

**standing
together**

a provincial action plan to
prevent domestic violence

Learning about
what it will take to
**Prevent Domestic Violence
in Nova Scotia**

Evaluation and Learning Summary

Diane Crocker & Heather Ternoway
2022



Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
the Status of Women


NOVA SCOTIA

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Prepared for

Standing Together
Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women
www.novascotia.ca/standingtogether

ISBN 978-1-77448-420-3
December 9, 2022

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CHAPTER 1

Foreword

Standing Together set out to work differently to understand domestic violence and map a forward path for Nova Scotia. The initiative embraced innovation, exploration, learning, and evaluation. This approach has produced a deep understanding of the context and promoted learning to inform actions and pathways for change.

This document summarizes Standing Together’s approach and describes key insights from the initiative’s first four years. The evaluation and learning framework incorporated a developmental and participatory approach that benefitted from many contributors. It included multiple perspectives as we “learned in real time” and built understanding of the broader context surrounding our commitments to preventing and addressing domestic violence in Nova Scotia. This approach included collaborations amongst government, academics, researchers, and community.

We did not wait until the end to produce or receive a final report that told us what we had learned and what the results were. The evaluation process was a co-created, collaborative, iterative effort that blurred the lines between “evaluation”, “learning”, and “implementation”. This partnership and approach led to improvements as the initiative proceeded and helps provide context for potential changes ahead.

We are pleased as co-leads of this learning journey to present and share this synthesis document that captures the approach, learnings, and insights from the last four years. This work was made possible (and better) through the contributions of many folks – groups that received grants, people that led collaborative projects, researchers, and colleagues across government that supported the work – who participated in open and honest conversations about what it will take to prevent domestic violence in Nova Scotia, better meet the needs of those experiencing violence, and shift our systems and structures to embrace a more human-centered and restorative approach to address inequities and systemic barriers.

The learnings, insights, and relationships developed through this work have built a strong foundation for ongoing brave and collaborative work to prevent and address domestic violence.

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CHAPTER 2

Standing Together to Prevent Domestic Violence

Standing Together is government's commitment to work differently with community organizations, across government departments, and with academic partners to learn about how to disrupt cycles of domestic violence. The government launched the first four-year, 9-million-dollar commitment in fall of 2018. In 2022, government committed to extending this important initiative, recognizing that to have an impact on this complex issue, sustained coordinated effort and investment are required.

Standing Together focuses on three pillars of change:

- **Prevent domestic violence** by disrupting cycles of violence and ensuring that Nova Scotians are better prepared to develop healthy, violence-free relationships
- **Support victims of domestic violence** with an improved system of programs that help them rebuild their lives and prevent violence in the future
- **Shift policies and interventions** so support systems better respond to people's needs, understand and promote gender equality, and address barriers facing the most vulnerable Nova Scotians

The Office of the Status of Women leads Standing Together. Over the past four years, the Office has facilitated collaborative dialogue with community, government, and academic partners. It has invested in and supported opportunities to experiment, build evidence, and develop a deeper understanding of what it will take to prevent domestic violence.

Standing Together provided grants and supported collaborations to enable community organizations and government agencies to test new, innovative ideas that would both prevent violence and support those affected by violence. Through over 80 initiatives, projects, and prototypes, we have learned about domestic violence in Nova Scotia and have greater insights into this complex problem. An evaluation and learning process provided opportunities to explore what was emerging from the projects and collaborations.

Nova Scotia is now better prepared to create conditions for change and work toward preventing domestic violence.

This report presents key learnings from the initiative. We begin with some context about the nature of domestic violence in Nova Scotia and the needs of those who experience it. We then describe what Standing Together has done over the past four years. The next sections of the report focus on what we have learned about prevention, supporting those who have experienced domestic violence, and shifting policies and interventions. The report then describes the changes that have come about because of Standing Together and what should come next.

CHAPTER 3

Setting the Stage for Change

Domestic violence has significant health, safety, and economic impacts. It is rooted in gender inequality, intensified by systemic inequalities, and connected to social determinants of health and conditions in relationships, communities, and broader society. It creates and reinforces intergenerational cycles and norms that become hard to break.

