

MEDIATION &  
RESTORATIVE  
JUSTICE  
CENTRE

Restorative Justice  
And  
Domestic Violence  
Research Project

Final Report

In 2005 the Mediation and Restorative Justice Centre (MRJC) embarked on a research project to determine if using a restorative process could expand options for women experiencing abuse and increase accountability for abusive men. The purpose of the project was to examine if, and under what conditions, restorative processes can positively impact people involved in domestic violence, that is, to examine how and to what extent the restorative process can be a successful approach to prevent and/or de-escalate domestic violence. A key outcome was to inform best practice within the domestic violence and restorative justice fields.

An action research approach was used to document and assess progress and outcomes. This approach was selected because it involves a continuous cycle of action or doing (implementation) and reflection on that action (interrogation into what worked and why, and how things could be improved). The participatory nature of an action research approach was seen as fundamental to maximizing learning arising from the project.

The key principle that guided the project was the creation of a safe and respectful place for people directly impacted by violence to experience the facilitation of disclosures, necessary to engage in dialogue about the harms caused by violence, and to identify and address the harmful behaviours.

Because the purpose of the research was to better understand and improve practice as it relates to Restorative Practice, RJ facilitators and participants were identified as key players in identifying which processes and strategies worked well, those which were problematic, and which improvements could be made. Project team members demonstrated significant commitment to supporting project success and to learning about the potential impact of the restorative justice process on participants as they move forward peaceful communication. Due to the transient nature of the participants it was difficult to follow up with all participants and the focus of the main data collection was the facilitators. A separate survey was conducted at the conclusion of the research phase to gather data from participants and it forms an internally prepared report.

As the research project unfolded it became necessary to clearly define the distinguishing features of the restorative process as compared to a mediation process. Our restorative process focused on a particular incident or violent action that had occurred in the past between the participants, and explored the harms that resulted from that violence. In addition the dialogue focused on exploration of the choice of violence and investigating the harms it caused as well as reaching an awareness and deeper (empathetic) understanding of the harms caused by the violence. In conventional mediation, conflict resolution typically focuses on resolution of a conflict (usually about something other than violent actions).

The service delivery aspect of the project (called Building Safer Ground) utilized a co-facilitation restorative process model involving a female/male team. Both facilitators meet with each participant individually (male participant with male/female facilitator team; female participant with male/female facilitator team) to clarify the RJ process, identify participant goals for the process, conduct a risk assessment, and check for existence of a Safety/Responsibility Plan. Individual meetings with participants helped them to become aware of what domestic violence is, and what they needed to discuss with their partner. Facilitators found that participants felt empowered by their ability to set their own agendas. When the facilitators assessed that the

participants were ready for face to face dialogue, and the participants agreed, the next step was taken—that is, that participants and facilitators meet as a foursome (4-way meeting). Individual meetings between each participant and the facilitators occurred to de-brief participants' satisfaction with the process and discuss next steps.

Early on in the process it was identified that reflecting on the practice of facilitating peaceful communication would be an important aspect of defining best practice. Facilitators needed to examine their own emotional / intellectual biases to find the “ethical place of the other” to arrive at ethical or best practice related to restorative practice. Time to reflect and to share was key to sharing those insights.

As the research project progressed it afforded facilitators time to clearly define what processes work most effectively for participants at micro and macro levels and, to hone their professional skills, and created time and opportunity for:

- In-depth discussion about specific participant types and cases, that is, reflection on practice;
- Discussion and refinement of program processes (e.g., risk screening, development of protocols to communicate with participants); and
- Participation in professional training opportunities (regarded as important “bonding experiences”).

The DOVE tool was identified as a very helpful mechanism not just to assess risk level, but for participants to use for self-reflection. Facilitators noted that participants' level of awareness of violence and risk also improved. Participants used DOVE to help focus discussion to better understand the violence and help set agendas.

As stated in the final report, this research project enabled an articulation of the components of a model for practice to facilitate restorative dialogue with individuals who have experienced domestic violence. These components included: purpose and outcome; infrastructure; intake process; scope of cases; case development; four-way meetings and follow-up.

This model can be used as a starting point for reflection among facilitators or be further researched to articulate the details of each component. As well, this model identifies areas of inquiry that could be used in the follow-up procedure with participants who have used the Building Safer Ground services. There is also an opportunity to revisit and further articulate this model on an annual basis to track the evolution of Building Safer Ground. All of these opportunities will contribute to the enhancement of the quality of service provided by Building Safer Ground and the contribution towards positive outcomes for those who have experienced domestic violence.

The following are the findings from the **Final Report** prepared for the project by Felix Research and Consulting. In the report interviewees refers to those who were interviewed for this evaluation, which included facilitators and staff of the Building Safer Ground project.

### **Consistent Elements of the Model**

- There is a consistent understanding of the purpose of Building Safer Ground: to address and explore harms that have occurred between participants; to acknowledge that the harm is wrong; and to facilitate a safe conversation that individuals involved in intimate partner violence want to undertake.
- There is a consistent understanding that the outcome of restorative dialogue is directed by the participants of Building Safer Ground.
- There are outcomes that have been observed so far in this practice, such as increased understanding, increased hope, and action plans. But there is no expectation that these outcomes are guaranteed for participants.
- Interviewees agreed that this type of program requires a strong administrative function and a clear strategic vision based in the values of restorative practice.
- The strengths of the current program's infrastructure includes: practitioner teams of mixed gender; reflection opportunities for facilitators; payment for facilitators; professional development for facilitators and linkages to other community resources.
- There is agreement and understanding that restorative dialogue is appropriate when participation is voluntary; there are low levels of violence; or there are difficulties communicating. It is also appropriate when there are children in the family. Also, there is an understanding that in some instances, there is ambiguity in the participants' experience of harms incurred and inflicted due to the long-term and intimate nature of the relationships.
- Goals of case development were commonly understood to be: develop a relationship with the participant; initiate restorative dialogue; explore the supports needed by the participants; prepare for the four-way discussion; assess the risk of violence in the relationship (using an objective tool like the DOVE for guidance); and assess client readiness.
- There was consistent agreement on how the agenda for a four-way discussion should be determined and in what instances a four-way discussion should be stopped.

- There were common descriptions of what skills, abilities and knowledge of facilitators would be needed in this practice.

### **Elements of the Model that Need Further Exploration**

- Interviewees perceived that a physical space and standards for process would enhance the program's current infrastructure.
- Interviewees perceived that the program would be enhanced by an arrangement that increases the client's access to staff or facilitators, which is currently limited by the part-time hours of the staff and contracted facilitators. Exploration in this area should include dialogue on how case development should best be undertaken and by whom.
- There was consensus among interviewees that recruitment of clients is a key component to the program's success. Interviewees expressed a desire to see recruitment be strengthened.
- There is a mixed perception of the intake process and its clarity. However all interviewees shared a strong consensus that more communication and ongoing feedback between the facilitators and the intake coordinator would strengthen the intake process and, subsequently, the program.
- The first round of data collection indicated that most cases involved physical violence. During the focus group, facilitators clarified that cases do not have to have physical violence to be identified as being suitable for a restorative dialogue process. The discussion highlighted a need to ensure that there is a common public understanding that Building Safer Ground would be suitable for participants experiencing any type of violence.
- In determining an individual's readiness for the restorative dialogue process, it would be helpful to establish a common understanding on which of these qualities take precedence over the others, when there is a conflict. For example, because the program values client choice, does the restorative dialogue take place if the participant wants to proceed even if the facilitators deems there is a safety issue? It would be helpful if precedents in this area were linked to the underlying principles of the program.
- Through the focus group discussion of preliminary results and the presentation of the draft report, stakeholders identified other areas of practice that need further discussion and exploration. These included:
  - A common understanding of what steps and activities are included respectively

- in the components of intake and case development
  - If four-way face-to-face discussions should be stopped by a threat to only physical safety or the broadest sense of safety
  - How the DOVE tool should appropriately be used to inform the decision for participants' eligibility for Building Safer Ground restorative dialogue services
- All interviewees agreed that a strong follow-up process is needed. But, the understanding about the current process is not clear among all interviewees. There also is no consistent agreement on who should undertake follow-up.
- There was a lack of data that emerged about the certain components of the practice. Some areas that require further investigation include: four-way face-to-face discussions; practitioner partner debriefing process; the experience and qualities that a practitioner should have for this type of restorative dialogue process; and how to recruit appropriate facilitators for this type of practice.

Professionals involved with the program believed that the restorative process can be appropriate for a broad range of participants regardless of the extent and level of personal issues and challenges participants may face. Participant capacity for reflection varied. However, even when they faced multiple issues and challenges facilitators were able to frame the language and guide the conversation so that participants could focus on the violence and impact of that violence. Another factor that impacted successful participation in the program was the willingness and readiness to be involved in the process that addresses the violence that had occurred in the relationship. When the violence occurred—that is, very recently, as if the police had intervened the night before the participant calls the program, or some time in the past, seemed to be little influence on participation.

A separate internal process was undertaken to document the comments of program participants. There were four outcomes/impacts that the project wanted to measure regarding participants.

1. Clients feel respected throughout their involvement in the RJ process
2. Clients feel that they are heard during the RJ process
3. Clients value their participation in the RJ process
4. There is a decrease in violence in the relationships of clients

The participants who participated in the survey represented six cases files of which four went to the dialogue stage. We were able to receive information from six of the female participant and four male participants. Information was gathered from both parties in four

cases of which two cases that went to dialogue. The facilitators for the other two cases recommended that conducting a dialogue would not be advisable.

***Clients feel respected and heard throughout their involvement in the RJ process***

Participants indicated that the abilities to listen, be nonjudgmental, impartial and understanding were clear indicators to them that the facilitators were attentive to their needs during the case development and dialogue phases of the program. Participants also indicated that the flexibility in scheduling and location of sessions helped to address their specific needs. The fact that all information was confidential and safety issues were addressed also assisted in participants feeling heard and respected.

