

SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE FIELD

Each day, thousands of men and women work to improve the experience of victims of crime in the criminal justice system. This is done through changing legislation, creating innovative programs, and providing services. The following stories have been selected to represent some of the programs that are particularly effective. These stories have been collected from government officials, victim service providers, non-governmental organizations and individuals who work to inspire change and to develop and improve victim assistance programs.

These stories can be used to:

- Offer information about some of the different types of services that exist;
- Lead to ideas for projects or programs that can be developed;
- Recognize the contributions of victim services workers – both volunteer and professional – in supporting and assisting victims;
- Support recruitment efforts by inspiring others to become involved in victim services;
- Encourage victims and their families on their journey toward healing;
- Inspire those who work to support and assist victims of crime to continue their efforts to improve programs and services.



BECOMING A SURVIVOR, “WHAT A POWERFUL FEELING”

Imagine, you are an innocent child, trusting in the caregivers around you. Yet, a family member that you see everyday and love, trust and look up to is sexually abusing you. You don't question what is happening to you because they are your family. They are there to protect, guide and nurture you.

Now you're a teenager and you know what has been happening is not right. You fear telling will only create more problems and grief in your life. You have no one to turn to. You withdraw, descending further into isolation, losing all self-esteem. Your friends introduce you to a new friend called 'crack.' You're told it will take all of the pain away and you won't feel tired, sad or angry. You convince yourself that you will only try it once and then never again.

But the first time you try it everything is better, if only for a little while. Then withdrawal. Your body aches and your mind screams for another dose of the 'magic.' The cravings are unbearable. Soon you will do almost anything to get it.

The street corner helps you make \$20 to buy the next piece. Helpless, you make a routine out of standing on that street corner. Your friends become your new family and your crack dealer becomes your pimp. Smoking crack 24/7, you have no fear. The abusers are slowly killing you from the inside out. Reaching out with ethereal hands, you still can't escape their grip. Who will save you?

Until recently, young victims of sexual exploitation in Manitoba had nowhere to go for understanding, a safe haven and a way out. Specialized programming that understood the revolving door in the child and family welfare and justice system did not exist.

In February 2003, a home was created by the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre, supported by Manitoba Family Services and the Manitoba Strategy for Sexually Exploited Children and Youth and the Winnipeg Housing and Homelessness Initiative. We called this home, “Honoring the Spirits of Our Little Sisters”.

These young people are our little sisters. They are our family. We encourage them and help them realize they have a rightful place in our community. They do not need to turn to the streets.

One of the unique aspects of our home is that it was developed by a group of survivors, rather than professionals. This was extremely important in the planning process. These five amazing survivors gave so much of their time and their hearts to ensuring our home was developed with the correct values. They are still, to this day, committed to the value of the home.

Little Sisters was fully developed to specialize in the area of child sexual exploitation through the sex trade. It is estimated that approximately 400 youth are being sexually exploited each year in Winnipeg, with the average beginning age of 13.5 years, with an average age range of 11 – 16 years. It is also concluded that at least 70 per cent of the youth are of aboriginal descent.¹

We've found that the majority of our referrals have had multiple placements throughout the Child and Family Services system. One 14-year-old has encountered 67 placements since the age of seven. Unfortunately, all of our young women are well known by the Winnipeg Police Missing Persons Unit and a large majority are or have been daily users of crack cocaine. Referrals into the Little Sisters program can come from Child and Family Services, community agencies and self referrals.

We need to "Honor our Little Sisters." We need to teach our children, listen to them and love them to prevent this type of victimization in our own families and in communities. This will result in a true story of survival for many.

Jackie Anderson has been employed within the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre for 12 years.

¹ Ndaawin (Our Home) Protecting Our Children Information Guide: Preventing the Sexual Exploitation of Children & Youth through Prostitution.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP – SUPPORTLINK

On April 30, 2008, Rogers Wireless, on behalf of the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association, presented an award to the Ontario Victim Services Secretariat and Ericsson Canada Inc. for the SupportLink Program. The award recognized SupportLink's use of wireless technology to benefit or increase the safety of people.

