



RESEARCH AND  
STATISTICS DIVISION

JUST BETWEEN YOU AND ME:  
A PEER PUBLIC LEGAL  
EDUCATION AND  
INFORMATION (PLEI)  
PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN IN  
FAMILY VIOLENCE SITUATIONS





Just Between You and Me: A Peer Public  
Legal Education and Information (PLEI)  
Programme for Women in Family Violence  
Situations

Final Report

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rr04-5e



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March 31, 2004

*The views expressed in this report are those of the  
authors and do not necessarily represent the views  
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## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the following individuals for their assistance and contribution to this study:

**Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, Northern Ontario Violence Against Women Prevention Initiative**, for assisting with the funding of the Peer Training;

**Donna Woldanski, Deborah Loosemore and Algoma University College** for their kind assistance in promoting the programme and providing space for the training;

**“Just Between You and Me” Advisory Committee Members**, who generously donated of their time and expertise to review the processes and materials for the training;

The **eighteen individuals** who faithfully attended eight training sessions and who now are beginning to share their new knowledge and insight with abused women in the Sault Ste. Marie and area;

**Gisele Beausoleil and Connie Manitowabi**, who did not write this report, but are responsible for much of the work that went into creating the “Just Between You and Me” project and process, and without whom, the project would not have been possible;

And finally, to **Susan McDonald** and the **Research and Statistics Division of the Department of Justice Canada**, who have given so much encouragement and support to the ongoing development and understanding of PLEI.







## Executive Summary

The “Just Between You and Me” project was designed to provide Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) peer support to women who had experienced family violence and assess its validity as a model for PLEI delivery. The goal of the project was that the peers would then share this information within their own networks of family, coworkers and communities, using resources already developed and existing in their areas.

In October 2003, the Research and Statistics Division of the Department of Justice Canada contracted with Gayle Broad, Community Research and Development, to conduct an assessment of peer model of delivery of PLEI to women who had been abused by their partners. The research included the delivery of the training programme to at least sixteen women drawn from the Indigenous communities of Sault Ste. Marie and area and from an urban centre in Northern Ontario (Sault Ste. Marie), and the assessment of the model for its validity as a method of delivering PLEI.

The study adapted an evaluation tool from earlier research (Broad, 2002), developed a recruitment tool, and used materials already produced by other PLEI providers as the basis for the curriculum. A total of twenty women were recruited for the eight-week training session, approximately one-half from the Indigenous communities. A total of eighteen women “graduated” from the training.

The Evaluation Framework served as a basis for an Action Research methodology. A local evaluator was hired to provide ongoing assessment throughout the project, including all aspects from adapting the framework, through recruiting participants, developing the training modules, and assessing the outcomes. Both the Advisory Group and the peer participants were invited to give feedback, which was incorporated into the process.

The findings of this study support the use of an Evaluation Framework as a method for ensuring that PLEI is delivered from a “best practice” approach. Building on previous research, the adaptation of the Framework for this project was easily accomplished, and served as a guide to the recruiting, curriculum development and training delivery. The Framework then provided guidance to the evaluator for assessing the validity of the peer model of PLEI.

The findings of this research support a recruitment process, which includes a media conference and information session to raise community awareness, followed by a careful selection of participants. The application and interview process ensures that peers are not in crisis themselves, and provides assurance that the training can focus on learning, not on the therapeutic needs of the participants.

This research also supports earlier PLEI studies that identify the need for culturally-appropriate materials and delivery. The role modeling provided by one of the Instructors, the use of community networks and personal contacts in the recruitment process, and the presentation and

adaptation of materials that reflected Indigenous content, were important factors in recruiting and retaining Indigenous peers.

The findings of this study support peer development as a valid PLEI model of delivery. The participants, in their final self-assessment, identified substantial changes in the areas of knowledge growth, perception/attitudinal and behaviour changes. Their comments indicate that they found the training empowering, and participants were already beginning to distribute the information through their community networks.



## 1.0 Introduction

The “Just Between You and Me” project was designed to provide Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) peer support to victims of family violence and assess its validity as a model for PLEI delivery.

The project began in October 2003, with a research team composed of three individuals with substantial experience in the field of family violence and PLEI. A fourth team member was recruited to evaluate the programme development and delivery. During the first three months of the project, the research team and evaluator, together with an advisory group, developed an evaluation tool for the project; a recruitment tool; the curriculum; and compiled resources. The peer participants were recruited in December 2003, and from January until early March 2004, the programme was delivered at Algoma University College. The project began with twenty participants, with a total of eighteen completing the full eight weeks of training.

The project trained peers in two communities: the Indigenous community in Sault Ste. Marie and area<sup>1</sup> and a Northern Ontario urban centre (Sault Ste. Marie). The peers were provided with resource materials and an orientation to some of the most common issues arising for victims of family violence. The intent of the project was that the peers would then share this information within their own networks of family, coworkers and communities, using resources already developed and existing in their areas. A support network for the peers has been established with free meeting space provided by a local community agency, Phoenix Rising Non-Profit Homes, Inc.

This report summarizes the activities undertaken throughout the course of the “Just Between You and Me” project, and the findings related to the assessment of its validity as a model for PLEI delivery.

### 1.1 Family Violence and PLEI

Despite a growing awareness of the problem of family violence, and increasing penalties for perpetrators of such violence, it remains an issue in Canadian society, and both family law courts and criminal courts remain challenged in their efforts to respond to this issue.

The Public Legal Education and Information needs of women who experience family violence are well documented and immense. Women who experience family violence do so in the private environments of their own homes. Thus reaching women with the PLEI, which they so desperately need, is very challenging. Transition houses, leaders in identifying the high risk of physical injury facing victims of family violence, have used a number of ingenious methods to reach women safely, including putting emergency numbers in tampon dispensers.

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<sup>1</sup> Sault Ste. Marie has a substantial urban Indigenous population due to its role as a regional centre in Northeastern Ontario. There are also two First Nations immediately adjacent to the city, Batchewana First Nation and Garden River First Nation who contribute to the city’s Indigenous community.

Some women, such as newcomers to Canada, those with disabilities, or those in rural or northern communities where there are few services, are particularly vulnerable. The nature of family violence, where the perpetrator purposefully isolates the victim, means that there are particular barriers in accessing PLEI, which is compounded when the victim lives in a small community such as a First Nation or due to her youth is less aware of services.

Women want, and often need, to know about a number of legal issues, particularly family law issues such as custody and support, criminal law as it pertains to stalking, harassment and assault, and for new Canadians, immigration law. A recent study also indicated that for some women, knowledge of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (formerly the *Young Offenders' Act*) is also a high priority (McDonald, 2000).

In response to this need, victims' and legal services have developed a wide array of PLEI materials (*see* [www.owjn.org](http://www.owjn.org) *for example*). These have been translated into several languages and a number of strategies have been employed to disseminate them, such as advertising, pamphlets, brochures, the Internet.

Often however, the victim is unable to access and/or use the information. This may be due to the difficulty posed by the “private and unsupported spaces” within which the violence occurs (United Way, 1998), while some women may have difficulty accessing PLEI due to a lack of language proficiency or cultural barriers that some minority communities may face. For some women, it may be due to the trauma of the violence itself. There has been very little research on learning and the law for those who have experienced violence or trauma, but some case studies would indicate that trauma may in fact substantially impair the victims' ability to retain essential information (Hill, 2003; Broad, 2002; McDonald, 2000).

This two-part challenge – delivering accurate PLEI through peers to women who may be experiencing family violence – was undertaken in the “Just Between You and Me” project.

## 1.2 Why Peer Learning?

The term “peer pressure” is used to describe the sometimes negative influence that close friends can have on one another, particularly in the context of teenagers influencing one another in risk-taking behaviours. A growing number of programmes however, are discovering that peers can be a highly effective way not only of pressuring one another into negative – or positive – behaviours, but also into providing information to one another (McDonald, 2000).

Peer learning works because:

- Trust is easily established – because of similar situations, because they share characteristics (language, gender, background), because they are not government;
- There is immediate empathy for the situation (the peer may have experienced family violence herself, or knows someone who has);
- The peer has learned through experience;
- The peer is immediately accessible (in the park, at the hairdresser's, picking up the children at school).



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If provided with training and appropriate support,

- Information provided is accurate, complete and up-to-date;
- Information is provided in the language of choice and more likely to be in plain language;
- Information provided is timely;
- Information is delivered in cost-effective way;
- Information can be supplemented with additional resources and referrals (phone numbers, written materials, etc.);
- Information provided does not threaten a woman's safety.





## 2.0 Research for Social Change

The project is modeled on a similar project, sponsored by Health Canada through the Family Violence Initiative, which provided peer support, but without a significant PLEI component. Peer support is widely used in HIV/AIDS education, particularly among street youth. In Sault Ste. Marie, two projects utilizing peer support to provide support to victims of sexual abuse and assault were highly successful among people with mental health disabilities.

