

Transition House Association of Nova Scotia



Submission to the
Minister's Review Committee
On the
Children and Family Services Act

October 3, 2006

Who we are:

The Transition House Association of Nova Scotia is the provincial voice for member organizations that provide shelter and services for abused women and their children across Nova Scotia.

Our member organizations provide shelter and services across Nova Scotia



What we do:



**Through direct service work,
research, training and
advocacy, our organizations
work towards the Elimination
of Violence Against Women
and Children.**

Our Focus

Section 22.2.i

“22 (2) A child is in need of protective services where (i) the child has suffered physical or emotional harm caused by being exposed to repeated domestic violence by or towards a parent or guardian of the child, and the child's parent or guardian fails or refuses to obtain services or treatment to remedy or alleviate the violence...”

Our Recommendations

Our Recommendations address the Act's interpretation and clarity, messaging about the Act, and training on Violence Against Women. We have also included anecdotal information from our organizations' contacts with abused women impacted by the *Children and Family Services Act*.

INTERPRETATION

THANS recommends that the wording of Section 22.2.i should be amended to read “...and the offending parent or guardian refuses to obtain services or treatment to remedy or alleviate the violence”

CLARITY (1)

THANS recommends that a plain language translation of the legislation be made available to clients

CLARITY (2)

THANS recommends that written communication of a client's requirements become part of protection worker's visits and case management conferences

TRAINING

THANS recommends that a comprehensive and consistent training program in Family Violence and Woman Abuse for all child protection personnel be implemented, and that it be facilitated by THANS member organizations across the province

The Voices of Women ...

The following quotes are from actual situations where transition house clients faced challenges with regard to Section 22.2.i and other sections of the *Children and Family Services Act*

~ Transition House Director~

“Another woman we worked with was told (again I was present during this) by her worker that it was her job and her job alone to protect her children from their father. The woman had been telling the worker about incidents that occurred while he was looking after the children while she worked, but of which she was unaware until recently. The woman was told point blank that these incidents were her responsibility.”

~Children's Outreach worker~

“I am frustrated with the Agency's notion of honesty. If they find out anything that the woman has not told them (perhaps by sheer not remembering or by figuring, usually rightly so, that it is none of their business) then she is accused of not being honest.”

~An Outreach Worker~

“I was told by a CAS worker that they also use Sections 22(2)(f) and (g) to apprehend our clients’ children. This is another example of not taking into account that our Moms, in almost every situation of abuse, attempt to support and help their children through the trauma of viewing violence, only to be prevented by their abusers, and then the CAS workers re-victimize them by blaming them for their children’s problems.”

~Distress Call Story~

“ A woman called our shelter after moving back to the area because it was believed (but not confirmed, and the child could not remember) that her ex-partner has attempted to strangle her child. She moved in with her Mom, and had only intermittent telephone contact with her ex-partner. CAS took her children into care, under the supervision of the woman’s own mom, and ordered her to leave her mom’s home. Throughout a lengthy court process the woman had to live separate from her children. CAS told her at the conclusion, when she was allowed to move back in with her mom, that the reason they took her kids away was that she was having intermittent contact, via phone, with her ex-partner.”

~Lack of Supports~

“We had a woman with a 9 year old son come to the shelter. They were brought by child protection workers. The woman was abused by her partner who kept the family in appalling conditions. During her stay at the shelter we learned the woman had very few daily living skills: cooking, using an electric stove, shopping etc. Because of her history of abuse as a child and an adult she never learned to do these things and her abusive partner punished her for trying to do them. We worked with her at the shelter and it was clear she had the ability to learn the necessary skills. She left the shelter and went home. The child protection people continued to check in on her and found her son was being neglected because Mom was struggling with every day activities. They provided a worker who went into the home a couple of hours here and there which was all they really could do given their resources. Eventually her son was taken into care. If this woman could have had someone to work with her daily for even 6 months I think she would have learned the necessary skills and been able to adequately care for her son.”

CONCLUSION

THANS member organizations and the Department of Community Services (DCS) are the two main providers of service to families where violence is a factor. Although we come to the issues from different perspectives, we have the same goal: healthy families where all members of the family can thrive. Despite the fact that our roles are different, they can and should be complimentary. Working together, we can make a significant difference in the lives of the women and children we serve.

Quote from Susan Harris & Deborah Sinclair:

“... we would encourage workers from both sectors to take responsibility to hold the big picture as we work together to build trust, understand each other's concerns and develop new models of collaborative intervention.”

THANK YOU

The Transition House Association of Nova Scotia (THANS) appreciates this opportunity to address the Minister of Community Services' Review Committee on the *Children and Family Services Act* and the *Adoption Information Act*, and to further the valuable work we all do to eliminate violence against women.