

# DEMOCRATIZING EXCELLENCE:

The Experience of the  
Research Centres  
on Family Violence and  
Violence Against Women

*Our mission is to help the people of Canada maintain and improve their health.*

*– Health Canada*

*Democratizing Excellence: The Experience of the Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women* was produced by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and Health Canada on behalf of the Family Violence Initiative and the Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women.

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For further information on family violence issues, please contact:

**The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence**

Family Violence Prevention Unit

Health Issues Division

Health Promotion and Programs Branch

Health Canada

Address Locator: 1907D1

7th Floor, Jeanne Mance Bldg., Tunney's Pasture

Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1B4 CANADA

Telephone: 1-800-267-1291 or (613) 957-2938

Fax: (613) 941-8930

Fax Link: 1-888-267-1233 or (613) 941-7285

TTY: 1-800-561-5643 or (613) 952-6396

Web Site: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/nc-cn>

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## Executive Summary

The Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women were selected in 1991 to establish a sustainable capacity to conduct research on family violence and violence against women. Funders were the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada, a federal granting council, and the Family Violence Initiative, a federal government initiative. The Research Centres incorporated the expertise of front-line organizations, provincial partners and academics. There are five Research Centres – in Vancouver, Winnipeg, London, Montreal/Quebec City and Fredericton. Partnership between front-line and academic members is fundamental to the Research Centres. A process that is mutually respectful lies at the core of their success. They all use a participatory action research approach, in which the front-line community defines the research question and helps to design the methodology, and direct, carry out and analyze the research. Research results are then applied in the community. This research model is critical to their cohesion.

This report synthesizes the experience of Research Centre members and draws lessons from the project. Information comes from reports of several review processes built into the project, from documents on the funders' files, from an evaluation of SSHRC's Strategic Grants Program from which the Research Centres benefited, and from focus groups that each Research Centre organized at the request of the funders in 1996/97.

### Lessons: Setting up the Project

Funders must ensure that their funding practices are devoid of barriers to equitable participation by all members before they start a project. When barriers are identified, the funders **and** partners need to find solutions. Funders must be understanding, flexible and supportive. They must be prepared to give the experiment time. Front-line participants in this process initially viewed with suspicion funding that flowed through academic channels, seeing it as reflecting an hierarchical perspective and signaling a lack of faith in their ability to manage money. This underscores how critical communications and transparency are in any process that links groups that have not worked together.

**Funding partners:** Resources can take the form of expertise as well as money. Resources should come from all sectors active in the issue. A resource partnership that includes universities, local community groups and individuals, and federal and provincial governments, builds a continuing relationship and a sense of ownership at the local level.

<b>Project design:</b>	A project such as this needs to be designed in consultation with potential partners. The language used should reflect the spirit of the project. Funders must be flexible and be prepared to modify procedures and practices to meet needs demonstrated by partners.
<b>Resource levels:</b>	Such projects need less money at the beginning and more in the later stages. The Research Centres can find research money, but to start the project and maintain the non-research agenda, core funding is critical. In the current fiscal circumstances, it was optimistic to expect Research Centres to be self-funded in five years.
<b>Sense of “Centre”:</b>	Funders need to create inclusive opportunities, such as annual meetings and joint conference presentations, to give Research Centre members a chance to meet and share strategies.

### Lessons: Establishing A Research Centre

The Research Centres have attracted many hundreds of thousands of dollars for the examination of questions that directly affect policy and practice. Using a participatory action research approach, they have been adept at producing research that is relevant to communities. The research addresses needs identified by ethnocultural and Aboriginal communities, rural women and women with disabilities. The Research Centres have examined issues of violence against women, child abuse and neglect, family violence and the abuse of older adults. They represent shades of thought across community organizations and can bring the right people to the table. They have facilitated development of successful partnership and collaborative mechanisms among academics, government policy makers, front-line partners and the private sector, and extended them to regional, national and international partners. In partnerships, the partners may come from different institutional cultures and the discourse is often different. It takes good will to work out the results of misunderstandings.

<b>Cultures:</b>	Building trust and mutual respect of skills, knowledge and experience, and decreasing cultural gaps, requires dedicated resources and energy. The process must be transparent and open.
<b>Time:</b>	Building Research Centres takes time. Taking the time at the beginning to develop a solid foundation of strong relationships is critical to creating a healthy synergy among partners which permits the Research Centres to excel.

## Lessons: Successes and Challenges

The Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women make their research findings accessible to a wide audience. Core funding gives the Research Centres the independence and latitude to speak on issues both in the university and in the broader community. The Research Centres have influenced the way people conceive and address the issue. They have contributed to the development of federal and provincial government policies. The media consult them because they respect the sound research products. The Research Centres have succeeded in fostering a critical mass of expertise on issues related to violence against women and family violence.

<b>The research model:</b>	Participatory action research is a model that works well for all partners.
<b>Project funding:</b>	A small grants program, such as that instituted by the Research Centres, is effective in involving the front-line community. It attracts resources, fosters ownership, gets buy-in to research, makes use of local skills, teaches new ones and works through growing pains.
<b>Dissemination:</b>	The ability to produce and disseminate pertinent high quality material is critical.
<b>Capacity building:</b>	The Research Centres' most significant "product" is the capacity built by involving researchers in the process. The Research Centre model provides a heightened profile for the university in the wider community, bridges the gap between academics and front-line workers, and is cost-effective for the university.

The Research Centres have all evolved beyond the original concept. They have exceeded every stated project expectation. They have encouraged research projects that brought together researchers from many disciplines to address specific research themes. They have found funding for research, trebling the investments of their host universities. Courses are better and are more grounded. They have enhanced the partner universities' reputations in their communities. They have attracted students to the university. Dedication to the issue and the objectives of each Research Centre has kept participants searching for solutions to family violence and violence against women in an environment that is mutually respectful and accepting.

The Research Centres have excellent reputations in their communities. They are all focal points of research related to family violence and violence against women, with successful outreach programs involving research, communication and leadership in their communities. Governments turn to them to have programs evaluated. Their research agendas have led to changes in policy in the communities they serve. Their work on violence is cited across the country, and the media respect and use their research. The success of the Research Centres lies in the strength of the relationships that have evolved, and in the application of a participatory action research approach that has built capacity to address family violence and violence against women in their communities.

The Research Centres' research agendas are all sustainable. Hundreds of people from many backgrounds have together volunteered thousands of hours. They share strategies and information through an Alliance of Research Centres which they have organized. That so many have done so much with so little testifies to the relevance of the work of the Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women. It is for administration and related activities they now need money. Managing these programs, coordinating research teams and maintaining a Research Centre network takes resources – human, “in kind” and financial. As each Research Centre expands, so does its administrative budget. The Research Centres are looking for ways to ensure that the creative energy and institutional links are not lost.

The Centres of Family Violence and Violence Against Women have provided a cost-effective way to conduct high quality research which responds to community needs. The success of the Research Centres is testimony to the dedication of the participants and staff. The partnerships that have been created have irrevocably altered the ways in which the academic and front-line partners carry on their work, enriching both the front-line and the academy. The products of research have been integrated into the policy-making process and widely diffused to the community at large. The Research Centres have reached the point where they can fully reap the benefits of established relationships among partners and are at that stage of maturity at which they can, as a network, develop a Canadian strategy to address violence.

## Introduction

In 1991, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), a federal granting council, and the federal Family Violence Initiative (FVI) co-funded a project to establish a sustainable capacity to conduct research on family violence and violence against women. It was the first time the funders had worked together and the project combined the expertise of the funders and of front-line organizations, provincial government representatives and academics in an innovative collaboration. The five Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women are in Vancouver, Winnipeg, London, Montreal/Quebec City and Fredericton. Now that each Research Centre has received \$500,000 from the project, it is a good opportunity to reflect on the project and its results. This report outlines the development of the Research Centres, highlights their achievements and considers the project's lessons.

At the outset, the project specified several reporting and review mechanisms. The Research Centres submitted annual reports on progress toward the project objectives. The funders conducted site visits and an independent Review Committee conducted formative and mid-term evaluations. As part of the evaluation process, the Research Centres sent the Review Committee reports and other research products, minutes of meetings, newsletters and newspaper clippings. These documents were added to the funders' files. All of these reports and the files of both funding partners were background material for this report. A compendium of research reports produced by the Research Centres is a companion document to this report.

Information for this report also came from focus groups that each Research Centre organized at the request of the funders in 1996/97. Focus groups consisted of Research Centre members and representatives of the universities, front-line organizations and government departments which work with the Research Centres, but are not members. Representatives of both funders, SSHRC and Health Canada, on behalf of the federal government's FVI, were part of each focus group. Each group was provided with the same set of questions to stimulate thought and help organize the time. For many participants, this was a chance to reflect on their involvement with the Research Centre. They talked frankly about what they had learned from their experiences. Participants' passion about their experiences suffuses this document in the phrases that are quoted. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes in the following pages are from focus meetings.