### 2.1 Action Research as a Methodology

*...AR is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis. But the social change we refer to is not just any kind of change. AR aims to increase the ability of the involved community or organization members to control their own destinies more effectively and keep improving their capacity to do so. (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:6)*

Feminists and other equality-seeking groups have been increasingly using Action Research (AR) as a research methodology (Stanley, 1990; Ristock and Pennell, 1996; Greenwood and Levin 1998). For this research, AR was identified as a particularly useful methodology because of a number of its characteristics:

- The project's intent was to create social change – through the development of a peer network, the researchers hoped to end the isolation of battered women, one of the key elements of keeping them in abusive relationships;
- The project was crossing disciplines – combining both social and legal aspects of the complex issue of violence towards women, a characteristic of feminist practitioners of AR (Reinharz, 1992);
- The project linked knowledge with action, providing the peer participants with PLEI so that they could share that knowledge more widely within their networks of family, friends and associates (Greenwood and Levin, 1998);
- AR is a process which involves participants in an empowering process of recognizing their own knowledge, skills and abilities (Maguire, 1987).

The scope of this research did not permit the inclusion of the peer participants in the planning of the research, something that is usually considered a key component of AR. Due to the time constraints, by the time participants were recruited, the content and delivery methods had already been decided upon. The research team did, however, ameliorate this challenge in three ways.

First, by using a *research team* approach, rather than a single researcher, the project had the benefit of the experience of four individuals who had all worked with battered women. The involvement of the Advisory Group augmented this knowledge and experience with several others.

Second, the research team used research that had been done earlier with battered women to help them identify the learning needs (McDonald, 2000; Hill, 2003). This research was augmented by a series of six interviews conducted by the team with women who had been battered. These informal interviews elicited information regarding what legal information they had found helpful in facilitating their leaving the abusive relationship.

Finally, throughout the programme delivery, the peer participants were encouraged to identify their learning needs through both the formal evaluation at the beginning and closing of the training, as well as informally through the programme facilitators.

Although the peer participants were not able to fully participate in the planning of the research, they certainly participated once the programme delivery began. The eight weeks of training had a remarkably high turnout, with less than one absence per class. It also had a remarkably high completion rate: of the twenty peers commencing the programme, one dropped out after the first class, indicating that she felt this was not suited to her needs at the time, and one other participant was unable to attend sufficient classes to be considered a “graduate”. The remaining eighteen members attended faithfully, frequently staying longer than the three-hour class time, following up with their “buddies” during the week, and providing unsolicited feedback on their level of enjoyment in the class<sup>2</sup>.

### **2.1.1 Cyclical Nature of Action Research**

AR is known for its iterative nature (Greenwood and Levin, 1998) wherein the research goes through a cycle of planning→acting→observing→reflecting and then returning to planning. “Just Between You and Me” followed this cycle throughout the project, beginning with the planning of the recruitment and evaluation, acting upon those plans, observing and reflecting on the outcomes, and then moving on to the curriculum development and programme delivery.

The evaluation process especially reflects the cyclical nature of AR, using a continuous feedback process throughout. Some AR practitioners call this type of cycle double-loop learning (Hall, 1993) reflecting the incorporation of learning developed in the research, into the research process, so that it can be further built upon in the next research phase.

This double-loop process was invaluable to the “Just Between You and Me” project. The suggestions of the Advisory Group and the Evaluator were frequently incorporated into the project, thereby improving the delivery of PLEI before it began. For example, one of the Advisory Group meetings generated the suggestion that the peers form a “buddy” system to provide support to one another in between meetings. It was felt that such a system would provide an opportunity for peers to share fears, concerns or even reduce re-traumatization that may have occurred during the training sessions. As this suggestion was incorporated into the project, the peers selected their “buddies” on the first night of class and this support was provided throughout the project. Although difficult to validate, this action may have contributed to the high retention and completion rate of the training by the peers. Certainly the facilitators

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<sup>2</sup> One of the participants shared a workplace with a member of the research team. On one occasion, when the research team member had not attended the previous evening’s class, the participant informed her that she had really missed out: “...this was the best one [class] yet!”





noticed that the “buddies” tended to immediately check in with one another upon arrival at the training location, and resulted in some new friendships during the course of the project.

“Buddies” were also responsible for updating one another should one of them be obligated to miss all or a part of one class. This provided an opportunity for the buddy who missed to get caught up, but it also provided the sharing buddy with an opportunity to practice passing on their knowledge.

## **2.2 Team Approach to Research**

The research team was composed of three individuals with significant experience and knowledge of both the social and legal issues, advocacy, counselling, crisis intervention, and adult/popular education. They also brought experience in cross-cultural work and teaching, as well as group facilitation skills. All three of the research team embrace the empowerment model of social change. Individually and collectively, they bring a multi-disciplinary approach to the project.

The lead researcher, Gayle Broad, has been involved with the development of a variety of PLEI materials through fifteen years’ experience as a Community Legal Worker with the Algoma Community Legal Clinic in Sault Ste. Marie. The materials have included a booklet for Indigenous women who wished to apply for Criminal Injuries Compensation as a result of sexual and/or physical assault; a video series which grappled with communities’ responses to the victims of sexual assault; and a series of booklets for sexual assault survivors who were engaged in the criminal court process. In 2002, Dr. Broad completed a report for Department of Justice entitled “Know More: An assessment of the impact of Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) on individuals and communities”. She currently teaches part-time in the Law and Politics Department of Algoma University College, and is the principal in her own research and consulting firm.

Gisele Beausoleil, MSW, is currently employed as an advocacy worker within a shelter in Sault Ste. Marie. Her work involves accompanying women to legal appointments and court appearances, and providing PLEI to abused women on a daily basis. She uses a variety of PLEI materials in her work and was key in identifying a substantial number of the resource materials available used in the peers’ handbooks. Gisele is also a part-time faculty member of Algoma University College’s Social Welfare Department.

Connie Manitowabi is a member of Wikwemikong First Nation and had been employed at a women’s shelter located on Batchewana First Nation for three years. She currently works as an educator and consultant in racism and violence against women. Connie’s experience and knowledge of Anishnabek cultural traditions were invaluable in designing a programme relevant to Indigenous women.

Moliner (1987) identifies that using local evaluators who have experience in evaluation is most desirable for a PLEI project. “Just Between You and Me” was able to recruit a local evaluator who had prior experience in the subject matter, being employed as a counselor with the Sexual Assault and Partner Assault Centre of the Sault Area Hospitals. She also had some previous

experience in programme evaluation, having been part of a programme evaluation team of a leadership programme for youth.

A number of benefits accrued from the participation of a local evaluator. Anna was able to attend all of the meetings of the Advisory Committee, several meetings of the research team, and was also available by telephone and email for occasional consultation. This proximity provided opportunities for the research team to immediately implement recommendations provided by the evaluator, and provided a continuous cycle of improvement to the programme. Such a cycle fit well with the Action Research methodology of the project.

The final session, number eight of the Peer group training included a process of evaluation with the participants. The areas of knowledge growth, and changes in both perceptions and behaviour were examined. Narrative comments were also solicited from the group regarding their experience. These comments were then incorporated into the final report.

### **2.3 Evaluation Framework**

To assess the validity of the model as a PLEI delivery method, this project adapted an “Evaluation Framework” from previously completed research (Broad, 2002). The “Framework for Assessing the Impact of Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) on Individuals and the Community” (see Appendix A) was developed through a review of PLEI best practices. In this project, the evaluation tool served as a guide both for the development of the model, as well as in assessing its validity as a method of PLEI delivery.

The Evaluation Framework was modified in two ways to address the goals of this particular project:

- First, the Advisory Group and the Evaluator felt that modeling empowering behaviour would be essential for the peers, so that they too would learn to empower not only through cognitive learning, but also through experiential learning. As a result, a question designed to elicit that response was added to the Framework (Question 10b);
- Second, while question number 6 of the original Framework addressed the developmental stage of the learner, given the cross-cultural nature of this project, it was felt that an additional query regarding the curriculum’s ability to meet the audience’s understanding and belief systems was essential. A question was therefore added to address this concern (Question 6b).

The Framework was then used by both the research team and the evaluator as a tool in guiding the project to its completion. During the curriculum design phase, the Framework was used by the Research Team to ensure that the proposed content and pedagogy responded to the “best practices” outlined by the tool. By asking themselves the Framework questions as they designed the programme, the research team was able to address matters that may have been overlooked otherwise.



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For example, the initial questions, regarding having clear goals for the PLEI activity, resulted in the drafting of clear learning objectives for each week's session. These learning goals then guided the planning of that session's delivery.

Finally, the Evaluation Framework guided both the Evaluator in her assessment of the programme's effectiveness, and in the organization of this report. By using the questions as a frame, the various components essential to delivering a quality PLEI programme were addressed, and the quality of the components in "Just Between You and Me" were evaluated.





## 3.0 Research Findings

“Just Between You and Me” has been very well received within the community, particularly amongst the peer participants, but also amongst the various people and organizations that were touched in some way by the project. For example, the Communications Officer at Algoma University College, Donna Woldanski, was very enthused with the concept, and worked to ensure that the initial media conference to launch the project was highly successful. The community organizations most directly effected – women’s shelters, medical clinic facilities, and counselling services – provided feedback frequently throughout the project to the research team, providing their support and encouragement. This was reflected in the Advisory Group, who willingly shared their time and expertise, to ensure the project was successful.