One female participant indicated that prior to coming to the program she felt isolated and did not feel that people would believe her. She found it comforting that she was acknowledged and believed by the facilitators.

*“They seemed to be able to reflect what I was saying and understood and provided information.”*

***Clients value their participation in the RJ process***

Of the ten participants contacted all but one agreed that their participation in the process was beneficial and that the facilitators understood what they wanted to achieve by participating. Of the six participants who experienced the two-way dialogue process all were satisfied to very satisfied with the process. They all indicated feeling adequately prepared for the dialogue. Of the participants contacted, where the facilitators recommended not conducting the dialogue session, one female and one male participant expressed dissatisfaction that the opportunity was not available and the other female was supportive of the decision.

*“Want to be involved to strengthen the relationship and it exceeded my expectations.”*

*“It gave me a clearer understanding, personally, and in regards to spouse’s position.”*

***There is a decrease in violence in the relationships of clients***

Of the six participants who experienced the two-way dialogue process all six agreed that it was helpful to talk about what had occurred and four (all females) felt that the discussion

provided a better understanding of what had occurred. One of the male participants indicated that the facilitators involvement assisted his female partner to express herself during the sessions which helped him understand better. All six participants agreed that the relationship had improved especially in relation to communication.

*“The relationship is better overall.”*

*“More confidence to deal with the situation”*

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**Building Safer Ground Research Study:  
A Model for Practice in Restorative Dialogue and  
those involved in Domestic Violence**

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## A. Introduction

The Mediation and Restorative Justice Centre (MRJC) is a community-based organization that seeks to promote the principles and practices of mediation and restorative justice and to offer innovative training programs and research. MRJC received three years of funding for a research project to examine if, and under what conditions, restorative practice can positively impact people who have experienced intimate partner violence.

Specifically, the research project goals were to:

1. If, and under what conditions, restorative justice processes can positively impact partners in intimate partner violence, and
2. Whether a restorative justice process contributes to the reduction of violence and open opportunities for positive dialogue between participants

In September 2006, this program, *Building Safer Ground*, started to receive clients. In January 2009, MRJC hired Felix Research and Consulting for a final research study.

The purpose of this study was to identify best or promising practices for restorative dialogue in situations where participants experience domestic violence. The study's intent was to produce the foundation for a model of practice in this context, highlighting those areas that need further study.

The consultant and a research associate reviewed key historical documents to gain an understanding of the context of the *Building Safer Ground* program, its intended outcomes, design and activities. They also conducted a literature review of research documents published within the last five years to identify emerging issues.

There were three main methods of data collection: interviews, focus groups and document review. The consultant conducted a series of one-to-one telephone or in-person interviews with current and former facilitators and staff of the *Building Safer Ground* program. The interview guide was developed by the consultant and a research associate. The Executive Director of MRJC was invited to give feedback on the questions. The interview sought information on all areas of the restorative dialogue process. (Appendix I, II and III)

Interviews were recorded on a digital recording device and the consultant took detailed notes. After the interviews were completed, the accuracy of the notes was confirmed with the interviewee and the interviews were transcribed for analysis. There were eleven interviewees: five current facilitators, three past facilitators, two current staff members and one former staff member.

The consultant analyzed the data by theming the responses using content analysis (using NVivo data analysis software specifically for qualitative research). Major themes and sub-themes that emerged from the participants responses were identified and named. Once the themes and sub-themes were finalized, they were used to create a framework for the results of the evaluation.

A research assistant reviewed meeting transcripts from the previous eighteen months to confirm if themes emerging from the interviews were consistent with the themes presented in previous group reflections.

Drafts of the findings specific to the practice of restorative dialogue were presented in a focus group format to three interviewees (all facilitators). The topics of discussion included: scope of cases, case development, four way meetings, follow-up and facilitator skills and abilities. The facilitators were asked to clarify or elaborate on the themes identified and this data was incorporated into the final report.

## B. Overview of the Literature

The research consultant reviewed key documents by Alan Edwards and Susan Sharpe ("Restorative Justice in the Context of Domestic Violence: A Literature Review", 2004) and Angela Cameron, The BC Institute Against Family Violence ("Restorative Justice: A Literature Review", 2005) as background for the project. She also searched the Social Services Abstracts and Social Work Abstracts for articles from the last five years in the area of restorative dialogue and domestic and family violence. There were very few articles that dealt with this topic in academic literary journals and the majority of these articles were philosophical in nature. There were no articles describing a model of practice in this field that was similar to the Building Safer Ground model of practice.

Because the field of restorative dialogue is still evolving, there were many debates in the literature about appropriate terminology. A definition of restorative justice that suits the context of Building Safer Ground would be one put forward by Alan Edwards and Susan Sharpe (2004).

Restorative justice is a set of values that guides decisions on policy programs and practice (Pranis 2000). Restorative justice values are based on the notions that all parties *involved* in crime should be included in the *response* to the crime; offenders become accountable through *understanding* the harm caused by their offence(s), *accepting* the responsibility for that harm and *taking* actions to repair the harm they have caused; and crime is defined as harm to *individuals and community* (italics in original) (Kelly, 2002:213-214).

This research project did not have the scope to outline the diversity of ideas and influences in restorative justice theory and practice. It is clear, however, that restorative practices are initiated, structured and authorized in a wide variety of ways.

A model described in the literature most similar to the Building Safer Ground Model would be Victim Offender Mediation (VOM), as described through the literature review of Angela Cameron (2005). In this model:

- The victim and offender are brought together with a trained facilitator in a safe, neutral environment.
- The facilitator's role is highly informed by trauma recovery research and practice.
- The family or greater community is not usually present.
- Emphasis is on reparation and restitution to the victim not on reconciliation of the parties.
- There is not necessarily a face to face meeting of involved participants.
- There is much preparation for the work before the meeting with participants.
- Mediators are trained professionals.

There were also many arguments for and against the use of restorative dialogue for individuals experiencing domestic violence. Some key issues in determining whether restorative dialogue is appropriate in these instances included:

- Does the process address power differentials between those who have caused the harm and those who had harm inflicted on them?
- Does the process acknowledge that harmful actions are part of a pattern of ongoing behaviours rather than an isolated incidence?
- How does the process address physical and emotional safety?

In the literature, there were some categories of practice identified that included: screening for the readiness of the offender; screening for the readiness of the survivor; what outcomes the survivor looks for in this practice; the follow-up process and required skills for the facilitator. As a result, the interview guide included these topics as areas for exploration.

Finally, the literature concluded that it is the *practice of restorative dialogue*, not the underlying philosophical foundation of restorative dialogue, which is most significant to the success or failure of a program of this nature for individuals experiencing domestic violence (Cameron, 2005). It is suggested that the practical aspects of these models be clearly outlined and explored.

## C. Evaluation Findings

The findings of this evaluation are separated into eight main areas.

Section C.1 Overview of Building Safer Ground presents findings related to the intended purpose of restorative dialogue, the outcomes to be expected from this process and the strategic direction of the program.

Section C.2 Infrastructure and C.3. Intake Process present findings related to the infrastructure and intake process for this type of program.

Section C.4 Scope of Cases and C.5 Case Development present the types of cases where restorative dialogue would be appropriate and the goals and processes involved in case development.

Section C.6 Four-way Meetings and C.7 Follow-up present findings about the actual restorative dialogue process for the couple with the two facilitators present as well as what kind of follow-up actions would be appropriate.

Section C.8 Facilitator Skills and Abilities presents identified skills and abilities necessary for a facilitator to have in order to successfully conduct a restorative dialogue session for a couple experiencing domestic violence.

Direct quotations from interviewees are provided as examples of comments that support the themes uncovered in the analysis process. Most of these quotes come from individual interviews and are italicized and indented. Each respective paragraph represents the words spoken by an individual interviewee. A break in the paragraph indicates a different individual's comments.

For the purposes of this report, **interviewees** refers to those who were interviewed for this evaluation, which included facilitators and staff of the Building Safer Ground project. **Facilitators** refers to those professionals who facilitate the restorative dialogue and **participants** refers to individuals who were clients of the Building Safer Ground project.

### C.1. Overview of Building Safer Ground

This section will describe the interviewees' understanding of the purpose, outcome and strategic direction of Building Safer Ground.

## C.1a. Purpose

All interviewees in the project agreed that one of the key purposes of restorative dialogue is to address and explore harms that have occurred between the participants.

*The point of RJ is to allow the victim a voice and an opportunity to explore the harms done ...*

*I would say the goal of the project is that people involved are specifically talking about how they've been harmed, describing clearly what violence is, how they're impacted by the violence and how they're responsible, if they're the responsible party.*

A key part of restorative dialogue involves an acknowledgement that the harm is wrong.

*Of course, if we're talking about going forward and someone has physically abused you, we're not talking about dialoguing when he'd be justified in hitting you again - and that's what talking about how to move forward means.*

Essentially, given that the conversation is about harm and responsibility for that harm, a restorative dialogue is about facilitating a safe conversation that both participants want to undertake. Interviewees indicated that restorative dialogue is neither counselling nor mediation.

*Building Safer Ground facilitates conversation that's basically built around making sure everyone is safe. This is perfect. Just to get them to sit down in a safe environment and facilitate a talk and be able to communicate ... When [they're] ready, [they]'re going to come into contact with a person [they]'re in conflict with and sit down and have a facilitated, safe talk.*

*The outcome of the program is that the two of [them] will get to talk to each other ... The only motivation to participate is that [they] need to get through this conversation or some difficult conversation that every time [they] have, it bursts into violence. It generally is an agreement on how [they]'re going to interact in a way that's not violent and facilitate the kinds of conversation that result in violence if they don't have a facilitated process.*

## C.1b. Outcome

Interviewees identified that **the outcome of restorative dialogue is directed by the participants in Building Safer Ground.**

*I would tell a client - what would you like as an outcome? This is a key value of the project. We don't define the outcome. We just want to ensure people are treated respectfully during the discussion. And that there is a co-creation of goals.*

*[Restorative justice] is having the dialogue about how I've been harmed and how I've harmed you. And sometimes it goes both ways ... And it doesn't matter that sometimes the guy goes "well, is she staying?" We're not an outcome focused program. We don't know where it's gonna go.*

*It's what you create, 'cause really it's about the dialogue. And there may or may not be a signed agreement that comes out of it. It's not an agreement settlement [process]. It's not a court ... [Restorative dialogue] is not an outcome agreement process.*

In the interviewees' perception, the actions that follow a restorative dialogue are completely up to the participants.