In 2020, police received 3,161 complaints about violence committed by an intimate partner in Nova Scotia. More than three-quarters of victims were women (Statistics Canada, 2021). It is estimated that only one in five incidents of intimate partner or domestic violence are reported to police (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Domestic violence happens in all types of relationships. However, the data clearly indicate that women are the primary victims and men the primary perpetrators. The trends in Nova Scotia mirror those happening nationally: incidents of police-reported intimate partner violence increased by 2% from 2020-2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Nova Scotia invests in a wide range of public safety partners, including first responders, domestic violence coordinators, high risk case coordination, victim services, criminal justice systems, and a network of vital community partners within the violence against women sector (including transition houses, second stage housing, women's centres, and men's programs). Most of these investments respond to domestic violence after it has happened. The province has invested more in prevention, including work with men and boys.

In 2019, a public opinion poll of Nova Scotians explored public awareness, attitudes, and perceptions around domestic violence and gender inequality. The poll found that most Nova Scotians understand that domestic violence is a crime and believe that it should be reported to police. They also believe that domestic violence is preventable, and is something that communities and governments have a role in addressing. While many Nova Scotians know where to go for help for themselves or a loved one experiencing domestic violence, one in four did not know where to seek help.

In the summer of 2019, the Minister of Justice & Attorney General held listening sessions across the province with survivors of domestic violence. Several themes emerged including the following:

- victims feel alone and isolated. They feel blamed, disbelieved, humiliated, or unheard
- concerns about custody and navigating family and criminal courts
- systems intended to support victims may not understand survivor experiences nor communicate enough
- challenges with police response
- agencies offering supports and services need to better understand the realities and impact of domestic violence on individuals and families; specific cultural contexts; and systemic barriers.

Since 2019, Standing Together has hosted several evaluation and learning workshops which have provided insight into how community, government, and academic stakeholders understand domestic violence. These insights include:

- domestic violence is rooted in gender inequity
- addressing domestic violence requires an intersectional lens
- some populations in the province – for example, African Nova Scotian, Indigenous, women with disabilities and those in rural areas – are less well served by systems and supports
- the system focuses too much on response and not enough on prevention
- the system is not well suited to preventative work
- government and community silos create barriers to prevention and coordination
- agencies that do not normally focus on domestic violence are ready to contribute
- domestic violence in Indigenous communities occurs in a context of colonization, residential schools, and intergenerational trauma
- creating safe(r) community spaces for conversation and awareness will help reduce stigma around domestic violence
- including young people in violence prevention is critical to build resilience, explore emotions, and understand what healthy interpersonal relationships should look like
- flexibility for projects to evolve will enable organizations to adapt and tailor their work to be more human-centred, meaningful, and relevant to participants and stakeholders.

CHAPTER 4

What has Standing Together Done So Far?

Standing Together has worked with community, government, and academic partners to carve a path towards new priorities, innovative actions, and intergenerational solutions to domestic violence. The initiative embraced a relational and restorative approach to creating and strengthening connections to those working in the domestic violence sector and others who have something to contribute. These efforts have focused on learning, innovation, and evidence to better understand how to prevent and disrupt cycles of violence, build relationships, and enhance capacity, while committing to our shared responsibility to work toward deep and lasting change. The diagram below outlines the key phases of this journey; the iterative approach focused on building relationships and understanding that would become the foundation for meaningful, transformative change.



Standing Together has been working with care to ensure that our actions and responses are thoughtful and inclusive of Nova Scotia's diversity and are aligned with the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Calls for Justice. The principles that guided Nova Scotia's approach throughout the National Inquiry – honouring relationships, keeping families at the centre, and collaboration – continue to inform our work and actions taken to date. This work is being led and guided by strong Indigenous women's leadership and grounded in collaborative and respectful relationships.

