



RURAL ENGAGEMENT SAFETY PROJECT (RESP)  
ADDRESSING THE SAFETY NEEDS OF RURAL WOMEN IN OTTAWA  
PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT  
2011  
W.I.S.E



WISE Rural Engagement Safety Project Executive Summary Report  
June 30, 2011

**Facilitated by Coordinator Evelyn Menary of WISE**

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**RURAL ENGAGEMENT SAFETY PROJECT**

**Project Description:**

This project consisted of a series of 22 Personal Safety Workshops and 5 Community Safety Audits being offered to women and seniors in rural Ottawa. The project was granted from the City of Ottawa under the Non-Renewable Community Project Funding. WISE was awarded \$15,000.00 and hired a Project Coordinator Evelyn Menary to carry out the project work. The goal of this project was to research the safety concerns of rural women, provide resources in the form of personal safety workshops, and community safety audits to address those concerns and to improve rural women's overall sense of safety in the environments in which they live and work.

**Project Time Frame**

The Rural Engagement Safety Project (RESP), was conducted between August 2010 and June 2011 in three phases. Following an initial orientation period for the new Coordinator, from mid-August to the end of August, the breakdown was as follows:

- 1) September, October and November 2010  
There were no project activities in December 2010 due to Christmas season
- 2) January, February and March 2011
- 3) April, May and June 2011

## **Method Employed During the Project:**

### **i) Research & Development**

The first phase of the project consisted of research and development of handout materials for workshops and the development of a template for the workshops that would be delivered. At the same time, immediate attention was directed toward making contact and networking connections in rural areas to foster the program. The WISE Project Coordinator began holding focus groups to ascertain the level of attitudes about women and senior safety in rural areas and to help highlight the issues that would be covered in the workshops. 3 focus groups were organized and conducted. (see Appendix A in the full report for focus group summaries).

To facilitate outreach and contact to ascertain the safety issues in rural Ottawa, the Project Coordinator employed a “snowball” approach, a more organic spreading of the word within the community by community members. This proved to be a successful approach as word did spread quickly through the rural communities and requests began to come forth.

As the project progressed, originally slated to be a 9-month project, it became clear that more time needed to be provided to meet community needs. Hence, the project was extended to the end of June.

The project initiated publicity and promotion as a result of the first Personal Safety Workshop which covered many topics of interest to women in the rural wards. This prompted further project activities, and this technique worked for most rural communities within which the project was carried out.

The Project Coordinator achieved successful networking methods by accessing the following techniques:

- a) attend events already happening in the community;
- b) attend existing committees, Fall fairs, posted flyers,
- c) attend Women’s Institute (W.I.) meetings, a seniors’ wellness fair, a seniors St. Patrick’s Day luncheon...etc.

### **Networking and Partnerships**

Listed below are partnerships formed through the RESP Project.

a) The Women's Institute in all wards were extremely valuable to the RESP, particularly as they were eager to embrace the RESP as part of their ROSE program (Rural Ontario Sharing Education)

b) Two health and social service committees – one in Osgoode ward and the other in Rideau-Goulbourn ward

c) Rural Affairs with the City of Ottawa

d) Rural Ward Councillors

e) Ottawa Community Police

f) Public health

g) Churches

h) Community associations

Volunteer women from the rural communities as well as WISE volunteers were an extremely valuable resource in conducting this whole project. There were a total of ten volunteers who assisted with RESP in various capacities including, networking, publicity, and planning.

### **Overall Comments and Recommendations on RESP**

With respect to the question of how will WISE be able to continue offering services to the rural wards:

It was recognized as being extremely important to continue to meet with residents in the rural wards, as opposed to expecting rural women to drive downtown Ottawa to access services.

It is HIGHLY recommended that WISE seek funding for train-the-trainer workshops for rural women so they can continue WISE work in their own communities.

The final report contains summaries of all focus groups, all Community Safety Audits, Personal Safety Workshops Evaluations and a number of published articles that appeared in the local media.

