggested contacts listed in this report in Table 1 on page ) who have had many years of experience in providing supervised visitation/ exchange services, including Alberta's only program providing supervised visitation / exchange specifically for domestic violence clients - Calgary's Sheriff King Family Support Centre.**

**After consultation with the above, developing provincial standards that include a program mission, philosophy, and principles for supervised visitation/ exchange programs in the province; defining the role of the visitation centre in a community, defining its relationship to the courts and child protection; outlining how the visitation centre fits within the continuum of domestic violence services in the community; guidelines for documentation; and, establishing standards of service delivery.**

**Recommendation 5:** Staff the supervised visitation centre with well-qualified professionals. The complexities of the dynamics in families impacted by both domestic violence and child abuse are commonly acknowledged. In Alberta, professionals are contracted to supervise child abuse visitations. In contrast, while many of the programs contacted for the environmental scan have professional staff, much of the monitoring of visits fall to trained volunteers or minimally trained staff. Surely, children impacted by domestic violence deserve the same consideration as victims of child abuse.

Staff turnover has been a significant problem in supervised visitation/ access facilities across the country. To help alleviate this problem, remuneration of supervisors should reflect the complexities and demands of this important role.

Professional staff, with at least bachelor level and preferably Masters training in professions such as social work and psychology, could be trained to assess the readiness of children/parents to change the nature of the visitations (for example from supervised visits to monitored exchanges) by conducting extra-visit assessments (not using the observations from the visitation sessions). Such staff could refer parents/children to other resources (such as parenting programs, counselling) should these become necessary.

Well-qualified staff with an in-depth understanding of domestic violence should be involved in establishing these visitation centres in the province.

**Recommendation 6:** Open the supervised visitation centres to child protection clients: either to non-custodial parents whose children still reside with a natural parent or to parents whose children have been placed in care. With the inclusion of exposure to domestic violence in Alberta's Child Welfare legislation, many of the families eligible for supervised visitation fit within the child welfare mandate. Not only would this have the advantage in smaller centres of ensuring that the centre has a sufficient client base to remain open, but it provides a suitable venue for parent-child visits when visiting in the community is premature. Consideration could also be given to accommodating supervised visits for extended family including siblings or grandparents.

In the environmental scan, many domestic violence supervised visitation centres refuse to take child welfare referrals. This appears to be based on the premise that the role and safety considerations for supervisors in child abuse visits are different from the role

and safety considerations for supervisors in domestic violence visits. While some of the dynamics may indeed be different, this does not necessary mean that the roles and considerations are incompatible. This premise also tends to be based on the assumption that “typical” child welfare clients using the service would have had their children placed in government care and custody. It does not consider the many parents who have their children living with them, as in the case of a Supervision Order addressing issues of domestic violence under the emotional abuse section of the Child Youth and Family enhancement Act. Due to continued safety concerns regarding the non-custodial parent, supervised visitation may be necessary. The dynamics in such a situation as this may not differ significantly from the dynamics of another family with domestic violence issues that may not have children’s services involvement.

However, professionally trained staff would have the background and skills to adapt to the differential needs of these clients. Furthermore, given the overlap of many child abuse and domestic violence cases, including child welfare referrals could provide safety to the adult victims in a manner that was not previously considered.

**Recommendation 7:** Provide extensive training with respect to the dynamics of domestic violence to any program supervisors, staff and volunteers (if utilized). One possible training resource will be available from Praxis International, one of the organizations in the US involved in the audit of supervised visitation centres. According to one of the project directors interviewed, Praxis International will have training monographs available in the coming months for agencies wishing to set up their own visitation programs. The Michigan report, referenced in this report (Praxis International, 2004), also provides a list of training topics that should be provided to staff working in supervised visitation centres (p. 17).

**Recommendation 8:** Consider associating with other programs that have experience in supervised visitation through such organizations as the “Supervised Visitation Network” or Florida’s Supervised Visitation Institute for Family Violence Studies.

**Recommendation 9:** Establish mechanisms for supervised visitation centres to work closely with the courts and child protection, to ensure the safety needs of adult victims and children are prioritized and documentation practices do not jeopardize their safety. Also, it is recommended that mechanisms be established to link supervised visitation centres with other domestic violence service providers, such as batterer intervention programs, women’s shelters, counseling agencies, child protection workers, community-based outreach follow-up workers, and the courts. For example, it may be important for supervised visitation centres to have advisory boards with representatives from these different service providers. These agencies may also be able to share domestic violence training resources with one another.

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## Appendix One: Glossary of Terms<sup>13</sup>

**Assessment:** The component of the planned change effort in which the mental health practitioner collaborates with the client to obtain information that provides the foundation for developing a plan of intervention (2005, Berg-Weger)

**Child orientation:** Meeting with the child and a staff member of the providing agency before the commencement of the first supervised access or monitored exchange.

**Custodial parent** (also “**visiting parent**”, “**residential parent**”): The biological or adoptive parent, guardian, or state agency or its representatives that has temporary or permanent physical custody of a child.

**Monitored exchange** (also “**access exchange**”, “**supervised exchange**”, “**supervised transfer**” “**safe exchange**” and “**neutral drop-off/pick-up**”): Supervising the one-way transfer of a child between the custodial parent and the non-custodial parent at the start of the parent/child contact or between the non-custodial parent and the custodial parent at the end of the contact. The supervision is typically limited to the exchanges: the remainder of the non-custodial parent/child contact is unsupervised.

**Non-custodial parent** (also “**visiting parent**”, “**non-residential parent**”): A biological parent or other adult who has supervised contact with a child.