Standing Together created formal and informal partnerships to advance our work. This included engaging an International Expert Advisory Panel as well as an Interdepartmental Committee representing key government departments engaged in the prevention of and response to gender-based violence. Through the Office of the Status of Women, Standing Together connected with national efforts to coordinate actions to prevent gender-based violence, including the development of the first Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ People National Action Plan and the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

Standing Together developed a strategic partnership with Research Nova Scotia to design and administer a grants program. The funding aimed to build capacity, increase awareness, and foster innovation through development and testing of new ideas and prototypes to prevent domestic violence and better support survivors and perpetrators. Proposals were welcomed from not-for-profit organizations, charities, educational institutions, health authorities, Mi'kmaq band councils, and municipal governments in Nova Scotia.

Two calls for proposals were held in 2019 and 2020 with three different grant streams:

- Prevention (2019) – up to \$10,000 for up to one year
- Shift (2019 and 2020) – up to \$75,000 over two years
- Connect (2020) – up to \$25,000 for up to one year

The calls for proposals generated 103 applications. Research Nova Scotia oversaw a collaborative review process that included academics, members of the Advisory Council on the Status on Women, community sector representatives, and government colleagues. Over the two rounds of review, Standing Together funded 42 projects.

Standing Together also invested in pilots and prototypes led by community organizations, government, and collaborative teams to foster innovation, learning, and action in priority areas. The initiative supported over 40 such collaborations in the last four years.

Standing Together funded projects, programs, and collaborations. The initiative also supported collaborations to innovate and learn about domestic violence prevention in Nova Scotia.

The diagram below illustrates some of the key initiatives, projects, and themes aligned with Standing Together's priority pillars – prevent, support, and shift.



Prevention projects focused on changing the culture, including building capacity, awareness, and engaging new groups that may not typically be involved in violence prevention work. Initiatives in the support pillar reflected new ways of providing support, engaged partners in addressing systemic barrier for underserved populations, and demonstrated new ways of collaborating. Shift projects contributed to learning about relationships, processes, and frameworks that can support the shift to more human-centered systems and transform environments that contribute to domestic and gender-based violence.

To learn in real time, Standing Together developed a partnership with one of the co-authors of this report, Dr. Diane Crocker at Saint Mary's University. She led the evaluation and learning process to help build a greater understanding of domestic violence prevention work in Nova Scotia. The work included interviews with funding recipients and project leads. The evaluation team hosted participatory workshops with government and community representatives. These workshops helped the evaluation team make sense of what was being learned and what changes were happening so that the learnings could guide Standing Together's evolution.

CHAPTER 5

What has Standing Together Been Learning?

The work to learn about domestic violence prevention applied the social ecological model of prevention to guide our thinking. It includes four levels of prevention factors:

- Individual
- Relationship
- Community
- Societal

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022):

This model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community, and societal factors. It allows us to understand the range of factors that put people at risk for violence or protect them from experiencing or perpetrating violence. The overlapping rings in the model illustrate how factors at one level influence factors at another level. Besides helping to clarify these factors, the model also suggests that in order to prevent violence, it is necessary to act across multiple levels of the model at the same time. This approach is more likely to sustain prevention efforts over time and achieve population-level impact.

Most Standing Together projects aligned with the individual and community levels. Individual level work tended towards education and training, as well as programming and counselling. Projects at the community level focused on schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods, and aimed to change these settings to improve their ability to do prevention work.

Smaller numbers of projects aligned with the relationship and societal levels. Relationship level projects included working with parents, families, and peer groups to promote healthy relationships. Societal level projects focused on changing social norms, such as the work with men to re-think men's roles in society and what healthy masculinity looks like.

We have learned that it's easier to work at the individual and community levels. Deliberate efforts will have to be made to work at the other levels to effect systems and social change.

Some prevention work may not look like it directly addresses domestic violence, especially the work that address society and community level change. Lana Wells (2021) provides examples such as pay equity policies, affordable childcare, and decolonization.

The diagram below shows what we learned from Standing Together stakeholders about what each level in the Social Ecological Model might look like in Nova Scotia, or what work could be prioritized at each level.



