



# BWSS Engaging Immigrant Women in the Legal System (EIWITLS)

Final Project Report: March 1, 2008 - January 15, 2011

## Introduction

During a time of increased cutbacks in accessible legal services, particularly legal aid, Immigrant women survivors of violence and abuse are faced with further barriers in navigating the justice system. The impact of abuse, migration and discrimination on Immigrant women's lives make Immigrant women particularly vulnerable to further victimization by the justice system.

The aim of the EIWITLS project is to make public the voices of Immigrant women through their active engagement in analyzing systemic legal issues from their experiences and perspectives. We strongly believe that engaging Immigrant women has better equipped us to develop strategies that effectively address the barriers women face. The ultimate goal of the EIWITLS project has been to create systemic change in the legal system through empowerment of Immigrant women and a strong community response to legal barriers.

The structure of the project is built on an empowerment model informed by feminist and anti-oppression frameworks. We believe that the experiences of women, their narratives and voices need to be part of any initiative which intends to address Immigrant women's issues.

The process of empowerment is an essential aspect of social justice initiatives; hence, the involvement of Immigrant women has been sought in all aspects of the project. By engaging Immigrant women in the process of researching, identifying issues and creating relevant legal resources for their communities, the project has built on the capacity of Immigrant women to take on a leadership role in their communities.

The outcome of this engagement is threefold; firstly, the project has been successful in building on the capacity of Immigrant women to become resourceful leaders in their communities. Immigrant women are often consulted by and provide support to other women in their social networks. Since legal information and resources are often inaccessible to Immigrant women, inaccurate assumption regarding the law is usually prevalent. Furthermore, Immigrant women are often unaware of available social and legal services for women. The Self Advocacy Trainings and other legal trainings conducted in these communities, offered accurate, relevant and language specific legal information to women.



Secondly, the project has brought the issue of violence against women and their experiences with the justice system to the forefront of community discussions. This is achieved through building alliances with community workers, social service providers and community-based organizers from the three communities.

Lastly, through the EIWITLS project, BWSS has created six material resources, which address a broad range of legal barriers facing Immigrant women. These resources include a manual, two toolkits and three resources for women and advocates. The project team has adopted community specific strategies, and has been actively involved in promoting and distributing the project resources among the three communities.



## Project Objectives

The initial project objectives are outlined below:

- Develop an Advisory committee of Immigrant women who are front line workers and represent each of the communities to inform the project
- Develop an empowerment and skill-based training program for peer researchers
- Recruit a core group of peer researchers and train them in the above training program
- Work with the peer researchers to recruit, research and organize focus groups of Immigrant women
- Conduct the focus group research to identify legal issues, existing resources, gaps, system barriers and recommend action strategies
- Create an action strategy report
- Implement the action strategies outlined in the report
- Develop a cultural analysis and understanding of Immigrant women's experiences in Canada
- Translate identified legal information into the identified languages
- Create a resource toolkit for women from the three communities
- Widely market and distribute the strategy, toolkits and translated resources

In addition to the outlined objectives, the project created additional initiatives to respond to the needs that arose as the project unfolded. These additional initiatives include:

- Engage and train frontline community workers working with battered Immigrant women going through the legal system
- Develop material advocacy resources for advocates supporting battered Immigrant women arrested by police
- Develop a comprehensive legal directory for frontline workers of existing community resources for battered Immigrant women
- Develop a best practices manual for lawyer's working with battered Immigrant women



## Year One

Community based research encompasses the heart of the project. Minimal academic research exists on battered Immigrant women's experiences, and community-based research is often not documented. The research conducted throughout the project guided us to create action strategies that truly reflect what battered Immigrant women believe is needed to create a more accessible legal system. Creating research reports and conducting research not only documented battered Immigrant women's experiences with the justice system, but it ensured that our action strategies were, and continue to be, effective, relevant and user-friendly.

A unique aspect of community based research is the full engagement of communities in all aspects of the research. Communities are the eyes and ears informing project developments, and participatory action research (PAR) projects are accountable to the community. For the EIWITLS project, a community-based team has been indispensable in meeting our project goals of empowering Immigrant women, creating a more accessible justice system, and developing effective, grassroots community-based resources. Each step of the project has been informed by the advisory committee, peer researchers, and Immigrant women in the communities we serve. Simply through the process of engaging Immigrant women's voices, and then developing resources that reflect those voices, the project resources are being well utilized by Immigrant women.

