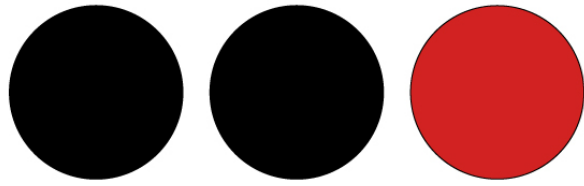




**BATTERED WOMEN'S
SUPPORT SERVICES**



Safety Changes Everything

The Simi Sara Show

Andrew Berry Sentencing: Why we need to pay attention to the warning signs of family violence

Host: Let's return now to the Andrew Berry case and the absolutely horrific murders of those two little girls. Four-year-old and six-year-old daughters of Andrew Berry. He was convicted on two counts of second degree murder; he was sentenced this morning. Andrew Berry, sentenced to life in prison on those two second degree murder convictions. He will have no chance for parole until he has served 22 years in jail. The tragic deaths of these two little girls now, has put the issue of child custody agreements under the microscope. According to the girl's mother, Sarah Cotton, Andrew Berry had been physically, verbally, and emotionally violent during their common law relationship. In her statement after the sentencing this morning, she said the legal system is an incredibly acrimonious one that favors equal parenting time over the safety and the wellbeing of the children. She also called for changes to be made to the legislation around divorce, separation, mediation-parenting time and access to children. Our next guest is Angela Marie McDougall, executive director of the Battered Women Support Services. She says more training is needed to help judges understand the warning signs of family violence. Angela, thanks a lot for coming on.

Angela: Hey, good day.

Host: Thank you very much. Do you agree with Sarah Cotton here, that the system here is too acrimonious and do we see some cases now where maybe some parents get access to children that they shouldn't have access to?

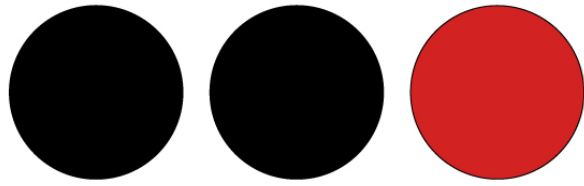
A: I agree with the mother entirely, unequivocally. You know, what we've got here is – there's a lot of evidence to show that when there's abuse in a relationship and parenting, custody issues that the mother and the children are at risk for violence, including lethal violence and the reason there's evidence in this case to give us a sense of the potential lethality, of not only the mother but also the children and the problem that we have and I know you talk about the training for judges and was just one part of the picture, we've got-you know Sarah Cotton is correct-the mother is correct, when she talks about this idea of equal parenting problem, when there's these histories of domestic violence by a father to a mother and to children. And you know, you just think that even attempting to address this work actually, through our work at Battered Women's Support Services for 40 years.

H: Okay, do you think there were warning signs that were missed in this particularly tragic case?

A: There always is, quite frankly, sadly. You know domestic homicide is one of the most predicted and most preventable forms of lethal violence that we actually have. What we don't have, unfortunately, is a sensible system that takes the violence seriously. We see routinely where the idea of the children having –the father



**BATTERED WOMEN'S
SUPPORT SERVICES**



Safety Changes Everything

having access—the abusive father—having access to children outside of the evidence of violence. And you know Sarah Cotton is speaking to that, you know, here is a mother that is telling her own tragic story of the death of her daughters, in something that we all know. You know, there's enough research, there's enough evidence and there's enough dead bodies to tell us exactly what the problem is. What they don't have is the culture and the system that's prepared to address it in a meaningful way, yet.

H: Okay, certainly if there are any warning signs there, if any kids are at risk, obviously we need a system that's responsive to that. What kind of changes do you think are needed?

A: Well, I mean, I think these changes have been suggested routinely. We have a new family law act in British Columbia that does address the domestic violence. However, the system continues to not take it seriously. We've got the apparatus in place, what we don't have are the individuals within the apparatus to respond in the way that understands *inaudible*.

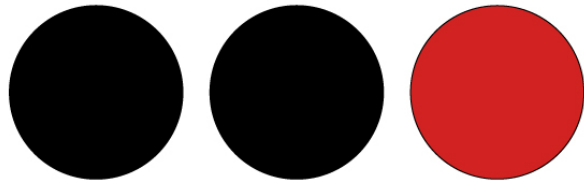
H: Okay so what do you need? Do you need more staff to enforce some of these rulings? What's required?

A: So, one of the things I know for sure in the province of British Columbia and right here in metro Vancouver that would be really great is that we have an amazing network of services for women survivors of violence and their children: transition houses, women centers, victim-service programs, community-based programs. This is a really good time for our community to invest in that community-based response. We know that when women and their children are connected to a community-based organization, not unlike the organization that I work for, they are safer, that's one thing for sure. And this is a good time to make donations to your local transition house, women's organization for sure. And the other thing that these services do is that they help advocate within the system. Women who are dealing with—women and their children who are dealing with lethal violence—like there is potential lethal violence—benefit from having an advocate. Someone that stands with them, that could help, hold the system accountable because again, we have some of the best laws and policies, quite frankly, in British Columbia and Canada as a whole, in the world. However, it's not enforced but instead it could be a game changer for women and their children and that's something that every woman that is dealing with violence should have the benefit of.

H: Just got a minute here left, Angela. I've talked to some dads in the past who felt that the system was a little stacked against them and that maybe they were not getting as much access to their kids as they would like. I mean in general, the concept of equal parenting, is that a sound one in your mind? I mean obviously, the whole game changes if there's any evidence of threats of violence or abuse but when you have, you know, two stable parents I mean is equal parenting a good concept?



**BATTEREDWOMEN'S
SUPPORTSERVICES**



Safety Changes Everything

A: And this is a really important discussion that we're talking about right now. We're not talking about when marriages and relationships break up and there's no violence or abuse—we're not talking about that, at all, we're not. We're talking about a very specific situation of which there's always evidence. And what happens unfortunately is that the system does not take that evidence into consideration and that is the biggest problem in terms of a broader sense but we are working to change that and I just raise my hat to Sarah Cotton and honor her, and of course our heart goes to her community and the loss of her daughters.

H: For sure. Angela, thanks for coming on.

A: Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this.

H: Thank you. Angela Marie McDougall, the Battered Women Support Services. She is the executive director there.