### 3.1 Peer Recruitment

The project proposed to recruit peer participants from two communities, the urban centre of Sault Ste. Marie, and the Indigenous community of the Sault area. The project had intended to recruit participants through posters distributed by fax to a variety of organizations throughout the Sault Ste. Marie area. However, the research team decided to “get the word out” initially through a press conference, scheduled to coincide with a service fair held at Algoma University College. The fair was scheduled in November to raise awareness of violence against women, and seemed an opportune time to publicize the programme in the community. The press conference was highly successful with representatives of electronic (radio and television, as well as internet-based) and print media attending. It also received regional coverage through CBC Radio.

The media conference became a valuable recruitment tool. Several of the participants mentioned that that was how they became aware of the programme. One woman described how she had been driving when she heard the announcement of the programme on the news, and had to pull over to the side of the road to write down the telephone number of the contact. The media announcement also generated a great deal of interest in the community at large, and the research team fielded many questions about the programme, its funding, and the potential of it being offered again. At one point, there was significant interest from a francophone group in Sudbury to obtain funding for a similar programme, but this group later decided that they needed to develop legal intermediaries first, before developing a peer support programme.<sup>3</sup>

The effects of the media conference were to develop widespread community interest in the project, and throughout the programme delivery, the research team was asked about participant progress. Several inquiries were made about delivery of the programme at a future date; the question, “Will you be offering this again?” was expressed to the research team by both individuals and organizations. It is quite unlikely that this level of ongoing interest would have continued without the attention directed to the programme by the media conference.

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<sup>3</sup> This group, the Centre Victoria, decided that their staff needed to be more knowledgeable about legal issues themselves before they would be able to provide training to peers. As a result they did access training through an initiative sponsored by METRAC. The Centre Victoria has only one staff person in Sault Ste. Marie and she did participate in the training.

Another recruitment tool that was very effective, particularly amongst Indigenous women, was personal, face-to-face invitations. This was achieved through the research team itself, but also through some of the community groups' employees who were faxed the poster. For example, one of the peers stated that she had been approached first by a worker at the Indian Friendship Centre, and then by Connie Manitowabi, and it was after the second invitation that she felt that "...my path was being led here". Several of the participants said that it was because they knew one or more of the research team that they decided to participate.<sup>4</sup>

In consultation with the Advisory group, the research team devised a screening tool, consisting of a letter of application or resume and two letters of reference, followed by an interview with a series of questions (see Appendix A attached). At the interview, potential participants were requested to sign a commitment form, intended to ensure that candidates completed the full eight weeks of training.

Initial recruitment of peers was done through personal contacts, the media release, and posters distributed through a network of social agencies, particularly those who deliver services to women. A total of fifty-three women initially responded to the request for volunteers. Subsequently a member of the research team contacted each woman, inviting her to submit a letter of application, together with two references.

This process resulted in approximately sixteen applications, with less than half being Indigenous. To meet the project's goal of fifty per cent participation coming from Indigenous women, additional personal contact was made with a number of agencies who assisted in recruiting additional participants. All of the participants did submit letters of application and references with the exception of one, who worked at Algoma University College – where the course was being held – and who did not realize this was an expectation until she attended the first night's class.

Efforts were also made to encourage women of all ages and ethnicities to apply. As the initial applications were reviewed, the research team noted that only one applicant indicated an Italian heritage, whereas the population of Sault Ste. Marie is approximately one-third of Italian descent. The names of those who had indicated an interest via telephone were reviewed and a number of others were encouraged to apply, resulting in a final number of four women of Italian descent participating in the final group.

Potential peers were then interviewed by two of the research team members, and all but three were accepted into the programme. Through the interview process, it was discovered that two had very recently left abusive relationships and were deemed to be still recovering from trauma. Gisele, in her capacity as a social worker, believed that it would be unethical to risk further traumatization through exposure to the course. A third candidate was deemed unsuitable due to very poor listening skills.

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that most of them knew the research team member through their work on violence against women and/or their work on legal issues, not through friendships or familial relationships.



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The curriculum and recruitment process was finalized in late December, however, to reach the Indigenous participant targets, recruitment continued into the first week of January, 2004 with a final group of twenty women, nine of whom were Indigenous.

In reviewing the recruitment process at an Advisory Group meeting, members queried whether this process was too onerous on the peer participants, as fifty-three people indicated a desire to take the course, but once the applications were requested, only thirteen actually followed up by submitting a resume and letters of reference. Eventually, through personal telephone calls and follow-up, a total of twenty did submit applications, indicating a high drop-off rate at the time of application.

The participants also indicated that the application process was a difficult one for them – that they were uncertain as to what to put in the letter, who to contact for references, and that the interview itself was a bit intimidating. Several of the participants also indicated that they were uncertain as to what the process would be, what the training would be like, what they would be learning, etc., and that they would have liked more information prior to beginning the course.

One of the peers did not participate in the recruitment process; she neither completed an application, nor an interview, but simply showed up on the first night of the sessions. Due to confusion amongst the research team, she was admitted to the group, but the next day approached the research team leader, and inquired whether she should withdraw as she had not completed the recruitment process. Upon discussion by the research team, it was decided to invite her to continue as she met the criteria for participation. This individual did complete the programme successfully, but the research team recommends that a thorough recruitment process is advisable for the reasons stated above.

The recruitment process did result in substantial diversity of participants. Peers were aged from their early twenties to their sixties, active in a wide variety of different groups including recreation, neighbourhood groups and housing complexes, one member of the small francophone (approximately 5% of the population) community. Some peers were career oriented, some did not work outside the home, and several were active in the volunteer sector.

Upon reflection of the recruitment process, the Advisory Group and the Research Team recommends that in future programmes, an “information session” be scheduled shortly after announcing the programme, that anyone may attend. At such a session, more information would be provided about the process, the logistics, and assistance could be provided to those who wished some, in completing their application. It is also recommended that a flyer outlining the key components of the programme, as well as contact information, be provided to all attendees at such an Information Session, so that they can review the information at home.

The research team feels quite strongly that the interview process needs to be retained as a step in the recruitment of peers. At the interviews, potential participants who were still in abusive relationships, or still suffering substantial traumatization were identified as being unsuitable at this time, and one candidate who had very poor listening skills was also eliminated through the interview process.

### 3.2 PLEI Curriculum

The Evaluation Framework identified knowledge growth as one of the goals of PLEI, and the curriculum for the training sessions was designed to increase the participants' knowledge in both the social and legal aspects of the issue of woman abuse.

Although the Research Team had intended to hold a focus group to assist in the curriculum development, this was not possible due to scheduling difficulties. As an alternative, interviews were conducted with women to obtain feedback on what legal information they needed during their efforts to leave abusive relationships. Since one researcher's role was to ensure cultural appropriateness, she interviewed three Indigenous women.

These interviews indicated that women who had left abusive relationships had found a number of different pieces of information helpful. As Hill's research (2003) indicates, perceived support is as important as actual support in times of crisis. For one woman, sometimes just knowing that services are available provided her with reassurance. The major points identified in these interviews as information helpful to leaving were as follows:

- Recognition and identification of what abuse is;
- Knowing where to find emotional support;
- Information regarding income maintenance programmes and entitlements;
- Specific legal information regarding family and criminal matters;
- Reassurance that abused woman is not “crazy”; is competent and capable of making own decisions;
- Finding a safe place;
- Advocacy by friends, relatives, legal intermediaries<sup>5</sup>.

This information was consolidated with the suggestions of the Advisory Group, which recommended that information regarding the ethical issues such as the duty to report suspected child abuse and confidentiality be added. The research team then identified a series of eight workshop topics (see Appendix B). Consistent with the principles of PLEI delivery, the workshop themes combine both social and legal aspects of woman abuse, including information about the effects of violence against women, advocacy, income maintenance, support services to victims of violence, family and criminal law issues and self-care.

The research team utilized a wide array of PLEI materials that had already been developed by other groups and organizations. Community Legal Education Ontario (CLEO), Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), and the Ontario Women's Justice Network (OWJN) contributed the largest volume of materials but local resources were also utilized including a video series called “Know More”. A handbook for the

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<sup>5</sup> These interviews did not elicit the need for information related to the effects on children witnessing family violence. This issue was overlooked until a final review of the report but is strongly recommended that it be included.





peer participants was prepared for their continued use and reference<sup>6</sup> although further materials have been copied and delivered to the group at the various sessions.

There were a number of major benefits to using the materials already produced:

- The materials of CLEO, METRAC and OWJN are well researched and dated, ensuring legal accuracy on a wide variety of topics. It would have been very difficult to have such legal expertise within one research team;
- The participants became familiar with a number of PLEI providers through this process, ensuring that they will know where to continue to access accurate, up to date materials and information, and are therefore not dependent on continuous contact with the programme providers;
- By using materials already developed, the research team was able to focus its efforts on identifying which materials might be best for this particular purpose, and spend more time on ensuring appropriate pedagogy.