*We offer an opportunity for a dialogue of this sort, out of this dialogue we would hope, at least understanding will come. It's up to the two people as to whether or not the understanding translates into making some specific decision and choices about how they will go forward.*

*That is the real distinction that people are concerned that somehow we are doing some marriage counselling to keep people together. And that is very contrary to the reality which is we've often found that this process is what releases people to have the conversation that allows the past hurts and harms, not to hold them together, but allow them to move forward in a positive way. Whether that's together or not.*

Interviewees were aware that **the facilitators' perception of a successful outcome and the participants' outcome might be different** and that it is the participants' perspective that is most important.

*They've already shared with us ... that just coming into the room and having some discussions about some of the matters they've talked about without getting to the point of shouting at one another ... is a major accomplishment which they've really appreciated. Just being able to*

*walk away, having had that kind of discussion and not hurting at the end of it, not injuring each other in a new way. ... It has been an accomplishment for them, and they've said that. Sometimes I think I set goals in my mind that are a little further than what the clients would necessarily say would be a successful goal for them. They'd be happy to achieve A, whereas I'm thinking they need to get to G to get any sense of satisfaction ... That's truly neat to be able to clarify our own expectations and make sure they're not so far aligned with what the clients report as being positive changes and we miss it.*

Although it is not the intention of restorative dialogue, one of the unintended outcomes of restorative dialogue often observed by facilitators is **increased understanding by the participants of their situation or themselves.**

*We can offer this opportunity to talk to each other, to share your experience and to hear the other person's experience. What are the ways you've been hurt [and] why do you want the other person to know this? What do you think will come from the other person knowing this? We offer an opportunity for a dialogue of this sort, out of this dialogue we would hope, at least understanding will come.*

*A [restorative dialogue] process may clarify things for them, clarify this piece of who they are ... It is not mediation. So, they understand themselves better and can figure out the next steps. It may help them arrive with some sort of peace with themselves and may help them understand the other person, which is important if they play a significant role in their life. It brings clarity and opportunity for new beginnings.*

Another unintended but observed outcome from this process is participants' experience of participating in a successful, non-violent dialogue. As a result, this experience can lead to having **increased hope for their personal capacity to engage in this type of dialogue.**

*What if we're just promoting a sense of hope and a small sense of what's possible in the future. And making that clear for them that things could be different and they walk away with that. Who's to say it has to show fruit here in our conversation. It may show fruit months down the road or continue to percolate with new ideas and they find suddenly things are changing. But it may be more an incremental change rather than something that would allow them to walk out of this office going, ah-ha!*

## C.1c. Strategic Direction

There is still much innovation in the field of restorative practice for individuals experiencing domestic violence. As a result, any program undertaking this service should ensure there is a clear strategic direction.

*We need to know exactly what the program is trying to do. What do we want to turn around and see what we were trying to accomplish ...Trying to be clear about what services we provide, where, and to whom.*

Interviewees also felt that the strategic direction and activities of the program reflect the values of restorative practice. Such principles named in the interviews included collaboration, non-judgement, client choice, client safety and respect. The previous research report done for this project, Building Safer Ground - Progress Report #2 (June 2008, Howard Research) states the agreed upon values for this practice and highlights its importance as well.

*It is best if the program has strong roots and philosophical foundations.*

## C.2. Infrastructure

There were a number of qualities named that would be important for establishing and maintaining a restorative dialogue service for participants who have experienced domestic violence.

Interviewees perceived these qualities to be essential for Building Safer Ground to reach its full potential :

- Well-organized administrative function
- Orientation for facilitators new to the team
- Consistent office hours for staff of the program

Other qualities that emerged from the interviews require more specific description and are described below.

### Physical Space

Interviewees felt that a **physical space would have provided a stronger profile** to the program.

*I think the biggest thing is that we should have had a physical presence ... that we were there and that we were a resource.*

*Even to have the community recognize and to see some storefront. To know there's a space, to know that it's happening, and that it was a confidential and quiet space.*

*I think that as soon as you start having a presence physically, there's more acceptance, knowledge ... I think that it radiates out into the community when that happens. We are really more seen now as a program of [Mediation and Restorative Justice Centre] whereas before it seemed very stand alone.*

Interviewees felt that a physical space for clients to connect with a person would **facilitate more interest and from potential participants, but also establish credibility as a professional service.**

*There should be somebody there to answer questions all the time.*

*An office and a workplace create a boundary where clients see you as professional instead of somebody they can just call anytime of the day.*

*The [participants] need a regular contact or if they could show up in the office on an afternoon and they're feeling really scared and crying, then there's someplace for them to show up. Somebody whose face is familiar, who is a central key person.*

Physical office space would also have provided a place for the restorative dialogue to take place that is **safer for both the participants and the facilitators.**

*We need a designated space, safe space in which to do one-to-one meetings and in which to have the four-way meetings.*

*There are matters of privacy and safety, and insurance. Making sure it's accessible and appropriate. Just so you are maximizing safety. The argument was you could never guarantee safety, so we had to maximize safety.*

*Safety for us as well, facilitator safety.*

## **Standards for Process**

Some interviewees felt that Building Safer Ground requires **standard processes and expectations outlined for facilitators and staff members.** If there was consistency in the program processes, it would foster Building Safer Ground's capacity to identify and track best practices in this field.

*So, everyone's really clear about the processes in place. Timeframes, how long can you take between case building and actual meetings. Some standards in place. It should be documented in a flowchart - clear and obvious. ... For me, it would be important that if someone is doing case building, we are all asking the same questions, so that at some point, there is some kind of consistency and you can actually compare apples to apples. So, for the articulation of best practices you can say - which questions work, which don't. The facilitators' expectations should be clear - how long should a case take, how many times should you meet individually with them, or as a group, and what would be the reasons for meeting more or less often, what exactly are you trying to get out of case-building? So, also set goals for case-building and group sessions.*

*But it's the structure and template for who we are, what do we do, what are the forms, what is the intake process - [it's needed] to move from the research project into a program.*

Other interviewees described this need for standards, especially with respect to paperwork.

*Well, I would like to see a better paper process and we are working towards that ... there has to be really good information so that at the end, the organization can confidently say our processes and protocols, whatever they may be, were followed and regardless of the outcome of the case ... everything was done with due diligence and appropriately. At this point, that's not always clear.*

*The biggest frustration is the management of a file. At least now we have forms ... I saw the form [in the file] but nobody ever taught us to fill in the form.*

## **Practitioner Teams of Mixed Gender**

Interviewees stated that restorative practice in domestic violence **requires teams of mixed gender**. Having one female and one male practitioner during restorative dialogue creates comfort and an accepting environment for dialogue for participants.

*Women practitioner speaking: [Gender balance] is essential for that kind of program ... There was a difference in how [the participants] responded to us ... One of the fellows was speaking with me quite a bit, very comfortable speaking with me, but when it came to making a really ugly disclosure, he would turn to [the male practitioner] and do it. And I don't know why, we never had a chance to look at it, but certainly things like that happened and you think, it's a good thing we have that balance. Plus, if we put two females in there, the female*

*might feel comfortable but the male might feel ganged up on and vice versa. And certainly you wouldn't want to put a female in there with three guys.*

*For sure, it's an absolute requirement. That's one non-negotiable because - it has happened with every single couple, but how [a male] might communicate with the man is different than how they communicate with the female ... I used to think men would have an easier time talking to the male. No. The man will spill his guts to me, and the women spill their guts to the guy ... It's fascinating. Absolutely you need the gender balance in the process.*

*It's the best approach - a hundred times better than one gender, than being there by yourself.*

Having a gender-balanced team of facilitators also **models healthy interaction and communication** for the participants of Building Safer Ground.

*There's the value of people seeing the modeling of communication between the two [facilitators]. And I didn't really buy that at first. But then I had clients talk to us and they had another hard issue they had to deal with again, and they told [the male practitioner], we imitated you and [the female practitioner].*

*[Having two facilitators and two genders] is a tremendous asset ... Certainly modeling good relationships between a man and woman, showing gender itself does not limit the kind of relationship you have ... That modelling opportunity is incredible.*

## **Reflection Opportunities for Facilitators**

Most interviewees stated there was **great value to having reflection opportunities for facilitators.**

Interviewees identified that the **team reflection meetings provide a safe place for facilitators to get support for their practice.**

*I think reflection is part of the best practice ... it's good to work with somebody else, to have the opportunity to reflect, to debrief as a group with other people doing this kind of work. Because otherwise your work is confidential, and especially because ... the people are in such danger and fragile, and we're hearing their story, and you feel responsibility.*

The information shared in reflection sessions **leads to exploration and learning of best practices.**

*The debriefing sessions add to my practice for Building Safer Ground. It's good to say how I see a situation, how my partner sees it and getting feedback from the other facilitators.*

*It's also caused me to have the opportunity to learn a lot from my colleagues. Sometimes it's cause I ask them why they do certain things and they maybe have a good response and I learn from that or they may acknowledge that they may not have done the best thing, so we have that kind of engagement. But, too, each of them comes from such diverse areas and brings real strength and skills from those areas that I've learned a lot more about psychology, addictions, restorative practices with a broad variety of clientele. There's been lot of ability to draw on the expertise of my colleagues and hopefully I feel that I've also contributed my own expertise with them as well.*

Part of the value of reflection sessions is that it facilitates the practitioner being more conscious of the process.