**Off-site supervision:** Supervision of parent/child contact that occurs away from a facility that is under the control of the third party who is the provider of the service.

**On-site supervision:** Supervising parent/child contact at a facility that is under the control of the third party who is the provider of the service.

**Supervised visitation** (also “**supervised access**”): Parent/child contact overseen by a third party who is the provider of the service.

- **Direct continuous supervision:** Requires the staff member to *directly hear and understand all words spoken* and to observe all contact between the non-custodial parent and the child.
- **Direct supervision:** Requires the staff member to directly *see all contact* between the non-custodial parent and children but not necessarily to hear all conversations between the parent and child.
- **Group supervision** (also “**multiple-family supervision**”): Supervision of parent/child contact in which more than one family is supervised by one or more visit supervisors.
  - **One –on – one supervision:** Parent/child contact supervised by at least one visit supervisor focused on overseeing that contact.
  - **Intermittent supervision** (also “**loose supervision**”): Parent/child contact in which a parent and child are supervised for part of the time and purposely left

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<sup>13</sup> Adapted from the British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General, RFP, (2004); Supervised Visitation Network: Standards for Supervised Visitation Practice (2006) California Demonstration Project.

unattended by a visit supervisor for certain periods of time. A supervisor is available if problems arise.

- **Supportive supervised visitation** (also “**supervised supportive visitation**”): Contact between a non-custodial parent and one or more children in the presence of a third person, in which the supervisor is actively involved in teaching the parent how to interact with the child and modeling behaviour to foster change in the parent/child relationship
- **Therapeutic supervision:** A trained therapist works with the family to improve or facilitate a safe and healthy parent/child relationship.
- **Visit supervisor** (also “**child access monitor**”, “**observer**”, “**visitation specialist**”): The third party contracted by the provider of the service who supervises, observes and oversees safe parent/child contact during the visit or transfers from one parent to another.

## Appendix Two: Interview Guide

1. Program's Demographics
  - Agency name and program name
  - Location (Address and contact information)
  - Geographical area served
  - Hours of operation
  - Number of clients per year by program (i.e. Supervised visitation or monitored exchange)
  - If supervised visitation: 1) What kinds of parent-child visits take place at your agency (i.e. child welfare and/or domestic violence) and, 2) Do you have any guidelines in place about the length of these visits?
  - Is there a maximum length of involvement for families?
  - Is there a cost to client and what is this? Is it income tested?
  - What is the funding amount the program receives to deliver this service to the identified client population
2. The following questions are with respect to your program:
  - Is the visitation/exchange on-site at the agency and supervised/OR at parent's home (supervised or not?)
  - exchange only
  - Is there documentation/record keeping of visit
  - If a court report is needed, do you provide this, and is there a cost to the client?
  - Is there an educational component – parent training, child development training, anger management? Are these mandatory or optional?
  - What happens when clients do not show up for visits – Are there criteria/processes with respect to this?
  - Are translation services/interpreters available?
3. How is your program funded?
  - private
  - FCSS
  - Contract
  - Solicitor General
  - Child Welfare
  - Other (please list)
4. How is your program staffed?
  - Numbers of staff (paid/volunteer?)
  - What is the ratio of staff to clients served in a year
  - What are the qualifications of your staff
  - Do you provide initial and/or ongoing training for your staff?
  - Do you have a training package or materials that we might have?
5. What is the referral process?
  - self-referral
  - Parole/Probation
  - Court of Queen's Bench

- High Risk, court order for safe/supervised visitation
  - Lower Risk, court order for safe/supervised visitation
  - Low - High Risk, no court order
  - Child Welfare
6. Do you screen families? If yes, what are your exclusion criteria?
  7. Do you have a set of standards in place for monitoring service delivery in your program? If yes, what do these standards cover? (could we have a copy?)
  8. What is the intake process?
    - Is a criminal record check required
    - Is a contractual agreement signed with the client (if so, can we get a copy?)
  9. Does your program have any of the following security considerations?
    - Two exits?
    - Do parents arrive and leave at different times?
    - Are children picked up by program staff and transported to visit?
    - Are gifts, food, note exchanges allowed?
    - Do you have any other rules or policies to ensure safety? If so, what are they?
    - Under what circumstances would a visit be terminated?
    - Can you describe the physical premises where the supervised access is taking place if offered. What set up works or doesn't work?
  10. In your opinion, what works best about your program model?
  11. Did you model your program after any other one in particular? If so, which one and what did you like best about it?
  12. Have you had any recurring problems with which your program had to deal?
  13. Did you have any unanticipated events and/or challenges in setting up/running your program? If yes, what were these and how did you address them?
  14. Has your program made any significant changes over the years? If so, what were these?
  15. Has your program been evaluated? If yes, what were the findings? Would it be possible to get a copy of the report?
  16. What is the most important piece of advice you would give to agencies considering developing their own safe visitation and exchange programs?
  17. What is the most important aspect to avoid when developing a safe visitation program?