The first step of the project was taken throughout March 2008 - June 2008 with one-to-one outreach to Immigrant women community workers. This step was important in beginning the process of hearing a grassroots perspective on Immigrant women's experiences with the family law legal system. Direct outreach also assisted in launching the EIWITLS project to the 3 communities, developing new partnerships, and strengthening connections with existing partners. In total, project coordinators connected with over 60 frontline community workers during the initial outreach phase. Immigrant workers were then invited to one of three brainstorming meetings at BWSS.

Brainstorming meetings with Immigrant workers from the 3 communities helped paint a layered picture of Immigrant women's experiences in the family law legal system. Through these ground-breaking meetings, Immigrant workers had an opportunity to share their voices to inform a community-based project. During the brainstorming sessions cultural nuances within each of the 3 communities became apparent. This information has helped bring a richer cultural understanding to the project. A second theme that stood out was the



emphasis by workers on the lack of training for Immigrant community workers supporting battered Immigrant women accessing the legal system.

Information gathered in the brainstorming sessions was compiled into the first research report of the project; the Community Worker Engagement Report informed all future direction within the project. This report led to a new project initiative: engagement and training of Immigrant women community workers

Concurrently, in 2008 the EIWITLS recruited the project advisory committee. Each member of the committee has a wealth of cultural, professional and legal knowledge. Advisory committee members were selected for their expertise on one of the three communities, and their ability to bring an on-the-ground perspective to each step of the project. In addition, all of the women in the advisory committee are established leaders within their communities. The combination of these factors has resulted in a project advisory committee that is highly engaged and well positioned to provide relevant feedback, support and guidance during each step.

The committee met consistently throughout the 3 years of the project in person, and provided support through phone and e-mail consultations. The guidance received by the advisory committee has been instrumental in ensuring each phase of the project is culturally appropriate, empowering Immigrant women, increasing access to justice for Immigrant women and will practically work within the 3 communities. Often, after advisory committee consultations project initiatives were adjusted to ensure they met the cultural realities within each community.

Alongside the advisory committee, EIWITLS peer researchers provided invaluable ongoing feedback from women who have the expertise to do so since they have experienced the challenges first hand. One of the key components of a PAR project is directly involving community members to receive training, design research, conduct research, give ongoing feedback on strategies, and participate in implementing strategies. Working with peer researchers help the project maintain a grassroots vision and have integrity and accountability to the women we serve. Also, the strong peer component in the project provides battered Immigrant women with a unique opportunity to receive long-term mentoring as community based leaders.



The peer researchers worked alongside the project coordinators to implement the initiatives in each phase of the project. Peer researchers were recruited on their personal experience of the issues, as members of the communities, and their readiness to work on a project at BWSS. Women interested in the position did not require any formal skills, as they were mentored throughout their work by the coordinators.

For many of the peer researchers this was their first time working on a research project. Many had no previous experience conducting research, outreaching to communities, designing training, facilitating training and working within a feminist anti-oppression framework. Project coordinators have worked extensively with peer researchers in each contract to mentor and provide support so each woman feels empowered and skilled in doing her work.

After the peer researchers completed 10 weeks of anti-oppression, facilitation and community-based research training in December 2008 the project began conducting focus group research. The focus groups provided peer researchers with the opportunity to practice the skills they learned in the training.

Research began in earnest in January 2009 with peer researchers and project co-ordinators brainstorming a recruitment strategy, structure and implementation of the focus groups. The team worked together to phone community workers, translate recruitment posters, post posters, and speak to interested participants. In total, the focus groups engaged 14 Immigrant women in the research.

During the focus groups women expressed multiple barriers including community workers as a risk, lack of legal representation, access to legal aid, power dynamics between lawyers/judges and women, not feeling prepared, and not knowing about court system. The information gathered in the focus groups was compiled into a comprehensive research report (Engaging Immigrant Women in the Legal System: Report on Phase One) based on an Immigrant women-centred lens. This research report paints a comprehensive picture of women's needs, their desires, cultural and lived realities of women's lives, and what women feel they need to create a more accessible legal system.