In general the peers indicated that this experience met their expectations. They expressed a belief that they have increased their understanding of legal processes and the dynamics of family violence. As well, interpersonal skills such as, learning how to listen and how to be a peer advocate were identified as important skills that were developed.

Through the evaluation process, specific areas of knowledge growth were identified by the peer learners. The women were asked to identify what they had learned and then as a group rated these based on importance. The areas of knowledge growth that the group identified as most critical for them were: court procedures, understanding legal advice, understanding legal terminology, criminal injuries compensation, Ontario Works procedures, what women should take when they leave a family violence situation, and how to deal with lawyers. Also of importance was information and learning about family law, the duty to report child abuse, the Domestic Violence Court, Ontario Disability, safety issues in family violence situations, child visitation guidelines, Victim Witness Assistance Program and the process of being a peer advocate.

### **3.2.1 Draft Training Materials**

The training materials were derived from a wide variety of sources readily accessible through programmes and services already in existence. Some of the most used sources were the Ontario Women's Justice Network, Education Wife Assault, METRAC and CLEO. The research team's expertise in this area was extremely helpful in identifying both sources and materials available. The Advisory Group also provided some excellent feedback, and as indicated earlier, interviews with six individuals who had left abusive relationships provided initial directions for the curriculum development.

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<sup>6</sup> The research team would like to acknowledge the support of Northern Development and Mines' *Violence Prevention Initiatives* for funding the publication costs of the handbook.

The curriculum was designed to address the various concerns raised by the Evaluation Framework. Issues considered during development included:

- Ensuring legal accuracy;
- Addressing common misperceptions;
- Placing the legal information within the context of the social issue of violence against women.

Additionally, a number of curriculum delivery issues were considered:

- Delivery of the programme in a safe environment;
- Delivery in plain language;
- Use of a variety of teaching methods;
- Cultural appropriateness;
- Involvement of the learners' experience in the delivery process.

As a result, the curriculum was broken into a series of eight sessions designed to gradually build the peers' confidence in the delivery of PLEI. One session, for example is designed specifically to address their concerns about moving into a legal environment (Session 3: "Preparing to be a Legal Peer").

Early in the discussions, the research team had anticipated that more time would be spent on family and criminal law. In the end, only one evening was devoted to each. However, after reflecting on the research of other PLEI initiatives, it was determined that what the peers needed most, was an opportunity to become confident about *accessing* legal information and advice. Clearly, for them to continue to keep their information up to date and accurate will require that they continue to access legal information regularly, so access will be key. By assisting them in identifying the community sources of PLEI available to them, and giving them the skills to make referrals and obtain the information, the programme can provide them with continuously expanding knowledge.

Many of the peers identified that the resource binders provided to them have been very helpful. They indicated that the books increased their confidence because they know they can access information quickly when it is needed. At the first session, peers expressed concern that they learn accurate and current information about the law, as they understood that much of the legislation had changed since they themselves had last been informed about it. This concern was addressed by providing peers with a list of websites and resources that are updated regularly, so that they themselves can update their knowledge as needed.

The curriculum was divided into eight sections which cover information on the benefits of peer training/learning, violence against women, advocacy and ethical issues, income maintenance and community support services, legal terminology and general processes, family and criminal law, and self-care issues.



### 3.3 Pedagogical Issues

The Evaluation Framework raises a number of pedagogical issues which go well beyond the content of the curriculum:

- Language level appropriate to the group;
- Cultural appropriateness;
- Incorporating the experience of the participants into the learning.

Also consistent with PLEI principles, the research team developed a format for each workshop which provided opportunity for experiential and interactive learning styles, as well as information presentation. Each workshop was designed with clear learning outcomes and to ensure consistency of delivery, the research team designed a Training Manual (see Appendix C attached).

Feedback from the Advisory Group and the evaluator were also helpful in the design of each session's delivery. The delivery was very interactive, with lots of opportunity for questions and answers, as well as small group activities. To address concerns related to self-care, a closing session each night, together with a "buddy-system" was implemented. The buddy system designed at the suggestion of the Advisory Group, ensured that each peer received at least one contact per week from another peer, thus providing further debriefing, encouragement and follow-up. This began the process of developing a mutual support group for the peers, something which the research team asked peers to commit to for a period of at least six months.

Most of the peers expressed that their interest in the training came from their own experience – either they themselves had been abused, or they had close contact with someone who had. The Advisory Group had identified a concern that a process to accommodate peers who might be re-traumatized through the training sessions was needed. As both of the primary instructors were also trained crisis workers, the research team was confident that any signs of re-traumatization would be quickly identified. This particular discussion at the Advisory Group level raised another awareness in the design of the project – i.e., that the project was not a counseling or therapy group. It developed a clarity within the research team that this project was not to be *therapeutic* in nature – the peers selected should be at a place in their lives where they could offer support to others.

There was one peer who mentioned in the closing circle that memories had been triggered by the training, and another individual who one of the instructors referred for counseling as she recognized that some triggers had occurred. This relatively low level of trauma in the group is a reflection both on the skills of the facilitators in dealing with difficult materials in a caring, yet not emotional manner, as well as in the selection of both the peers themselves, and the materials. Clearly this issue is one that is crucial for future training.

The format for each training session was followed throughout, with the exception of the first and final meetings, which incorporated an evaluation component, and therefore had more flexible formats. Each evening began with a "Welcome and Thank you" and "Getting Connected" session. This part of the training was designed to allow some social interaction, and provide

peers with a few minutes reflection on why they were present, what had taken place in the past week, and to re-bond with their co-peers. This model also encouraged the women to talk to each other, learn from one another's experience and knowledge, and provide support to one another.

Following this introduction, the group then participated in a “fact or myth” session. This often followed the format of a brainstorming or small group discussion. In this manner, the peers were able to explore their own biases, societal stereotypes and common misperceptions about the law, the issue of violence against women, and the diversity of women within society. The course instructors found the participants to be empathetic and very open-minded, though initially some of the women were reluctant to open up about their feelings about some challenging issues, such as welfare recipients, or women with alcohol and drug problems. The small group format engaged the women however, and the dialogue provided an opportunity for them to explore issues which were at first somewhat uncomfortable for them.

Each week a presentation on the major theme of that training session was given: violence against women, advocacy, accessing various types of financial support, how the legal system works, family law, criminal law and self-care were the major themes of the presentations. Initially, it had been the expectation that guest lecturers would be invited to come and make the presentation, but this plan was abandoned for a number of reasons:

- The research team had the necessary expertise to deliver the training, and had already established a rapport with the participants;
- Each session was carefully constructed to provide maximum content in the time available – the research team was best situated to understand both the time constraints and the goals of each session;
- To reinforce the empowerment model, peers were encouraged to view the instructors as peers who had a bit more experience. Bringing in “experts” in their professional capacity could have detracted from this goal;
- Frequent acknowledgement of the Anishnabe traditions and culture served as a powerful role model to the Indigenous peers. This was reinforced by presentations on the Medicine Wheel as a model for understanding violence against women, and the healing process.

There was a short break each week followed by a “Sharing/Caring” period which usually took the form of small group discussions providing participants with an opportunity to connect what they had learned in the presentation with their own experience. This section of the training elicited comments from the peers midway through the training, when the instructors asked for feedback on how useful they were finding the training. A number of the peers indicated that they were already sharing the information that they were learning, as well as practicing their listening skills. They shared these experiences and obtained immediate feedback both from the instructors and the peers on whether they were doing this “correctly”, and how they could improve. They felt that the information, as they went home and talked to their families and friends about the course, was having a ripple effect in the community, as their close associates were also learning some of what they had. It also demonstrated the confidence that the peers were developing in using their new skills and knowledge.



The evaluator noted that there is anecdotal information to support the encouragement of peers to use their newly acquired skills and knowledge as soon as possible. In her experience in training nurses to do interventions with survivors of sexual assault, the time between training and using the new knowledge and skills is crucial for retention. Nurses are much more likely to stay on the roster for intervention work if their first crisis call comes within a few weeks of their training, and appear more confident of their ability to deal with the situation.

The closing circle – a common practice within Indigenous communities – was a valuable piece of the agenda. At this time each person was asked to share their thoughts on the evening’s activities – what they had learned, what their experience of the session had been. Often the sessions extended past their end time of 9 pm because the women simply had more to share than time would have allowed, but the women willingly stayed, showing respect for the traditional practice of allowing each person to have their say.

At the evaluation session, the peers identified that they had learned some practical tools which will allow them to be helpful to other women who are experiencing violence. They identified that the variety of learning techniques was helpful. This also sometimes took the form of role-playing, the most successful of these was perhaps the mock criminal trial. The participants were fully engaged in the process of acting out the survivor of abuse, the judge, the crown and defence attorneys, and the witnesses.

One of the themes that came up from both the evaluation with the peers as well as the discussions with the instructors was the fun and laughter that the course engendered amongst the participants. As several of the peers stated, they never wanted to leave at the end of the session because they were enjoying themselves too much. Given the painful subject, it is easy to focus on the negatives, but the opportunity for participants to build on their own experiences, to brainstorm, talk in small groups, interact with one another, lent the programme a conviviality that engendered strong bonds between the peers. These bonds will be invaluable as they share their knowledge in the community.