## **Appendix Three: Canada's Supervised Visitation Centres**

## **BRITISH COLUMBIA**

### **GREATER VANCOUVER**

Elizabeth Fry/ Attorney General  
Supervised Access Program  
4th Floor-402 East Columbia Street  
New Westminster, BC, V3L 3X1  
Tel. (604) 520-1166; Fax (604) 520-1166

### **VANCOUVER**

Elizabeth Fry/Simon Fraser Visitation Program  
1616 West 7<sup>th</sup> Ave. Vancouver, BC, V6J 1S5  
Tel. 1 (888) 879-9593; Fax (604) 520-1166  
Email: [info@elizabethfry.com](mailto:info@elizabethfry.com)

### **VANCOUVER**

Ms. Jane Grafton  
Unit 72, 5811 – 122 St.  
Surrey, B.C., V3X 3N5  
Tel. (604) 521-0662  
Email: [mjgrafton@aol.com](mailto:mjgrafton@aol.com)

### **VANCOUVER**

Hollyburn Family Services  
Vancouver, B.C.  
Tel. (604) 721-7739  
Email: [jstoffer@shaw.ca](mailto:jstoffer@shaw.ca)

### **NANAIMO**

Haven: A Society for Women and Children  
Wentworth Street –  
P.O. Box 311, Nanaimo, BC, V9R 5L3  
Tel. (250) 756-2452 ext 365  
Email: [haven@havensociety.com](mailto:haven@havensociety.com)  
Website:  
[www.havensociety.com/programs.html](http://www.havensociety.com/programs.html)

## **ALBERTA**

### **CALGARY**

YWCA Calgary, Sheriff King Home  
Community Safe Visitation  
2003 – 16 St. S.E., Calgary, T2G 5B7  
Tel.: (403) 206-2767  
Website: [www.ywcaofcalgary.com](http://www.ywcaofcalgary.com)

### **CALGARY**

Men's Educational Support Association  
Box 4691, Stn "C"  
Calgary, Alberta, T2T 5P1  
Phone: (403) 228-6366  
Email: [info@mesacanada.com](mailto:info@mesacanada.com)  
Website: [www.mesacanada.com](http://www.mesacanada.com)

## **SASKATCHEWAN**

### **MOOSE JAW**

Family Support Program  
VON Prairie in Moose Jaw  
500- 1 st Ave NW Unit B60, Coop  
Lower Level  
Moose Jaw, SK, S6H 8C1  
Tel. (306) 693-4221, Email:  
[von.mj@shaw.ca](mailto:von.mj@shaw.ca)  
Website: [www.von.ca](http://www.von.ca)

### **SASKATOON**

Family Justice Services, Social Work Unit  
Saskatoon and Area  
701, 224 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. South  
Saskatoon, SK, S7K 2H6  
Tel. (306) 933-6103  
Website: [www.saskjustice.gov.sk.ca](http://www.saskjustice.gov.sk.ca)

### **REGINA**

Family Justice Services, Social Work Unit, Supervised Access/Exchange Program  
Room 323, 3085 Albert St. Regina, S4S 0B1  
Tel. (306) 787-9416  
Website: [www.saskjustice.gov.sk.ca](http://www.saskjustice.gov.sk.ca)

### **REGINA**



Aboriginal Family Services, Family Learning Program, Family Support Program  
2910, 5 Avenue, Regina SK  
Tel. (306) 525-4161

### **PRINCE ALBERT**

Native Coordinating Council, Children's Haven  
3 Elmwood Ave Prince Albert SK, S6V 7Z1  
Tel. (306) 922-4454  
Website: [www.childrenshaven.ca](http://www.childrenshaven.ca)

### **MANITOBA**

#### **WINNIPEG**

Winnipeg Children's Access Agency  
170 Scott St. Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 0L3  
Tel. (204) 284-4170  
Email: [wcaa@shaw.ca](mailto:wcaa@shaw.ca)

#### **BRANDON**

Brandon Access Exchange Service  
Brandon Friendship Centre  
836 Lorne Avenue Brandon, Manitoba, R7A 0T8  
Tel. (204) 727-1407  
Email: [bfcaccess@mts.net](mailto:bfcaccess@mts.net)  
Website: [www.mac.mb.ca](http://www.mac.mb.ca)

### **ONTARIO**

#### **ALGOMA DISTRICT**

(Sault Ste. Marie, Blind River)  
Supervised Access Program  
205 McNabb Street, Sault Ste. Marie, ON  
P6B 1Y3  
Tel. (705) 945-5054 ext.2323,  
Fax (705) 942-9273

#### **BRANT COUNTY** (Brantford)

Supervised Access Centre  
21 Charlotte Street, Brantford, ON, N3T 2W3  
Tel. (519) 751-0466, Fax (519) 751-3365  
Website:  
[www.comdir.bfree.on.ca/bdsupacc/](http://www.comdir.bfree.on.ca/bdsupacc/)

#### **BRUCE COUNTY** (Walkerton)

Grey-Bruce Supervised Access Program  
P.O. Box 395, 365 14th Street West,  
Owen Sound, ON, N4K 5P7  
Tel: (519) 371-5991 ext. 34  
Fax: (519) 371-6648

#### **COCHRANE** (Timmins, Kapuskasing, Hearst)

Child and Family Services for Timmins & District, 600 Toke Street  
Timmins, ON, P4N 6W1  
Tel. (705)360-2100 ext. 5800  
Fax (705) 360-7222  
Web site: [www.timminschildfamily.org](http://www.timminschildfamily.org)

#### **DUFFERIN COUNTY** (Orangeville)

Dufferin Child and Family Services  
655 Riddell Road  
Orangeville, ON, L1W 4Z5  
Tel. (519) 941-1530 ext. 325  
Fax (519) 941-1525  
Web site: [www.dcafs.on.ca](http://www.dcafs.on.ca)

#### **DURHAM REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY**

(Ajax, Oshawa North, Oshawa South)  
Durham Supervised Access Program  
230 Westney Road South, Ajax, ON, L1S 7J5  
Tel. (905)619-4565 ext. 305, Fax (905)619-4578