## Year Two

The EIWITLS advisory committee, peer researchers, and project coordinators began year two with a reflection on the focus group findings and research process. The reflection phase led to a number of changes to the cultural framework used within the project. The team realized the focus group model was a very Western form of engaging communities and was not complimentary to the cultural norms within the three communities. More natural methods of engaging women include having a conversation over food, sharing in less formal format, and not having to expose oneself as a battered woman.

Violence against women, divorce & the legal system continue to be highly taboo topics in the communities. The team faced this barrier frequently throughout the three years, particularly during the focus group phase. The focus group model necessitated sharing personal information in a setting where women had to tell other community members they have experienced abuse. As a result of the community feedback, the team recommended the next project step needed to be community engagement through cultural based conversation cafés that would better engage Immigrant women in the legal system; concurrently, this would provide an opportunity to bring accurate legal knowledge to women in the communities.

Peer researchers and project coordinators began the second phase of research and engagement in August 2009 by preparing for the community based legal cafés. Three community cafés were held in October 2009 to further engage Immigrant women from the communities. Women had an opportunity to receive information from a family law lawyer, share food, and have conversations on the legal system. Peer researchers documented Immigrant women's experiences with the legal system using large flip charts in small group conversation tables. In total, the cafes engaged 44 Immigrant women around discussions on the family law system and gathered women's suggestions for action. The information collected was synthesized into a second research report (Engaging Immigrant Women in the Legal System: Report on Community Cafés).

This research report compliments the focus group research report. The findings reiterated the themes arising in the focus group research: Immigrant women experience cultural, communication and language barriers in the justice system, the effects of trauma impact a women's legal experiences,





women have inadequate legal representation, and community workers are an invaluable resource in helping women navigate the legal system.

The research phase was an invaluable step towards all future project initiatives. In addition, it provided Immigrant women a rare opportunity to provide input into initiatives that directly impact their lives. Through the process of research Immigrant women shared their stories, learned about the legal system, bonded with other women and shaped future tools. In addition, this research was relevant as it was conducted by women from their communities.

Integral to PAR projects is reflection, brainstorming, and action. An action strategy report was created for January 2010 by the project coordinators. This report synthesized the information that was collected to inform recommendations for action strategies. The strategies recommended were developed after a comprehensive review of the research by the EIWITLS team. Peer researchers and the coordinators met over two days to brainstorm ideas for action. Over the two days, the team rigorously reviewed the research findings, reflected on women's suggestions for change, and utilized the expertise in the room to brainstorm community-based ideas for action initiatives.

Simultaneously, project coordinators were conducting a comprehensive gap analysis. The gap analysis showed what resources existed in the community and what was missing. The recommended action strategies were suggested because they met Immigrant women's needs and did not reflect existing resources in the communities. As a result, the strategies were new, fully informed by Immigrant women, and filled existing gaps in community services. A second phase of the work during year two included moving forward with the engagement of Immigrant women community workers. After feedback from the advisory committee, a large networking event for Immigrant women was held as an active response to meet the expressed need of lack of collaboration amongst Immigrant women community workers.

The event was highly successful in connecting Immigrant women community workers and was held in April 2009. The night provided a space for Immigrant women to network with one another, have small group discussions on issues faced by Immigrant women community workers, and listen to a legal speak.





Participants had a unique opportunity to connect with one another over a meal and discuss their journeys as Immigrant women now working within their communities.

Immigration lawyer with PIVOT Legal Society, Lobat Sadrehashemi, provided the participants with tips on how Immigrant community workers can better support women going through the legal system. In total over 60 Immigrant women participated in this evening of networking.

In addition, during the research phase Immigrant women expressed experiencing multiple barriers when working with community workers and recommended increased training for workers. This suggestion reflected a key component of PAR work: sharing knowledge with communities to empower people to create long-lasting changes. Thus, a training initiative was added to the Immigrant community worker engagement piece. This training initiative is complimentary to BWSS, as BWSS is in a strong position to provide relevant and knowledgeable skill-based training to the community.

Moving forward with this initiative, in 2009 the BWSS team began writing a manual for community workers. The information and knowledge acquired through the previous two phases of EIWTLS project contributed to the tools, analysis and practical solutions provided in this manual (Empowering Non Status, Refugee and Immigrant Women who Experience Violence: A women-centred approach to managing the spectrum of needs from settlement to empowerment). The manual has been one part of a twofold response to community worker training. The second aspect included a community worker training conference held in March 2010.