## Project Overview

On December 6, 1989, 14 women were murdered at Montreal's École Polytechnique. Shortly thereafter, the federal government announced its intention to continue the Family Violence Initiative, dedicating \$136 million for five years. The FVI that was announced in February 1991 involved six federal Ministries. The Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women were developed within this Initiative, at the suggestion of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, as a way to establish a sustainable research capacity to address family violence and violence against women. The project would draw on expertise of researchers from front-line and academic organizations to ensure a research program that strengthened links and transferred knowledge between front-line groups and university researchers. The proposal that was developed for approval of the Minister of Health, as lead Minister for the Family Violence Initiative, featured a partnership of SSHRC and Health Canada, on behalf of the FVI, to jointly manage the project.

The project of Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women was intended to “stimulate and support research in the field of family violence and violence against women with applicability to policy development, through a network of research centres at Canadian universities.”<sup>1</sup> It would promote, coordinate and communicate the results of Canadian research about violence. The Research Centres could investigate violence against women, intra- and extra-familial child abuse, spousal abuse, abuse of older adults, abuse of people with disabilities, all forms of abuse against women as individuals and in society, including physical assault, intimidation, mental or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, deprivation and financial exploitation. The research was to reflect the needs of Aboriginal people, residents of rural and remote communities, ethnocultural populations and people with disabilities. In particular, the research would focus on the determinants of family violence and violence against women, effective intervention models, preventive measures and new strategies. It would lead to change and be applicable in communities. Front-line workers and young researchers would be trained in the project to develop a critical mass of violence researchers and to stimulate the generation of knowledge to inform policy development. Partnership among front-line and academic researchers and government officials was fundamental to the project.

Health Canada and SSHRC chose the 1991 annual meeting of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women to launch a competition. In the end, the Selection Committee found that five applications were outstanding. Successful proposals were announced on November 13, 1992. SSHRC and Health Canada, on behalf of the FVI, equally shared the total cost of \$2.5 million. The funding was new money, over and above the amounts the federal government had already committed to anti-violence programming. The selected Research Centres were each to receive \$100,000 a year for five years to cover administrative expenses, after which time they were expected to have become self-funded. The Research Centres would compete with other applicants for research grants to support their research agendas. SSHRC handled the project's financial administration and

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<sup>1</sup> SSHRC and Health Canada. *Memorandum of Understanding*, June 6, 1991.

received annual financial reports. Health Canada transferred administrative responsibility for FVI funds to SSHRC for two reasons: first, the FVI would end in 1995, before the Research Centre project, whereas SSHRC could continue to carry over funding past 1995, and, second, universities whose faculty obtained SSHRC grants were obligated to provide support services.

Each of the Research Centres submitted an annual progress report, statement of goals and objectives and an audited financial statement. These were reporting requirements that the Research Centres found onerous. The funders jointly monitored progress, conducting a site visit early in the project, an independent formative evaluation, an independent mid-term review upon which the results of fourth and fifth years' funding depended, and this synthesis to draw the threads of experience together.

## The Five Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women

Within the parameters of the Terms and Conditions of the project grant, each Research Centre developed its own model. These models reflect differences in partnerships and organizational goals. Within its unique model, each Research Centre has exceeded both the goals it set out for itself and the original project goals.

### 1. B.C./Yukon Feminist Centre for Action Research on Violence Against Women/Feminist Research, Education, Development and Action Centre (FREDA) – Vancouver

The Feminist Research, Education, Development and Action Centre (FREDA) began as a partnership among service delivery groups, the Women's Research Centre, and academics from the Feminist Institute for Studies on Law and Society at Simon Fraser University and the Centre for Studies in Gender Relations and Women's Studies at University of British Columbia. A national panel to study violence against women was set up about this time. Some women felt that money would be better spent on front-line service delivery organizations, which were beginning to have funds cut, than on studies and research. These factors influenced the initial tentative partnership between front-line and academic Research Centre members.

Despite this beginning, FREDA did establish an office at the Women's Research Centre. A coordinator consulted extensively with community groups in British Columbia and Yukon to determine the research needs of specific communities and front-line service delivery agencies. Participants identified the kind of research that was most required and the particular community groups FREDA needed to involve in the research process. Participants supported a participatory action research orientation and insisted that research address the needs of marginalized populations, including Aboriginal communities, women of colour, and immigrant and refugee women. Based on the consultation, FREDA developed objectives and priorities.

FREDA has worked to include representatives of marginalized groups on its governing board and to undertake research projects with the communities they represent. FREDA has consistently used a facilitative approach, training community members to undertake the research, and editing and publishing the findings. In the last five years, FREDA has published 17 reports addressing issues pertaining to the experience of violence for, among others, the South Asian community, domestic workers from the Philippines, Aboriginal communities, and rural and small communities. It has published guides to helping children who have witnessed violence and also produced a video concerning barriers that are encountered by community members in organizing against violence.

FREDA uses two tracks. On the one hand, FREDA encourages community-based research, at the same time facilitating transmission of research skills to community members, students and new researchers. On the other hand, FREDA takes a lead in producing research that addresses emerging needs identified by its community partners. Existing research is used to formulate presentations to provincial inquiries and is analysed to address current issues. For example, a FREDA survey assessed reaction to the proactive arrest measures in British Columbia's Violence Against Women in Relationships Policy that was implemented after the massacre in Vernon, B.C., in 1996. The press published survey results, and the report of the Coroner's Inquiry on the massacre incorporated some of the recommendations. Research is also used to address policy issues. For example, FREDA collaborated with Westcoast Legal Education and Action Fund to review the Privacy Shield Law. Status of Women Canada and the Vancouver Foundation recently funded FREDA to critically examine all policies affecting women and children leaving violent relationships.

## **2. Manitoba Research Centre on Family Violence and Violence Against Women – Winnipeg**

This Research Centre began as a partnership among the University of Manitoba, Brandon University, the University of Winnipeg, provincial government officials, front-line workers and Aboriginal service organizations, including the Association of Manitoba Chiefs. However, in 1995-96 the Research Centre began a process of developing a more active regional research network. Now the Prairie region, including Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, has become the geographic reference point for the Centre which maintains its administrative core at the University of Manitoba. Each province has a local steering committee composed of front-line workers, academics and government policy makers. Representatives from the steering committees compose its regional council, which is the policy-making body for its regional research network.

In the past five years, the Research Centre has attracted over \$1 million in external grants and contracts to conduct over 30 research projects. The Research Centre has developed criteria for project affiliation which ensure that sponsored and funded research provide findings with pragmatic program and policy applications. All centre committees include practitioners, policy makers and academics. This ensures the relevance of research and has also attracted resources from local and specific interests, as well as provincial and federal funding bodies. The Research Centre's newsletter and guest speakers series facilitate cooperation and serve as vehicles for dialogue among partners.

In pursuit of sustainability, a Prairie Action Foundation has been developed. The Foundation brings together a new type of community partnership involving corporations, community leaders, philanthropists, foundations and government in the three provinces to raise funds to endow the Research Centre's research network. Its research and foundation partnerships are based on the principle of "democratizing responsibility"; that is, family violence is everybody's business and all members of our community have a role in the struggle to eradicate it.

### 3. Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children – London

The Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children is a partnership of the University of Western Ontario (UWO), Fanshawe College and the London Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse. The Coordinating Committee represents community groups as diverse as front-line feminist anti-violence workers, the police, the Children's Aid Society and men's treatment programs. Since 1992, this collaborative venture has provided a solid base for all Centre initiatives. These activities remained true to the goals set out by the Steering Committee. The Board of Directors supervises four research streams: Civil and Criminal Remedies, Education and Training, Evaluation of Intervention Strategies, and Prevention. For each research area, a committee intellectually drives and oversees projects. As the committees have evolved and developed research proposals, more academics and front-line practitioners have joined them and formed advisory committees and working groups for specific projects. The three founding partners and the larger community have representatives on the board of directors and every committee and working group. Through its Small Grants Program, the London Research Centre supports research initiated by the community with seed money of up to \$5,000.

The research performance of the London Research Centre has been exceptional, generating in excess of \$1,280,000 in grants and contracts from sources as diverse as the Trillium Foundation, the Ontario Women's Directorate, the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, the Secretary of State, the Canadian Bar Association, Correctional Service of Canada, SSHRC, Health Canada, the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General and the Ontario Solicitor General. The London Research Centre has done particularly ground-breaking work on the economic costs of violence against women and children, curriculum resource evaluation and development of anti-violence educational materials, evaluation of treatment programs for assaultive men, and the backlash against gender equality in the university.