#### **ELGIN COUNTY** (St. Thomas)

Elgin County Supervised Access Centre  
16 Mary Street West, St. Thomas, ON, N5P 2S3

Tel. (519) 637-1667, Fax (519) 637-2230

**ESSEX COUNTY** (Windsor)  
Windsor-Essex Supervised Access Program 1453 Prince Road, Windsor, ON, N9C 3Z4  
Tel. (519) 257-5106 ext. 72926  
Fax (519) 257-5216

**FRONTENAC COUNTY**  
(Kingston, Sharbot Lake)  
The Supervised Access Program - Kingston/Napanee  
326 Alfred Street, Kingston, ON, K7L 3S5  
Tel. (613) 542-8533, Fax (613) 542-4094

**GREY COUNTY** (Owen Sound)  
Grey-Bruce Supervised Access Program  
P.O. Box 395, 365 14th Street West  
Owen Sound, ON, N4K 5P7  
Tel. (519) 371-5991 ext. 34, Fax (519) 371-6648

**HALDIMAND-NORFOLK REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY** (Town of Simcoe)  
Haldimand-Norfolk Supervised Access Centre 21 Charlotte Street, Brantford, ON, N3T 2W3  
Tel. (519) 751-0466, Fax (519) 751-3365

**HALIBURTON COUNTY** (Haliburton)  
Kawartha Pine Ridge Supervised Access Centre Tel. (705) 742-3803 ext. 325  
Fax (705) 743-4144  
Web site: [www.kinark.on.ca](http://www.kinark.on.ca)

**HALTON REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY**  
(Burlington, Milton)

Burlington Counselling and Family Services Family Visiting Program  
460 Brant Street, Suite 200  
Burlington, ON, L7R 4B6  
Tel. (905) 637-5256, Fax: (905) 637-8221

**HAMILTON**  
(Hamilton Downtown, Hamilton Chedoke)  
The Supervised Access Centre for the City of Hamilton,  
75 MacNab Street S., Hamilton, ON, L8P 3C1  
Tel. (905) 522-9922 x129, Fax: (905) 526-6527

**HASTINGS COUNTY** (Belleville, Bancroft)  
Supervised Access Services for Hastings and Prince Edward Counties  
150 Dundas Street East  
Belleville, ON, K8N 1C7  
Tel. (613) 968-7362, Fax (613) 966-4542

**HURON COUNTY** (Clinton)  
Supervised Access Program of Huron  
The Emily Murphy Centre  
67 Barron Street,  
Stratford, ON, N4Z 1G9  
Tel. (519) 482-8766 or 1 (888) 826-8117  
Fax (519) 482-8721

**KENORA (DISTRICT OF)**  
(Kenora, Dryden, Sioux Lookout, Red Lake)  
Patricia Centre for Children and Youth  
P.O. Box 760, 75C Van Horne Avenue  
Dryden, ON, P8N 2B2  
Tel. (807) 223-8550, Fax (807) 223-2791

**KENT COUNTY** (Chatham)  
Essex-Kent Supervised Access Program

62 Emma Street, Chatham, ON, N7L  
1A7  
Tel. (519) 436-2516, Fax (519) 436-  
2596

**LAMBTON COUNTY** (Sarnia)  
Supervised Access Service – Lambton  
161 Kendall Street,  
Point Edward, ON, N7V 4G6  
Tel. (519) 344-8570, Fax (519) 344-  
8026

**LANARK COUNTY** (Smith Falls)  
The Rose Garden Family Support Centre  
P.O. Box 430, 333 California Avenue,  
Unit #18 Brockville, ON, K6V 5V6  
Tel. (613) 345-6007 or 1 (877) 417-6007  
Fax (613) 345-6560

**LEEDS AND GRENVILLE UNITED  
COUNTIES** (Brockville)  
The Rose Garden Family Support Centre  
P.O. Box 430, 333 California Avenue,  
Unit #18 Brockville, ON, K6V 5V6  
Tel. (613) 345-6007 or 1 (877) 417-6007  
Fax (613) 345-6560

**LENNOX AND ADDINGTON  
COUNTY** (Napanee)  
The Supervised Access Program -  
Kingston/Napanee,  
326 Alfred Street  
Kingston, ON, K7L 3S5  
Tel. (613) 542-8533, Fax (613) 542-  
4094

**MANITOULIN** (Gore Bay, Little  
Current, Mindemoya, Wikweminkong)  
Manitoulin Supervised Access Centre  
Box 152 - 6062 King Street  
Mindemoya, ON, P0P 1S0  
Tel. (705) 377-6080, Fax (705) 377-  
6081

**MIDDLESEX COUNTY** (London)  
Supervised Access Program

1064 Colborne Street  
London, ON, N6A 4B3  
Tel. (519) 434-6848 ext. 232  
Fax (519) 434-6851  
Web site: [www.merrymount.on.ca](http://www.merrymount.on.ca)

**MUSKOKA DISTRICT  
MUNICIPALITY**  
(Bracebridge)  
Simcoe/Muskoka Supervised Access  
Centre  
P.O. Box 338,  
Midland, ON, L4R 4L1  
Tel. (705) 526-1095, Fax (705) 526-  
1360

**NIAGARA REGIONAL  
MUNICIPALITY**  
(Niagara North: St. Catharines, Niagara  
South: Welland)  
Supervised Visitation and Exchange  
Niagara  
1604 Merrittville Highway, R.R. #2  
Welland, ON, L3B 5N5  
Tel. (905)384-9551 ext. 258, Fax  
(905)384-9144  
Website: <http://www.ncys.ca>