The conference and manual launch was held on over two days in March 2010. The conference was developed entirely by and for Immigrant women. The majority of presenters were also Immigrant women community workers and lawyers. The participants had the opportunity to work on case studies, listen to key note speakers, learn from lawyers and engage in topic specific workshops. The conference response was very positive. In total 80 Immigrant women community workers attended the conference, and evaluations expressed a positive response and a desire for ongoing training from BWSS.



### Year 3

The focus of year three has been the implementation of the chosen action strategies. Implemented strategies were chosen for two reasons: their strength in reducing barriers for Immigrant women and the capacity of the team to implement the strategy within the project time-frame. The selected strategies include: self advocacy training for Immigrant women, a Toolkit for Immigrant Women Working with a Lawyer, a Best Practices for Lawyers Toolkit, community specific speaks and grassroots outreach and distribution of project resources.

### Peer Researchers

Year three began with training five newly hired peer researchers. The new peer researchers participated in the Immigrant Women Engagement in Legal Justice training program, which was facilitated by the project coordinators and existing, seasoned peer researchers. After completion of training, peer researchers began the preparation for the self advocacy training sessions. Developing, preparing and facilitating the self advocacy training was a challenging and rewarding experience for the peer researchers. For all of the peer researchers, this was their first experience developing and facilitating training. To overcome challenges project coordinators consistently mentored and supported the peer researchers to fully implement trainings. Through the process of mentorship women were guided to feel confident in their skills. While giving feedback on their experiences with the project, peer researchers expressed their experience as challenging and empowering. Women also expressed that the opportunity to implement the skills they learned in training was invaluable to the growth of their skills.

In addition to the self advocacy training, peer researchers did targeted outreach with community leaders and established community hubs to distribute the project resources. This piece was important as during the research phase women overwhelmingly expressed not knowing of existing resources when they need them. Targeted outreach took place with church leaders, family doctors, ESL classrooms and teachers, libraries, MLA offices, union leaders, beauty parlours, community centres, and community agencies. The work of the peer researchers was wrapped up with two reports: a report on the self advocacy training and a second reflective report on their experiences with the project. Peer researchers completed their work on February 4, 2011 with a celebration



at BWSS in honour of their work and accomplishments as EIWITLS team members.

### Self Advocacy and the Legal System Trainings

Self advocacy trainings were recommended to provide a vigorous strategy to address and alleviate the community specific challenges Immigrant women shared in the research. The goal of the self-advocacy workshop series has been twofold. On the one hand, this strategy builds the capacity of peer researchers as women leaders in their communities; on the other, it empowers Immigrant women in the three communities by providing culturally relevant and accurate information about available legal resources and services, as well as skills required to become effective self advocates. In addition, the self advocacy trainings are facilitated by Immigrant women from their own communities who have had similar experiences.

Through community connections established in August and September 2010, project coordinators consulted community workers from local organizations from the 3 communities. The goal of the consultation was to solidify partnerships, dates and locations for the Self Advocacy Training. Training locations were selected on the basis of accessibility, familiarity and convenience for women from the specific communities to gather. Preparation for the training was done from August - September 2010 by the peer researchers and project coordinators. Peer researchers facilitated each training session and a project coordinator was present as support to the facilitators, to debrief post session and provide relevant feedback.

In total, 103 Immigrant women participated in the trainings from the three communities. The following provides a detailed summary of each of the community specific workshops:

#### Latin American Communities

Neighbourhood houses are a common place where Latin American women gather, and were a natural partner for the Latin American Women's Self Advocacy Training. In partnership with the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House and the Collingwood Neighbourhood House (CNH), the training was held at CNH over four Thursdays in October and November. The training was facilitated in Spanish by peer researchers.

In total, 20 Latin American women participated in the training sessions. Latin American communities are incredibly diverse, and this was reflected in the



participants. Women participating came from many countries with varying political situations, diverse cultural backgrounds, and different dialects of speaking Spanish. Due to the large diversity of Latin America, in one country a word in Spanish may have a very different meaning than the same word spoken in another country. This understanding of the variation in Spanish dialects was particularly important when imparting legal knowledge during the training to ensure each woman had an accurate understanding of the information being conveyed.

A large number of the women receiving training had either gone through the family law system, or were currently accessing it. Women expressed that the training was very relevant and useful for them to navigate the family law system. In particular, women found the cultural relevance, the self advocacy model and the 'how tos' shared to be particularly useful. Specifically, women expressed that information on court behaviour, legal myths with the communities, fostering new behaviours, information on immigration law, information on legal specific community resources, and the dynamics of violence against women to be very helpful.