The London Research Centre is committed to communicating research results as accessibly and widely as possible. It does this through frequently scheduled speaker presentations, seminars and workshops, and through a newsletter and a regularly updated web site. The publication series has been exceptionally successful, financing itself through sales in Canada and internationally. Recently, the London Research Centre has partnered with the local Sexual Assault Crisis Centre to organize a major conference on sexual harassment, from which an educational video will be produced.

The London Research Centre has merged with the Centre for Women's Studies and Feminist Research at UWO to provide a base from which to seek further funding now that the SSHRC/FVI grant has ended. Plans are under way to raise funds through UWO to endow the Small Grants Program and a University Academic Chair on Violence Against Women and Children. The Women's Studies program provides a strong connection, encouraging even more active exchange and collaborative projects among researchers and students from many sectors in the community. Although the two Centres share space and a director, the core structure and individual identity of the Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children will be maintained to ensure the continued close involvement of the founding partners.

#### **4. Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur la violence familiale et la violence faite aux femmes – Montreal and Quebec City**

The Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire sur la violence familiale et la violence faite aux femmes (CRI-VIFF, centre for interdisciplinary research on family violence and violence against women) has researchers from different universities (Université Laval and Université de Montréal) and a variety of disciplines, as well as workers from different practice environments (Fédération des CLSC and Relais-Femmes). All these people have in common an interest in the problems of family violence and violence against women.

CRI-VIFF's research, training and dissemination activities are fully integrated into the actions of the organizations in the community; the research done is pragmatic, not only because it has a concrete impact, but also because it is designed, defined, developed and conducted with those in the practice environments. CRI-VIFF's goal is to contribute to the development of innovative and useful approaches to prevention of family violence and violence against women, as well as to development of more effective intervention models. The three areas to which CRI-VIFF assigns priority for research are:

- understanding the problem of violence in its different forms (includes all studies aimed at defining the forms of violence, determining how people perceive those forms of violence, and so on);
- understanding the determinants of violence (includes studies aimed at identifying the determinants of violence, risk factors and protection factors); and
- analysis and evaluation of the interventions (includes studies aimed at systematically evaluating interventions in the area of violence, with both victims and abusers).

## 5. Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research – Fredericton

The Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research (MMFRC) was conceived by the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Foundation (the Foundation), which has funded research on family violence since 1985. MMFRC began as a partnership among the University of New Brunswick (UNB), the Foundation, l'Université de Moncton, St. Thomas University and New Brunswick community groups. The board of directors has representatives from each partner, an academic and a community representative from each of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and a community representative from each of three research teams. MMFRC is situated in UNB's Faculty of Arts. As a regular faculty member, its director reports to the Dean of Arts and teaches half time. UNB and MMFRC co-fund the director's salary. The associate director liaises with community organizations, manages MMFRC as a full-time UNB employee and reports to the director. MMFRC has a full-time administrative secretary.

The director, associate director and Dean of Arts are *ex officio* members of MMFRC's board. The board meets three times a year to recommend to the Dean operating and research policies. MMFRC is managed by an Operations Committee, chaired by the director, and composed of representatives from UNB and the New Brunswick community. The Operations Committee meets three or more times a year to make recommendations to the board. Since January 1998, MMFRC's operation has been funded largely by a \$2.0 million endowment raised by the Foundation. MMFRC is seeking additional core operating funds.

MMFRC has become the focus of the Atlantic Region's struggle to eradicate family violence. In both anglophone and francophone communities, MMFRC combines research and front-line expertise, and translates the combination into policy. MMFRC has a large research output, but its greatest success is the strong regional partnerships and collaborations it has established among many groups and individuals. People own and take pride in MMFRC. MMFRC supports 210 researchers, most of whom are neither university faculty nor students, but who are survivors, practitioners, service providers, community members and policy makers from government. MMFRC's 20 research teams focus on four action-oriented themes: Isolation, Human Development, Health, and the State. The Isolation theme teams address violence in rural areas and in religious faith, and violence associated with disability and in immigrant, Aboriginal and military communities. The Human Development theme teams address violence in schools, dating violence, violence and the girl child, sexual harassment, workplace violence, women in transition, abuse of older adults and a longitudinal study of family functioning. The Health theme team addresses women and substance abuse. The State theme teams address violence and foster children, child custody/access, survivors and the justice system, and management and treatment of sex offenders.

Building the networks that are required to meld research, action and policy takes time, goodwill and trust. MMFRC supports its members through regular networking meetings, team coordinators' meetings, research days, skills development workshops, public education events, practitioner training, newsletters and an e-mail information network. MMFRC has consolidated its discoveries by constructing and disseminating such initiatives as *Guidelines for the Conduct of Collaborative Research, Criteria for Tenure and Promotion at UNB as They Relate to Faculty Affiliated With the Muriel McQueen Fergusson Centre for Family Violence Research*, and a continually evolving document on Collaborative Research Policies.

## Meeting Project Objectives

The Research Centres have surpassed expectations, developing beyond project objectives. This section discusses how the Research Centres met challenges posed by each project objective.

The Call for Proposals articulated the following project objectives:

- To achieve sustained collaboration among academics, community workers, practitioners, policy makers and other interested parties through developing ongoing research networks in the areas of family violence and violence against women and providing research training opportunities for community workers, young researchers and students;
- To promote the development of a critical mass of research in the areas of family violence and violence against women and to stimulate the generation of knowledge which will assist in policy development, including suggesting new approaches for critically assessing existing intervention strategies and creating more effective intervention models; and
- To make research widely available for use by community groups, policy makers, legislators and the public.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Sustainable Collaboration

The list of Research Centre products demonstrates sustained collaboration. A list of Research Centre products is available from the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, telephone: (613) 957-2938; 1-800-267-1291; TTY: (613) 952-6396; fax: (613) 941-8930; faxlink: (613) 941-7285; 1-888-267-1233; Internet homepage: <http://www.hs-sc.gc.ca/nc-cn>

The Research Centres developed collaborative mechanisms among the original academic, government and front-line partners and extended them to regional, national and international partners. In universities, they encouraged multidisciplinary research projects that brought researchers together around specific themes and projects. They facilitated partnership development among front-line and university partners, the private sector and policy makers. Solidifying these partnerships is an important Research Centre innovation. In some instances, historic working relationships existed among communities; in others, over the past five years the Research Centres built relationships among people who may never have worked together. They regularly refer inquiries to sister Research Centres and there is one inter-Centre research team. They share strategies and information through an Alliance of Research Centres which they established. Some Research Centres have international partnerships to share their expertise on prevention of violence against women and family violence outside Canada.

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<sup>2</sup> Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. *Family Violence and Violence Against Women: Call for Proposals*.

***i. Who is involved?***

The Research Centres are partnerships among communities. "Community" may be a geographic area, a common interest or experience, or a specific population. Communities of interest include institutions such as the CLSCs, hospitals and direct service organizations. They encompass front-line workers, health, social service and legal system professionals, government officials and academics. People belong as individuals or as representatives of front-line organizations. Front-line workers and high school students volunteer at Research Centres. Once they consolidate administrative mechanisms, Research Centres engage partners regionally. In becoming regional Research Centres, they recruit more universities as partners. The cultures in the university, front-line organizations and policy-making bodies are very different, and in forging these links, individuals have confronted biases and preconceptions. It takes time and interpersonal exposure to create the respectful, trusting relationships such collaboration requires.

***ii. How have they been involved?***

*Common ideology*

The Research Centres have been remarkably successful at expanding the original core of founding participants to include a range of people working on issues related to family violence and violence against women. From fewer than a hundred, Research Centres now involve several hundred people. How have the Research Centres engaged such disparate communities? In several ways, they provide an environment conducive to resolution of differences. First, the issue attracts people who share a common vision, frame of reference and compatible belief systems. Research Centre members say that they respect one another and value one another's experiences and opinions. Members talk about "paying attention to the needs of others."

*Process*

Second, the Research Centres established processes that permit differences to be resolved and incorporated into project direction and final product presentation. One Research Centre always saw itself primarily as a process, and at first questioned the value of establishing a physical location. Another evolved to a more horizontal model after much discussion. From a Research Centre built around the founding partners in a vertical relationship, that Research Centre illustrates its current way of working as a process at the centre of a large circle, with members dotted around the circumference and reciprocal communication lines crisscrossing the circle.

Developing research projects is a process of cross-pollination. Members report that the Research Centres "deconstruct myths" and "demystify research." Decisions are usually made by consensus. Members call the Research Centre approach "gentle," "enabling," a "dynamic synergy." Describing the process, they use words such as "mutually supportive," "respectful," "creative," "inventive," "productive" and "credible." One Research Centre participant eloquently conveyed a sense of what the Research Centres do as "democratizing excellence." Members believe that time spent in a Research Centre is part of the community response to violence.