**NIPISSING DISTRICT**  
(North Bay, Mattawa, Sturgeon Falls)  
Nipissing Supervised Access Centre  
P.O. Box 1407, 243 Aubrey Street  
North Bay, ON, P1B 8K6  
Tel. (705) 472-0678, Fax (705) 472-  
6236

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY**  
(Cobourg)  
Kawartha Pine Ridge Supervised Access  
Centre 380 Armour Road, Suite 275  
Peterborough, ON, K9H 7L7  
Tel. (705)742-3803 ext.325, Fax (705)  
743-4144  
Web site: [www.kinark.on.ca](http://www.kinark.on.ca)

**OTTAWA-CARLETON REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY** (Ottawa)

Child/Parent Supervised Access Program  
312 Parkdale Avenue, Ottawa, ON, K1Y 4X5  
Tel. (613)725-3601 ext. 175, Fax (613)725-5651

**OXFORD COUNTY** (Woodstock)

Oxford County Supervised Access Centre  
24 Light Street, Woodstock, ON, N4S 6G8  
Tel. (519) 533-1379, Fax (519) 533-1794

**PARRY SOUND** (Parry Sound, South River)

Supervised Access Program  
District of Parry Sound Social Services Administration Board  
76 Church Street, Parry Sound, ON, P2A 1Z1  
Tel: (705) 746-8517, Fax (705) 746-4712

**PEEL REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY**

(Brampton, Mississauga)  
Peel Region Supervised Access Centre  
c/o York Region, Neighbourhood Services Inc. 17705 Leslie Street, Suite 202

Newmarket, ON, L3Y 3E3  
Tel. (905)895-0809 ext. 24 or 1  
(866)243-9925 ext. 24, Fax (905) 953-8241

**PERTH COUNTY** (Stratford, Listowel)

Supervised Access Program of Perth  
The Emily Murphy Centre  
67 Barron Street, Stratford, ON, N4Z 1G9  
Tel (519) 272-9706 or 1 (888) 826-8117  
Fax (519) 272-2900

**PETERBOROUGH COUNTY**

(Peterborough)  
Kawartha Pine Ridge Supervised Access Centre 380 Armour Road, Suite 275  
Peterborough, ON, K9H 7L7  
Tel (705) 742-3803 ext 325, Fax (705) 743-4144  
Web site: [www.kinark.on.ca](http://www.kinark.on.ca)

**PRESCOTT AND RUSSELL UNITED COUNTIES** (Hawkesbury)

Centre York Centre, 26 Montreal Road  
2nd Floor, Suite 200,  
Cornwall, ON, K6H 1B1  
Tel (613) 933-1253, Fax (613) 933-3405

**PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY**

(Picton)  
Supervised Access Services for Hastings and Prince Edward Counties  
150 Dundas Street East  
Belleville, ON, K8N 1C7  
Tel. (613) 968-7362, Fax (613) 966-4542

**RAINY RIVER DISTRICT**

(Fort Frances, Emo, Atikokan)  
Supervised Access Program  
240 First Street East, Suite 200  
Fort Frances, ON, P9A 1K5  
Tel. (807) 274-0381, Fax (807) 274-6646

**RENFREW COUNTY**

(Pembroke, Renfrew, Killaloe, Petawawa)  
Family and Children's Services of the County of Renfrew, 77 Mary Street, Suite 100  
Pembroke, ON, K8A 5V4  
Tel. (613) 735-1093, Fax (613) 735-6641

**SIMCOE COUNTY** (Barrie, Midland)

Simcoe/Muskoka Supervised Access Centre

P.O. Box 338,  
Midland, ON, L4R 4L1  
Tel. (705) 526-1095, Fax (705) 526-1360

**STORMONT, DUNDAS AND  
GLENGARRY UNITED COUNTIES**

(Cornwall)  
Centre York Centre,  
26 Montreal Road, 2nd Floor, Suite 200  
Cornwall, ON, K6H 1B1  
Tel. (613) 933-1253, Fax (613) 933-3405

**SUDBURY DISTRICT/ SUDBURY  
REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY**

(Sudbury)  
Supervised Access Centre  
176 Larch Street,  
Sudbury, ON, P3E 1C5  
Tel. (705) 675-2003 ext. 47, Fax  
(705)671-9441

**THUNDER BAY DISTRICT** (Thunder Bay)

Lakehead Regional Family Centre  
283 Lisgar Street,  
Thunder Bay, ON, P7B 6G6  
Tel. (807) 343-5027, Fax (807) 345-0444 Website: <http://www.lrfc.ca/>

**TIMISKAMING** (Kirkland Lake,  
Englehart, Haileybury/North Cobalt)  
Timiskaming Child and Family Services

6 Tweedsmuir Road  
Kirkland Lake, ON, P2N 1H9  
Tel. (705) 544-8870 ext. 262 or 1  
(866)229-5437  
Fax (705) 544-7423

**TORONTO METROPOLITAN  
MUNICIPALITY** (Central Toronto,  
Etobicoke, Scarborough, North York)

Access for Parents and Children in  
Ontario  
1300 Yonge Street, Suite 407

Toronto, ON, M4T 1X3  
Tel. (416)304-1221 ext. 105, Fax  
(416)304-0660

**VICTORIA COUNTY** (Lindsay)  
Kawartha Pine Ridge Supervised Access  
Centre 380 Armour Road, Suite 275

Peterborough, ON, K9H 7L7  
Tel. (705)742-3803 ext. 325, Fax  
(705)743-4144  
Web site: [www.kinark.on.ca](http://www.kinark.on.ca)