SupportLink is a joint public/private sector partnership between the Ministry of the Attorney General of Ontario, Rogers Wireless and Ericsson Canada Inc. It helps victims at risk of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking to develop a personal safety plan by providing information and referrals to community services, follow-up, and, where appropriate, cell phones pre-programmed to dial 911.

The focus of SupportLink is to keep victims safe through planning and awareness. While not all victims referred to SupportLink will receive wireless phones, all are offered the specialized planning services to assist them in keeping safe. Each one is provided with information and tips on how to prevent, or escape from potential problem situations.

Recently, the program celebrated its tenth anniversary. Started in 1998 as a pilot project in Barrie and Ottawa, the SupportLink pilot was so successful that it was made permanent in 2001 and expanded to 20 locations across the province. The program is delivered by community-based victim service agencies.

The following case stories demonstrate the comfort, hope, and security that SupportLink provides to individuals living in a state of fear and apprehension for their safety and the safety of their families.

Case #1

“Thank God for that little phone. The children and I could never have stayed in our home without it. The risk would have been too great.”

A woman who had suffered terribly at the hands of her abusive husband lived in a rural setting with no neighbours for several kilometres. She did not have a landline and lived with the very real threat that despite a court order prohibiting him from contact, her husband would show up at the home and she would have no way to call for help. It is hard to put into words the level of anxiety and fear that this woman and her children lived with, especially after the perpetrator was released from prison.

A safety plan was put into place and she was given a 911 emergency cell phone.

Without the SupportLink program, her only other option was to uproot the children from their home and school and move temporarily into the closest women's shelter that was 40 km away. The addition of this cell phone to the existing safety plan meant so much to this family during this very difficult time in their lives.

Case #2

Wearing her bedroom slippers in the middle of winter, a woman fled her apartment to escape a very violent and abusive partner. She waited at the bus station, hidden in the ticket office until the bus departure time. Her destination was a women's shelter where she hoped and prayed that she would be safe and that he would not come to look for her.

This woman was battling an addiction to alcohol and was working very hard to maintain her sobriety in the face of great obstacles. The weekly Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting was a lifeline and her biggest fear was running into her abuser on the street. As a result, she was incapable of leaving the secure walls of the shelter and walking to her AA meeting.

Staff from SupportLink did extensive safety planning with this woman and provided her with a 911 emergency cell phone. A glimmer of hope was reflected in her eyes when staff explained that there was no charge for the pre-programmed cell phone. Although she never had to make a call on her “Rogers Crisis Phone”, knowing that it was available if needed helped ease her anxiety. It also played a huge role in enabling this woman to have the courage to attend AA meetings and continue to rebuild her life.

SupportLink now serves more than 2,000 new clients annually across Ontario and there are 735 phones issued to SupportLink programs across the province. The Ontario Victim Services Secretariat staff work collaboratively with Rogers and Ericsson to improve the SupportLink program and to ensure that victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking continue to receive the best possible services.

MANITOBA JUSTICE VICTIM SERVICES – THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INTERVENTION UNIT

The Manitoba Justice, Domestic Violence Intervention Unit (DVIU) was introduced as part of the Victim Services Branch in April 2006. It offers support to Winnipeg families who have called local police for domestic violence incidents that do not result in charges or arrests. The DVIU workers help people at risk of abuse in relationships to stop the cycle of violence. The unit's involvement with a case is designed to be brief and is offered as part of broader, ongoing services to domestic violence victims.

This program was developed to fill a significant need in domestic violence prevention. Annually, approximately 25 per cent of the 15,000 to 17,000 domestic calls to the Winnipeg Police Service result in charges being laid¹. In 2007/2008, DVIU responded to 10,969 matters². The DVIU initiates contact with individuals involved in cases where arrests do not take place. The unit offers a co-ordinated approach, improving the safety of these families by increasing their awareness, encouraging them to get help and connecting them to appropriate community resources through education, information, referral, advocacy and coordinated community based resources.