We have seen, in our evaluation and learning workshops, an appetite for shifting responsibility away from criminal justice to a more holistic approach. Participants' views echo academic research that questions the role of the criminal justice system in addressing domestic violence (Goodmark, 2018; Whynacht, 2021). This perspective came out loud and clear in our 2020 learning and evaluation workshop when discussing the racism embedded in criminal justice and child protection responses to domestic violence. It reflects public conversations questioning the relevance and potential harm of criminal justice interventions in many situations including substance use and mental health crises. A shift away from criminal justice-oriented solutions would facilitate a move toward more primary prevention and create the conditions to make that possible.

Standing Together paid particular attention to several priority populations and communities whose needs have not been served well by the existing system. In some cases, the system has created or exacerbated harm in these communities. Anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism emerged as a major theme and a barrier to meaningful and culturally appropriate prevention work. Participants from Mi'kmaw communities described their lack of trust in mainstream supports and services. They highlighted the importance of strength-based approaches, the need for safe spaces and Indigenous-led programs and service. Standing Together participants from African Nova Scotian communities emphasized their experiences of systemic racism in the province. They want to see Afro-centric service and supports that allow them to directly challenge, on their own terms, some expressions of masculinity in the community.

Standing Together identified three other priority groups for funded projects: women and girls; children and youth; and men and boys. From the work done, it became clear that not all women experience domestic violence in the same way. Not all women can access the same kinds of services. Some women may never seek help or support from domestic violence agencies. Women in rural areas and those with disabilities face additional barriers. One size does not fit all. Standing Together participants agreed that prevention efforts should focus on children and youth. This effort will require further coordination and collaboration with local schools and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. At the same time, we heard that we should take care not to put much pressure on youth to be the "change agents."

The focus on men and boys was particularly significant. In the past, working with men who perpetrate domestic violence was seen as taboo. We have seen a significant shift, and community and government participants highlighted the need to work with men to prevent harm and to generate allies in the movement to end domestic violence.

CHAPTER 6

What Has Changed Since Standing Together Started?

Standing Together has built what one participant called an “intentional and comprehensive container for this work.” The work has generated optimism that was reflected when participants described the most important change they were seeing because of Standing Together. According to participants, Standing Together has addressed gaps in programs and services particularly related to underserved populations. The work has been more human-centred than before, has increased public awareness, and created opportunities for viable and sustainable collaborations.

Over the course of the evaluation, we collected hundreds of stories about what was changing because of Standing Together. The stories tended to be about:

- legislative and policy changes
- opportunities for collaboration and partnership
- programs for perpetrators of violence
- engaging men and boys
- work being led by African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities
- efforts to understand and address systemic barriers
- community capacity, infrastructure, and operational models

The stories collected revealed an increased awareness of the complexity of domestic violence prevention; deeper understanding of what it will take to do culturally appropriate work; and opening space for previously unheard voices.

The stories on the following pages highlight some of the **key insights and learnings** from the work.

Individual Nova Scotians have been affected by Standing Together funded programs.

“During our self-care workshop, we had decided to go away from the outline of our workshop, and focus more so on the activities to really implement self-care practices. We were not at full capacity this afternoon, so there were only four individuals in the group room. I had offered the option to colour, and we were able to sit down at our tables and spent some time colouring, and conversing. Halfway through group, one man, who was seated next to me, struck up a conversation about a number of different historical events in his life, sharing freely. After a few minutes, he told me that he never really thought that he could be so relaxed and content while colouring a picture, letting him share his experiences, as art expression was never really a viable outlet that was ever presented to him. I felt that to truly be a positive thing that happened that day, by allowing him to truly experience a form of self-care rather than talking about self-care in a bigger context.”

People have learned about healthy relationships and gender norms.

“These university male students described on camera how they struggle with how the negative actions of some men can paint a picture of the behaviour of all males but also that they are able to show through their own daily actions that masculinity can be a positive and helpful force. It can provide roles for working hard, respecting others, helping out, and being vulnerable enough to cry or express hard times with a counsellor, friend or teammate. A fascinating point was how varsity football athletes who can sometimes be assumed to be gathering status or influence from wearing sports uniforms struggled with assuming that others who see them in these uniforms think they are toxic, unhelpful males or not capable of positive male relationships and connection.”