*Inclusiveness*

Third, although management by committee is never easy, the Research Centres have established inclusive administrative mechanisms. Original partners were committed to equitable partnership, although initially they may not have recognized the scope of that commitment. Committee structures reflected the partnership between the academy and the community in which the Research Centre is situated. Those Research Centres that established a senior executive position designated for a person from the front-line community found it to be an effective link to that community. To better serve communities outside the mainstream, the Research Centres include members of minority groups in their management structures. They developed ethical research criteria to ensure that projects meet diverse needs and reach under-served communities.

One particularly Canadian challenge is producing information in ways that are accessible across the country. This is especially a problem for those whose working language is French. Whereas most francophones read English, the reverse is not true. That means that research carried out by CRI-VIFF or MMFRC's Université de Moncton members may not reach the rest of the country. To counter the potential for any sense of isolation, MMFRC is organizing a networking meeting for its francophone members. But the Research Centres admit that rural areas are not well served and that the Research Centre membership, predominantly female, may affect the focus of research subjects.

*Defining the discourse*

Finally, discourse is important. Common terms can have very different interpretations. Members must reach consensus on how they define violence and related fundamental terms. They must come to appreciate each other's environments and realities in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The Research Centres have recognized and accepted that conflict is inevitable when cultures first meet. But they provide environments in which disagreements are resolved in "creative confrontation" which challenges and changes perceptions. One Research Centre member wryly notes that Research Centre meetings provide lots of opportunity to develop facilitation skills. Throughout the process – one which can be time consuming, expensive and painful – the Research Centre environment provides a safe place to discuss differences constructively.

***iii. Why are they involved?***

The Research Centres have created a common ground where academic and front-line members come together in a collaborative process to bridge different needs. One front-line member observed that it has allowed members to "leave the crisis and talk about ideas." The Research Centres address challenges related to attitudes, differing needs, power imbalance and trust in ways that benefit both academic and front-line partners.

*The research model*

The Research Centres apply to a participatory action research model a feminist analysis linked to community interest. Community workers have become disillusioned with researchers who use front-line workers or their clients as subjects, so the nature of the participatory action research model is critical to obtain their buy-in. Front-line Research Centre members already have research skills and the Research Centres encourage them to use their skills to conduct applied research. They provide supportive environments to use skills in interviewing, evaluation and research, so that carrying out research projects becomes a learning experience for everyone.

Giving the research back to the community is important. Research Centre front-line members feel that they own the research results. Not all projects have been successful, but they have all provided learning experiences. Research Centre members say that the research forms a “creative tension between excellence and action.” Participatory action research has “galvanized” their communities and empowered them to put research results into immediate practice. Their voice is heard through the Research Centre experience. Members believe that the Research Centres have so effectively changed the map of research in the community that they cannot go back to addressing research questions in the old way.

*The research issue*

The Research Centres are concepts around which people who were working in isolation have come together on issues related to violence. Partners find the work of the Research Centres to be grounded and relevant. Their agendas focus on research that meets immediate community needs, whether those needs be to develop and evaluate programs, to influence the public or policy makers, or to present an issue to the media. They provide means by which questions defined by the front-line community can be addressed. Research Centre results translate front-line experience into public policy. Participation in the Research Centres has changed the way that their community members carry out their practice. At this point, many Research Centre front-line members consider research and evaluation to be integral to project development.

*Front-line community research funding*

Front-line groups historically have not had money for research and evaluation. The Research Centres addressed the problem innovatively. Following the lead of CRI-VIFF and the London Research Centre, they all used a quarter of their administrative grant to create small grants programs. Some programs are intended to match resources “in kind,” time, skills and money donated by the community; others are more in the nature of seed money to develop research agendas and projects. The programs provide up to \$5,000 for community research initiatives. One such project – a video on backlash developed by the London Research Centre, staff and students of the partner college and university – provided media skills; money came from several sources, and those who worked on the project volunteered time. According to comments from focus groups, this seed money approach stimulates the interest and involvement of members of both the academic and front-line communities in action research. Furthermore, this involvement fosters a sense of ownership in these communities. Starting with small projects proves to be an excellent way to learn.

*Benefits to front-line partners*

The Research Centres can be seen as studies in reciprocity: they bring the university and front-line together, bring the front-line into the university and the university into the front-line. The research approach of the Research Centres effectively cements the relationship between the two communities. The front-line community finds the Research Centres accessible and trustworthy. They directly influence the research agenda. For example, an MMFRC research team developed the “Its Up to Me” segment of its dating violence program when students involved in the research said they needed it. Although the process sometimes seems slow, they agree that they benefit from better quality research and immediately applicable results. They may use obviously practical research findings to change programs even before the research is completed. Partnership adds credibility to the research, mobilizes resources and creates opportunities. The Research Centres provide access to the latest Canadian data. Involvement brings new partners to the table and develops links. The Research Centre process has validated front-line experience and legitimized community programming.<sup>3</sup>

Front-line focus group members said they found the Research Centre experience to be personally rewarding. Many front-line workers have personally experienced abuse. They can bring their perspectives to the research, but the research teams also provide social and personal support networks for them. Involvement has been a “changing place” for some, encouraging them to think more broadly, pursue formal studies or focus their studies on violence issues. Members bring co-workers to the Research Centres and take new or reinforced values back to their workplaces. Most importantly, the Research Centres offer their front-line members the chance to share their expertise and experience.

Front-line groups underwrite the Research Centres with considerable donations of time and expertise. Research Centre work tends to be additional to a front-line member’s regular work day. Already stretched for operating dollars, front-line organizations cannot pay staff to participate in Research Centre activities. The funders had not considered this impediment to front-line participation in the project design. SSHRC guidelines on eligible expenses were changed at the request of the Research Centres to include items such as replacement costs, child care and other out-of-pocket costs for front-line participants.

*Benefits to academic partners*

Academic focus group participants say that the Research Centre experience has been rewarding. It has been invigorating to develop better understanding of the structural aspects of violence and the reality of front-line work and to see research applied in front-line work. Membership in a Research Centre facilitates their access to formal and informal networks. Front-line members offer a reality check, raise new research issues, help formulate appropriate research questions and make sure the research is relevant. Research instruments are stronger for collaborative authorship. Academic partners have enriched their teaching styles, bringing the community into the classroom through guest speakers. The Research Centres have attracted students to the issue and enriched their learning experiences through field placements. Although some academic members believe they offer expertise to the community in exchange for research resources, most see the relationship as a team approach.

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<sup>3</sup> Social Sciences and Humanities Research Canada and Health Canada. *Report of the Assessment of Progress Committee for the Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women*. June 1994, p. 4.

Commitment of host universities to the Research Centres varies. They have contributed space, salaries, legal services, payroll administration, computer, fax, telephone and photocopier services, but not all recognize what the Research Centres contribute to the university profile. The Research Centres have attracted donations in kind, volunteer hours and research grants. Partnership gives the university a human face in the community, and attracts students. Internal to the university, the Research Centres act as lightning rods, attracting scholars from other disciplines to the issue of family violence and violence against women. Typically, these include faculties such as Sociology, Psychology, Social Work, Health, Law, Criminal Justice, Political Science, Women's Studies, Gerontology, Industrial Relations and Family Studies. While this is usually desirable, in smaller academic institutions it can syphon expertise from other research areas. Faculties that do not value interdisciplinary research may think it a stretch to link their issues to violence, and so may be reluctant to become involved.

The participatory action research model, which uses qualitative data as well as quantitative data to support arguments, is slowly gaining credibility. As the Review Committee noted in its 1994 report, "research that is hard to define in strict disciplinary terms, that has indefinite time horizons, that involves sharing research definitions and research work with less qualified colleagues, poses problems within academia."<sup>4</sup> Not all academic institutions and publishers accept the concepts of team research and team publication or the time they take. Universities may not value student and faculty participation in a Research Centre, particularly when the Centre is located in a partner university. Tenure and Promotion Committees may not credit collaborative research. The academic community raised this issue during a 1996 evaluation of SSHRC's Strategic Grants Program.<sup>5</sup> All of these factors may have an inhibiting effect on participation of academic researchers, but attitudes are gradually changing. Universities do recognize that researchers who participate in the Research Centres benefit from working with front-line groups, multidisciplinary research groups, and colleagues from other institutions.