### **3.4 Cultural Adaptations**

One of the goals of the programme was to engage peers drawn from the Indigenous community of Sault Ste. Marie and area. Throughout the programme a number of adaptations were made to ensure the achievement of this particular goal:

- Members of the research team and the Advisory Group both reflected the cross cultural nature of the programme;
- During recruitment, additional efforts were made through personal contact to ensure that 50% of the participants were drawn from Indigenous communities;
- One of the instructors throughout the course was Anishnabe – kwe;
- The format of the training used the circle as a mainstay in classroom setting;
- The Medicine Wheel teachings were used to illustrate the cycle of abuse and of healing;
- The self-care teachings included traditional teachings.

One of the key factors in adapting the programme for Indigenous peers was the involvement of Connie Manitowabi as a member of the research team. Her knowledge of the grandfather teachings, the Medicine Wheel teachings and other Anishnabe traditions brought a cultural component to every discussion and meeting. For example, when discussing violence against women “male-bashing” can become an easy trap to fall into. Connie’s adherence to the grandfather teachings ensured that men’s role was always viewed with kindness and understanding that they are traveling down an incorrect path. Connie’s participation ensured that there was balance in recognizing that not all men are violent, and understanding that part of ending violence is achieving a proper balance in society.

The cross-cultural nature of the group itself was also a key component to the success of the training. Due to the large number of Indigenous women (fifty per cent) the small group discussions also helped to build the bridge between the cultures. All of the small groups had a number of Indigenous women, so no one was ever “alone”. Two issues were discussed that came directly from the Indigenous experience: the history of residential schools and the effects that experience had on communities and on violence against women; and how alcohol abuse might contribute to increased aggressiveness in women and men.

The evaluator noted a number of changes that occurred between the initial assessment at Session 1 and the final assessment at the eighth training session. At the first session, the women had grouped according to their cultures – the Indigenous women clustering on one side of the room. At the final session, the women were interspersed throughout the room, including during the social time when they were sharing food, and making their graduation hats. As they did the self-care circle on the last night of class, Connie shared the medicines and conducted a smudge ceremony. At the conclusion, one of the women shared that in her culture sage was also burned as a cleansing ritual. The evaluator noted that this information was received with interest, and with no apparent discomfort on the part of the Indigenous women.

In evaluating the programme, one of the women spoke of how her “journey” had put her “on this path” of learning, and reaching out to women who had been abused. This language reflects the Anishnabe teachings that life is a journey and that each of us must find our own true path in the journey of life.

### **3.5 Location and Funding**

Algoma University College donated the classroom space for the training. Initially there were some concerns that participants might find a university location intimidating. However, the space proved conducive to peers feeling that they were obtaining a high quality of training, and feeling a part of the university community. As a university, it was also an anonymous space – the women could have been attending any class, not necessarily one that would relate to woman abuse. As a result it was a “safe” place for the women to go. Two employees of the university participated in the training – one a member of the cafeteria staff and the other a member of senior management further contributing to the sense that the university was endorsing and supportive of the project.



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The programme was funded to provide a small stipend of \$20 per night to each participant to meet childcare and travel costs. This stipend proved invaluable to participants as some had almost an hour's drive to get to the programme, while several had childcare costs. Not all participants accessed the stipend every week; instead participants obtained the funding on an as-needed basis by dating and signing a prepared receipt. In reviewing this process, the research team felt that a less obtrusive manner of distributing the funds might have been to provide the funding to everyone, and those who did not require the funds could be encouraged to donate it to a charitable organization.

Additional monies were obtained from the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines *Prevention of Violence Against Women Initiatives* to augment the funding provided by Department of Justice Canada. These funds were used for copying the handbook for participants and for instructional fees.







## 4.0 Viability of the Peer PLEI Delivery Model

The goals of any PLEI project may include a change in knowledge, perceptions and behaviours of the participants (Broad, 2002). The participants in the “Just Between You and Me” project indicated that they had changed in all three areas due to their participation in the training sessions.

### 4.1 Knowledge Growth

Peers identified a number of areas of knowledge growth that went well beyond the family and criminal law issues that one might expect to obtain through a PLEI project directed to the issue of woman abuse. The following areas were all identified by peers in their self-evaluation of knowledge growth:

- Knowledge of community resources available “who to call”;
- Knowledge of various types of income maintenance and compensation programmes including disability benefits, social assistance, Employment Insurance, Criminal Injuries Compensation;
- Knowledge and understanding of violence against women and the process of leaving an abusive spouse;
- Legal terminology, court processes, how to obtain legal advice and how to deal with lawyers;
- “Duty to report”, family law and criminal law.

### 4.2 Perception/Attitude Changes

Measuring changes in perceptions and attitudes is often difficult; in the self-evaluations, however, peers identified a number of areas where their own misperceptions on issues had been confronted in the training, or their self-confidence in dealing with an issue had increased. Their comments in this section reflect these changes:

- “Women stand tall and together we gain strength”, “If we stand together we will be stronger”, “Women need to advocate for other women”, “Help women to help themselves – Empower” “Feeling more connected – Sisterhood”, “Women are the Backbone”, “Common experiences”;
- “I can make it through”, “Not afraid to go”, “More secure with self”, “I am more powerful and able to speak what I feel”, “Trust your feelings – if it doesn’t feel right, don’t go with it”, “Strength and Calmness”, “More hopeful” “Empowered to enable change”;
- “Support her voice – don’t speak for her”, “Important to validate woman’s feelings – Believe them”, “Don’t victimize”, “You (we) are not alone”;
- The need to ensure that the abused woman is in a safe place;

- Thought physical abuse alone counted for family violence, “Abuse has many faces – learned it can happen to everyone”;
- “Learned I can’t save everyone”;
- “Don’t Judge”, “Be more open-minded” “Be aware of words, expressions and their real meaning”, “More open-minded, empathetic”.

### **4.3 Behaviour Changes**

The peers were already beginning to report that they were using the information and sharing it with friends and family. When asked to identify whether they felt their behaviour had changed, and if so, how, the participants reported the following:

- “Not being scared to use my voice” “Don’t hesitate to offer information”, “Spread the info around”;
- “Keep eyes open – watch for signs of abuse”;
- “Not just listen – hear”, “Listening skills”, “Listen more carefully”, “Observe behaviours of women more closely”;
- Fight harder, “Speak out for women on social assistance”, Advocate.

### **4.4 Demand for Further Training**

The length of the training was also discussed, with some of the peers expressing their concern that eight weeks was insufficient and that they felt there was still much more to learn. It is hoped that this concern may be addressed through the support network which the peers formed, and which they have committed to for a minimum of six months.

There was a great deal of interest expressed, not only by the peer participants, but also by Advisory Group members and other interested individuals in the community<sup>7</sup>, in further training sessions. Suggestions were offered regarding other funding possibilities such as another grant from the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, or the North Shore Tribal Council. Some of the peers also suggested that there could be train-the-trainer sessions for service organization staff so that the delivery could be ongoing, and some of the peers expressed interest in taking such a course so that they themselves could become trainers.

Other suggestions were that the training session could be offered as a 3-day weekend workshop; that training could be held for men so that they could also become peers; and that more assertiveness training be included.

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<sup>7</sup> Several potential peers who were unable to participate due to other obligations, frequently asked about the progress of the training, and whether there might be subsequent training sessions.



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## 5.0 Conclusions

The scope of this research does not allow for ongoing follow-up, though a full assessment of peer delivery as a valid model of PLEI delivery would benefit from a longitudinal study, which could provide more detailed information. Such a study might examine the number of women influenced and assisted; the continued participation of the peers in the monthly support group and ongoing training; and the overall impact of the programme on the communities from which the peers were drawn.

There is however, substantial evidence that the peer PLEI model is a valuable tool:

- The peers themselves were able to identify substantial knowledge growth regarding the socio-legal issues involved in woman abuse;
- Their self-assessment indicated that their perceptions and attitudes towards abused women had changed to a more accurate, empathetic view;
- The peers also indicated behaviour changes: that they themselves were more empowered to advocate on behalf of abused women, and that their advocacy would be rooted in an empowerment model;
- The peers were already sharing their new information and perceptions with their community networks;
- The requests for more training, both from the peers themselves and from community members, indicate the value that others see in having this type of delivery model.

### 5.1 Evaluation Framework and Recruitment Tool

The “Just Between You and Me” project supports the use of an evaluation framework in delivering PLEI. The framework used in this project guided the development of materials and the delivery, and contributed to making the training culturally appropriate, and empowering. By using the framework to question themselves throughout, the research team ensured that the project adhered to clear goals and processes, resulting in quality training.

The recruitment process was a challenging part of the project, and a number of recommendations have resulted from the process:

- A media conference is an excellent method of creating community awareness and alerting potential peers of the opportunity to participate;
- Using community networks of social agencies, legal intermediaries and personal contact is essential when recruiting from minority communities, and ensuring diversity of participation;
- An “information session” for all interested community members would be useful in assisting the application of some who might find a formal application intimidating;
- Interviewing prospective peers is a crucial part of recruitment to ensure that peers are ready for training.