*[Reflection sessions] brings what you do to a very conscious level. And that's now how I do training.*

*I think they have caused what I do in a session to change based on the fact that I know I'm going to be reflecting on it afterwards. So, it requires real integrity and honesty knowing that you're going to have to debrief afterwards about what you choose to do in a session. You are more mindful ... It causes me to think about what I'm going to do before I do it.*

Team meetings also provide an opportunity to share information on how the program is meeting clients' needs.

*It's really always learning about what's going on with the clients. And I think that's probably the most important piece, how are we adapting to the clients' needs. And that's where we learn it.*

However, some interviewees stated that the reflection sessions could be frustrating when there were few cases to discuss.

There are also the **practitioner partner debriefing** sessions identified as being valuable, where the paired facilitators discuss the case.

*What is most useful is when we are debriefing with our partners. But I don't know if it is terribly useful for others who weren't part of that process.*

## Ongoing Professional Development for Facilitators

Because both restorative practice and domestic violence are areas where knowledge and practice are continually growing, **ongoing training in restorative dialogue and family violence** were seen as essential for facilitators. As well, in both these fields, there is wide divergence and often conflicting perspective on appropriate practice. As a result, ongoing and collective training in these fields for facilitators would enhance the team's ability to reflect, share, and implement best practices.

*Domestic violence training would be the first thing you'd want to send people too. That's tough because I don't know how much standardized training there is out there ... it's not just training, but to keep up on it as well.*

*I heard people say that in the early days of this program they all did some domestic violence training. And, knowing of course, domestic violence comes with its etiology depending on who's offering it, still people have been exposed to a common etiology from which to work and choose to agree or disagree.*

Other potential areas for professional development included: addictions; abuse, including its impact on children; apology; communication styles; cultural competency; legal perspectives; trauma and healing; and victims and offenders.

## Payment for Facilitators

Interviewees highlighted that **payment for facilitators undertaking this work is necessary to acknowledge the demanding nature of the work.**

*You need an expertise in this area that is beyond a restorative justice focus.*

*I think it's more demanding work than victim-offender restorative dialogue ... There are real challenges in this area that do not exist in the other process where people are often strangers or can be strangers.*

*You are at a greater personal risk. There is a safety issue. We have been fortunate in the program and we haven't dealt with extremely violent situations ... But sometimes, there are people under extreme pressure. That kind of pressure can erupt in ways that are inappropriate, particularly when they are working through difficult things and we're facilitating them working through difficult things.*

*If I weren't being paid for it, I might be more inclined to say no and not take on the challenges, because this is not easy work to do. And, it can be very rewarding at the end of the day to have a conversation taken to a place they wouldn't otherwise get to, and for my own professional development and development just as a person ... but they're hard things to do as well and I'm giving up things I also value.*

Payment also professionalizes the program and acknowledges the skills of the facilitators.

*In order to feel honoured and appreciated for the effort and experience I bring, the amount I am paid helps to acknowledge that and helped me feel like a professional and make room in my life for this to be a priority.*

*The pay professionalizes it. It keeps people with the skill level that is required for participating.*

Some interviewees identified that **pay is not the primary reason that professionals undertake the work.** However, the payment does acknowledge their contribution.

*Either I'll do it or not do it, it's not a financial reason. This is where my heart is. Do I have something to contribute? Will I learn from it? Will I become better at what I do, if I participate? Will the world be a better shape cause I'm involved? ... I want the program first to attract the right people, get the people and say - guess what -as a bonus, you also get paid. Sometimes that's ok, it doesn't have to be what people would earn on the "market", but they should be paid to what the time is valued.*

*[Other similar work] requires less of me than these ones do. So, if you're measuring the contribution financially - then the pay makes sense and the pay it's at makes sense. But, you can't do this work if [payment] is why you're involved in this work, it's a wacky reason. It's too hard.*

## **Accessibility to Clients**

Interviewees highlighted that a key component to ensuring success of a program like Building Safer Ground is to **ensure that those who need such a program can access the program easily.** Such accessibility could have been enhanced by a **physical space**, as described above.

Other interviewees described that having part-time facilitators and part-time staff to support the program limits a client's accessibility to Building Safer Ground.

*Everyone is part-time and we get together once a month ... and I don't know how to make it work ... do you have a couple of people who do the case building or do you change the model so you have two people full-time on this project and they do all the cases?. Because the other thing that happens with all of us on this - when you have the level of training and experience we have - we're busy people. Trying to coordinate two of us with those clients' schedules, plus you're trying to coordinate that through someone who is on two days a week ...*

Unfortunately, the limited staff time can mean a long time in-between a client contacting the program and meeting face to face with a practitioner.

*All of our availability - because we're doing this on a part-time basis - has been difficult ... Maybe would it made a difference if we had a full-time staff member who could have taken all of the cases that were more difficult to structure because often there is too much time between the initial contact, setting up the first meeting, and then meeting with them again in a four-way. I think people are highly motivated by emergent situations that they want to deal with really quickly and lose interest really quickly when they can't get immediate service. [Our intake] tries to do a good job in between meetings to ensure that [engagement] happens, it just wasn't feasible for facilitators to do that in this process.*

*Those are the only two days [the intake worker] has to work on a file. If you miss a call, or the client, she doesn't reach them, it might be a week before contact.*

*Because we're not exclusive staff, we have to fit our time schedule in with the other facilitator. We have to coordinate our schedules with the clients. This is ok - emails work and as long as I have a week ahead notice, I can fit anybody in. And usually, the other facilitators can do that also. There's a gap here - answering the phone and initial contact. Also, re-contacting the participants to come in and do the work.*

As well, a client might be more willing to engage in a program if they can speak to someone fairly quickly (for example, within an hour or two), rather than having to wait a couple of days.

*If I call a program and get a machine, I'll hang up. If I talk to somebody, then I've got some kind of relationship and they ask questions and get*

*some information, I'll likely be more hooked on it and say I'll try it ...  
And it's always the one that needs the help the most that hang up.*

The limited accessibility to staff or facilitators also means that the program is not as able to respond to clients' needs, should there be a last minute change in plans or location.

Even if there was a full-time staff member supporting the program, the program **should be supported by accessible phones** available to staff and facilitators. Otherwise, communication is limited to only the intake worker's contact with the client, which limits the facilitators' ability to follow up with a participant or engage them throughout the restorative dialogue process.

*But we can't call [a participant] directly cause we're using our own phone number, and I don't want her to have my phone number ... for follow-up, we can't even say - just give us a call. Cause what we say is give [the intake worker] a call in two weeks and she'll let us know what you say, and then we'll give her some info to set up another meeting ... it doesn't have some smooth flow to it.*

## Recruitment of Clients

Interviewees identified that the program **needs to undertake appropriate activities to recruit clients into the program**. Important activities that contribute to this include: having appropriate facilitators; marketing; and working with the domestic violence community of services.

*It mostly centers around the people you get involved. So, if you get good people then you can probably do wonders. It may affect working with the community too that the facilitators have a good reputation. How willing people are to refer is important.*

*I think part of the best practices is actually the work done around the program, collaborating with the family violence community so that you get referrals to the program.*

All interviewees agreed that **recruitment of participants to the program has been limited**.

## Linkages to Other Community Resources

Interviewees identified it is important for the **program to be effectively connected to other community resources** that would be of use to participants of Building Safer Ground or to individuals who seek to use Building Safer Ground but are not appropriate for the program.

*Often our clients need a lot of resources for other things that we can't provide. So the more we know, the better to support them with that. Also, sometimes they are not ready to go through the program so then what else is there to offer?*

### C.3. Intake Process

This section of the report presents results related to the intake process.

#### Understanding of the Process

Among the facilitators, there appears to be a **mixed perception of the intake process**. Some find the process very clear and helpful. Others are unaware of what participants undergo before they meet with them.

*[Intake] does the initial assessment and makes the contacts and then finds facilitators who are available, plans the initial contact - this works very well.*

*[It is] explaining the program, explaining how it works, what's involved, what are the principles of the program, then fielding the client's interest, if they are interested, getting their information, background, finding out what some of what their goals are and whether or not they fit with the Restorative Justice process. There is talking a little bit about some of the barriers, like legal barriers, safety barriers, child care barriers and transportation ... then coordinating meetings, facilitating meetings with the clients, finding space for the meetings.*

*I don't know what's going on. I don't know how the assessment works [for] if someone is appropriate or not. I don't see any guidelines.*

#### Communication

Many interviewees identified that there needs to be **ongoing communication about the intake process** in order for it to be improved and relevant to the service.

*In the intake process, there is an issue of needing transparency of information or a team protocol for how the flow of information needs to happen.*

*But the confusing part has been what is the role as far as how much information is collected ... how far is there coaching to get [the*

*participants] ready for dialogue ... sometimes at meetings [facilitators say] I didn't need any information, I can just go in cold. I have never heard that they have had too much information.*

Many stated that the intake process could be improved even further if there is ongoing feedback from the facilitators to the intake worker about what kind of information is useful.

#### C.4. Scope of Cases

This section presents interviewees' descriptions of qualities that would need to be present for a restorative dialogue to be appropriate for participants.

It should be noted that the description of these qualities are based on the facilitators' limited exposure to cases as identified through this research project. Given such, the description of the scope of clients is a starting point from which criteria for appropriate participants can be developed.

#### Voluntary

Interviewees stated that **participants in Building Safer Ground have to participate in the program voluntarily**. If participants are involved in Building Safer Ground to fulfill a requirement from another agency or partner, then they are not appropriate for this program. As well, this program is **also not appropriate for those who wish to reach another objective through their participation in Building Safer Ground**.

*If they want to build a case against their spouse because of some custody, then it's not appropriate. It clearly has to be that they're volunteering, that they're not participating because there's some carrot down the road. Our criteria is just that the couple refers themselves, that it is never ordered.*

A couple of interviewees described participants who came to restorative dialogue hoping the process would help them proceed in their relationship towards an intended goal, whether that is to help them reconcile or separate. Interviewees identified personal goals like this were also not appropriate for restorative dialogue.