The relevance of the training can be seen in the overwhelming response from the women asking for more Self Advocacy Training. Specifically, women expressed a desire for future trainings to be in Spanish.

#### Iranian and Afghan Communities

Given the great diversity both between and within communities, two separate outreach strategies were developed to effectively engage key members of the Iranian and the Afghan communities.

Despite speaking the same language, the Afghan and Iranian communities are incredibly culturally diverse. Considering this cultural diversity, workers and grassroots leaders from the Afghan community were consulted. The project coordinators organized several meeting with the women leaders (i.e. elders) in the community to introduce the project, build trust and make alliances with elders in the community. After consulting with community workers and organizers and comparing the demographic concentration and other community variations in regards to learning styles (e.g. women's literacy levels), project coordinators made a decision to hold 2 separate Self Advocacy Training series' in Farsi for the two communities. However, participation of women from either Afghan or Iranian background was not restricted to one specific series.

Three 4-hour sessions of training were held in Coquitlam from the first week of October to the first week of November 2010. From the 35 women participants,



10 were Afghan women and 25 were Iranian. Women participants were from a broad range of literacy levels from pre-literate to post secondary graduates. In order to engage all participants despite their literacy level, particularly, the ability to make use of the written material and handouts, peer researchers introduced alternative group activities. These group activities were organized in a storytelling style which resonated well with the women's narrative style despite their literacy levels.

The peer researchers and the project coordinators developed new strategies to engage women who were unable to read and write in Farsi. As part of this strategy the peer researchers made use of both illustrations and words to explain the points. Moreover, since pre-literate women talked about their reliance on their memory for retrieving information, the scenarios were narrated with repeated emphasis on the important details. These strategies enabled the facilitators to successfully engage women with the topic and in the discussions.

To accommodate the large Afghan community in Burnaby, a second series was offered in Burnaby. Two 4-hour sessions took place in the end of November 2010. In total, 23 Afghan women received self advocacy training in Burnaby. Women participants in these training sessions were more similar in terms of literacy level. In particular we are indebted to women leaders in Malalay Sewing Cooperative based in Burnaby; their generous support and collaboration enabled us to engage women the total of 33 Afghan Immigrant women during the Self Advocacy Training sessions in Coquitlam and Burnaby.

### South Asian Communities

When deciding which specific South Asian community to target for the Self Advocacy Training the decision was made during outreach to partner with a masjid (mosque), and provide training to South Asian Muslim women.

During the community outreach, community leaders from South Asian Muslim communities expressed a lack of resources and trainings offered to Muslim women, particularly in the masjid. The gap analysis conducted in January 2010 also showed the majority of community resources target the Sikh Punjabi-speaking majority within the South Asian communities of the Lower Mainland. As a result, South Asian Muslim women do not have the same access to community resources that target their specific needs.

For Muslim women, gender segregation is ingrained in their religious practice; hence, women play significant roles as community leaders in organizing



community events relevant to the needs of Muslim women. Partnering with a Muslim women's group was a natural step in reaching South Asian Muslim women who would otherwise not receive legal information and training.

In partnership with the Women's Council of the British Columbia Muslim Association, the training was held at Masjid Al Salaam in Burnaby over 2 Saturdays in December. Training was held in early December 2010 to accommodate Islamic religious holidays held throughout October and November. The Women's Council requested the training be facilitated in English, as opposed to Punjabi, because English is the common language amongst Muslim women from different South Asian communities.

Participants were from diverse South Asian communities with different languages, cultural experiences, socio-economic backgrounds, and understanding of Immigrant women's legal realities. In total, 25 South Asian Muslim women participated in the training and are now positioned within their community to self advocate for themselves, and to pass on accurate legal information to other South Asian Muslim women. Participant feedback reflected the information as relevant and necessary. Post-training feedback forms overwhelmingly requested ongoing training from BWSS to be held at the masjid. To date, 5 participants of the training have followed up with BWSS to request additional legal training.

### Resource Toolkits

Overwhelmingly, the project research revealed Immigrant women experiencing barriers with their lawyers. Women participating in the research spoke continuously about lawyers not understanding their culture, not listening to their stories, and being impatient with them. Moreover, the research showed extensive language and communication barriers between Immigrant women and their lawyers.