The DVIU has two primary goals:

- To increase the level of safety for families involved with police by offering support before there is an assault or a criminal charge;
- To re-direct individuals to community supports that may help them break patterns of contacting police for non-criminal, non-safety based concerns.

This second goal is beneficial because the individuals involved (who are always encouraged to contact police if there are criminal acts or if their safety is threatened) may be better served through community resources. In addition, the Winnipeg Police Service is more available to deal with higher-risk calls if frequent, non-emergency callers can be re-directed when appropriate.

The unit attempts to contact complainants to offer services as soon as possible after an incident to ensure they are safe and to offer information about available resources. When individuals cannot be reached by phone, letters are sent and, in some circumstances, home visits are done in partnership with a Winnipeg police officer.

It is important to highlight the value of the police officer/social worker pairing during domestic violence interventions in the community. The presence of a non-uniformed police officer with a social worker has been well received and is extremely effective in positively working with the people involved. The police officer actively engages in an intervention that is based on concern rather than investigation. Individuals are more likely to respond well to this kind of intervention and will often make an appointment with the social worker to come in and discuss matters further.

The response to phone contact by the unit has been similarly positive. The timing of these calls is paramount to the effectiveness of the program. The DVIU's involvement comes at a time in the family's cycle when individuals are often thinking about making a change but may not yet be

in a place to actively work towards it. The unit reaches out to them and offers information, assistance and connections to people who can help. The impact is overwhelmingly positive, whether the individual engages immediately or re-connects with the program months after the initial contact.

In addition, DVIU staff provide information about Protection Orders and often help victims apply for them. It is important to note that programs, policies and processes are always improving, with input from the police, community, and the provincial probation and prosecutions staff.

Manitoba Justice Victim Services is extremely proud and excited about the success of the DVIU. For those caught in the cycle of domestic violence, timing is everything. This program has the unique ability to respond in a timely way. Coupled with flexibility and mobility, the DVIU has become a vital link between the various valuable components of Manitoba's domestic violence services.

1 Winnipeg Police Annual Report 2007.

2 Manitoba Justice Annual Report 2007-2008.

NATIONAL PAROLE BOARD (NPB) INTERACTIVE HEARING ROOM

Enhancements to the Federal Victim Strategy were announced by the Ministers of Justice and Public Safety in March 2007. The National Parole Board (NPB) received funding to give victims a more effective voice in the federal corrections and the criminal justice systems and ultimately greater access to services. Five areas were identified by the NPB to achieve this goal: outreach, training, interpretation services, voice amplification systems, and website improvement.

Research has demonstrated that most victims could be better informed about the criminal justice system, particularly about the conditional release process and the range of services available to them.¹ To address this concern, the NPB made improvements to its website to make it more user-friendly for victims, including the development of a comprehensive interactive program. The goal of this project is to provide victims and other observers with a visual appreciation of what they can expect when they enter a federal penitentiary to attend a parole hearing.

The interactive hearing room addresses specific needs of victims and members of the public who want to attend a NPB hearing, including instructions on how to obtain approval to attend a parole hearing. The interactive hearing

room program shows the various participants at a hearing and describes their role. Photographs of federal penitentiaries are included along with photographs of the hearing rooms, how they are configured, and how a hearing proceeds.

In addition, this website includes links to other federal victim-serving agencies.

You can visit the website at: www.npb-nlc.gc.ca/hearing/flash/index.html.

The National Parole Board is an independent administrative tribunal responsible for making decisions about the timing and conditions of release of offenders to the community on various forms of conditional release. The Board also makes pardon decisions, and recommendations respecting clemency through the Royal Prerogative of Mercy. The Board's first and foremost consideration in its decision-making is the safety of the public.