**WATERLOO REGIONAL  
MUNICIPALITY**

(Kitchener-Waterloo, Cambridge)  
Child and Parent Place, 41 Weber Street  
West  
Kitchener, ON, N2H 3Z1  
Tel. (519)743-1460 ext. 289, Fax  
(519)749-0519

**WELLINGTON COUNTY** (Guelph)

Child and Parent Place, 41 Weber Street  
West Kitchener, ON, N2H 3Z1  
Tel. (519) 743-1460 ext.289, Fax  
(519)749-0519

**YORK REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY**

(Newmarket, Thornhill)  
York Region Supervised Access  
Program  
17705 Leslie Street, Suite 202  
Newmarket, ON, L3Y 3E5  
Tel. (905)895-0809 ext. 25 or  
1 (866)243-9925 ext. 25, Fax (905) 953-8241

**Ministry of the Attorney General**

Judy Newman, Program Coordinator  
700 Bay Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Box 171, Toronto, ON, M5G 1Z6  
Tel. (416) 212-2028, Fax (416) 212-2032  
E-mail: [judy.newman@jus.gov.on.ca](mailto:judy.newman@jus.gov.on.ca)

## QUÉBEC

### BAS ST-LAURENT – AREA 01

Entraide Le Rameau, 364, rue Bernier  
Rimouski, Qc, G5L 6E7  
Tél. (418) 725-3434, Fax (418) 721-2030  
Email: rameau @globetrotter.net

Maison de la famille de Matane  
350, St-Joseph, Matane, Qc, G4W 1N8  
Tél. (418) 562-0918, Fax (418) 562-0917  
Email: maisondelafamilledematane@hotmail.com  
Website: www.mdfmatane.org

### SAGUENAY LAC ST-JEAN - AREA 02

Maison de la famille de Chicoutimi  
Droit de visite ou de sortie, 700, rue Bégin  
Chicoutimi, Qc, J7H 7Y6  
Tél. (418) 698-3057, Fax (418) 698-5386  
Email: [maisondesfamilles@bellnet.ca](mailto:maisondesfamilles@bellnet.ca)

### QUÉBEC – AREA 03

Service familial d'accompagnement supervisé  
1239-A 3e Avenue, Québec, Qc, G1L 2X8  
Tél. (418) 521-2104, Fax (418) 521-5268

Maison de la famille R.E.V  
5905 St-George, Lévis, Qc, G6V 4K9  
Tél. (418) 835-5926, Fax (418) 835-5923  
Email: maisonrev@bellnet.ca

CERF Volant de Portneuf  
139, rue Dupont Est  
Pont-Rouge, Qc, G3H 1M8

Tél. (418) 873-4557, Fax (418) 873-4135

E-mail: cerf\_volant@globetrotter.net  
Note: Address will change May 2006.  
Telephone and email remain the same.

Maison de la famille DVS  
545, 1ère Avenue,  
Limoilou, Qc, G1L 3J6  
Tél. (418) 523-0472; Fax (418) 523-1162  
Email: maisondvs@bellnet.ca  
Maison de la Famille de Charlevoix  
250, rue St-Étienne, bur. 100  
La Malbaie, Qc, G5A 1T2  
Tél. (418) 665-3282, Fax (418) 665-4924  
Email: maisonfa@charlevoix.net

Maison de la famille DAC  
4985 1ère Avenue  
Charlesbourg, Qc, G1H 2T6  
Tél. (418) 623-5705,  
Fax (418) 623-7904  
Email:  
[maison.famille.dac@globetrotter.net](mailto:maison.famille.dac@globetrotter.net)

### MAURICIE – AREA 04

M F bassin de Maskinongé  
75 St-Jacques, Louiseville, Qc, J5V 1C3  
Tél.(819) 228-8888,  
Fax (819) 228-4953  
Email:maisonfamille@cgocable.ca

Maison de la famille Chemin du Roi  
6038, Notre-Dame Ouest  
Trois-Rivières Ouest, Qc, G9A 5A4  
Tél. (819) 693-7665; Fax (819) 693-9460  
Email:  
[maisonfamille.ch.duroi@bellnet.ca](mailto:maisonfamille.ch.duroi@bellnet.ca)

Maison de la famille de Trois-Rivières  
946, St-Paul, 2<sup>e</sup> étage,  
Trois-Rivières, Qc, G9A 1J3

Tél. (819) 691-0387, Fax: (819) 691-0421  
Email: [maison.famille@tr.cgocable.ca](mailto:maison.famille@tr.cgocable.ca)  
Website: [www.maison-famille.org](http://www.maison-famille.org)

### **CANTONS DE L'EST – AREA 05**

La ligue pour l'enfance de l'Estrie -  
Maison Calm, 401-7e Avenue Nord  
Sherbrooke, Qc, J1E 2S1  
Tél. (819) 563-8774, Fax (819) 563-8024  
Email: [ligue.enfance@qcaira.com](mailto:ligue.enfance@qcaira.com)

Maison de la famille du Granit  
3658 rue Montcalm  
Lac Mégantic, Qc, G6B 2H9  
Tél. (819) 583-1824, Fax (819) 583-4093  
Email: [maison\\_famille\\_granit@yahoo.ca](mailto:maison_famille_granit@yahoo.ca)