#### ***iv. Partnership Challenges***

##### *Integration*

Potential partners were wary of engaging in the Research Centre process at the beginning. Many front-line groups, whose budgets were being cut, felt they knew the dimensions of the problem and argued that money was better spent on direct service. Some felt that the marriage between academic and front-line expertise was a "shot-gun wedding." Because they are physically located on campus, the Research Centres have struggled against being painted as academic organizations. Some front-line members, who may not have been aware of the rationale for financial arrangements, saw power imbalance as implicit in an arrangement that saw funding flow through university coffers and in exclusively academic access to grants from institutions like SSHRC. Others mistrusted government and academic institutions, having had unfortunate research experiences in the past.

<sup>4</sup> Social Sciences and Humanities Research Canada and Health Canada. *Report of the Assessment of Progress Committee for the Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women*. June 1994, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ekos Research Associates. *Report on Interviews of Panel Members for Strategic Grants and Joint Initiatives*. In Sciences and Humanities Council, *Strategic Grants Programs Review: Final Report*. April 1996, p. 4.

They were disinclined to work with either, and securing their involvement is a challenge. The fact that the funders used the phrase “imparting research skill to community workers...” in the Terms and Conditions of the grant to the Research Centres did not inspire their confidence. Some front-line partners challenged the credentials of academic partners who, they believed, did not have front-line experience. Others saw family violence as a “women’s issue.” As partners came to know one another, such issues receded. But Research Centre staff point out that these concerns may resurface if front-line groups and academic partners are once again forced to compete for, or are denied access to, research funds.

The Research Centres have succeeded in creating a welcoming front-line-university partnership. They encourage community groups to use their facilities, making the physical space useful to front-line partners, and ensuring that staff are available to help bridge cultural differences. One First Nations community worker described how the Research Centre provided a physical bridge to the academic setting. Her community began by using the Research Centre’s telephone and fax, then its resource centre, then the university library, and finally by enrolling in university courses. Through the Research Centres, front-line and academic partners have come to appreciate the parameters of the environments in which each works, to value their differences, to respect the needs of other partners and to value the other’s contribution. Interests have melded. No one talks of “sides.” But Research Centre members point out that the good will they have generated has a short shelf-life. Partnerships are fragile and require constant nurturing.

#### *Ethics*

The Research Centre project has raised ethical issues for members. Some believe that the process of accountability is asymmetrical: academic partners are accountable to their university, but front-line partners are accountable to the community at large. Some academic partners thought that designated Research Centre principal investigators were responsible for all research projects. Some were reluctant to recognize front-line research skills and share control of the research. The question of who owns research results – the group for which research has been carried out or the Research Centre – has caused concern. How does a Research Centre reconcile different interpretations of results? Is it ethical to disseminate research results pertaining to a specific local situation? There is always the potential for competition or conflict and academic imperatives need to be balanced against front-line sensibilities. The Research Centres are travelling through uncharted territory on these issues.

#### *Process*

All partners agree that flexibility has been key to good relations between the funding partners and the Research Centres. The novel project concept involved reinforcing old alliances and creating new ones. Policies and procedures needed to evolve or be altered to accommodate the developing needs of the Research Centres. When the Research Centres could demonstrate the effectiveness of their approaches, the funders allowed expenditures that were unusual for the SSHRC program. From the beginning, funders allowed the Research Centres to use part of their grant to develop small grants programs, and publish research papers, proceedings and newsletters. Throughout the grant period, the funders underwrote the annual meeting to enable front-line and academic representatives from each Research Centre to attend and to facilitate conduct of the meetings in French and English.

An annual meeting gives Research Centres the chance to share plans, discuss administrative matters of mutual concern, enhance cooperation and avoid duplication. Health Canada collated an intra-Centre newsletter for the first year. The Research Centres appreciated the funders' patience, gentle prodding and review processes.

#### *Project funding*

In implementing a sustainable research agenda in a limited time frame, the Research Centres faced a conundrum: they were required to find money for research, but, to attract that money quickly, they needed to have a body of reputable research. They felt that funders might have helped facilitate access to grant money by revising their own funding criteria to reflect a commitment to participatory action research in partnership. They also saw that SSHRC, a major source of academic research funding, did not have experience in academic/front-line partnership grants, nor could it fund research by front-line groups. At the Research Centres' request, SSHRC sensitized its adjudication committee members to the collaborative aspect of Research Centre proposals. SSHRC also changed its application forms, accepting less conventionally presented front-line *curricula vitae*, and removed the restriction that principal investigators needed academic affiliation. However, SSHRC grants continue to flow only through academic institutions, so Research Centres' chief financial officers must be affiliated with a post-secondary institution.

Although attitudes are changing, the Research Centres are challenged to find money to conduct participatory action research. Particularly when research funds become scarcer, the challenge involves cultivating potential funders, balancing the competing objectives of the front-line community, policy makers and university partners, drafting proposals and, when they succeed, managing projects. This requires dedicated staff. As the work of the Research Centres increases, so too does the administrative budget each requires. The reality is that it is easier to find money for discrete projects than for the day-to-day Research Centre activities – producing newsletters, organizing meetings, responding to crisis calls and making referrals – activities that cannot be packaged as research. Nevertheless, the Research Centres have succeeded in finding several million dollars for research on family violence and violence against women, more than trebling the return on their academic hosts' investment.

#### *Sustaining funds*

Another adjustment involved the project's annual funding level. Through the project, the Research Centres each were to receive \$100,000 a year for five years. Those Research Centre members that were already conducting family violence research projects were able to fold those projects into the Research Centre agendas immediately. In such cases, the Research Centres were able to use all their annual allocation. Those that had to build relationships from the ground up did not begin to implement research projects until their second year and did not use all their allocation in the first year. SSHRC's financial management allows unused portions of grants to be carried over from one year to the next so that some Research Centres were able to extend the grant until early 1998.

The funding partners encouraged the Research Centres to become financially independent – in part because the contribution capacity of the FVI ended in 1995 and in part because the funders believed that financially self-sufficient Research Centres would be more responsive and responsible to their communities. The Research Centres planned to ensure their survival by such means as establishing endowment funds and becoming more closely integrated into the host university. One Research Centre is supported by a Foundation which raised a \$2.0 million endowment, hoping that the Research Centre could fund projects from the interest. But the income is interest rate sensitive and even that amount has proven to be inadequate as the work of the Research Centre expands. A second Research Centre has formed a similar Foundation and launched a fund-raising campaign in 1998. University hosts have offered to give moral support to other Research Centres if they can find donors. But administrative fees deducted by the universities can be a substantial amount of every grant or contribution. Since the project was developed in 1991, changes in the economic climate have made it difficult to find benefactors.

It is particularly difficult to find contract money for key aspects of Research Centre work, such as dissemination of research results. In seeking sustaining funding beyond the project's five years, Research Centres chose not to approach foundations that supported local projects, in keeping with ethical concerns about diverting locally based funds and competing with front-line community groups.<sup>6</sup> This placed limits on funding options. One could argue that the federal government could have taken the opportunity to attract provincial, territorial and corporate partners at the beginning of the project, when the initial grant could have been positioned as seed money. The Research Centres believe that they have generated momentum to conduct research on family violence and violence against women. They remain concerned that without core funding it will be difficult to keep the institutions alive. While individual links will be maintained, it is the connection among universities, front-line organizations and government officials that takes the issue forward. The commitment to a participatory action research model requires the dedication of all the current partners and more.

#### *Time*

Research Centre members agree that the process of forging relationships and constructing infrastructure is time-intensive. Trust built on understanding partners' realities is fundamental to creation of the interdisciplinary teams through which Research Centres address research problems. It takes time to change institutional culture and attitudes, and the Research Centres are not necessarily credited with either the time that takes or the value of the shift. Altogether, front-line and academic Research Centre members have donated hundreds of hours of volunteer time to build the trust that underpins equitable partnerships. That both front-line and academic members have committed so much time speaks to the relevance and importance of the work the Research Centres do. Funders must find ways to credit this donation of time. Research Centre members point out that family violence and violence against women are complicated issues. Addressing the issues requires long-term commitment. Evaluating outcomes is a long-term proposition. They appreciate that core funding has, so far, underwritten the time for these exercises. They credit their ability to institute innovative dissemination mechanisms and the fact that they have been able to maintain an administrative hub to access to core funding.

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<sup>6</sup> Health Canada. *Report of Meeting of Network Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women*. 1993.

Whereas other joint initiatives funded by SSHRC have had difficulty maintaining the involvement of all partners<sup>7</sup>, the Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women have developed several models of good partnership. At their 1995 annual meeting, the Research Centres concluded that successful partnerships emerged when:

- partnership relationships had been adequately developed, allowing for transparency in the process;
- the roles of the partners have been clearly articulated at the outset of the project;
- ethical questions have been resolved;
- the issue of power difference among partners has been constructively addressed; and
- explicit acknowledgment of accountability has been made.