As the research results from the earlier phases were reviewed, the need to create two toolkits, one for Immigrant women and one for lawyers, became apparent to the EIWITLS team. Developing two toolkits has allowed EIWITLS to address the barriers Immigrant women experience when communicating with their lawyers.

The process of writing the toolkits began in June 2010 and continued into October 2010. In the process of writing the toolkits, two lawyers, a Family Law





lawyer, and an Immigration lawyer, provided legal supervision and direction based on the drafts of the two toolkits that were sent to them. From August 2010 to October 2010, BWSS managers, BWSS intake staff, EIWITLS Advisory Committee members, EIWITLS peer researchers reviewed and provided comments and suggestion on both toolkits. The final version of the toolkits reflects the invaluable direction and suggestion made by the total of 12 reviews we received. In addition, the Toolkit for Immigrant Women Working with a Lawyer is being translated into Farsi, Punjabi and Spanish.

### **I) Toolkit for Immigrant Women Working with a Lawyer**

The Toolkit Immigrant Women Working with a Lawyer provides practical tips and tools for women working with lawyers. Although some information exists in the community on the topic, there is nothing that is from an Immigrant women's perspective. This toolkit is highly unique, relevant and valuable because it is framed around this perspective. As a result, the language is jargon-free, addresses cultural issues and stereotypes, and the tools address the true needs of Immigrant women going through the justice system. The voice of Immigrant women can be seen in all aspects of the resource.

Practically, the toolkit is framed on the research collected, for the most part, during year one and two of the EIWITLS project; and it is designed to be accessible and informative. The tools and strategies provided in the toolkit offer a broad range of practical tools, tips and information which facilitates Immigrant women's effective communication and efficient use of time with their lawyer. The toolkit has been distributed to women and community workers in the three communities; in addition, this resource is available to download through the BWSS website. This toolkit has been translated into Farsi, Spanish and Punjabi.

### **II) Best Practices for Lawyers working with Immigrant Women**

The Best Practices for Lawyers Working with Battered Immigrant Women Toolkit aims to alleviate the challenges lawyers, particularly Legal Aid lawyers, face when working with battered Immigrant women. This toolkit provides a snapshot of the impacts of diverse psycho-social phenomenon on a battered Immigrant woman's life. By situating a woman in the context of her past and present life events, lawyers develop an understanding of the specific challenges battered Immigrant women experience. Moreover, this resource offers practical tools and strategies to foster effective communication between the lawyer and women. The resource section presented at the end of the



toolkit provides lawyers with a list of where to refer Immigrant women for community-based legal support.

The toolkit can be used by lawyers practicing in any field of law. The toolkit compliments the recommendation of the EIWITLS strategy to train lawyers working with battered Immigrant women. Future steps include distributing the toolkit to legal practices throughout the Lower Mainland, and through established BWSS legal networks. In addition, the toolkit will be a key aspect of future training of lawyers.

### **Translation of Identified Information**

While gathering language specific resources for the self advocacy trainings, peer researchers and project coordinators noticed a significant gap in the resources available in Farsi. After an analysis of relevant resources, the decision was made to translate the BWSS brochure How Can I Help My Friend into Farsi.

This resource is relevant in providing Farsi-speaking women with information about abuse in a non-threatening, simple language. These qualities make this resource a suitable way of introducing the issue to communities. The translation of this booklet was completed in September 2010 after multiple reviews by the Farsi-speaking project coordinator and BWSS staff. The translated material in the booklet was widely used during the Self Advocacy Trainings in Farsi to direct discussions about violence against women and to illustrate ways in which women in the community can provide support to empower battered women.

### **Community Specific Speaks**

Providing language-specific community speaks is one of the ways in which the project has brought the issue of violence against women and their experiences with the justice system to the forefront of community discussions. From August to October 2010, the project coordinators provided a total of eight community-speaks to the three communities.

Speaks were provided to Immigrant women groups at SUCCESS Coquitlam, Malalay Afghan Women's Sewing Co-operative, Tri-Cities Early Year Refugee Pilot Project, South Asian Community Worker's Networking Group, PICS Vancouver South Asian Women's Group and the Indo-Canadian Senior's Centre Women's Group. In addition, two speaks were offered through the South Asian ethnic media radio talk shows.