Safer spaces have been created.

“We use storytelling to get at the essence of what folks need. We sit down, provide tea, have a safe and inviting environment, and clients say they feel welcome in the space and not judged.”

“We don’t often have the opportunity to come together as a community, to engage in peer-to-peer conversations or have a safe space to connect without having to censor thoughts, words, or experiences.”

Victims/survivors have been supported.

“We gave women with disabilities who experienced domestic violence and the staff who serve them the space to tell their stories. This doesn’t happen very often. But the project also showed how challenging it is to actually reach women with disabilities currently in situations of domestic violence. These women are socially and geographically isolated, especially in rural communities.”

Funded organizations have been strengthened.

"We are part of a project with a new partner organization and people we have long respected and admired. We are strengthening that respect, admiration and excitement in working together, having important conversations and being allies. And also learning about a new territory."

"Example of new partnerships and funding provided to agencies that have not normally worked in the domestic violence field are notable. They exemplify how Standing Together has worked on enhancing community capacity and built government-community-researcher collaborations."

"I think what happened with our organization being able to partner with – like having the partnerships of the other organization, it kind of gives us a little more weight and a little more ability to broaden what we are able to do in our community because mostly we're working in a silo within our very small volunteer organization and so this kind of helps to broaden it so I'm really excited about that."

More generally, the evaluation and learning process identified several changes that occurred under the Standing Together initiative. These included:

- more resources for women in violent relationships
- increased capacity to think, talk about, learn, and effect system change together
- more funding to organizations that do not typically focus on domestic and gender-based violence but work with underserved or at-risk populations
- improved level of collaboration, cooperation, and speed (especially COVID related)
- increased willingness to speak about gaps in services for men and boys
- more safe spaces (i.e., physical spaces for those in underserved populations)
- more updated resources and information about domestic violence and services
- more hope
- stronger connections between organizations, service providers, and government
- more cross-sectoral collaboration
- openness to restorative and relational ways of thinking and working

As Standing Together's work evolved, the evaluation team saw increased attention and interest in system change as an important part of the shift pillar. We explored system level change in the evaluation data based on five key outcomes developed by Fraser and Glass (2019):

1. **increased knowledge and capacity of system actors**
2. **expanded, deepened relationships, collaborations, and networks**
3. **legislative and policy changes**
4. **practice changes**
5. **new narrative and culture shift**

The evaluation and learning process found indicators and changes related to all five outcomes, suggesting that Standing Together had some impact on the system and has created momentum for more change.

1. Increased knowledge and capacity of system actors

The learning and evaluation work notes several examples of increased knowledge and capacity among system actors. We note an increased awareness among those in the system about the effects of racism and colonialism on peoples' experiences and how the system can replicate and reinforce injustice for African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities. There has been a pronounced increased in capacity to work with men and boys. The pandemic led to changes in how agencies use technology and, in some cases, the new capacity to work remotely has had advantages for some services. Members of the Interdepartmental Committee are better informed about domestic violence as a social problem, and also how different government departments can play a role in addressing it.

Standing Together has enhanced community's capacity to work in collaborations, and government's ability to participate in them. We heard participants in the evaluation workshops share their experiences in this regard. One person from the community talked about how they just needed an invitation, yet they had not been invited before. We also heard that the evaluation workshops have helped create conditions for the collaborative work to be undertaken.

Several specific investments have increased the system's capacity to address domestic and gender-based violence:

- equitable funding for Strait Area Women's Place; new core funding for Nova Scotia Native Women's Association
- funding for Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Resource Centre
- support for YWCA's Safer Spaces to support survivors of human trafficking
- COVID emergency response funding to women-serving organizations
- investments in two new shelters (Bryony House and Chrysalis House) and two second-stage housing projects (Autumn House and Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre)
- data infrastructure for women-service organizations
- new operational models at Bryony House, Autumn House, Naomi Society
- pilot to explore expansion of Shelter Movers to rural Nova Scotia

While Standing Together funded projects related to the 2SLGBTQ+ and immigrant populations, less new knowledge emerged around the issues facing these communities.