SSHRC's Strategic Grants Program Review, which examined the characteristics of successful partnerships, supported this analysis. That Review also identified as critical "the presence of an interlocutor who can help partners talk to each other in a meaningful way."<sup>8</sup> The Research Centres have been able to provide the supportive, respectful environment that enables members to find common ground.

## 2. Critical Mass of Research

The Research Centres' commendable research record has been developed during a period of scarce resources. Despite cutbacks, they have levered many hundreds of thousands of dollars to examine questions that have direct impact on practice and policy. Through collaboration with front-line groups, they have been particularly adept at ensuring research products that are relevant to the communities conducting the research. The research has addressed the needs identified by ethno-cultural and First Nations communities, as well as rural women and women with disabilities. The Centres have examined the issues of child abuse and neglect, family violence, violence against women and the abuse of older adults. Front-line members suggest that the Research Centres in their regions have provided the "glue" that brings groups together and "cemented women working in the community."

Because each of the Research Centres provides both a centre of expertise and a community of thought, they have become focal points both inside and outside the academy. The Research Centres have a recognized presence in the community, so they are able to bring together the appropriate people, groups, front-line members and research partners with the knowledge and skills to address issues. As they become better established, communities begin to understand how the Research Centres are dedicated to helping communities help themselves. For example, FREDa worked with one Gulf Island community to develop a process to organize against violence in the community. Through that process, the group constructed an integrated community response protocol. Academic

<sup>7</sup> Ekos Research Associates. *Report on Interviews of Panel Members for Strategic Grants and Joint Initiatives*. In Sciences and Humanities Council, *Strategic Grants Programs Review: Final Report*. April 1996, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. *Strategic Grants Programs Review: Final Report*. April 1996, p. 16.

partners from a broad spectrum of disciplines have been attracted to the issue. Students trained in the Research Centres continue post-graduate studies in the issue. The respectful environment allows exploration of the issues in ways that did not happen 10 years ago.

At the provincial/territorial government level, relevant departments may include Women's Directorates, Child and Family Services, Health, Justice and Social Services. Where health and social services are delivered regionally, Research Centre membership frequently includes representatives from those agencies. Police services are also often part of the partnership. At the front-line, members include organizations responsible for delivering services to abused women and children, coordinating committees and umbrella agencies. Now that Research Centres are developing regional partnerships, teams include people from neighbouring provinces and territories. Growth has been organic, as the Research Centres consolidate their bases. As one Research Centre expressed it, the teams are enriched by variety of place. Managing such far-flung teams presents its own challenges. Maintaining open communication is an ongoing requirement. While nothing replaces the utility of initial face-to-face meetings, the Research Centres are experimenting with alternative media, including teleconferencing. Internet connection allows access to one another and to other family violence and violence against women research resources nationally and internationally.

Being known as institutions that can facilitate access to the right partners has immediate effects. The Research Centres find that when issues are couched as research, groups are more receptive to discussion than when sensitive issues are approached confrontationally. The teams which the Research Centres often develop to address sensitive issues can attract critical players. So, for example, the MMFRC involved congregants to address the issue of spousal assault between church members, and the London Research Centre brought together a group of hospital administrators, police and interest groups to develop an emergency room protocol for people injured by a lesbian partner. The people around the table felt comfortable discussing the issue as a research question when they had been reluctant to talk about it as one of unequal access to criminal and hospital services. Because their work has gained respect, the Research Centres are beginning to influence policy makers who might not otherwise accept feminist analysis. But even working with the provincial government on what one Research Centre called a "parallel mutually supportive track" serves to advance the issue. Government policy may not be pro-feminist, but delivery structures frequently do reflect a feminist approach. The Research Centres bring the two perspectives together in constructive synergy to promote change.

The Research Centres have an impressive inventory of research products. In some instances, the academic members were conducting research on such topics before they joined the Research Centre. In others, the Research Centre consulted the front-line to construct agendas. All Research Centres now add to their research agendas in response to the expressed needs of their members. Front-line groups that need to evaluate a program might approach a Research Centre, or research theme teams might develop projects. The Research Centres find money to carry out these projects and cover the team infrastructure costs. They also respond to government requests for proposals. Increasingly, that avenue is a defining imperative, because successful proposals bring with them considerable funding. The danger in this reality is that the Research Centres must struggle to control their agendas or, at a minimum, accept the fact that implementing them will take time. They are

also less likely to undertake research on emerging issues or on subjects such as abuse of older adults, which are outside the mainstream. This is a problem faced by all organizations that, because they do not have independent or core funding, may be deflected from their own objectives to conform to those of available funding programs. Nevertheless, the Research Centres have created, designed, implemented and evaluated effective intervention models using the participatory action research process.

### 3. Dissemination of Research Results

The Research Centres have used core funding to produce materials that are accessible and to implement dissemination strategies for their research findings. They have appeared before Parliamentary committees<sup>9</sup>. They have put issues on the public agenda, contributing to development of federal and provincial government policies. Core funding has given the Research Centres the independence and latitude to speak out about issues in the university and in the broader community. The Research Centres have helped shape the way people conceive of and address the issue. They are becoming recognized centres of expertise. The media often consult them as opinion leaders because they know that the Research Centres represent shades of thought in a partnership among community organizations and they appreciate that the sound research products address community realities. Coverage of Research Centre findings in the media is reshaping attitudes concerning issues and events. In fact, research results reach beyond national boundaries. The Research Centre results can reach both academic and community constituencies through the distribution networks provided by all their members.

The Research Centres have developed a range of innovative communication mechanisms. The most obvious is that research results are immediately incorporated into university course lecture notes, to the benefit of students. As well, board and team meetings often provide opportunities to transfer research results. One of the first outreach mechanisms to be implemented was the “brown bag lunch” or Speaker Series. Research Centres organize information sessions for their constituencies at convenient times and places on relevant and emerging issues. Occasions of this kind facilitate networking and integration.

Conferences serve as another dissemination mechanism. Research Centre members attend conferences, deliver scholarly papers and organize sessions. Each year CRI-VIFF organizes sessions at L'Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences (ACFAS). The Research Centres made joint presentations at conferences sponsored by the British Columbia Institute on Family Violence, at the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women and at the University of New Hampshire's Family Research Laboratory conference. The Manitoba Centre organized a conference on family violence; MMFRC organized a consultation on a longitudinal study of family violence and a conference on violence in the workplace; the London Research Centre is organizing a conference on harassment. Because these events are local and as inexpensive as possible, they are accessible to front-line workers, providing rare professional development opportunities. The conferences have been overwhelmed by registrations far above the expected numbers

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<sup>9</sup> Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. *Family Violence and Violence Against Women Follow-up to Mid-Term Review: Appendix 1.*

and the events have received national press coverage. Proceedings are published and distributed. Academics note that research results reach a wider audience more quickly through these mechanisms than through academic journals.

Because teams often include government representatives, the Research Centres have seen their results translate into government and organizational policy. The National Policy Team of Status of Women Canada consulted the Research Centres. New Brunswick changed its youth policing policies and has begun to revise sex offender and men's programming because of work done by MMFRC. A MMFRC team developed a school-based program about dating violence which is used across the province. CRI-VIFF sits as the university representative on an interministerial committee on family violence. The screening tool to identify abused women developed by CRI-VIFF for the Fédération des CLSCs is being systematically adopted by all CLSCs in Quebec, thereby affecting direct practice. CRI-VIFF has been instrumental in reorienting discussion in the province – from a criminalized victimology focus to a preventive strategy – and its participatory action research model is being emulated in suicide prevention activities in the province. The school-based *Education for Change* material developed by the London Research Centre for the provincial Department of Education is used province wide. Recently in a keynote address to a Washington, D.C. conference on violence against women, Hillary Clinton referred to research on the economic costs of violence conducted by the London Research Centre as an example of the type of work that needs to be done to advance the issue. Manitoba Research Centre members have studied the Winnipeg Family Violence Court since its establishment, orchestrated community presentations for a provincial inquiry into a family violence-related murder/suicide, and developed a user-friendly evaluation framework for shelters. In British Columbia, FREDA's critique helped shape public opinion about a provincial child abuse inquiry that has precipitated overhaul of the provincial child welfare system. The press regularly seek out a FREDA spokesperson. These are just some examples of ways in which Research Centre results have been used to develop policy and advance understanding of the nature and dynamics of family violence and violence against women.

The ability to produce and disseminate pertinent, affordable, high quality materials is critical. The Research Centres have found that the greater the awareness of the issue, the more community programs are instituted. All of the Research Centres have web pages where they post their research results. Research publications such as those on the London Research Centre's education resources project, its backlash video and its estimates of the economic costs of violence against women, have found ready markets. However, publication markets serve as only a limited revenue source, because many potential purchasers work in organizations that do not have resource material budgets. As a more accessible alternative, the Research Centres have published newsletters to disseminate information on research activities and results. Circulation has reached 2,000 each. They all try to publish newsletters in both languages (for MMFRC, bilingual publication is a legislated requirement), but this is an expensive undertaking. Unfortunately, mechanisms such as newsletters fall victim to periodic financial crunches.