During each speak, project coordinators provided information on BWSS, the issues of violence against women and the legal barriers Immigrant women face in accessing and navigating the legal system and the EIWITLS project goal and initiative; moreover, the project developed resources were introduced and disseminated during these sessions.

### **Outreach and Distribution of Project Resources**

Throughout the months of December 2011 - February 2011, the EIWITLS team brought the project resources developed to the communities. Outreach and distribution of the resources has been integral to ensure they reach women when they require them. The action strategy plan developed in early 2010

outlined hubs where women in the communities go for information. For each community different hubs were identified. Each resource package contained language-specific legal resources, Violence against Women and the Law: Resource for Women and Advocates, Toolkit for Immigrant Women working with a Lawyer, When Battered Women are Arrested: Resource for Women, and When Battered Women are Arrested: Resource for Frontline Workers.

For Farsi-speaking women, family doctors where overwhelming identified as a confidential place where women disclose abuse. From December - January 2011, the Farsi-speaking peer researchers spoke to family doctors serving the Farsi community and distributed project resource packages in English and Farsi. Peer researchers found many of the doctors and medical assistants receptive to receiving the information. In total, 22 family doctors received resource packages.

The Latin American peer researchers focused on community outreach and doing community speaks to Latin American women in January 2011. As there are many hubs where groups of Latin American women gather, peer researchers met with these groups. During these speaks, a peer researcher presented BWSS, services offered and the EIWITLS project. The project resources where also presented and distributed to women. In total, five speaks were presented to the community. Three speaks were provided to ESL classes of primarily Spanish speaking women, one to a Latin American women's church group, and one to Parent Support Services Latin American Women's Parenting Group.

Latin American peer researchers also outreached to Spanish speaking community workers, ESL teachers and family doctors. Community workers were identified as the main source of information and support as they are well established as a source of support. In total, peer researchers distributed 14 resource packages through their outreach.



The South Asian community resource packages were distributed to a variety of community locations. Project research and community consultations showed that there is no specific hub where women go to receive information. The South Asian peer researchers focused on distributing packages at unique locations women utilise. In total, 25 packages were delivered to doctors, MLA offices, libraries, school boards, and union representatives serving South Asian communities.

### Additional Project Initiatives

#### **Community Worker Engagement and Training**

After community worker outreach conducted in early 2008, it became increasingly clear that frontline Immigrant worker engagement and training was, and continues to be, a vital piece in improving access of the justice system for Immigrant women. Community worker training was aimed to better equip community service providers to respond to Immigrant women's experiences of violence, their need for relevant and accessible legal information, resources and services. This included promoting women-centred advocacy skills, expanding their knowledge about the prevalent legal issues Immigrant women face when accessing it and the ways in which they could empower and women thought the process.

#### **Resources for Battered Immigrant Women Arrest**

Over 2009, BWSS became increasingly alarmed by the growing number of women, particularly Immigrant women, accessing our services who had been arrested for allegedly perpetrating abuse against their partners. These arrests, for the most part are occurring despite the fact that in all cases women were in relationships where they were being abused. The emotional, psychological and social affects of arrest are dire for battered women. In particular, Immigrant women are more vulnerable due to language barriers and the impact a criminal conviction may have on Immigration cases. BWSS saw the dire need to advocate for Immigrant women experiencing arrest.

During 2009, EIWITLS developed two material resources: When Battered Women are Arrested: Resource for Women and When Battered Women are Arrested: Resource for Frontline Workers. Both resources provide a framework for understanding the factors that contribute to this problem and the consequences of these arrests for Immigrant women. More over, these resources offer advocacy tips and legal information which assists front-line



worker and women through the intervention process. The resources have been translated into Farsi, Spanish and Punjabi and are available for download on the BWSS website.

## **Violence against Women and the Law: Resource for Women and Advocates**

As the project unfolded, the EIWITLS team saw an existing gap in legal information and resources available. Online and print resources are often inaccessible to Immigrant women and community workers. Battered Immigrant women are often unaware of print resources, community organizations and existing legal services.

The EIWITLS team saw a need for a comprehensive, one-stop, directory of legal resources for battered Immigrant women. The purpose of the resource is to assist workers and women in finding relevant legal information effectively and efficiently. The initiative to create a legal directory was further strengthened by a report from the Immigrant Public Legal Education consortium; in this report BWSS' website was listed as one of the main online resources most accessed by community workers seeking legal information.