¹ Regional consultation with victims (Focus Group 2000) and National Parole Board questionnaire 2003.

NEW BRUNSWICK'S VICTIM SERVICES CELEBRATED MILESTONE ANNIVERSARY

In 2008, New Brunswick was honored to celebrate its 25th anniversary of providing quality services to victims of crime.

Initiated in 1983 as a pilot project, jointly funded with Justice Canada, direct delivery of services to victims was established in two locations (Saint John and Campbellton). Initially, Victim Services was a Crown-based volunteer program operated by the New Brunswick Department of Justice. In 1984 the program was moved to the Community and Correctional Services Division of the New Brunswick Department of Justice. The volunteer aspect of the program was eliminated and staff functions were redefined to provide direct service delivery. This model was expanded across the province in 1988 and has since evolved into today's provincial victim services program operated by the New Brunswick Department of Public Safety.

Over the last twenty-five years, Victim Services in New Brunswick has continued to develop and improve supports for victims of crime. Services include: court support and court preparation, provision of trauma counselling, short term counselling, crime compensation, assistance with Victim Impact Statements and notification of the release of offenders on not-criminally-responsible accused.

In the last ten years, Victim Services has been enhanced to meet *Criminal Code* amendments and to address victims' needs. In 2002 New Brunswick completed a comprehensive review of Victim Services and a strategic plan for program enhancements was developed to implement the recommendations. Enhancements to date include:

- Amendments to the provincial *Victims Services Act*;
- The provision of a continuum of support services throughout the criminal justice process from police referral until completion of offender's release through a focused case-management approach;

- Implementation of *Criminal Code* amendments by establishment of vulnerable victim/witness court support when testimonial aids are used;
- Establishment of Victim Impact Statement Program for Not-Criminally Responsible Review Board hearings and provision of services (accompaniment and travel to read Victim Impact Statements.);
- Providing financial assistance for victims who wish to read their statements in court through the Victim Impact Statement Transportation Program;
- Creation of public awareness materials such as pamphlets or booklets on new services;
- Formalized liaison with Municipal Police, RCMP, Public Prosecutions, Court Support Services and the *Criminal Code* Review Board.

To celebrate our twenty-fifth anniversary and promote victim services in New Brunswick, a television commercial was developed and launched during National Victims of Crime Week 2008. The launch took place at a reception held at Government House, the home of the Lieutenant-Governor. Both the Lieutenant-Governor and the Minister of Public Safety acknowledged the role of the non-government partner agencies and organizations, and provided representatives with a certificate of recognition to show gratitude for the continued support given to Victim Services throughout the province. A staff appreciation dinner was also held at the Delta Hotel with the Chief Provincial Court Judge as keynote speaker.

Program enhancements continued in 2008 with the implementation of Danger Lethality Assessments and Aid to Safety Assessment & Planning (ASAP) for domestic violence cases. In November, Victim Services hosted a meeting of the Federal/Provincial Territorial Working Group of Victims of Crime, held in Saint John; the first time the group met in New Brunswick.



New Brunswick's Victim Services continues to address individual victim's needs. Current new initiatives include:

- Enhancing public awareness initiatives, including a television and web campaign, so victims are fully aware of the many services that are available to them;
- Participation in the development and implementation of the First Atlantic Canada Domestic Violence Court where two full-time victim services coordinators are in place;
- Establishment of a pilot support program for parents of victims of child sexual abuse with the Fredericton Sexual Assault Centre;
- Creation of age appropriate materials for adolescent victims which includes the teen DVD, "You Are Not Alone" and accompanying guide in partnership with Public Legal Education of New Brunswick;
- Undertaking a needs analysis on the nature and extent of victims with addictions issues;
- Continuing to work with criminal justice partners and non-governmental agencies for quality services in the province.