### **MONTREAL – AREA 06**

Répit Providence  
1- 3579 St-Catherine Est  
Montréal, Qc, H1W 2E6  
Tél. (514) 254-3170, Fax (514) 523-5745  
Email: [repitprovidence@videotron.ca](mailto:repitprovidence@videotron.ca)

REPERE  
10780, rue Laverdure  
Montréal, Qc, H3L 2L9  
Tél. (514) 381-3511, Fax (514) 381-7132  
Email: [reperer@qcaira.com](mailto:reperer@qcaira.com)

Le centre de médiation Consensus  
1857 Boul. Maisonneuve Ouest  
Montréal, Qc, H3H 1J9  
Tél. (514) 932-9612, Fax (514) 937-5548  
Email: [mjgamache@sympatico.ca](mailto:mjgamache@sympatico.ca)

Pères séparés - Petite-Jonction/Little-Jonction

4 - 2150 rue Théodore, Montréal, Qc,  
H1V 3B9  
Tél. (514) 609-9545  
Email: [info@peres-separes.qcca](mailto:info@peres-separes.qcca)

Baltimaeus inc  
228 -3539 Boulevard St-Charles  
Kirkland, Qc, H9H 5B9  
Tél. (514) 953-7432, Fax: (514) 694-4359  
Email: [dfarley@baltimaeus.com](mailto:dfarley@baltimaeus.com)  
Website: [www@baltimaeus.com](http://www@baltimaeus.com)

Famijeunes  
3904, rue Notre-Dame Ouest  
Montréal, Qc, H4C 1R1  
Tél. (514) 931-5115, Fax (514) 931-8228  
Email: [famijeunes@videotron.ca](mailto:famijeunes@videotron.ca)  
Website: [www.famijeunes.org](http://www.famijeunes.org)

Maison de la famille P.B. de Noailles  
4350 de Salaberry,  
Montréal, Qc, H4J 1H3  
Tél. (514) 337-1522,  
Fax (514) 337-1522  
Email: [maifapbn@colba.net](mailto:maifapbn@colba.net)

### **OUTAOUAIS – AREA 07**

Association familles monoparentales et  
recomposée-Outaouais  
85, St-Joseph, Hull, Qc, J8Y 3W6  
Tél. (819) 771-3269,  
Fax (819) 771 3260  
Email: [afmro@ncf.ca](mailto:afmro@ncf.ca)

### **ABITIBI-TÉMISCAMINQUE – AREA 08**

Maison de la famille de Rouyn-Noranda  
380, av. Richard, local 110  
Rouyn-Noranda, Qc, J9X 4L3  
Tél. (819) 764-5243,  
Fax (819) 762-9697



Email:  
maisonfamillern@cablevision.qc.ca

### **COTE NORD - AREA 09**

Service de supervision de droits d'accès  
842, rue Bossé, C.P. 2202  
Baie-Comeau, Qc, G5C 2S9  
Tél. (418) 589-2119, Fax (418) 589-2887  
Email: ssdabaie-  
comeau@globetrotter.net

### **CHAUDIÈRE-APPALACHES - AREA 12**

Maison de secours La Frontière  
201 Rue St-Louis, Montmagny, Qc,  
G5V 1N6  
Tél. (418) 248-7133, Fax (418) 248-7133  
Maison de la famille de Lotbinière  
81 rue Rousseau, St-Apollinaire, Qc,  
G0F 2E0  
Tél. (418) 881-3486, Fax (418) 871-3859  
Email:  
[maisonfamillelotbiniere@globetrotter.net](mailto:maisonfamillelotbiniere@globetrotter.net)

Maison de la famille R.E.V  
2- 5905 St-Georges, Lévis, Qc, G6V  
4K9  
Tél. (418) 835-5926, Fax (418) 835-5923  
Email: maisonrev@bellnet.ca

Maison de la famille Beauce-Etchemins  
12110, 1ère Avenue, St-Georges, Qc,  
G5Y 2E1  
Tél.(418) 228-9192, Fax (418) 228-9196  
Email: mdelafe@globetrotter.net

### **LAVAL - AREA 13**

S.O.S Jeunesse

1502 chemin d'Oka,  
Deux-Montagnes, Qc, J7R 1M8  
Tél. (450) 473-5014  
Email: s.o.s.jeunesse@homail.com

### **LAURENTIDES – AREA 15**

Centre de la famille des Hautes-  
Laurentides  
362, rue Salaberry, Mont-Laurier, Qc,  
J9L 1N7  
Tél. (819) 623-7215, Fax (819) 623-9718  
Email: ctre.famille@ireseau.com

### **MONTEREGIE – AREA 16**

Le Petit Pont, 645 Ste Marie  
Saint-Hyacinthe, Qc, J2S 4R8  
Tél. (450) 773-2225,  
Fax (450) 773-8742  
Email: [petitpont@gsig-net.qc.ca](mailto:petitpont@gsig-net.qc.ca)

Maison familiale de Valleyfield  
195 rue Salaberry, Valleyfield, Qc, J6T  
2J1  
Tél. (450) 373-9116, Fax: (450) 373-9116  
Email: [maison.familiale@rocler.qc.ca](mailto:maison.familiale@rocler.qc.ca)

Le Parenfant de la région de Brome-  
Missisquoi  
224 rue Sud., Cowansville, Qc, J2K 2X4  
Tél. (450) 263-5000, Fax (450)263-5000  
Email: parenfantb@yahoo.ca

### **CENTRE DU QUEBEC – AREA 17**

Maison de la famille Drummond inc  
152 rue St-Damase,  
Drummondville, Qc, J2B 6G5  
Tél. (819) 478-9307, Fax (819) 478-0756  
Email: [maisonfamille@drummond.net](mailto:maisonfamille@drummond.net)