In early 2010, the project coordinators began the process of developing the Violence against Women and the Law Resource. The resource has been widely distributed to community workers and Immigrant women and the response has been very positive. Community workers have expressed that they frequently utilize the resource in their work. This resource is uploaded on the BWSS website and available to download.

### Key Project Accomplishments

The following section provides an overview of the key project accomplishments over the years of engagement:

#### Year One

- Developed a 60 hour training program for peer researchers
- Hired and trained 9 peer researchers in the Immigrant Women Engagement in Legal Justice Training Program
- Engaged 14 women in focus group research
- Engaged Immigrant women community workers in community based research
- Wrote 2 reports on findings of Immigrant women's experiences with the family law legal system



### Year Two

- Engaged 44 women in cultural based community legal cafés
- Wrote a 3rd report on our findings
- Held a networking forum for Immigrant women community workers, with a total attendance of 60 community workers
- Developed the following 3 resources:
  - Empowering Non-Status, Refugee, and Immigrant Women Who Experience Violence Training Manual
  - A Resource for Front-line Workers: When Battered Women are Arrested
  - Resources for Women: When Battered Women are Arrested
- Translated When Battered Women are Arrested in Spanish, Punjabi and Farsi
- Recruited, Hired and Trained 5 new Peer Researchers
- Trained 80 Immigrant women in a 2 day legal training conference

### Year Three

- Developed the following 3 resources:
  - Violence against Women and the Law: Resource for Women and Advocates
  - Toolkit for Lawyers: Best Practices in Working with Battered Immigrant Women
    - Toolkit for Immigrant Women working with a Lawyer
- Translated How Can I Help My Friend BWSS resource to Farsi
- Provided self advocacy training for 103 Immigrant women in Farsi, Spanish and English to women from Afghan, Iranian, Latin American & South Asian Muslim communities
- Did in person outreach and project resource distribution with 44 community workers and grassroots leaders
- Presented 12 community specific speaks:
  - 5 speaks to South Asian women's groups and radio talk shows
  - 4 speaks to Latin American women's groups
  - 3 speaks to Farsi-speaking women's groups
- Distributed 61 project resource packages:
  - 22 packages to Farsi community serving family doctors
  - 25 packages to South Asian community workers, doctors, MLA's and libraries
  - 14 packages to Latin American community workers, ESL teachers and doctors

### **Conclusion**

EIWITLS project has been a three-year journey of supporting Immigrant women to reduce the legal barriers women experience when accessing the Canadian





justice system. Through active engagement of Immigrant women and their communities, the project has successfully made public the voices of Immigrant women, and created multiple new initiatives that truly meet women's needs. At a time when as a result of increased cutbacks, inaccessible legal help has led to women having devastating experiences with the family law justice system, this project has implemented initiatives that reduced and will continue to reduce the impacts on Immigrant women.

Through Immigrant women's engagement in this project, today hundreds of Immigrant women are better equipped with, and have access to resources, tools and strategies that enable women to more effectively navigate the legal system. In addition, the project has left a long-term legacy of accessible print resources. By the end of the three years, the EIWITLS team created six new print resources for Immigrant women and documented women's experiences with the family law system through three research reports.

Most importantly, EIWITLS has created a legacy of resourceful, trained and empowered Immigrant women leaders. There are now over one hundred more women in the community who are equipped with skills and understanding of how to be effective self advocates for themselves and other women in their communities.



## Appendix 1

### Overview of Project Accomplishments

#### Research Reports

- Wrote 3 reports on findings of Immigrant women's experiences with the family law legal system
- Wrote 1 action strategy report

#### Peer Researchers

- Provided employment and mentoring to 15 peer researchers over 3 years
- Provided 120 hours of training to 15 peer researchers

#### Immigrant Women Engagement

- Engaged 58 women in community based research
- Provided 52 hours of Self Advocacy Training
- Trained 103 Immigrant women
- Provided 8 community speaks

#### Community Worker Engagement

- Trained 140 Immigrant women community workers over 3 years
- Outreached and created connections with 74 Immigrant women community workers

#### Resources Developed

- Developed 6 new resources
- Translated 3 resources into Farsi
- Translated 2 resources into Spanish and Punjabi
- Distributed project resources to 22 family doctors
- Distributed project resources to 250 Immigrant women community workers