New Brunswick is committed to providing quality services to victims of crime; something that could not be easily achieved without the work of dedicated, professional staff throughout the province. For further information, visit www.gnb.ca/publicsafety.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES AND OUTREACH TO VICTIMS OF CRIME

Since 2005, the Ontario Victim Services Secretariat has successfully delivered two grant programs to help victims of crime in Ontario: a three-year Community Grant Program and a Community Hate Crime Response Grant Program. These grants have provided over 270 community agencies across the province with time-limited funding for new and creative projects that empower victims of crime to rebuild their lives.

In August 2008 the Secretariat also launched a new innovative Aboriginal Victims Support Grant Program to improve services to Aboriginal communities and organizations.

Community Grant Program

The \$15 million Community Grant Program was designed to improve supports and services to victims of crime in communities across the province by:

- Addressing gaps in services;
- Enhancing service quality and accessibility;
- Supporting community development;
- Increasing awareness of victimization, victims' issues and services available in the community.

Priority victims served under the program included victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or hate crimes, child victims who have suffered sexual abuse and exploitation, and under-served and un-served victims.

For the first time, members of local community groups and victim service agencies participated in the grant review process and made recommendations. Innovative projects funded under the Community Grant Program include:

- Campaigns in 12 communities to educate, engage and empower neighbours, friends and family members on how to recognize the signs of domestic violence and what to do to help victims;
- A two-day conference and the development of information kits to raise awareness among Francophone women about victimization, family violence and the rights of women and their children;

- Addressing the urgent needs of adult male survivors of sexual abuse;
- Developing and delivering programs for child and youth victims of sexual and physical trauma;
- Support for Aboriginal children and youth through an Aboriginal holistic healing model;
- An Art Therapy Peer Support Program to help children aged 7-15 victimized by domestic violence.

With these grants, many organizations created and developed useful products such as manuals, protocols, brochures, DVDs and educational tools. A directory was created to share the resources developed through the program. The directory can be found on the Ontario Victim Services Secretariat website: www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/ovss/.

Community Hate Crime Response Grants Program

Through the \$1.3 million Community Hate Crime Response Grants Program, 23 organizations received funding that allowed them to develop and enhance services and resources for victims and communities often targeted by hate.

Three of the projects had a province-wide scope and included:

- A two-day forum to increase awareness of hate crimes and enable community stakeholders, educators, the justice sector, victim services and communities to establish linkages to address hate crimes in Ontario;
- A Hate Crimes website to ensure communities that are victims of hate crimes are supported with access to information about hate crimes and crime prevention. More information can be found at www.notohate.ca;
- The development of Victim Impact Statements as they relate to hate crimes, and new templates and a resource guide for service providers and victims.

All of the Hate Crime grant projects will be completed by the end of the 2008/2009 fiscal year.

Aboriginal Victims Support Grant Program

This new \$2 million program is an investment in improving services to Aboriginal victims of crime by supporting the delivery of services by Aboriginal communities and organizations. Up to \$250,000 in funding, including capital costs will be made available to Aboriginal organizations for a wide range of small and large projects.

The program is designed to:

- Respect the need to build positive relationships and productive partnerships with Aboriginal peoples by ensuring their involvement in matters that directly affect their communities;
- Promote homemade solutions to community building by funding projects led by Aboriginal organizations and encouraging non-Aboriginal organizations to become partners.

The unique features of this grant program include:

- Improved grant administrative processes to increase program access;
- Support for application and proposal development;
- Community engagement and information sessions across the province with language interpretation in Cree, Ojibway and Oji-Cree if required;
- Development of program fact sheets developed translated into Cree, Ojibway and Oji-Cree.

CAMPAIGN 911 – THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE

In Canada, impaired driving remains the number one criminal cause of death. On average, just under four people are killed and another 196 are injured **every day** due to impaired driving¹. The loss has a ripple effect and is felt through entire communities.