The Research Centres feel that they now have recognized presence in their communities. They believe themselves to be at that stage of maturity at which they can, as a network, develop a Canadian strategy to address violence. An Alliance of Research Centres operating in Canada faces some unique challenges, however. Distance is a big factor. E-mail and internet help, but travel is expensive. Academic conferences provide opportunities for members associated with Research Centres to meet as a group, but this leaves out front-line members. Without assistance from the funding partners to send two delegates from each Research Centre, an annual meeting might not have happened in the formative years.

The Research Centres think that funders need to consider more appropriate evaluation mechanisms that measure the value of institutional partnership and process as well as research products. While the Centres have been highly successful in creating research and educational tools, they have also brought about changes in the academy and the front-line. Students and academics exposed to the environments in the Research Centres have developed an openness to interdisciplinary research, and have experienced how research can be developed and disseminated in applicable ways that respond to the needs of communities. Communities have developed tools which will allow them to better examine the ways they work. These are the types of outcomes that are living testaments to the dedication of the people who truly believed in the concept of partnership.

## Learning

An outstanding feature of the Research Centres project has been the way in which groups came together to examine a contemporary social issue. All partners, including the funders, invested time in establishing relationships and developing procedures to address the challenges. Each Centre developed in a unique way, but they share many experiences and challenges. This section considers some lessons that emerged from the way the project was set up and the way the Research Centres developed.

### 1. Setting up the Project

#### *i. Funding partners*

Resources include expertise as well as money. The federal government, through the FVI and SSHRC, contributed \$2.5 million. University hosts contributed dollars, staff, facilities and services. Front-line organizations contributed expertise, experience and time. Everyone associated with the Research Centres contributed hundreds of hours of their time. Participation of sympathetic bureaucrats facilitates academic access to government.

A partnership that includes the university, the local community and the provincial government builds a continuing relationship and a sense of ownership. All sectors involved in addressing the issues should provide resources for a project such as this to nurture pervasive commitment. Just as front-line workers saw federal involvement in the Research Centres as demonstrating a commitment to the issue, so too could the private sector and individuals be included in discussions of ongoing support for this type of partnership. Host provinces supported proposals for Research Centres in their jurisdictions because of the potential policy implications of their work, but only one Research Centre obtained significant financial commitment from a province. The provinces and territories are key partners in health and social service programs. When research networks are being developed, the funders have bargaining chips, and at that time they are in a position to obtain the tangible support of other key players.

#### *ii. Project design*

An innovative project such as this needs to be designed in consultation with potential partners. Does the proposal nurture an equal partnership? Does it credit the extent to which knowledge flows both ways? How do funders themselves interact with the partners? What do they expect the partnership to accomplish? What shape do they expect accomplishments to take? What sorts of products do they expect? How do they think partners will fund the projects? Are their own programs equally accessible to all partners? When separate segments of communities have not historically collaborated, it is important to be aware of perceptions. The language of project designers should reflect the spirit of the project. When partnerships are new, all these elements are open to interpretation and can unintentionally impede. In this instance, for example, front-line partners initially thought the fact that funding flowed through the academic hosts signalled a lack of faith in the community.

Funders of experimental projects such as the Research Centres must be prepared to be flexible and to modify procedures, practices and evaluative processes to meet program needs. Conventional review may be inappropriate for such partnership programs as that of the Research Centres and must be balanced against respondent burden. Funders must find ways to appraise new products that may not fit conventional expectations. The Research Centres depend on a small professional and dedicated paid staff and a large volunteer staff. They must demonstrate an extraordinary level of commitment. The limited pilot project approach often used by governments to start these projects takes its toll, especially when individuals are involved in several programs. They often see funding dry up for projects that are beginning to make a difference. "Centre fatigue" and disillusionment sap energy and discourage participants when funders do not appreciate the level of personal costs entailed. Funders need to recognize the contribution of members and to value the process.

### ***iii. Resource levels***

The funders need to consider a staged resource approach at the start of such programs. In this instance, the Research Centres were to receive \$100,000 for each of five years for administration. They were expected to find money for research projects and other activities. They needed fewer dollars in the start-up phase, when much of the work revolved around building partner relationships and establishing organizational frameworks, and more in the latter phases, when they had to manage major research projects and respond to front-line requests. They did vary the resource level by taking advantage of funder provisions that allowed unused money to be rolled over to the next year.

Core funding is critical to the Research Centres' non-research agendas. Some of the project's more successful elements, including action-oriented activities, small grants programs, publishing dissemination mechanisms in French and English, newsletters and seminars, involved much more than what is called "research." It is hard to find resources for many of these outreach and dissemination activities, and yet this was a project objective. Without core funding, Research Centres may have to shelve programs. Restarting them will take a regrettable and avoidable amount of effort. Ultimately, this could erode the Research Centre partnerships.

In the current fiscal climate, it was optimistic to expect the Research Centres to be self-funded in five years. To attract research dollars, a program needs a good reputation. To establish a reputation, it needs a body of results. When research funding is available, this dilemma can be resolved, but when money is scarce, innovative programs, in particular, have a hard time finding dollars. Dependence on contract research could compromise systematic and logical research agendas, leading to dependence on projects driven by government and funder priorities. The need for funders to more actively assist Research Centres to find alternative core funding has been identified. In providing such assistance, however, respect for each Research Centre's unique vision would be essential.

### ***iv. A sense of Centre***

It has also been recognized that funders need to create opportunities, such as annual meetings and joint conference presentations, to give Research Centre members a chance to meet and share strategies. The sense of "network" among Research Centres depends on interaction. The face-to-face contact that facilitates setting up a research team is just as critical to the creation of a network of Research Centres.

## 2. Establishing a Research Centre

### *i. Cultures*

Lessening cultural gaps and building trust and mutual respect regarding skills, knowledge and experience requires dedicated resources and energy. The process must be transparent. Front-line groups may have different cultures, norms, approach to research and sense of utility of results quite different from academic organizations. Personal and professional reality differs, different research models are accepted, methodology is different, and academic must publish results. Because the Research Centres work in many new ways – not the least of which include the nature of the founding partnership, a participatory action research orientation that also entails a balance between qualitative and quantitative research methodology, and a focus on current contentious issues – they often challenge dominant norms. Members can find this threatening. When groups unfamiliar with one another's cultures are brought together to work, it should come as no surprise that conflict is part of the process. There is no template for conflict resolution in this context.

### *ii. Time*

Building Research Centres takes time – time to develop partnerships between academic and front-line communities, to recognize strengths/resources, to build trust and cement relationships, time to create respectful processes, to define discourse and develop a new vocabulary, to set up infrastructure and establish administrative mechanisms, to demonstrate relevance to the communities, to develop action-oriented research, to develop a regional perspective, to develop a national partnership, to find research dollars. The development of strong relationships during the initial year was critical to create the healthy synergy among partners which permitted the Research Centres to excel. When they set up programs based on partnership, governments seldom take into consideration the time it takes to develop sound working relationships. In fact, that investment of time in project development pays off for the front-line Research Centre members, because the front-line members involved in the research often take steps to improve their service delivery programs in light of initial research findings even before data are fully analysed.

## 3. Successes and Challenges

### *i. The research model*

Participatory action research is an approach that works well for all partners. It has immediate application for the front line. Participatory action research produces credible answers to the questions Research Centre members ask. The research agenda is focused and grounded. The research methodology has affected the way the community views research. It feels less threatened by research and uses the results to effect. New services are more likely to include evaluation components. Academics have extended their research reach and enhanced their teaching course delivery. Policy makers have used research results to plan.

Ownership of research results may become an issue. Do they belong to the team or the team leader, the community group or the Research Centre? Some institutions remain opposed to the research model and discourage participation in a Research Centre. Many faculty members need to be educated about the utility of the model.

***ii. Project funding***

A small grants program is effective in providing the front line with affordable, relevant research. It involves the front line, attracts resources, fosters ownership, gets buy-in to research, makes use of existing local skills, teaches new ones, and works through growing pains. And researchers have fun. Small grant recipients may need to be close to the funding Research Centre.

***iii. Dissemination***

The ability to produce and disseminate pertinent high quality material is critical. If material that people trust is produced, it will be in demand. Research Centre products have found a ready market across Canada, throughout North America and around the world. Canada is seen as a world leader on the issue. Word is spread by academics, government officials and the connections that immigrants retain with their countries of origin.