Among the most important shifts are efforts and willingness to address systemic barriers. The Creating Communities of Care project exemplifies this work in its approach to supporting those experiencing gender-based violence using customary law and Afrocentric approaches.

2. Expanded, deepened relationships, collaborations, and networks

We see evidence of agencies working together differently. In some cases, government agencies are collaborating in new ways. In others, community agencies used the support to develop new ways of working within the agencies. In other cases, the project supported work to enhance relationships and cooperation between government and community agencies.

Collaboration was a common theme running through many of the change collected during the evaluation process:

“New partners are emerging, new people are stepping up and taking ownership and coming into the conversation because it’s a complex issue. If we knew the answer, we would have solved it by now, we wouldn’t still be having these conversations so that to me is one of those little nuggets and evidence of change around bringing so many different people into the conversation.”

“The opportunity to bring in partners and collaborators to make sense of the learnings in a participatory way is inclusive and respectful, and recognizes that none of us holds all of the knowledge and information to chart the course for the next decade.”

The work has provided opportunities for expanded, deepened relationships, collaborations, and in some cases created new networks, including:

- COVID-19 Domestic Violence Coordination Working Group
- Domestic Violence Court Program Working Group
- Nova Scotia Restorative Justice Program Task Group on Domestic and Sexual Violence
- Provincial Highest Risk Domestic Violence Table
- Memorandum of Understanding with Research Nova Scotia
- Standing Together International Expert Advisory Panel
- Standing Together Interdepartmental Committee
- Partnership agreement with Saint Mary’s University to support deep learning and evaluation
- Atlantic Domestic Homicide Review Network

3. Legislative and policy changes

Since Standing Together began, several policies have been updated and relevant legislation amended. Legislative and policy changes have included:

- Amendments to the Fatalities Investigation Act
- Amendments to create the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee and Child Death Review Committee
- Amendment to the Labour Standard Code to allow for domestic violence leave
- Labour Standard Code amendments to strengthen equal pay provisions
- Ended the practice of birth alerts
- Amendments to High-Risk Case Coordination Protocol

4. Practice changes

The evaluation and learning processes revealed many practice changes related to COVID. For example, one project hosted cooking classes on zoom while public health restrictions prohibited gatherings. This kept them in touch with individuals in the program. Some community agencies have kept some adaptations in place. Several projects, such as the THANS review of models of service and some other work on operational models in transitions houses, set the stage for new practices to roll out across the province in other agencies.

One practice change that emerged in the change stories collected focused on a shift to client and human-centred work:

"I think it's been empowering to give those individuals the opportunity to decide what they feel they need and support them with that rather than wait until they're court-ordered to take action and do something."

One theme that emerged from the collaborations is that **how** the work gets done can be as important as **what** gets done. This shift in thinking about process can underpin practice changes and has been an important change that supports improved relationships and collaborations.

5. New narratives and culture shift

New narrative and culture shift epitomize system change, and we see evidence of change in these regards. For example, we see the narrative shifting away from framing women as victims and men as perpetrators. We are seeing a trauma-informed approach to those who experience violence and those who cause the harm, and a recognition that men who have committed violence often face their own underlying trauma.

We have observed a striking change in how violent or abusive men are viewed. While no one excused male violence, the narratives we heard reflected on seeing these men through a different lens. The work with men could catalyse social change that re-thinks men's role in society and what it means to be a man. As one project participant reflected to a service provider, the program is "helping me see my male identity differently."

We heard about emerging narratives more generally from evaluation interviews and workshops:

"We are recognizing that there is a complexity of socially constructed factors which are all at play in incidences of violence... I feel there are more conversations about domestic violence. There is more of an understanding, perhaps, that domestic violence isn't just a private matter, is not just an individual matter, that it will harm families, that it needs to be heard... I've definitely seen a greater shift towards addressing the needs of men... We have created more space for these conversations that we don't want to hear... There was definitely a resistance towards acknowledging or admitting that domestic violence occurs in Canada."