*And they still manage to come in, having had all those conversations, still believing this might be an opportunity to get some leverage on his partner to get her to see she needs to change her ways to better this relationship. That's not a good motive for restorative conversation. On the other hand, it's probably no more of a restorative conversation for the victim, when [they want to] show the community they've done every*

*last thing they can do to maintain the relationship and convince themselves and the community, so they can walk away. I'm not sure that's restorative either.*

## Physical Violence in the Past

To date, the majority of the cases have involved **physical violence**. This does not mean that emotional abuse is not also taking place in these relationships. There have been a few cases where the abuse is only emotional.

*In my experience, there was physical harm done in every one of [my caseload]. It was physical harm to be addressed and this was fairly clear.*

*The only common thread between all of the cases is that there's violence in the relationship.*

Generally, the **violence has occurred in the past**. Interviewees expressed it would be inappropriate to work with participants where violence is occurring concurrently with the restorative dialogue process.

*Ongoing high-level domestic violence is not appropriate [for this program]. Ongoing – in the sense that this is something that not only has occurred before contact with the program but occurs during contact – is also not appropriate.*

*If there is violence, the police are called and he was charged or there is the threat of violence, then we would use that as an indicator of not ready to do restorative justice. Too volatile.*

*[This process] was absolutely perfect for a couple who have been married for 34 years. In their early years, the husband was an alcoholic and there was some violence. Then, he quit drinking and there hadn't been any violence for thirty years. And then something – there was a shove and a push or something – so, the wife kicked him out of the house and called the police. He moved in with a relative. They hadn't been living together for a month when they called this project.*

## Low Levels of Violence

There was consistent agreement among interviewees that restorative practice was most appropriate for participants where there **had not been extreme violence**.

*If it is high-level - I'm talking about serious personal injury, the really severe restrictions on lifestyle, whether it's getting knocked in the home or being refused access to money, even if it hasn't been happening in the last month, one has to look with extreme caution whether this is an appropriate program or starting place ... My understanding is the program sees itself mandated to deal with low-levels of domestic violence.*

*And the types of clients we have seen are not the typical clientele of other services in society, such as shelters, which often involve exceptionally extreme violence where there is significant personal injury. I'm not minimizing violence. I'm saying there is a different degree in the people we have seen. There often hasn't been police involvement in the past, or it's been minimal. What I mean by minimal is the number of times the police have been required to attend, which is often, at a maximum, one or two, and often no charges were laid.*

As well, the violence in these cases took place with **participants that were involved in long-term relationships**, at any phase of the relationship's development, including after the relationship had been ended. As a result, it isn't necessarily one incident that is being discussed in the restorative dialogue.

*So, for this project, it doesn't matter [if] they're about to escalate into violence, if it's the first hit ever, if they're living together or apart ... it can be post-separation, pre-separation, post-divorce, pre-divorce ... These are people that have had long-term relationships.*

*It is generally people that have been involved in couples relationships, so partners either married or living common-law or have been married or have been living common-law.*

Interviewees stated that participants occasionally shared that in their perception, they had **limited options for support within the domestic violence community**. The participants expressed they had difficulty identifying or easily accessing support services, as they felt the majority of domestic violence services were for those that faced extreme, ongoing violence. During the focus group, interviewees added that participants may have mistakenly perceived it would be difficult to find services for individuals who do not wish to terminate a violent relationship.

*[Other mainstream providers] work with couples where the violence is still going on and there are safety concerns to be addressed, helping the victims to extricate themselves from dangerous situations and doing*

*what they can to try and encourage the perpetrators to go to counselling and ensuring they are complying with whatever restrictions have been put on their behaviour.*

*In the domestic violence community, there's still varying opinions if you should even allow [restorative dialogue] to go on in the presence of domestic violence ... The majority of [professional mediation project] cases [I have observed] have domestic violence and if we're not dealing with them, then who's gonna? Wait until they go to the court? In the meantime ... I had one mom who was scared [of her partner]. If they get a court order, it's such an adversarial process, so what are their options?*

*There's so many many people who are under the radar of the criminal justice system. The abuse statistics indicate there are many people experiencing violent interactions in their relationships. And yet only a tiny fraction of those are dealt with by the justice system. And those generally, I would think are on the extreme end of the continuum ... So, all of these other incidents are not provided with any forum or opportunity to address significant hurt and harm that's occurred in a way that's acceptable to them.*

## Communication Issues

Interviewees identified that many of the participants they work with have **difficulties with communicating.**

*The only motivation to participate is that [a couple] needs to get through this conversation or some difficult conversation that every time [they] have, it bursts into violence.*

*A husband and wife in conflict where communication has stopped is one scenario ... There's similarity in the cases. There's a theme - a lack of communication and totally unacceptable behaviours.*

## Presence of Ambiguity

Nearly all of the interviewees identified that **it is not uncommon for the incidents of harm and who is perceived as being responsible for harm to be ambiguous** in the relationships. Unlike what the literature in this area indicates, there are often instances where there is no clearly identified "abuser" and no clear "victim".

For example, ambiguity is created because the violence is often mutual.

*There's nothing [in my language] to indicate there's a victim and an indicator of a male and a female. I do that purposely because when people come to this process generally, 75-80% there is mutual violence. Those statements are equally true for either partner.*

*Like in the conversation we're having now with one couple, it's not clear to me where the victimization and perpetration begins and ends with these couples.*

*You often get two people who are feeling equally hurt in this relationship and each feel the other has been the giver of considerable abuse.*

Some of the ambiguity exists because **the couple is involved in a long-term relationship** and the restorative dialogue occurs within a context that involves a series of events, not just one.

*These folks, it's not a victim offender [scenario] where there's been one crime and that is your box you're talking about. These are people that have had long-term relationships. Many many things have occurred in the relationship.*

*That they clearly have to be willing to talk about the impact that the violence is having on whomever the victim is and that's blurry in a long-term relationship. They both feel like victims.*

However, while there are cases where violence is mutual, it should **not be the starting place to look for mutual harm** in a restorative dialogue, due to the dynamics of power and control in domestic violence.

*Mutual hurting emerges, but I would be hesitant to go in as the starting place, looking for mutual hurting when there has been a clear offence and a primary offender. The last thing I'd ask a battered woman to ask her husband - what have you done to harm him? [You have to be] extremely careful with the notion of mutual harm ... I feel like the caveat has to be written in capital letters before we talk about mutual harmful relationships.*

## Presence of Children

Finally, interviewees identified that restorative dialogue is particularly appropriate process when there are **children in the family**, due to the necessity of ongoing communication, even when the relationship is ending or has ended.

*It seems to be a most appropriate process where there are children involved ... because there are serious harms to the children, as is recognized in the child welfare legislation, by seeing violence occur ... A common agenda item is the child and the harm that's occurred to that child and the impact of what both of them are doing that is causing harm to a third individual who is not at the table.*

## C.5. Case Development

This section presents findings describing the goals of case development. Case development describes that stage of the restorative dialogue process when one individual in the couple meets with the two facilitators, before a four-way meeting between two facilitators and the participants take place. There is no described order to who should meet with the facilitators first and often, they meet more than once with the facilitators. The process for case development appears to be similar for both individuals in the relationship.

### Development of Relationship

One of the key goals of case development is to establish rapport with and **build a relationship with the client**.

*It's basically relationship building.*

*You need to build that trust to help them go to the places a restorative justice process asks for.*

A couple of interviewees identified that key to this goal is having an **open agenda**.

*And then we allow them to talk about what's brought them there that day to that session. They are allowed to talk about anything they want to.*

*[My facilitator partner] and I both have a fundamental philosophy to follow the client ... I think there's a rough pattern of needing a meeting in which people simply get to tell their story as much as they feel they wish to tell their story to the people they are going to be working with ... I see that as an open-ended process ... I find that people have a need to tell their story and to know that they've been heard.*

Given the openness of this process, some interviewees indicated that, ideally there should be **no time limit** on this process. However, generally, these interviews lasted between one hour to one hour and a half.

*If the client needs a certain amount of time to talk, that's the amount of time the client gets ... there might be people who are concise thinkers and speakers and for them, this process might not be as protracted.*

## Initiation of Restorative Dialogue

Case development was identified by interviewees as essentially the **first step of the restorative dialogue process**. Even before there is progress to a four-way meeting, the individual interviews allow for clients to **explore the impact of the violence**.

*Every interview is part of the restorative justice process. We are talking about how you've been harmed, how you've been impacted by that harm, are you willing to accept responsibility. So we're still having the harm and responsibility conversations in the [individual interviews]. [Funders] are only seeing restorative justice as the face to face piece ... We always do individual sessions. That's definitely a best practice.*

*That session is where I would explore what effect are you having on your spouse? Is she or he afraid of you? Or are they detaching or what's going on?*

*In that second stage interview, asking the person what do you think that impact might be on that other person.*

## Explore Needed Supports

During case development, there is also the opportunity to **identify community supports** that might be needed by the client.

*That session is where I would explore ... Are we going for power or control or anger counselling that you think that would help you? Have you had instruction on communication skills?*

*[In the one-on-one], [the client] got a lot of information for establishing a safety plan and what resources are available and she did access some of those.*

*That raises the question, particularly in the early stages of being aware of the need for other resources and references, whether its referrals out [for those who are] inappropriate to the program - or complementary resources, so there may be a need for counselling, treatment along with or before the actual facilitation. This is what I would see as necessary for the first round of case development along with intake.*

It is also an opportunity for interviewees to explore the **individualized support** for the client from their own personal support network.

*And often we would ask what kind of supports did they have ... Certainly anybody that wants to bring a support person with them, we'd be open to that.*

## Preparation for Four Way Discussion

All of the interviewees agreed that case development prepares everyone for a direct face-to-face four-way discussion. Firstly, there is the step of **determining if the four-way discussion is feasible.**

*That's why it's important to have an initial meeting with the wife or husband - we let them empty out ... By asking a few questions, then they start coming up with more answers ... and the feelings start coming out. Then, [as a facilitator] I can assess if they're ready to come through a facilitated talk or not.*

*We spend a lot of time talking individually to make sure we have a safe four-way conversation.*

During case development, it is also an opportunity for the facilitators to work with individuals to **identify issues that will likely emerge in a four-way discussion**. This was described as an important goal of case development.