It has been estimated that there are still eight million trips of impaired driving annually in Canada. There are less than 70,000 arrests and less than half of the arrests result in convictions (approx. 33,000).²


Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) Canada and other anti-impaired driving groups, the government and our strategic partners have been educating the public with anti-impaired driving messages in media, schools and communities. Police have been conducting sobriety checkpoints at key times during the year. To do more, MADD Canada realized that it needed the public's assistance to apprehend impaired drivers and prevent deaths and injuries. As well, there would be a deterrent if the public's perception was that someone would more likely be reported and apprehended if they chose to drink and drive.

Campaign 911 is a public awareness campaign that was officially launched by MADD Canada in May 2007. It was developed to empower citizens across Canada and give them permission to call 911 to report an impaired driver. Prior to launching the program, MADD consulted with the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, Canadian Police Association and Canadian Association of Police Boards to develop campaign materials and proper protocol for the public to report impaired drivers. MADD Canada and its chapters and community leaders began distributing posters, bookmarks, Public Service Announcements (PSAs), bus advertisements and banners, and erecting signs across the country. The number of participating communities continues to grow. Working with local police as partners, the message is being reinforced that we all have a role to play.

We know the program is working to get impaired drivers off the roads. In York Region in Ontario, the program was implemented and advertised with roadside signs and media. From June 2007 to January 2009, the York Regional Police Communications Branch has received 3,432 calls from members of the public reporting what they suspect is a driver impaired by alcohol or drugs. As a result of these calls, officers have arrested 500 people and charged them with impaired-related offences.³ In Barrie, Ontario, in a short period of time, there were 166 calls to 911 that resulted in 41 arrests (24.9 per cent) for impaired driving.⁴

In Alberta, Edmonton Police tracked its 911 program for 2007. During that time, there were 8,425 calls to 911. From those calls, police stopped 2,587 vehicles. Charges of impaired driving were laid for 32 per cent of the vehicles stopped. Another 6.5 per cent of those stopped received 24-hour suspensions. By comparison sobriety checkpoints stopped far more vehicles, but only .05 per cent were charged with impaired driving and only .09 per cent were given 24-hour suspensions. Best practices would combine *Campaign 911* and sobriety checkpoints to maintain a public reminder to motorists to drive sober or there is a good likelihood that impaired drivers will be caught.⁵

As the public becomes more involved in reporting impaired driving, there are some safety reminders that need to be reinforced. Drivers need to observe all driving safety rules, keep a safe distance from the impaired driver, and wear a seatbelt. They need to use extreme caution when using a cellular phone to call 911. Citizens should not try to apprehend the driver. Police officers are trained specialists so let them do their job.



When reporting an impaired driver, you need to be able to state your location, the description of the vehicle (try to include the licence plate number, make, model and colour of the vehicle) as well as the direction the vehicle is travelling in and a description of the driver.

As we reflect on the theme of this year's National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, "*Supporting, Connecting, Evolving*", Campaign 911 encompasses all of those. To initiate the campaign, the **support** of strategic partners was required. We needed to **connect** with communities and the Canadian public, and to be 100 per cent effective, the program needs to **evolve** over the next few years.

As more Canadians recognize that they have a role to play in saving lives and preventing injuries, we hope our mission will be achieved: impaired driving will be stopped and there will be no more victims of this violent crime.

Submitted by Wanda Kristensen
Director of Programs
MADD Canada

1 "Estimating the Presence of Alcohol and Drug Impairment in Traffic Crashes and Their Costs to Canadians". Submitted to MADD Canada by: Applied Research and Evaluation Services, University of British Columbia, Dr. B. Mercer, Dr. M. Marshall [Revised April 2008].

2 *ibid.*

3 January 2009 York Regional Police Press Release.

4 Barrie Police Report September 2008.

5 Edmonton Police Report January 2008.

TAMARA'S HOUSE SERVICES FOR SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS, INC.