Summary of Focus Group findings:

Focus groups were conducted in Vernon Osgoode Ward, Navan in Cumberland Ward, and Kinburn in West Carleton Ward.

A summary of some of the comments of residents underscore the need for the Personal Safety Workshops and Community Safety Audits for women and seniors in these rural areas.

Women recalled incidents of a series of attacks on a local woman; and an incident where a youth from the community was charged with a sexual assault at a local fair in a previous year;

One woman remarked that she consistently forgot to lock her car and entrance door from her garage to her house; memory of rash of break-ins which scared residents in Greely; people feel isolated and don't have destinations to walk to in rural areas; however, they did feel at the same time that neighbours are familiar and reliable to support and help;

Vandalism by young people is rising; people feel discouraged. However, they are setting up phone trees, neighbourhood watch programs and citizen patrols. Rural maintenance issues are huge factors for rural residents; Since many residents are so dispersed, they feel like they are exposed to a lot of the same issues as urban dwellers: home invasions, theft, and break-ins, consequences from poor maintenance, and poor road construction and design.

The residents who participated in these focus groups all recognized the need for further WISE intervention and support.

#### Summary of Community Safety Audits:

Navan Community Safety Audit: A number of findings came out of this audit: lighting was a huge factor for women and seniors who walk in this area. The existence of deep ditches at the side of the road presented a hazard in areas which are very dark and present problems on wet or slippery weather conditions. A bus stop located on a local rural road, was located next to a steep ditch and tended not to be used by residents who selected an alternate space to wait for the bus. Bus stops also need improved lighting

Signage is important to residents of this neighbourhood. Traffic is very fast on Smith Road and residents feel that installed signage alerting drivers to children playing will slow them down.

Maintenance needs attention in this neighbourhood also. Broken pavement at bus stops, narrow road shoulders on Smith Road pose a problem. Slanted sidewalks make walking hazardous and almost impossible for anyone with mobility aids such as walkers. Moss and vegetation covered surfaces make walking hazardous as well on Trim road. This also discourages people from going out particularly at night because of the dark areas and hazardous walking conditions.

Conclusion: Residents during this audit did identify elements in their community that threatened their sense of safety, security and community. Residents recommended changes in the following areas: improved lighting, improved and installed signage, targeted maintenance to address hazardous conditions of sidewalks, bus stops and road shoulders, and to address vandalism issues and prevent entrapment sites by cutting back bushes, and ensuring accessibility for all residents.

We understand that Councillor Blais has committed to making the results of the audit a part of the ongoing rural review by the city of Ottawa. The Navan Community Association has also committed to carry the audit forward with the support of the Women's Institute.

WISE believes that the safety of a community is based on the strength and cooperation of its every member. The users of a space share an expertise on the factors that work in making their physical and social spaces safe for all members of the community, including its most vulnerable. A community based approach to safety planning builds communication and partnerships that bring together solutions and cohesive commitments that allow everyone to feel an ownership for the place in which they live, work and play.

#### Vernon Community Safety Audit Summary:

The residents of Vernon during their safety audit walkabout, chose to audit the space at the Vernon Recreation Centre parking lot. An extremely important issue identified was the malfunctioning or nonexistent lighting. Groups who meet there often park and the far end of the lot is not visible due to the lack of lighting. One group reported taking the safety measure of ensuring that all women's car would start before everyone left the lot. Volunteers and the Coordinator of this project met with city staff and lighting is being considered for installation and repair. The installation of lighting here would also provide security for residents using the outdoor rink as residents currently now light it up with their car headlights.

Also, maintenance to cut back trees near a bunker close to an outdoor rink would go a long way to addressing the issues of entrapment sites and usability of the space. Dedicated volunteers have committed to carrying out follow up on these items in Vernon.