"I have seen a huge change in talking with others about doing and thinking about gender-based analysis plus. There used to be numerous reasons why we weren't in a good place for doing and thinking about gender-based analysis plus. Now, we are doing it! We have developed and are piloting training, and hosted a panel from work across government with champions in other departments who are thinking about how GBA+ applies in their program and policy development work. Before Standing Together, there were numerous reasons for not doing GBA+ work. For example, it wasn't a good time, it was too conceptual, too difficult, not enough data, not the right approach or time. Now it's like the door is open and people are interested or already thinking about these questions and are interested in learning more together about how we can work towards adapting programs and policies (and research) to include a gender-based analysis from an intersectional perspective in their work. What's changed? The time is right. Societal conversations about equity, racial justice are also about gender equity – and it's an exciting time to work towards change."

CHAPTER 7

What Should Standing Together Do Next?

The relationships Standing Together has fostered will allow the province to go forward with coordinated action from government and community organizations, building on what we have learned. We need to prioritize prevention while also continuing to improve responses to violence. Primary prevention and crisis response can work hand in hand to address what the Centres for Disease Control calls a “serious preventable public health problem” (2022).

The evaluation and learning team have been working under the assumption that Standing Together would culminate in a provincial domestic violence action plan. Over the past year, we have explored what an action plan might look like, reviewed plans from other jurisdictions, and heard input from experts, academics, and colleagues about their efforts to prevent domestic violence and other forms of gender-based violence. Working at all levels in the social-ecological model – individual, relationships, community, and societal – will naturally lead to thinking more broadly about all forms of gender-based violence.

Many action plans rely on linear checklists which can be helpful for short-term accountability but may have limited impact. The linearity of a checklist cannot account for the complexity of the problem or be easily operationalized to generate deep system change.

Throughout the evaluation and learning engagements, we have heard some cynicism about “plans that gather dust on shelves.” It may be worth thinking about why this happens. In some cases, it may be that no authority other than “the government” has been tasked with implementation of a plan. In other cases, a plan may have received support from government, but the actions recommended might not have aligned with current priorities. Some members of the evaluation team discussed way to conceive of an action plan differently so that it could be a “catalyst for change” rather than a static report.

In our most recent conversations with the evaluation and learning team, we started questioning the need for an action plan at all. This leaves open the issue of next steps and how to guide strategic commitments to generate a shift towards more prevention work. To be sure, with developmental thinking in mind, Standing Together should not produce an action plan just because that was a good idea when the initiative was conceived.

The time is right for something new.

Doing something new will require focus on the factors that Standing Together participants identified as critical to the work:

- stakeholder engagement
- collaboration and cooperation
- resources, including staff who can prioritize the work
- diversity of service providers
- strong relationships among stakeholders
- social determinants such as housing
- social support for gender equity
- government commitment and champions

In the last several years, we have all experienced unprecedented change locally and globally. People are having more difficult conversations in mainstream places. Collectively, citizens and governments have developed a deeper understanding of our interconnectedness and the complexity of many social problems. The pandemic has required government and community to respond and collaborate in new ways to meet emerging challenges. It has also shone a light on the experiences of domestic violence and many underlying vulnerabilities that contribute to individual, family, and community safety and wellbeing.

In Nova Scotia, gender-based violence is being examined through the Desmond Inquiry and the Mass Casualty Commission, and has entered conversations and media coverage in our province like never before. Social movements and awakenings about race, gender, and inequity – through local, national, and international attention to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, residential schools, Black Lives Matter, Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children – compel us to do better to address systemic racism; unequal access to resources and services; and silos in our systems and structures.

Domestic violence is a complex and serious, but preventable, public health problem. By leveraging the relationships built during the first phase of Standing Together, the province can continue to build upon the trust that has been created, and that is needed, to move forward to address domestic violence in Nova Scotia together. A commitment to coordination, through strengthening and stabilizing the intervention sector, is a critical foundation for success. The forward path needs to continue to prioritize and invest in prevention at all levels. Primary prevention should be the focus of the next phase, and the stage has been set for this focus to be implemented effectively.