## **NOVA SCOTIA**

### **SYDNEY, CAPE BRETON**

Supervised Access and Exchange  
Program

Cape Breton YMCA, 106 Reserve Street  
Glace Bay, NS, B1A 4W5  
Tel. (902) 849-5500

### **HALIFAX**

Supervised Access Service, Veith House  
3115 Veith Street, Halifax NS, B3K 3G9  
Tel. (902) 453-4320

Email: [veithhouse@hfx.eastlink.ca](mailto:veithhouse@hfx.eastlink.ca)

Website: [www.veithhouse.ns.ca](http://www.veithhouse.ns.ca)

### **HALIFAX**

FAMILY SOS, 337 - 7071 Bayers Road,  
Bayers Road Shopping Centre  
Halifax, NS, B3L 2C2  
Tel. (902) 455-5515, Fax (902) 455-  
7190

## **NEWFOUNDLAND**

### **ST. JOHN'S**

Supervised Access Service of the  
Unified Family Court

21 Kingsbridge Rd., St. John's NL, A1C  
3K4

Tel. (709) 729-2347

## **Appendix Four Alberta's Supervised Visitation Programs**

**CALGARY**

YWCA, Sheriff King Home  
Community Safe Visitation  
2003 – 16 St. S.E.  
Calgary, T2G 5B7  
Phone: (403)-206-2767  
Website: [www.ywcaofcalgary.com](http://www.ywcaofcalgary.com)

**CALGARY**

Men's Educational and Support  
Association (MESA)  
Box 4691, Stn "C", Calgary, T2T 5P1  
Phone: (403) 228-6366  
Email: [info@mesacanada.com](mailto:info@mesacanada.com)

**CALGARY**

Spectrum Youth and Family Services  
Association  
8614 – 46 Avenue N.W.  
Calgary, T3B 1Y7  
Phone: (403) 247-5003, Ext 231  
Fax: (403) 286-1163  
Email: [info@spectrum-yfsa.org](mailto:info@spectrum-yfsa.org)

**CALGARY**

Calgary Home Support Services  
500-1400 1 Street SW  
Calgary, T2R 0V8  
Phone: (403) 232-8770  
Website: <http://aetashealth.com/>

**CALGARY**

Four Directions Foster Parent  
Association  
4869 Hubalta Road SE  
Calgary, T2G 2E6  
Phone: (403) 272-6602

**CALGARY**

Worth Resolving

**CALGARY**

Town and Country

**MEDICINE HAT**

Saamis Children's Centre

87 Cuyler Rd. S.E.  
Medicine Hat, T1B 1V4  
Phone: (403) 529-3153

**BROOKS**

SPEC  
327 3 St. W  
Brooks  
Phone: (403) 362-5056

**LETHBRIDGE**

Family Ties  
#206, 909 3 Ave. North  
Lethbridge, T1H 0H5  
Phone: (403) 320-8888  
Email: [zora@familyties.ca](mailto:zora@familyties.ca)  
Website: [www.familyties.ca](http://www.familyties.ca)

**LETHBRIDGE**

Woods Homes  
312—Third Street South.  
Lethbridge, T1J 1Y9  
Email: [askus@woodshomes.ca](mailto:askus@woodshomes.ca)

**LETHBRIDGE**

Opokaa'sin  
Suite 404 – 3 Ave. N  
Lethbridge, T1H 0H5  
(403) 380-2569  
Fax: (403) 327-6775  
Website: [www.opokaasin.org/](http://www.opokaasin.org/)

**RED DEER**

McMan  
5028 49 St.  
Innisfail, T4G 1M1  
Email: [centraladmin@mcman.ca](mailto:centraladmin@mcman.ca)  
Website: [www.mcma.ca](http://www.mcma.ca)

**WETASKAWIN**

Big Brothers and Sisters of Wetaskawin  
5109 51 St.  
Wetaskawin, T9A 2A5  
Email: [kbwyc@telus.net](mailto:kbwyc@telus.net)  
Phone: (780) 352-4643

E-mail: [bwilliamson@wjsgroup.com](mailto:bwilliamson@wjsgroup.com)

**EDMONTON**

Ben Calf Robe Agency  
12046 – 77 St.  
Edmonton, T5B 2G7  
Phone: (780) 477-6648

**EDMONTON**

Changes

**EDMONTON**

The Family Centre

**EDMONTON**

Alta Care Resources  
15355 117 Ave  
Edmonton, T5M 3X4

**EDMONTON/ FORT  
SASKATCHEWAN/MORINVILLE**

Creating Solution,  
9690 – 182 Street, Edmonton  
Phone: (780) 414-0609  
Fax: (780) 414-0610  
Email: [csi@interbaum.com](mailto:csi@interbaum.com)  
Website: [www.creating-solutions.com/](http://www.creating-solutions.com/)

**BONNYVILLE**

Catholic Family Services  
Phone: (780) 826-3935

**GRANDE PRAIRIE**

PACE  
#201 10118-101 Avenue  
Grande Prairie, T8V 0Y2  
Phone (780) 539-6692  
Fax (780) 538-0960,  
Email [pacegp@telus.net](mailto:pacegp@telus.net)

**HIGH LEVEL**

WJS Family Support Agency  
High Level: (780) 926-3216  
406, 9728 Montrose Avenue  
Grande Prairie, T8V 5B6  
Phone: (780) 532-5246  
Phone: (780) 926-3216  
Fax: (780) 532-5361