*I've learned that I'm not alone. I've learned that I'm strong and I've learned not to feel guilt about what happened to me. It wasn't my fault. There. I said it. **It wasn't my fault.**"*

- Tamará's House service user

Childhood sexual abuse is a crime that can have long-lasting physical, emotional, mental and spiritual consequences. Adults who suffered sexual abuse in childhood are more likely to experience struggles with chronic illness, addictions, relationship problems, poverty, and mental health issues than the general population.¹

Tamará's House in Saskatoon was initiated by survivors of childhood sexual abuse and their supporters who recognized the need for services that could provide more thorough understanding and support than was available through psychiatric services. Since its incorporation as a non-profit organization in 1991, Tamará's House Services for Sexual Abuse Survivors, Inc. has developed services that include: a residence where women can stay for up to two weeks while working intensively on their healing; a drop-in centre that provides ongoing support, information, crafts, and psycho-educational programming; and Harmony Song (funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation), which provides services to assist First Nations women in overcoming the legacy of Residential School abuses. The agency is housed in a beautiful home-like residence in a quiet neighbourhood, and welcomes women from all backgrounds. Volunteers assist with tasks such as fund-raising, providing complementary care to service users, leading yoga classes, maintaining a free clothing exchange, assisting with celebrations, and maintaining a garden. Tamará's House is wheelchair accessible, and interpreters can be provided to allow women with hearing disabilities to take part in programs.

Women come to stay at Tamará's House from throughout Saskatchewan, and occasionally from other provinces. Each woman talks to the Intake Worker before she comes, to give an idea of her circumstances, and decide on the goals she wishes to work toward during her stay. When she arrives, she chooses a room (made cozy with a donated patchwork quilt), and learns the routines of the household. During her stay, she takes part in house meetings and group discussions, helps with cooking and clean-up, and joins in programs offered in the Drop-In. Her stay in Tamará's House gives her a quiet retreat away from the demands of family and employment where she can work intensively on her healing.

I feel honoured to be here. I want to make the most of being here. There's lots of women that would want or need to be here. Like people back home where there isn't a place like this, where people are institutionalized, where they can't come here. It's a privilege."

- Tamará's House resident from a different province

Tamará's House Drop-In provides a comfortable atmosphere where women can drop in for coffee and a chat, take part in craft or psycho-educational programs, and find – and offer – support. A computer, as well as a Resource Room, with books on a variety of subjects, are available for their use. When funding allows, Tamará's House sponsors a once a week "Share Our Soup" program that forms a gathering point for the community.

"I'm finally being seen and respected for the woman I am. Not the girl. Not the misfit. Not the wannabe."

- Drop-In service user

The Harmony Song Project offers additional supports to First Nations women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, or are dealing with the legacy of Residential School abuses. Each week, a Healing Circle is facilitated by an Elder, and each month, a Full Moon Ceremony is held in conjunction with another Saskatoon agency. In addition, Harmony Song staff provide educational programs in the community to help increase understanding of the abuses in Residential Schools and their long-term effects on individuals, families, and communities. Retreats can also be arranged that allow several women from a First Nations community to access Tamará's House residence as a group, and work on their healing together.

"The Circle has been an awesome experience. I have grown so much. It has given me strength to get through university. I thank God for the women circles. Women are blessed to have a place like this. If I had a million dollars, I'd donate it to Tamará's House. That's how much it changed my life..."

- Healing Circle participant

Tamará's House works with the Women's Community Training Residence, the local Parole office, and PineGrove Correctional Centre to offer services to women in conflict with the law.

Tamará's House is supported by grants from the provincial and federal governments, by foundations, and through donations from the community. Please see our website, www.tamarashouse.sk.ca for more information on programs and services.

"I learned I am important... and I deserve to be happy. I have more knowledge, and it's empowering and I can keep going in healthier ways."

- Tamará's House service user

- submitted by Judith Cheesbrough, Tamará's House, December, 2008

¹ National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Public Health Agency of Canada: Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse – Overview Paper, at www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/nfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/nfntsxagrsexadult_e.html.