No organization holds the only solution to these complex challenges, and primary prevention will take more than a generation to demonstrate impact. We have a shared responsibility to make deep and lasting change. By strengthening relationships built on trust – between individuals, community, and government – we believe that we can create a future where young people will have safe spaces where they can express their feelings openly and honestly, find strength in each other, and learn how to model nurturing, loving, healthy, and safe relationships.

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APPENDIX A

Collaborators and Contributors

Evaluation & Research Team

The evaluation team was led by Dr. Diane Crocker at Saint Mary's University, and included contributions from the following individuals:

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The evaluation and learning process reflected a different way of working in partnership with the Office of the Status of Women and was led within government by Heather Ternoway, Executive Lead, and included key contributions from Lesley Poirier McLernon, Program Administration Officer, and Stephanie MacInnis-Langley, Executive Director.

The work benefited from the inputs of members of Standing Together's International Expert Advisory Panel, Interdepartmental Committee, and team members at the Status of Women. While some members and representatives changed, the following individuals and departments supported Standing Together between 2018-2022.

International Expert Advisory Panel

Gale Burford
Myrna Dawson
Michael Flood
Dawn Lavell Harvard
Jennifer Llewellyn
Lana Wells

Interdepartmental Committee

- Communities, Culture, Tourism & Heritage
- Community Services
- Education & Early Childhood Development
- Justice
- Health & Wellness / Addictions & Mental Health
- Labour, Skills & Immigration
- L'nu Affairs
- Long-Term Care & Seniors
- Municipal Affairs & Housing

Contributing Organizations

Many organizations, groups, and researchers contributed to Standing Together by participating in evaluation and learning processes, leading projects and prototypes, collaborating on new initiatives, and supporting community based change. The list below includes the organizations that received funding, participated in projects, or engaged with the work in a variety of ways. Organizations are listed alphabetically. More information on funded projects can be found at www.novascotia.ca/standingtogether.

- 211 Nova Scotia
- Access to Justice and Law Reform Institute
- Adsum Association for Women & Children
- Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia
- Alice House
- Association of Black Social Workers
- Autumn House
- Be the Peace Institute
- Bridges Institute
- Clifford Street Youth Centre Society
- Coverdale Courtwork Society
- Dalhousie University
- Department of Community Services
- Department of Justice
- Department of Natural Resources & Renewables
- Department of Labour, Skills & Immigration
- Descendants of African Americans Enslaved Living in Nova Scotia
- Direction 180: Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre
- East Preston Empowerment Academy
- Easter Seals Nova Scotia
- Elizabeth Fry Society of Cape Breton

- Eskasoni Mental Health Services
- Every Woman's Centre
- Family Service of Eastern Nova Scotia
- Halifax Transition House Association (Bryony House)
- Heartwood Centre for Community Youth Development
- Hope Blooms Youth Social Entrepreneurial Ventures Inc
- Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia
- John Howard Society of Nova Scotia
- Leaside Society
- Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia
- Membertou Men's Society
- Mi'kmaw Legal Support Network
- Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre
- Naomi Society
- Nova Scotia Accessibility Directorate
- Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities
- Nova Scotia Native Women's Association
- Petite Riviere Elementary School
- Pictou County Women's Resource and Sexual Assault Centre
- Piktukewaq Women's Association
- Preston Board of Trade
- Research Nova Scotia
- Research Power Incorporates
- Saint Mary's University
- Sexual Health Centre for Cumberland County
- Shelburne County Youth Health & Support Association
- Shelter Movers
- Silent Witness Nova Scotia
- Sipekne'katik (Indian Brook) Native Women's Chapter
- Southwest Nova Transition House Association, Juniper House
- St. Francis Xavier University
- Transition House Association of Nova Scotia
- Union of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq
- Victim Services Volunteer Association (Halifax Regional Police)
- Wellness Within (formerly Women's Wellness Within)
- Women's Centres Connect
- YMCA of Southwest Nova Scotia Association
- YWCA Halifax