## **5.2 Materials and Delivery**

The use of materials already developed by other organizations such as METRAC, the Ontario Women’s Justice Network, and CLEO ensured that materials were up-to-date and accurate, and also connected women to these PLEI providers. For the peer delivery model, it is essential that developers of PLEI materials such as these be readily available, as peers themselves do not have the skills or expertise to develop their own materials. By providing peers with the knowledge of where to access accurate legal information and advice, “Just Between You and Me” was able to reassure peers that they do not need to know every detail – rather they develop the confidence that they can obtain such information and advice when needed.

This is a key learning from “Just Between You and Me” – that the validity of the peer delivery model relies on the production of useful, accurate PLEI materials in plain language and the confidence of the peers to understand and use the materials. At the final self-assessment, many of the peers spoke of the resource handbook as a valuable tool that they will use in their dispensing of information.

The training of the peers was based on an empowerment model, following the guidelines of the Evaluation Framework. The interactive, experiential delivery built confidence amongst the peers and encouraged them to problem-solve and role-play. The small group discussions encouraged a cross-cultural atmosphere where peers felt respected and valued, key components of empowerment.

## **5.3 Some Final Thoughts**

The Advisory Group, together with the team approach to the research, played a valuable role – several heads are better than one! Through the combined expertise of approximately eight women employed in the fields of woman abuse, legal advocacy, and education and research, many pitfalls were avoided and several improvements were made. This approach also raised the level of awareness in the community, and contributed to the ease of recruitment of peers.

There have been many requests to the research team of “Just Between You and Me” to provide additional training, both to peers as well as to service providers. It is highly likely that the curriculum developed for this project will be used again to provide such training, due to this project’s success. Now that the model has been developed, peer training can be delivered in a very cost-effective manner, following the template developed.

Finally, the peers new-found confidence in sharing their knowledge supports research which indicates that sometimes just knowing that help is available, is sufficient for an abused woman to decide to leave the abuse (Hill, 2003). “Just Between You and Me” has clearly contributed in distributing that information more broadly.



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# Appendix “A”: Framework for Assessing the Impact of Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) on Individuals and the Community

## Identifying the goals of the Initiative

1. *What is the goal(s) of this PLEI initiative?*
  - a) *knowledge growth*
  - b) *perceptual change(s)*
  - c) *behavioural change(s)*

## Ensuring pedagogical appropriateness

2. *Has it taken into account the literacy level and preferred language of the target audience?*
3. *Are legal terms explained in a way that is meaningful to the target audience?*
4. *Have the materials been reviewed for legal accuracy?*
5. *Does the initiative address common misconceptions about the issue?*
6. *a) Are the materials tailored to the developmental stage of the target audience?*  
*b) Do the curriculum materials selected address the audience understanding and belief systems regarding this issue?*
7. *Does it employ a variety of teaching methods?*
8. *Are follow up materials, sessions or information planned and available?*
9. *Is it delivered in a "safe place" such as a community centre, or a place where the target audience is already familiar and comfortable?*
10. *a) Is it delivered by an educator who is already known to, and has developed a relationship of trust with the audience?*  
*b) Does the programme/educator model the behaviour changes desired by the programme?*

## Community appropriateness

11. *Who participated in establishing need and setting the goals? (i.e., target audience, intermediaries, community leadership, PLEI providers)*
12. *How were the goals identified?*
13. *Was there collaboration with others/intermediaries who are connected with the target audience in the production, distribution and/or delivery of the program, materials or initiative?*
14. *Was the community leadership involved?*
15. *Has the delivery agent considered where the information would be most readily available to the target audience?*

## **Reaching the target audience**

- 12. Who and how many people is it reaching?*
- 13. What knowledge has been gained?*
- 14. Have learners been asked for feedback on other PLEI that may be needed?*
- 15. Have efforts been made to reach other service providers?*
- 16. Is it helping to develop skills, confidence, leaders within the target audience?*
- 17. Is it motivating learners to participate in other community activities?*
- 18. Are intermediaries initiating new/more PLEI?*
- 19. Are learners initiating new/more PLEI?*





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## Appendix “B”

### Screening Tool for Selection of Peers

#### Introduction

The objective of the “Just Between You and Me” project is to provide Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) peer support to victims of family violence, and assess its validity as a model for PLEI delivery. The project will train peers in two communities: the Indigenous community in Sault Ste. Marie and area, and Sault Ste. Marie. The peers will be provided with resource materials and an orientation to some of the most common issues arising for victims of family violence. They will then share this information within their own networks of family, coworkers and communities, using resources already developed and existing in their areas.

To ensure that peers selected for the training are able to deliver the programme effectively, the research team reviewed other peer programmes and consulted with the Advisory Group to the project to develop the following selection criteria and screening tool.

#### Peer Selection Criteria

From a review of the literature, and the Advisory Group’s suggestions, the following criteria were established to guide peer recruitment and selection:

- The candidate will demonstrate the willingness to learn and become empathetic to the issues that are faced by women who experience family violence.
- The candidate will demonstrate a willingness to work within the feminist model of empowerment (i.e., raising women’s capacity to gain control over their lives).
- The candidate will demonstrate respect for and sensitivity towards a diversity of women.
- The candidate will demonstrate some evidence of having a large network of people contacts, i.e. people person.
- The candidate will demonstrate the understanding of confidentiality.
- The candidate will demonstrate a reasonable amount of availability (both in time and accessibility to people).
- The candidate will demonstrate the use and awareness of her own self-care plan.

#### Recruitment Process

The initial proposal had suggested that recruitment would be done through contacting various organizations throughout the community which were already known to the research team. A poster was designed to advertize the program, and the organizations are being requested to post these in high-visibility areas. Members of the Advisory Group are also being asked to distribute the poster within their organizations and networks, and to make referrals to the program.

The research team was cognizant that making the recruitment process too onerous might discourage some valuable peers, but also wished to ensure that appropriate rigour be applied to limit the size of the peer recruits to those most able to distribute PLEI broadly through the community. To ensure diversity in the networks to which peers had access, it was concluded that an application process would be valuable.

Potential peers are requested to provide the following in application to the position:

1. Provide a letter of introduction, or resume which outlines your interest in the “Just Between You and Me” program, and your networks in the community (e.g. parents’ school council, faith group, recreational group, etc).
2. Provide one professional reference, name and contact number.  
e.g. employer (current or former), volunteer supervisor, teacher, clergy person, etc.
3. Provide two personal references, names and numbers.  
e.g. family or friends.
4. Willing to obtain C.P.I.C. (C.P.I.C. is available to volunteers at no cost, and the project team will assist volunteers in obtaining, after selection).

*\*\*Consideration may be given to some applicants from immigrant communities who, due to their networks would be desirable candidates, but may be unable to submit resumes and references. It is recognized that language proficiency and lack of work experience may pose barriers to immigrant women meeting the selection criteria. In those situations, an interview which will elicit the above-noted information would be more appropriate.*

## **Interview and Contract**

Following the submission of the application, references will be checked, and potential peers will be contacted and requested to attend for an interview. For consistency, a set of interview questions have been developed, based on the selection criteria.

At the conclusion of the interviews, the research team will select those candidates for training who:

- a) satisfy the team that they meet the criteria
- b) represent the diversity of Sault Ste. Marie and area
- c) at least 50% shall be from the Indigenous community



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## Conclusion

The Screening Tool and Process therefore has the following components:

- Referrals through organizations that already provide services in this area;
- Application through letter of introduction or resume, including references;
- CPIC;
- Interviewing process;
- Contract signature.

Through this five-step process, it is expected that peers will be selected who will be able to meet the selection criteria identified by the research team and the Advisory Group.

## Interview Questions

1. Interviewer will introduce and describe the project “Just Between You and Me”

Interviewer will give the expectations the project have for participants and provide participants with a copy of the “contract” (See below). Interviewer will particularly identify the issues of confidentiality and time commitment.

2. Do you have any questions or concerns regarding your ability to meet the terms of the “contract”? (Goal: To identify whether participant is prepared to make sufficient commitment to project).
3. How did you hear about this project? (Goal: To identify participant’s community connections)
4. If you receive this training, how would you share your new knowledge with other women? (Goal: to identify diversity of networks that may be accessed)
5. Describe yourself, as a listener, and as a talker. (Goal: to identify ability to maintain confidentiality, ability to discern presence of abuse)
6. Name and describe two different types of abuse. (Goal: to identify participant’s knowledge level regarding woman abuse)
7. Describe one situation where you were confronted by someone who held very different views and/or values from yourself. What did you learn from that experience? (Goal: To identify participant’s capacity to respect diversity)
8. Scenario: A friend has disclosed to you that she has left her partner, and he has been charged with assault towards her. She is having second thoughts and is questioning if she has done the right thing in calling the police.