*[We meet individually] until we feel we know their life experiences enough that there won't be any great surprises if we were to have a [four-way] conversation. We should know enough of the history to be able to walk with them ... familiar enough with the circumstances so that we won't be surprised by anything. And we can hold them safely with whatever conversation and however they want to bring it up.*

Being aware of these issues often includes identifying for the person who is abused **what conditions are needed for an individual to feel safe in a four-way conversation**. In many instances, this conversation also includes discussion on signs that a conversation is escalating in a negative manner and the **preparation of a safety plan**. So far, there have been no four-way discussions that have ended because of fears for safety.

*As much as you know about them and their dynamic and what triggers each other, they walk in the room and they're face to face, and something exists there that you can't always predict. The stuff you have to be aware of! A lot of it is subtle things - looks or eyebrow raising. Cause you talk to them about - what triggers you, how do you know when he's about to be violent, what are the things you notice? And so you [need to be] aware of all of those before they come face to face*

*... a discussion about how they would feel safe. So developing a safety plan between then and the next meeting and how they would feel safe in engaging with the other person ...*

*You need to be able to communicate in a safe environment. And have a safety plan, so that when [they] leave [they] feel safe when [they] get home.*

For the individual in the relationship who is abusive, these one-on-one conversations also allow an opportunity to develop **responsibility plans**.

*With the abuser, you're looking at a responsibility plan. They have to accept responsibility. [For example], [I would tell the abuser], you have to identify what triggers you, if it's when you're drinking then part of your responsibility plan is you're not around your wife when you're drinking. That's the key difference. For one, it's how do you stay safe, for the other it's put something in place that responsibly keeps that person safe and keeps you apart once you know what's causing the escalation of violence.*

Finally, during the one-on-one interviews, there is an opportunity to set the agenda for the four-way conversation.

*So, the first thing you're going to do ... is to establish a mutual agenda ... if you have a mutually agreed upon agenda and you choose an event that's occurred or you choose one area - like harm to children - it helps to get greater focus.*

*The toughest part of this work - and it needs to be the toughest part of doing this work, and that part does need to stay really vague and uncomfortable and weird - it is coming up with what is the agenda. If you're bringing them face-to-face, what is it that you're bringing them face to face to talk about. So, besides the obvious agenda item of - you will talk about the violence -- but it's what are all the other agenda items? ... Do we talk about the addiction issue ... So, the first couple of meetings, we say "if you come face to face, what do you want to be able to talk about?"*

## Assessment of Risk for Violence

Interviewees identified that a goal of case development is also to **assess the level of risk for violence** in the relationship. The level and type of violence in a relationship informs the facilitator's decision if a four-way meeting is appropriate or not and helps prepare them for the four-way meeting.

*I now save the DOVE instrument to the second meeting. The DOVE is an assessment of certain indicators that are likely to be connected to violence in a relationship and the amount of risk that a person may be facing and from that you can work with what the person wants to talk about [and] what's an appropriate way to meet.*

*Through this project, [the couple] ended up specifically doing that DOVE instrument which [can] support what they perceived to be the issue anyway - or the reason violence had escalated ... That last couple*

*fell under power and control ... Another couple fell under the conflict. And they ended up signing up for that communication and conflict course ... it comes from a place of frustration rather than they're wired to be violent or controlling or abusive.*

In the *Building Safer Ground* program, the DOVE instrument is specifically used to help measure the level of risk of violence. Many interviewees felt an **objective tool**, like the DOVE, is necessary to complement the facilitator's assessment. A tool should be used, however, to **provide guidance** not to solely determine eligibility for the program.

*The DOVE tool is useful. It's important to have something more or less objective, some sort of standard to measure.*

*I think information that comes back from the DOVE does bear directly on whether or not or what kind of conversation we have with the couple and what might be some of the challenges of the couple.*

*I think a standard tool is a great idea as long as it's validated [useful] within the program and to use it as a decision-making tool, not black and white.*

*Folks that get involved - after a little while, the facilitators start to pigeon hole. If you use the tool ... you have a list that helps you check things out, find things that are new and different. That has a huge value, to keep us fresh and on our toes and awake.*

Interviewees also felt an objective tool is **valuable for the program's accountability**.

*It needs to be a tool for accountability reasons ... Our tools structure our interviews in ways to ensure ... we don't have gaps in our assessment. On a bad day we might not get everything and even on a good day we need some structure that ensures we are collecting comprehensive, systematic information about possible risk factors.*

Interviewees also stated that the completion of the tool is a **starting point for discussion** with clients.

*[You] go over what they've said and how high their score is and I think this is very eye opening for them. Answering the questions one at a time, there's no pattern, but by the end comes, they start seeing the pattern themselves and they're often quite surprised by themselves and that generates further conversation.*

*It opens up a clear discussion with the person and turns the mind to realistic safety plans where you're able to challenge the person that because nothing has happened so far, doesn't mean that they may not be in serious risk and need to consider that. And also if it doesn't indicate serious risk, it's a good opening and engenders further deepening of a conversation between you and that person. To me, it's the turning point with individuals where you're talking with them candidly about how they've responded.*

Most individuals were satisfied specifically with the use of the DOVE tool. One facilitator highlighted that with any tool, the goal of using the tool needs to be clear for the program and for the facilitators using the tool.

## **Assessment of Client Readiness**

One key goal of the case development process is to **assess if the client is prepared to participate in a restorative dialogue process**. This process takes place with both participants respectively in the individual one-on-one sessions. Sometimes, one participant may be more ready than the other to participate.

One part of this process is **orienting the client to restorative practice**. This can include discussing the restorative dialogue process so that expectations are realistic. Many of the interviewees described potential clients as not having a clear understanding of restorative practice.

*Most clients don't have a clear understanding of what the restorative justice process can bring for them. But, this is the case in mediation as well. Emotionally and intellectually, they may not be ready to hear what restorative justice can offer.*

*I'm not sure the people we are working with have it very clearly in their mind - and maybe it's our job as well - to clarify the difference between counselling and having a restorative dialogue.*

*Readiness also entails how realistic their expectations are ... I think that needs to be dealt with ...[by] being really clear about what we can offer.*

Many interviewees stated that it was important to look for a client's ability to engage in dialogue. This readiness includes a **willingness to talk** about the issues, **an understanding of their own emotions** about these issues, and an **ability to empathize with the other person**, where appropriate.

*That they clearly have to be willing to talk about the impact that the violence is having on whomever the victim is ...*

*If they're violent, angry, pounding the table, really focused on revenge, then they're not ready ... When they are in touch with the effects on them of whatever's going on - the feelings and the behaviours they develop because of the other person's behaviour.*

*... readiness in terms of the capacity for imaginative empathy ... is there evidence in the interview that there's a capacity for that on part of the person who created the harm. If there's a classic victim-offender, where you have a one-sided abuse situation, the abused wife [doesn't have to] show her ability to be empathic about that.*

Interviewees are also looking for the abuser to **take accountability** for his or her actions.

*If this person can only see it in terms of -- I couldn't help it, lack of responsibility or rationalizing it as something the other person made me do, or had it coming -- then obviously those are major screen-outs because I don't see case development as [a place to] teach empathy. It's not the place of case development to take someone through that anger management or self awareness process.*

*We directed him to a program in the city called Changing Ways which helps fellows to look more clearly at their behaviours in the context of harm they're causing their partners and to truly see it as behaviour that they have choice and control over ... I thought if he finished that program he might be able to talk more clearly and fully about what he was responsible for in the relationship.*

*[The program] was only for people who said, yes, I did this, I take responsibility and I want to do something about it.*

In cases, where the violence is mutual, there must be shared responsibility identified.

*[They must be] willing to accept their share of responsibility. Can't be totally the other person's fault. Both sides, an element of shared responsibility ... or at least willing to examine their role and what happened.*

Part of this accountability might be demonstrated by the abuser in the relationship by showing remorse for his or her actions.

*Cases that are appropriate are where people are sorry for what they've done and want to fix it and work through it.*

Interviewees also described that it is important to look for a client's **willingness and capacity to change**.

*So, they're ready to make movement. Whether it's split up or get help ... whatever. If they're ready to make movement, than it's ok.*

*There has to be some element of curious - this person is going on "I don't understand this and I need to understand it to move on." [It would not be appropriate] if they have their world already decided. No room to change, grow, move something.*

As described earlier, interviewees described looking for evidence that the process has been initiated from internal motivation and is not being undertaken to fulfill external requirements imposed upon them by other agencies. That is, **participation must be voluntary**.

*If they want to build a case against their spouse, then it's not appropriate ... It clearly has to be that they're volunteering, that they're not participating because there's some carrot down the road, that they're getting something from participating.*

However, even if it appears that one is undertaking restorative practice voluntarily, it is important to be aware that domestic violence involves issues of control and power. One facilitator clearly identified the importance of looking for an individual's **capacity to contract and negotiate**.

*Do they have the ability to contract ... And with domestic violence, there used to be a real debate about do victims have capacity or will they always be too influenced by the offender? And my view was that most victims do have capacity, but we often have to be careful that we didn't see them acquiescing to something they didn't want, or that the case-building was something they didn't want. So you didn't want anyone to be coerced into anything during the program or cave-in for some reason so just [ensuring there is] the capacity to negotiate ... I*

*remember people saying once you've been exposed to domestic violence, they lose that capacity to make those decisions and I suppose [that's the case] in some really hard-core cases, ... but we weren't getting those kinds of cases anyway.*

The ability to contract and negotiate is an important component of **client choice**, which needs to be an essential for participants in this process. A few of the interviewees described it as the most important quality to look for.