***iv. Capacity building***

The Research Centres' most significant "product" may be intangible – the capacity and good will built by involving researchers in the respectful process the Research Centres have employed. They are a cost-effective way to attract several million dollars to produce relevant research on the issues. They are addressing communication challenges in creative ways to establish regional influence. The Research Centre network has developed a sustainable response to family violence and violence against women in Canada. But, it needs to find ways to acknowledge, account for and value personal growth in team members, to document and measure success and to communicate it to people in positions of influence.

The Research Centre model is cost-effective from the university perspective, provides a heightened profile to the university in the wider community, and bridges the gap between the academy and the front-line community. Participation in the Research Centres exposes students to a different research model, interdisciplinary collaboration and contact with front-line organizations and other universities. The greatest challenge can be building bridges in academic circles.

## Summary

The Research Centres have all evolved beyond the original concept. Although the funders envisaged a partnership, even they were not sensitive to the extent to which knowledge flow would be reciprocal and participants would learn from one another. The Research Centre synergy has developed into a special relationship among participants. It is obvious that the Research Centre experience, despite its challenges, has been energizing and joyous. Members are fiercely proud and protective of what they have created. The sum is definitely greater than the parts.

Historically, we have judged project success according to the resulting products. The Research Centres have a long list of products, shown by very extensive lists of publications, successful research grant applications and information-sharing mechanisms. But the real success of the Research Centres may lie beyond the output of such products. It appears to lie in the strength of the relationships that have evolved, in the acceptance of participatory action research approaches in the communities from which the Research Centres are formed, and in the capacity they have built in their communities.

The partnership experience has not been without difficulty. Some original participants have left. Each Centre has encountered situations that have challenged the foundations of the partnership. But a dedication to the issue and the objective of the Research Centres has kept the remaining participants searching for solutions. That they have continued to do so in an atmosphere of mutual respect and acceptance is to their credit. The experience has confirmed the need for funding parameters that recognize the amount of time required to forge these new relationships, even when partners know one another and have worked together individually. Establishing institutional partnerships often challenges in unexpected ways the cultures in which individuals have worked. Special dedication is required to bring together groups of people who have not worked with one another to collaborate on as sensitive an issue as family violence or violence against women. Each Research Centre has reflected on the nature of its partnerships and several have published articles so that others can learn from their experiences. Terms and Conditions of funding should allow the time for these partnerships to gel.

The Research Centres have exceeded every stated project expectation. They have all built excellent reputations in their communities. They are all focal points on issues related to family violence and violence against women. They have found funding for research, trebling the investments of their host universities. They have enhanced their host universities' reputations in their communities. They have even attracted students to the university in part because courses are better and practica are more grounded. Their research has been incorporated into policy in the communities they serve. Their work on violence is cited across the country and they are on the verge of very productive findings. They have done this when research dollars are relatively scarce. Searching for research money takes a lot of time. Even when it results in success, as the Research Centre proposals frequently do, research teams and projects demand to be managed.

The Research Centres have successful outreach programs involving research, communication and leadership in their communities. The media respect and use their research. Governments turn to them to have programs evaluated. Hundreds of people from many backgrounds have together volunteered thousands of hours at Research Centres since 1991. Managing all these programs and research teams takes resources – human, “in kind” and financial. This approach to capacity building has a clear, human cost. After they have been involved in many similar exercises, people become less willing to devote themselves to such ventures because of the amount of time and energy demanded. Volunteer fatigue is high and people are simply running out of energy. That so much has been done with so little by so many testifies to the relevance and importance of the Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women.

The Research Centres' agendas are all sustainable, thanks to the capacity built during the early years. They can find research money. What they lack is money for administration and related activities. Even an endowment does not guarantee the ability to self-fund. Not only is investment growth dependent on the economy, but as each Research Centre expands, so does its administrative budget. Coordinating research teams and maintaining a Research Centre network requires staff. While personal partnerships will continue, maintaining institutional links requires more time and energy than either partner can realistically take on in the absence of a coordinating body. The Research Centres are looking for ways to ensure that the creative energy and institutional links are not lost.

The Centres of Family Violence and Violence Against Women have provided a very cost-effective way to conduct high quality research which responds to community needs. The success of the Research Centres is testimony to the dedication of the participants and staff. The partnerships that have been created have permanently altered the ways in which the academic and front-line partners continue their work, enriching the environments of both. The products of research have been integrated into the policy-making process and widely diffused to the community at large. The Research Centres have reached the point at which they can fully reap the benefits of the partnerships that define them.

# Feedback Form

We would very much appreciate your feedback on this resource material. If you can find a few minutes – in your busy schedule – to complete and return this feedback form, we will use your valuable input to improve future family violence resource materials. Please mail or fax this form to:

**National Clearinghouse on Family Violence**

Health Promotion and Programs Branch, Health Canada  
Jeanne Mance Bldg., 7th Floor, Address Locator: 1907D1  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1B4  
FAX: 613-941-8930

**1. Your province/territory:**

- |                                    |   |                                    |  |                                     |
|------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Nunavut      | <input type="radio"/> Northwest Territories | <input type="radio"/> Yukon        | <input type="radio"/> British Columbia | <input type="radio"/> Alberta       |
| <input type="radio"/> Saskatchewan | <input type="radio"/> Manitoba              | <input type="radio"/> Ontario      | <input type="radio"/> Quebec           | <input type="radio"/> New Brunswick |
| <input type="radio"/> Nova Scotia  | <input type="radio"/> Prince Edward Island  | <input type="radio"/> Newfoundland |  |                                     |

**2. Category of your organization:**

- |  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Social Services    | <input type="radio"/> Health Services          | <input type="radio"/> Professional          | <input type="radio"/> Non-Governmental Organization |
| <input type="radio"/> Federal Government | <input type="radio"/> Provincial Government    | <input type="radio"/> Municipal Government  | <input type="radio"/> Parliament                    |
| <input type="radio"/> Media              | <input type="radio"/> Criminal Justice         | <input type="radio"/> Universities/Colleges | <input type="radio"/> Schools                       |
| <input type="radio"/> Student            | <input type="radio"/> Library                  | <input type="radio"/> Corporate             | <input type="radio"/> Religious/Spiritual           |
| <input type="radio"/> Public             | <input type="radio"/> First Nations/Aboriginal | <input type="radio"/> Other: .....          |   |

**3. Did you find the content of this resource:**

- |  |                           |                          |                                  |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Accurate?                                | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No | <input type="radio"/> No opinion |
| Comprehensive?                           | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No | <input type="radio"/> No opinion |
| Balanced in its portrayal of the issues? | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No | <input type="radio"/> No opinion |
| Up-to-date?                              | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No | <input type="radio"/> No opinion |
| Relevant to your needs?                  | <input type="radio"/> Yes | <input type="radio"/> No | <input type="radio"/> No opinion |

**4. How would you rate this resource in terms of its: (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)**

- |                         |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Style and "voice"       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Use of understandable vocabulary & concepts?    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Overall attractiveness? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Organization? (Is it easy to find information?) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**5. How would you rate the overall usefulness of this resource? (1 = very poor, 5 = very good)**

1 2 3 4 5

**6. How do you plan to use this resource? (Check as many as required.)**

- |  |  |  |                                    |                                |                                |
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| <input type="radio"/> Education                        | <input type="radio"/> Public Awareness | <input type="radio"/> Treatment                  | <input type="radio"/> Training     | <input type="radio"/> Research | <input type="radio"/> Personal |
| <input type="radio"/> Reference                        | <input type="radio"/> Prevention       | <input type="radio"/> Policy/Program Development | <input type="radio"/> Other: ..... |                                |                                |
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7. Did this resource influence your thinking and/or practice?  Yes  No

Please explain:

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8. Will you recommend this resource to others?  Yes  No

9. Will you use information in this discussion paper to: (Check as many as required.)

- Draw on the "lessons learned" in the development of the Research Centres to plan future research strategies?
- Inform others about the work of the Research Centres?
- Will not use this resource.
- Access the Research Centres?
- Other: .....

10. How useful did you find the following sections? (1 = not useful, 5 = very useful)

Executive Summary	1	2	3	4	5
Introduction	1	2	3	4	5
Project Overview	1	2	3	4	5
The Five Research Centres on Family Violence and Violence Against Women	1	2	3	4	5
Meeting Project Objectives	1	2	3	4	5
Learning	1	2	3	4	5
Summary	1	2	3	4	5

11. Does this document raise other issues or knowledge gaps that you think should be addressed?  Yes  No

Please explain:

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12. Please use the space below to add any other comments or attach a separate sheet.

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**Thank you for taking the time to complete and return this feedback form.**

*– National Clearinghouse on Family Violence*