How would you respond to this situation? (Goal: to assess participant’s ability to identify some of the key issues in dealing with women assault)

9. What are some things that you do to take care of yourself? (Goal: Identify participant’s ability to balance her own needs with needs of peers)

### **Expectations of Participants (Contract)**

- Attend eight 3-hour information training sessions. There will be one session a week for eight weeks.
- Attend one additional, 2 hour evaluation follow-up session approximately 3 weeks after the completion of the eight week training and information sessions.
- Keep the confidentiality of peers.\*
- Respect the perspectives of equality and diversity.
- Acknowledge that the safety of peers and self is a primary concern, and take no unnecessary risks.
- The peer PLEI providers will ensure a reasonable amount of “time off” for themselves.
- To continue to meet and support each other for a minimum of six months following the training and information sessions.

*\* Confidentiality means that information received or observed about a community member, a client, or a community/client group will be held in confidence and disclosed only when the peer volunteer is properly authorized in writing or obligated legally to do so.*

*-Adapted from the Social Work Code of Ethics*

Dated at Sault Ste. Marie this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2003.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_



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# Appendix “C”: Just Between You and Me A Public Legal Education and Information (PLEI) Manual for Training Peers of Abused Women

## Curriculum Outline

*This manual is intended for use with the accompanying booklet “Just Between You and Me: A PLEI Handbook for Peers of Abused Women”. It is intended for the use of PLEI delivery to peers of battered women in the Sault Ste. Marie area. Due to the community demographics, the programme emphasizes the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. Adjustments would be required to address the needs of larger urban centres with a larger immigrant population. It is intended for use with the accompanying manual “Just Between You and Me: A PLEI Handbook for Peers of Abused Women”.*

By Gayle Broad  
Gisele Beausoleil  
Connie Manitowabi

December, 2003

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Please see the accompanying handbook “Just Between You and Me: A PLEI Handbook for Peers of Abused Women” for copies of the resources listed.



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## Section I: Using this Manual

*This manual is intended for use with the accompanying manual “Just Between You and Me: A PLEI Handbook for Peers of Abused Women”. It is intended for the use of PLEI delivery to peers of battered women in the Sault Ste. Marie area. Due to the community demographics, the programme emphasizes the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. Adjustments would be required to address the needs of larger urban centres with a larger immigrant population.*

### **Background to the Project**

The Public Legal Education and Information needs of women who experience family violence are well documented and immense. Women who experience family violence do so in the “private and unsupported environments.” (United Way, 1998) of their own homes. Thus reaching women with the PLEI which they so desperately need, is very challenging. Transition houses, leaders in identifying the high risk of physical injury facing victims of family violence, have used a number of ingenious methods to reach women safely, including putting emergency numbers in tampon dispensers.

Some women, such as newcomers to Canada, those with disabilities, or those in rural or northern communities where there are few services, are particularly vulnerable. The nature of family violence, where the perpetrator purposefully isolates the victim, means that there are particular barriers in accessing PLEI, which is compounded when the victim lives in a small community such as a First Nation or due to her youth is less aware of services.

Women want, and often need, to know about a number of legal issues, particularly family law issues such as custody and support, criminal law as it pertains to stalking, harassment and assault, and for new Canadians, immigration law. A recent study also indicated that for some women, knowledge of the Young Offenders’ Act (and its proposed changes) is also a high priority (McDonald, 2000).

In response to this need, victims’ and legal services have developed a wide array of PLEI materials (see CLEO, for example). These have been translated into several languages and a number of strategies have been employed to disseminate them, such as advertising, pamphlets, brochures, the Internet.

Often however, the victim is unable to access and/or use the information. This may be due to the difficulty posed by the “private and unsupported spaces” within which the violence occurs, or it may be due to the trauma of the violence itself. There has been very little research on learning and the law for those who have experienced violence or trauma, but some case studies would indicate that trauma may in fact substantially impair the victims’ ability to retain essential information (Broad, 2002, McDonald, 2000).

The research that does exist indicates that women do, and want to learn through one another, by word-of-mouth, and given the isolationist nature of family violence, this may be the best way of reaching these individuals. Research indicates, however, that learning about the law in this manner often results in information that is inaccurate, incomplete or out-of-date.

## **Why Peer Learning?**

Peer learning works because:

- Trust is easily established – because of similar situations, because they share common characteristics (language, gender, background), because they are not government;
- There is immediate empathy for the situation (the peer may have experienced family violence herself, or knows someone who has);
- The peer has learned through experience;
- The peer is immediately accessible (in the park, at the hairdresser’s, picking up the children at school).

If provided with training and appropriate support,

- Information provided is accurate, complete and up-to-date;
- Information is provided in the language of choice;
- Information provided is timely;
- Information is delivered in cost-effective way.

## **General Programme Format**

The training for the peers has been divided into eight sessions, each session intended to last approximately three hours. The format for each session is designed to provide peers with a safe, comfortable setting where they will feel free to ask questions and develop an awareness of their own learning and perceptual changes. With the exception of the first introductory class, each week will proceed according to the following format:

1. Welcome and thank you – 2 minutes.
2. Getting connected – 15 minutes ( a check-in as to what has happened in the last week, where people are at, etc).
3. Breaking a bias exercise (addressing some of the most common misperceptions and biases about woman abuse and legal issues).
4. Information presentation – 40 minutes (this will include a question and answer period).
5. Break – 15 minutes.
6. Interactive learning exercise – 60 minutes (this will alternate between small group discussions, role plays, practice interviews, etc., providing an opportunity for peers to practice “hands-on” skills).
7. Sharing/Caring – 30 minutes (opportunity for peers to examine what they have learned/experienced over the course of this class).
8. Closing – 3 minutes.





## Section II: Course Outline

### Session I: Introduction

#### *Session Objectives:*

1. *Develop a sense of camaraderie and safety within the classroom setting (buddy system, format of classes).*
2. *Ensure that Indigenous peers feel comfortable and welcomed (Indigenous facilitator and intro).*
3. *Peers learn background to the project.*
4. *Peers experience feeling of empowerment regarding their input into course (valuing of their input).*

ACTIVITY	PRESENTER/FACILITATOR
Welcome	Connie, Gisele, Gayle
Introductions – Tell us about 3 networks to which you belong	Gayle
Background to Just Between You and Me (Section I of Handbook Materials)	Gayle
Significance of peer participation	Gayle and Connie
Establish "Buddy System"	Connie and Gisele
Orientation to Peer Handbook	Gisele
Break and Orientation to Algoma University College	Gisele and Gayle
Focus Group – Identifying peer learning needs**	Anna Hagerly (Evaluator) and Gayle
Closing Circle	Gisele and Connie

\*The “Buddy System” was suggested by the Advisory Group as a method of keeping peers in contact with one another in between the weekly sessions. Buddies would be expected to talk with one another at least once in between classes, and debrief with one another following the sessions.

\*\*The Evaluator will be looking for ways in which peers’ level of knowledge have changed through attendance and participation in “Just Between You and Me”. The Evaluator will look for growth in attitudes, perceptions and knowledge.

**NB: The curriculum may change somewhat depending on the information gathered by the focus group conducted in this first session. Data gathered will be discussed by the Advisory Group to the project to determine what adjustments, if any, need to be made to subsequent sessions.**

## Session II: Violence Against Women

### Session Objectives:

1. Peers are able to define several different types of woman abuse.
2. Peers are able to identify abuse on a spectrum of violence.
3. Peers are able to identify the structural abuse of women in society.
4. Peers are able to identify abuse in their own lives.
5. Peers' perception of feminism is one of equality-seeking.

ACTIVITY	PRESENTER/FACILITATOR
Welcome & thank you	Connie
Getting connected	Connie
"Fact or Myth"	Gisele
Presentation – Warning signs of abuse, power and control, equality wheel	Gisele
Break – 15 min.	
Small group discussion – Does this information change my perception of woman abuse? How?	Connie & Gisele
Sharing/Caring - Where am I on the oppression wheel? What kind of feminist am I?	Gisele & Connie
Closing Circle	Connie

### Resource Materials

1. "Fact or Myth" – Interval House of Hamilton-Wentworth
2. "Dispelling the Myths" – Women In Crisis (Algoma)
3. Power and Control and Equality wheels
4. "The Cycle of Violence" – Women's Outreach, Sault Ste. Marie
5. "Definitions of Abuse" – Women In Crisis (Algoma)
6. "Stalkers and Stalking" – <http://www.antistalking.com/aboutstalkers.htm>
7. "Are you in an abusive situation?" Women In Crisis (Algoma)
8. "Why Do Women Remain in Abusive Relationships" – Women's Program Centre for Spanish-speaking peoples, May 1994
9. "Life Patterns of Canadian Women" – Minister of Supply and Services Canada 1990. *A report by the National Council of Welfare, Women and Poverty Revisited.* Ottawa: Summer 1990
10. "Wife Assault/Assault of Female Partners" – Women In Crisis (Algoma)
11. "Family Violence in Canada: Facts" <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/familyviolence/html/1facts.html>
12. "Words that count women in" – Ontario Women's Directorate
13. "Definitions of Feminism" – Nancy Hartsock
14. "Various Types of Feminism" - unknown
15. "The Women's Movement: A Brief His(her)story – unknown
16. "People call me a Feminist..." Rebecca West
17. "Feminism" – unknown



## Session III: Preparing to be a PLEI Peer

### Session Objectives:

1. Peers are able to identify at least one personal bias.
2. Peers are able to identify at least five symptoms of trauma.
3. Peers are able to describe the Medicine Wheel of abuse.
4. Peers are able to identify at least 2 ethical obligations.