#### Community Safety Audit summary of Sarsfield

Representatives of the Women's Institute use a senior's building in Sarsfield as a location for monthly meetings. This prompted comments on the level of lighting available in the parking lot as poor and making it very dark. The audit was conducted with the WISE Coordinator, Women's Institute reps, the building's property manager and Councillor Blais. It became clear that jurisdictional issues of who fixes what is complicating the remedies for the various issues at this location and who has management over particular items such as parking enforcement in the driveway loop in front of the building. In fact, since some people had parked in the loop, it often obstructed emergency vehicles when they tried to access the building to respond to residents' needs.

The installation of an elevator was originally identified during the walkabout. It was noted that 2<sup>nd</sup> floor residents had to carry groceries and heavy parcels up the stairs; often having to stop and rest every few steps. Unfortunately, the property manager indicated no plans for an elevator existed. Residents could apply for the 1<sup>st</sup> floor or move. However, the Coordinator indicates that a possibility of a dumb waiter feature might be a possibility.

Since the audit, Councillor Blais and the Property Manager have been working on ironing out the jurisdictional issues for the location.

#### Summary of Metcalfe Community Safety Audit

Lighting at the Family Connections Centre in Metcalfe is very poor at the back of the building and lighting is only provided on one side of the parking lot. Staff might be better to park onstreet after hours. There is no light inside the front door

Staff who participated in the audit would like to see a security system initiated which would indicate who is present in the building or post a calendar of events.

Serious maintenance issues exist at this location: poor locks or no locks on exterior doors, crumbling bricks or sunken areas on pathways present walking hazards, questionable as well, is the functionality of doorbells at the front, lack of window coverings expose staff to observers from outside at night making them feel uneasy and vulnerable especially since a woman was sexually assaulted at a public facility in the past year.

Numerous entrapments sites were identified during the audit including rooms with malfunctioning locks or none at all, the Council Chambers, a room containing a safe, and on the exterior in overgrown bushes at the side of the building. Also of note is the lack of an emergency telephone for anyone to call for help.

#### Summary of Osgoode Community Safety Audit

The volunteers audits two locations at this audit; the first was Senior Citizens Peace park – a park located through the woods between the seniors residence in Osgoode and Main Street which was designed and built for the use of seniors and dedicated to peace. Currently, there seems to be no one assigned for its supervision and since mail is now delivered to boxes closer to the residence, seniors don't use it as much and it has fallen to the use of motorized vehicles. Community members mourned the loss of its use. They would like to see the OPP have a presence there occasionally. The Osgoode Link pathway was the 2<sup>nd</sup> location for examination. It is a link pathway intended for pedestrians but is used frequently by persons on motorized vehicles putting pedestrians and their pets at risk. The residents would like to see the building of a separate pathway for vehicles I.E. snowmobiles. Also, they would like the help of the Pathway patrol and/or Ottawa Community Police. That information will be passed on to the community police officer assigned to that area.

#### Summary of Personal Safety Workshops

During this project, WISE engaged the Coordinator to conduct 22 Personal Safety Workshops – designed to help women and seniors in rural areas of Ottawa to develop helpful strategies to enhance their personal safety. A series of workshops was given at times combining communities together to deliver a workshop where participants could engage in the role plays, discussions, and take advantage of the resource materials on home safety, safety on the street, while using public transit, cyber safety, protection from fraud and theft, and self defense orientation.

Evaluations were conducted at each workshops and self evident is the impact that these workshops have had on rural women: they were asked to name 3 of the most valuable things they learned during the workshop:

Learn to trust your instincts  
How to set limits and boundaries  
That you are valuable

Self defense moves

Be aware of your surroundings

Try to be in control of the situation

Use your voice

Signs of domestic violence

Conclusion:

WISE has gauged that this project has been most successful. In delivering the 22 Personal Safety workshops and conducting the 5 Community Safety Audits, we have made a start to forging strong connections with community partners in the rural areas.

Key points that came out of this project that WISE must follow are:

.Engage rural women in their own communities and not require them to travel to the urban core for service

.to continue our work in the rural area by offering a Train-the-Trainer program wo that rural women can continue the service to other rural women.

WISE must maintain the connections made in the rural areas as valuable work has been started and we must do our best to continue to offer service to rural areas.