*[You are looking for] their agreement they're ready. Or their opinions on it. I'm not saying I wouldn't challenge someone [who] said they were ready for a face to face and I thought there were some real risk indicators. I would be candid on questioning them about that. But I do believe in personal empowerment and that people need to make their own choices as to their readiness, and it's not for me to assume that my judgement on that score is more informed than theirs. So, I look to them.*

*You always look for capacity and choice. Client choice you honor that.*

One facilitator described how **client choice** may come into conflict with other qualities being looked for, such as safety.

*If they really want to go ahead, then it's really important to weigh that in versus you think it's not appropriate. So client choice and client safety is always a bit of a struggle ... I had one case where ... the client wasn't at risk physically, but he was at risk financially and emotionally and he knew that. ... He was aware of it and so were his supports but he still wanted to move forward ... But it was a bit of a debate we had [earlier] in program - do you make someone get a safety plan before you are willing to work with them? Again, it's taking away the client choice and forcing them into decisions ... But at the same time, it would make me sleep better at night, knowing they have a safety plan. [At that time], we wouldn't force anyone into it. We'd strongly encourage it.*

## Case Development Roles

There was some discussion about who is most appropriate to carry out case development. During the interviews, some interviewees identified reasons why there might be a need for one individual to undertake case development and another individual to facilitate the restorative dialogue. For example, as discussed earlier, the time of facilitators in this program is limited and there is an interest in building capacity of the *Building Safer Ground* staff. However, most interviewees stated that **case development is best undertaken by the restorative dialogue facilitators** for continuity and establishing a trusting relationship.

*Case development approach with one other person, I don't think it would work. ... The [practitioner] has to be involved early on with the case.*

*I have a strong belief in case development by the people involved in the [process] ... Part of my belief has to do with relationship building and a certain level of anticipatory preparation that you have an idea of where some of the pitfalls may be etc. and if there is one, you have a clear notion if it was your fault cause you weren't prepared for it or not.*

### C.6. Four Way Meetings and Follow-up

Interviewees described that after case development has been finished, then four-way meetings can take place. They stated that for four-way meetings, as established in case development, **the agenda has to be mutually agreed upon.**

*We work with them intentionally at those individual meetings to determine what the agenda will be so that it's developed mutually.*

There are some instances in which a four-way discussion would be stopped, but the point at which that is reached isn't always clear. Interviewees described that if there **continues to be violence** in the relationship or **physical safety is threatened**, the restorative dialogue would cease.

*If a client is volatile and I'm seeing that this woman or guy is in big trouble after they leave and it's adding fuel to the fire and if there's threats. We would stop.*

*We're in the middle of one now, and ... it's lead to fighting quite a bit. The female has been reporting unpleasant fights, not dangerous, but unpleasant fights on the days before they come in for their interviews. I'm not entirely sure what the arguments are about but I think he's bringing up issues that are bothering him outside the structure of our interview ... Do we stop tonight? Are we able to go into a restorative dialogue with this couple? Or is it helping them?*

As well, if one of the individuals **continues to deny accountability** or is not **authentic** during the dialogue. The four-way discussion would also be stopped.

*We would stop a session if ... they take back some of their accountability. If they start to legitimize their violence - they have to be committed to this process.*

*On the other side, if I'm watching and seeing someone is playing a game, manipulating, smiling and not being authentic with their real feelings. And if it's a game, and they're manipulating to try to get something, we stop. And you have to have the courage to say why the process was stopped. I wouldn't let them leave the room without them knowing.*

## **C.7. Follow-up**

Interviewees felt that, ideally, **there should be a strong follow-up process** in place for clients who have engaged in restorative dialogue. Part of the follow-up process would include seeing if they needed further supports, if they felt they've been treated respectfully, and if their expectations were met.

*Ideally, [the client] would have to come back and sit with us for at least half an hour to say where are you at, what have you done, what have you not done, how are you feeling about it. How can we help you. Then, if she decides to close, it's done.*

*There certainly would be follow up at least with the victim who has come to this dialogue with some expectations ... were there needs met, not met - how are they dealing with what unfolded in the room.*

*It's important for follow-up to ask the clients if they felt respectfully treated. It used to be that inevitably, the offender and victims would feel quite surprised that they were treated respectfully ... and contacting people six months up to a year down the road, to see if the*

*agreement has actually held or if it made any difference. ... I expect having someone follow up with them to see how the mediation went for them and whether their expectations were met.*

There is a follow-up process in the program, but it is not clear to everyone **what that process is**. Even if it is not possible to follow-up with a client due to the client's circumstances, interviewees would like to know more details of what follow-up actions, if any, are taken.

*There's no process for follow-up now ... We don't hear anything back as to what the reasons were. Nothing in writing.*

*The follow-up process was fine. Mind you, I didn't get any feedback, I didn't know what happened beyond my activities. I did know but there wasn't any formal feedback. There is supposed to be a six-month follow-up as part of it. And there is some data collected I think on satisfaction, stats, and the quality of service.*

There were also **mixed perceptions of who should undertake the follow-up activities**.

*I'm still not sure if the facilitators ought to be the one to do it, but I think it has to happen.*

*[Facilitator speaking]: It makes sense to do some follow-up. And it is fine for someone else to do it.*

*The follow-up should be done by the people who do all the work with the client. That's part of it - that we have a check-in.*

*I think whether this is seen as part of the intake coordinator's job or it's the facilitators ... depends on the quality of the interaction and how things seem to be, possible risks that have been talked about that might need to be followed up on. I haven't made up my mind whether it's by the facilitator, the intake coordinator or by some combination.*

## **C.8. Facilitator Skills, Abilities and Knowledge**

Interviewees described those facilitators' skills, abilities and knowledge that would be needed in order to effectively facilitate restorative dialogue with participants who have experienced domestic violence.

A clear understanding of **family violence, issues of power and control and family dynamics** were areas of knowledge that would be valuable for a facilitator. It was also identified that **training on the tool** (in this case, the DOVE tool) being used to assess the risk of violence in the relationship is an essential component of any restorative dialogue practice like Building Safer Ground.

*Skills? Well a sense of what domestic violence is. Understanding dynamics in terms of power and control. This is more complex than for victim-offender mediation, because the parties are living together. There are family dynamics in addition to the harm done - so knowledge of family dynamics is useful ... Dynamics of domestic violence is something you need to have.*

One facilitator described the importance of receiving restorative practice training and **placing it in the context of the facilitator's practice and training to date**. All interviewees come with different training styles and disciplines. An awareness of how the current restorative practice training fits into the facilitator's world view was identified as important.

*So, restorative dialogue functions in a different context. What we bring in with our previous training, needs to be worked through in the context of what restorative practice requires of us.*

A couple of interviewees also identified a valuable skill in restorative practice is the **ability to foster communication skills** in clients.

*A necessary component that we have missed and I think would be very critical, and I don't know if it's a skill of the facilitator who does this work - we really need to have some way of teaching communication and engagement skills to our participants. Sometimes, that can occur in the sessions themselves. Certainly our more successful ones have included a component of that. So, it's almost a training component because most [facilitators] have that skill ... A lot of it is knowing the ways that you can encourage people to listen to each other, to hear openly, to be more empathetic. Those are necessary for this type of dialogue to take place. I'd like to see those sessions or those training opportunities provided before we go into a four way. Whether by the facilitators or by an independent.*

It is also helpful if facilitators are aware of resources available in the community for clients, if needed.

## D. Implications

The researcher reviewed the results of the study to identify elements of the Building Safer Ground model where there was consistency and a common understanding. Areas of practice were also identified where there was less clarity and a need for further exploration.

Themes were also identified in transcripts of the previous reflection sessions to see if there was consistency between the themes that emerged in the interviews and those found in the transcripts. There were no major discrepancies found in the two sources of data.

### D.1. Consistent Elements of the Model

- There is a consistent understanding of the purpose of Building Safer Ground: to address and explore harms that have occurred between participants; to acknowledge that the harm is wrong; and to facilitate a safe conversation that individuals involved in intimate partner violence want to undertake.
- There is a consistent understanding that the outcome of restorative dialogue is directed by the participants of Building Safer Ground.
- There are outcomes that have been observed so far in this practice, such as increased understanding, increased hope, and action plans. But there is no expectation that these outcomes are guaranteed for participants.
- Interviewees agreed that this type of program requires a strong administrative function and a clear strategic vision based in the values of restorative practice.
- The strengths of the current program's infrastructure includes: practitioner teams of mixed gender; reflection opportunities for facilitators; payment for facilitators; professional development for facilitators and linkages to other community resources.
- There is agreement and understanding that restorative dialogue is appropriate when participation is voluntary; there are low levels of violence; or there are difficulties communicating. It is also appropriate when there are children in the family. Also, there is an understanding that in some instances, there is ambiguity in the participants' experience of

harms incurred and inflicted due to the long-term and intimate nature of the relationships.

- Goals of case development were commonly understood to be: develop a relationship with the participant; initiate restorative dialogue; explore the supports needed by the participants; prepare for the four-way discussion; assess the risk of violence in the relationship (using an objective tool like the DOVE for guidance); and assess client readiness.
- There was consistent agreement on how the agenda for a four-way discussion should be determined and in what instances a four-way discussion should be stopped.
- There were common descriptions of what skills, abilities and knowledge of facilitators would be needed in this practice.

## **D.2. Elements of the Model that Need Further Exploration**

- Interviewees perceived that a physical space and standards for process would enhance the program's current infrastructure.
- Interviewees perceived that the program would be enhanced by an arrangement that increases the client's access to staff or facilitators, which is currently limited by the part-time hours of the staff and contracted facilitators. Exploration in this area should include dialogue on how case development should best be undertaken and by whom.
- There was consensus among interviewees that recruitment of clients is a key component to the program's success. Interviewees expressed a desire to see recruitment be strengthened.
- There is a mixed perception of the intake process and its clarity. However all interviewees shared a strong consensus that more communication and ongoing feedback between the facilitators and the intake coordinator would strengthen the intake process and, subsequently, the program.
- The first round of data collection indicated that most cases involved physical violence. During the focus group, facilitators clarified that cases do not have to have physical violence to be identified as being suitable for a restorative dialogue process. The discussion highlighted a need to ensure that there is a common public understanding that Building Safer Ground would be suitable for participants experiencing any type of violence.
- In determining an individual's readiness for the restorative dialogue process, it would be helpful to establish a common understanding on which of these qualities take precedence over the others, when there is a conflict.