ACTIVITY	PRESENTER/FACILITATOR
Welcome and thank you	Connie
Getting connected	Connie
Breaking a Bias exercise (dispelling myths) - Words that hurt (racism, homophobia, etc)	Connie & Gisele
Presentation – Impact of Trauma & Medicine Wheels	Connie & Gayle
Break	
Ethics, Duty to Report, Confidentiality, Listening and interviewing skills	Gisele and Connie
Sharing – Community Resources	Connie
Closing	Connie

### Resources

1. “Communicate Straight” – unknown
2. “Getting Comfortable Saying No” – Taken from “The Right to Innocence” by B. Engel
3. Defining Oppression - unknown
4. Domination, Oppression, Privilege – unknown
5. “Operating from a lesbian positive perspective: some do’s and don’ts” – London Battered Women’s Advocacy Centre
6. Medicine Wheels
7. “Victims’ Response to Trauma and Implications for Interventions: a Selected Review and Synthesis of the Literature” by James K. Hill. Summary. Ottawa: Department of Justice. RR03-VIC-2e
8. “Empowerment of Women” – unknown
9. “Signs of Unhealthy Boundaries” – John Bradshaw

## Session IV: Getting Out

### Session Objectives:

1. Peers are able to identify at least 3 reasons why women stay in abusive relationships.
2. Peers are able to describe at least 2 types of income assistance available to women leaving abusive relationships.
3. Peers are able to identify at least 3 community organizations they can contact for assistance in helping women leave abusive relationships.

ACTIVITY	FACILITATOR/PRESENTER
Welcome and thank you	Connie
Getting connected	Connie
Breaking a Bias – “Welfare Bums”	Gisele
Presentation – Maintaining an income after you leave	Beth Walden, Algoma Community Legal Clinic (or Gayle)
Break	
Problem-solving exercise – “Finding support”	Gisele and Connie
Sharing/Caring – Staying safe	Connie and Gisele
Closing	Connie

### Resources

1. “Need welfare? How to apply for Ontario Works benefits” – CLEO
2. “Applying for benefits by phone” – CLEO
3. “Community Start-up Benefit” – CLEO
4. “Criminal Injuries Compensation Board – Have you been a victim of a crime of violence?” – Ministry of the Attorney General of Ontario
5. “Housing Programme” – John Howard Society
6. “Instructions” (for making a safety plan) – from *Getting Out: An Escape manual for Abused Women*, Kathy L. Cavanagh. 1996, Huntington House Publisher
7. “How to get the most effective police response” – unknown
8. “Things to Have in Your Vehicle” – OPP
9. “Security Recommendations – Residential, Personal, Vehicle, Office” – unknown
10. “Safety Plans” – unknown
11. List of shelters in Algoma District
12. List of police services in Algoma District
13. List of medical services in Algoma District
14. Other services and resources



## Session V: Understanding the Legal System

### Session Objectives:

1. Peers are able to use the glossary of legal terms provided.
2. Peers are able to identify at least 3 different ways of obtaining legal advice.
3. Peers are able to distinguish between “advocating” and disempowering women.

ACTIVITY	PRESENTER/FACILITATOR
Welcome and thank you	Connie
Getting Connected	Connie
Breaking a Bias – legal terms	Gisele
Presentation – Accessing Legal Information and Advice, and being an Advocate	Gisele and Beth Walden, Algoma Community Legal Clinic
Break	
Role plays – Advocating and Using community resources	Gisele and Connie
Sharing/Caring –	Connie and Gisele
Closing	Connie

### Resources

1. “An advocate does not” - unknown
2. “Do you know a woman who is being abused – A legal rights handbook” CLEO
3. “Four characteristics of Advocacy” – unknown
4. “Say Something” – White Ribbon Campaign
5. “What Can you do?” – unknown
6. “Finding a Lawyer – How to find, pay and work with a lawyer right for you” METRAC & OWJN
7. “Looking for a Lawyer” – Lawyer Referral Service
8. “Can I get a Legal Aid Certificate?” – Legal Aid Ontario
9. “Financial Eligibility” – Legal Aid Ontario
10. “Notice to legal aid applicants, Information Sheet and Legal Aid Ontario application for two hours of free advice” – Legal Aid Ontario

## Session VI: Overview of Family Law Issues

### Session Objectives:

1. Peers can identify at least 3 ways that abused women can obtain family law advice.
2. Peers have a beginning level of knowledge of the process of obtaining interim custody.
3. Peers have a beginning level of knowledge of separation and support issues.
4. Peers can name at least 2 community agencies that would be helpful in resolving custody, access and support issues.

ACTIVITY	PRESENTER/FACILITATOR
Welcome and thank you	Connie
Getting connected	Connie
Breaking a Bias – Justice and the Law	Gisele
Presentation – Families, Abuse and the Law	Gisele/Family Law Lawyer
Break	
Partnering to complete legal forms	Gisele and Connie
Sharing/Caring – Children and the law	Gisele
Closing	Connie

### Resources

1. “Courtroom terms” – unknown
2. “Family Law Glossary” – METRAC & OWJN
3. “Do you have a complaint about a lawyer” – Law Society of Upper Canada
4. “Family Law Information Centres” – Ministry of Attorney General Ontario and Department of Justice Canada
5. “Child Custody & Access” – METRAC & OWJN
6. “Child Protection” – METRAC & OWJN
7. “Child Support” – METRAC & OWJN
8. “Spousal and Child support” – CLEO
9. “Custody and Access Disputes Involving Domestic Violence” – Ruth Busch, and “Special Issues in Visitation Disputes with Allegations of Domestic Violence” by Peter G. Jaffe
10. “Restraining Orders” – unknown
11. Superior Court of Justice Financial Statement forms
12. “Supervised Access Centre” – Algoma Family Services



## Session VII: Overview of Criminal Court Issues

### Session Objectives:

1. Peers are able to name at least 3 criminal charges that may be laid against an abuser.
2. Peers develop a beginning level of understanding of the criminal court process.
3. Peers are able to identify at least 5 roles in the criminal court process.
4. Peers are able to identify at least 3 organizations that may be of assistance to abused women experiencing the criminal court process.
5. Peers have a beginning knowledge of the content of a victim witness impact statement.

ACTIVITY	PRESENTER/FACILITATOR
Welcome and thank you	Connie
Getting connected	Connie
Breaking a bias – Sexual assault	Gisele
Presentation – Video “No More Silence: No 4 ‘Is there Justice”	Gisele
Break	
Interactive learning – Preparing victim impact statements	Gisele and Connie
Sharing/Caring – Children in Conflict with the law	Connie and Gisele
Closing	Connie

### Resources

1. “A Crime Victim’s Guide to the Criminal Justice System” – Policy Centre for Victim Issues: Department of Justice Canada
2. “Criminal Law Glossary” – METRAC & OWJN
3. “Definitions of terminology commonly used by the Police” – unknown
4. “Victim/witness information” – Victim/witness programme, Sault Ste. Marie
5. Victim Impact Statements – Criminal Code amendments
6. Criminal Harassment (Anti-Stalking Law) – Criminal Code of Canada
7. “No More Silence” video series – Shaunagh Gravelines and Harmony Bay Productions
8. “Sexual Assault” (2) – METRAC & OWJN
9. “Intervention Orders” – METRAC & OWJN
10. “Restraining Orders, Peace Bonds & Terms of Release” – METRAC & OWJN
11. Peace Bond application forms
12. “Stalking” – METRAC & OWJN
13. “Sexual Assault Criminal Trial” – unknown
14. “Trial Procedures” – unknown
15. “Women and the Criminal Justice System” – Trainor, Normand and Verdon, Statistics Canada
16. “Intervention Orders” – Intervention Orders and the Domestic Violence Protection Act, Speakers’ Notes
17. “Sexual Assault The Accused” – unknown
18. “Sexual Assault Criminal Trial” – unknown
19. “My Child is in Trouble with the Law” – CLEO

## Session VIII: Self-Care and Support Networks

### *Session Objectives:*

- 1. Peers are able to identify at least 3 things they need to do on a weekly basis to ensure that they care for themselves.*
- 2. Peers establish a schedule for support network meetings for a period of at least 6 months.*

ACTIVITY	PRESENTER/FACILITATOR
Welcome and thank you	Connie
Connecting	Connie
Breaking the Myths – “Wonder woman”	Gisele
Presentation – Empowering women vs burning out	Gisele and Connie
Break	
Interactive learning – ways to support ourselves	Gisele and Connie
Sharing/Caring – Keeping the network going	Connie and Gisele
Closing	Connie, Gisele and Gayle

### **Resources**

1. “My Declaration of Self-Esteem” – unknown
2. “How to be a Fabulous Feminist” – unknown
3. “Nurturing things we do for ourselves” – unknown
4. “Listen” – unknown
5. “Imagine a Woman” – Patricia Lynn Reilly from “Imagine a Woman In Love with Herself”