For example, because the program values client choice, does the restorative dialogue take place if the participant wants to proceed even if the facilitators deems there is a safety issue? It would be helpful if precedents in this area were linked to the underlying principles of the program.

- Through the focus group discussion of preliminary results and the presentation of the draft report, stakeholders identified other areas of practice that need further discussion and exploration. These included:
  - A common understanding of what steps and activities are included respectively in the components of intake and case development
  - If four-way face-to-face discussions should be stopped by a threat to only physical safety or the broadest sense of safety
  - How the DOVE tool should appropriately be used to inform the decision for participants' eligibility for Building Safer Ground restorative dialogue services
  
- All interviewees agreed that a strong follow-up process is needed. But, the understanding about the current process is not clear among all interviewees. There also is no consistent agreement on who should undertake follow-up.
  
- There was a lack of data that emerged about the certain components of the practice. Some areas that require further investigation include: four-way face-to-face discussions; practitioner partner debriefing process; the experience and qualities that a practitioner should have for this type of restorative dialogue process; and how to recruit appropriate facilitators for this type of practice.

In summary, this research project enabled an articulation of the components of a model for practice to facilitate restorative dialogue with individuals who have experienced domestic violence. These components included: purpose and outcome; infrastructure; intake process; scope of cases; case development; four-way meetings and follow-up.

This model can be used as a starting point for reflection among facilitators or be further researched to articulate the details of each component. As well, this model identifies areas of inquiry that could be used in the follow-up procedure with participants who have used the Building Safer Ground services. There is also an opportunity to revisit and further articulate this model on an annual basis to track the evolution of Building Safer Ground. All of these opportunities will contribute to the enhancement of the quality of service provided by Building Safer Ground and the contribution towards positive outcomes for those who have experienced domestic violence.

# Appendix I: Interview Guide for Facilitators

## **INTRODUCTION**

*We have been asked to help develop best practices for restorative justice in the domestic violence context, based on the experiences of interviewees to date.*

*All of your comments are confidential and while your quotes may appear in the final report, there will be no names attached to specific comments.*

*You can share as much or as little information as you like. As the conversation progresses, I may occasionally summarize what we have discussed to confirm that I have understood you correctly. You can tell me then if I got it right or if you would like to add anything.*

*After this first set of data collection, I will offer you and the other interviewees an opportunity to look at the initial results in order to provide feedback and further refine the model. A draft of the final report will be provided to you in order to confirm that I have understood your contribution correctly.*

1. First, I would like to learn about how you got involved in the Building Safer Ground project. Tell me about how you became involved in this project.
2. What kinds of contexts or situations would RJ be appropriate in DV cases?
3. Describe the different roles and responsibilities of MRJC interviewees in assessing if a case is eligible for restorative justice services from MRJC? (intake)

### Screening/Readiness

4. What kinds of characteristics are you looking for in an abuser or someone who has been abused to determine if they are ready for the RJ session?
5. What helps you make this assessment appropriately? (tools, skills, etc.)  
-How do you know you made an appropriate assessment?
6. How, if at all, does the couple's expectation of the outcome of an RJ process influence their readiness?

## RJ Process and Follow-up

*We have been talking about the screening/readiness of the offender and survivor in the RJ process. Now I would like to talk more generally about the RJ process as well as the follow-up.*

7. What are other realistic outcomes for the type of RJ practice you use here?
8. Under what conditions or circumstances would you stop an RJ process (either in the midst of or between sessions)?
9. What kinds of services, if any, should be offered to couples that would make an RJ process more effective? (throughout or as follow-up)
10. What would an ideal follow-up process look like?

## Facilitator Skills and Practice

*My next set of questions asks about the facilitator skills and some general practice questions.*

12. Can you think of an instance where your facilitator had a skill that you thought brought added value to a facilitated session? If so, what was the situation and what skills did the facilitator use?
  - What other kinds of skills have you seen other interviewees bring that you think are valuable for DV cases?
13. What tools in this project have helped you enhance your practice? (DOVE, facilitator reflective guide, client interview guide, best practice principles).
14. How, if at all, did the reflection sessions, influence your practice?
15. One practitioner described the importance of being conscious of the theories or world view that shape his or her practice. Would you agree this is important?
16. Describe what has been helpful or not helpful about facilitating in teams of one male and one female?
17. What are some advantages or disadvantages of being paid for your work on this project rather than being a volunteer?

## General/Conclusion

*We have talked about many things today – the RJ process, the offender and survivor screening/readiness, and the facilitator skills.*

18. Is there anything else you can think of, in your experience so far, that contributes to an effective RJ process in DV cases?

## Appendix II: Interview Guide for Intake Worker

1. First, I would like to learn about how you got involved in the Building Safer Ground project. Tell me about how you became involved in this project.
2. What is your role as intake coordinator for the Building Safer Ground project?
3. What is the role of the overall Coordinator for the Building Safer Ground project?
4. What specific tasks are you responsible for as intake coordinator?
5. Describe what your role has been in assessing if a case is eligible for restorative justice services from MJRC?
6. What kind of factors do you think support the intake coordinator role? What kind of factors make it difficult to fulfill the function of the intake coordinator role?
7. Is there anything else that you can think of that affects the Building Safer Ground program that we haven't talked about already?

## Appendix III: Interview Guide for Coordinator

1. First, I would like to learn about how you got involved in the Building Safer Ground project. Tell me about how you became involved in this project.
2. What is your role as coordinator for the Building Safer Ground project?
3. What is the role of the intake coordinator for the Building Safer Ground project?
4. In the literature, it says that infrastructure, administration, training and referral practices are part of best practices. With this perspective, what do you think has worked well to support the Building Safer Ground project?
5. What do you think could be improved upon?
6. Is there anything else that you can think of that would improve the practice of the Building Safer Ground program that we haven't talked about already?

## Participant Survey – Building Safer Ground

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The purpose of the Restorative Justice and Domestic Violence Research project was to examine if, and under what conditions, Restorative Justice (RJ) processes can positively impact people involved in domestic violence, that is, to examine how and to what extent the RJ process can be a successful approach to prevent and/or de-escalate domestic violence. A key outcome was to inform best practice within the domestic violence and restorative justice fields.

Research/evaluation activities were directed to both describing the processes and outcomes achieved and assessing the extent to which expected outcomes were achieved.

The methodology chosen for the project was an action research approach which involved documenting and assessing project progress and outcomes. This approach was selected because it involves a continuous cycle of action or doing (implementation) and reflection on that action (interrogation into what worked and why, and how things could be improved). The focus of the work with the external research consultants was documenting the change in practice of the facilitators to reflect what was learned through the experience of trying to change or develop an innovative practice.

The purpose of this report is to document the feedback received from the participants. There were four outcomes/impacts that the project wanted to measure regarding participants.

1. Clients feel respected throughout their involvement in the RJ process
2. Clients feel that they are heard during the RJ process
3. Clients value their participation in the RJ process
4. There is a decrease in violence in the relationships of clients

In order to attract participants into the program the client serve aspect of the Restorative Justice and Domestic Violence Research project was called Building Safer ground. Between 2007 and the early part of 2010 there were sixteen cases files opened in the Building Safer Ground program. MRJC conducted a phone survey with past participants to determine participant satisfaction with the program and to look at client comments as they related to four identified outcomes/impacts.

There were twenty-five potential participants identified for contact. We were able to make contact with thirteen of these (52%). The contact information on file for ten past participants (40%) was not current and we were unsuccessful in our attempted to contact two (8%). Of the thirteen participants contacted ten (40%) agreed to participate in the survey. The three individuals who did not participate in the survey

## Participant Survey – Building Safer Ground

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indicated that their involvement in the program consisted only of an initial conversation and no or limited involvement with the facilitators.

The participants who participated in the survey represented six cases files of which four went to the dialogue stage. We were able to receive information from six of the female participants and four male participants. Information was gathered from both parties in four cases of which two cases that went to dialogue. The facilitators for the other two cases recommended that conducting a dialogue would not be advisable.

### ***Clients feel respected and heard throughout their involvement in the RJ process***

Participants indicated that the abilities to listen, be nonjudgmental, impartial and understanding were clear indicators to them that the facilitators were attentive to their needs during the case development and dialogue phases of the program. Participants also indicated that the flexibility in scheduling and location of sessions helped to address their specific needs. The fact that all information was confidential and safety issues were addressed also assisted in participants feeling heard and respected.

One female participant indicated that prior to coming to the program she felt isolated and did not feel that people would believe her. She found it comforting that she was acknowledged and believed by the facilitators.

*“They seemed to be able to reflect what I was saying and understood and provided information.”*

### ***Clients value their participation in the RJ process***

Of the ten participants contacted all but one agreed that their participation in the process was beneficial and that the facilitators understood what they wanted to achieve by participating. Of the six participants who experienced the two-way dialogue process all were satisfied to very satisfied with the process. They all indicated feeling adequately prepared for the dialogue. Of the participants contacted, where the facilitators recommended not conducting the dialogue session, one female and one male participant expressed dissatisfaction that the opportunity was not available and the other female was supportive of the decision.

*“Want to be involved to strengthen the relationship and it exceeded my expectations.”*

*“It gave me a clearer understanding, personally, and in regards to spouse’s position.”*

## Participant Survey – Building Safer Ground

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### ***There is a decrease in violence in the relationships of clients***

Of the six participants who experienced the two-way dialogue process all six agreed that it was helpful to talk about what had occurred and four (all females) felt that the discussion provided a better understanding of what had occurred. One of the male participants indicated that the facilitators involvement assisted his female partner to express herself during the sessions which helped him understand better. All six participants agreed that the relationship had improved especially in relation to communication.

*“The relationship is better overall.”*

*“More confidence to deal with the situation”*