

BATTERED WOMEN'S SUPPORT SERVICES
21st Century Practice – Transforming Women's Lives
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"We are a group of women who have been fighting to raise issues in a variety of ways. We have been taking on issues, been knocked down and we keep trying again. Now we are strong and solid as an organization. We are learning about what women need over time and we are seeing the results of doing all this. Now it is about believing in ourselves!"

INTRODUCTION: BELIEVING IN OURSELVES

This publication aims to describe Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS), a 21st Century anti-violence organization for women. BWSS is very proud of its strong roots in the feminist and women's movements of the late 1970's, 1980's and 1990's, and of the new directions it is taking in its work with women. Through its growth over the past three decades, and consequent maturation, BWSS is now at an ideal point in its organizational development to take stock of what has been achieved so far. BWSS has always changed and evolved, primarily in line with the needs of women who come for help, but also in response to demands from the wider community and to societal and political shifts. By always trying to respond well to the needs of women who come to its door, BWSS is constantly considering new directions to its work. Through this self-reflection BWSS has realized the need to become more vocal about its approach to working with women who experience violence, both within the network of anti-violence services and within wider support and service settings for women in BC.

This is for a number of reasons. Firstly, those in BWSS are clear that their approach to working with women, many of whom are on the margins of social and community life, is special, and deserves to be shared more widely with others. Contributing to a dialogue with other organizations across the province, and more widely in Canada and across the globe, on what women need from support services when they are experiencing violence, is part of this activity of sharing. This dialogue is felt to be particularly critical in the area of support for women who have substance use/addiction concerns or who are experiencing extreme mental and emotional distress, alongside their violent relationships.

Secondly, BWSS is also convinced that the anti-violence, feminist, women's community must take a lead on integrating responses to women's experience of violence and the effects of this violence on women's health, mental health and their use of substances. Angela Marie MacDougall, Director of BWSS, believes that the anti-violence, feminist, women's community already is already taking a lead in this area:

"Our work is on the cutting edge. We witness women's experiences. We are the leaders of integrated practice. We have the voice, authority and knowledge... It's never been separate for me. These silos, the mental health world, the addictions world, the violence world. I couldn't get it. This separation just didn't exist in my life, in the life of my mother, in the lives of the people around me" (BCASVACP Training Forum Keynote Speech, November 2007).

BWSS believe that this community is best placed to provide leadership in this area because of the experience and expertise that they have developed over the years in working to support and empower women.

A study that demonstrates the role played by the anti-violence sector in the area of substance use was undertaken by a team of researchers associated with the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (BCCEWH) in collaboration with the BC and Yukon Society of Transition Houses in 2002-3 (see Jategaonkar *et al*, 2005; Greaves *et al*, 2006). The study examined the use of alcohol and other drugs

by women as they entered transition houses, and again three months later after they had left. Women were asked about their use of alcohol and other substances as well as other key stressors they faced. They reported significant reductions in their use of alcohol and stimulants in the period following their stay in a transition house. Women described how their experience of violence and use of alcohol and other substances were interconnected in complex ways and influenced by individual, relational, and structural factors such as financial concerns, mothering, social support, and mental and physical health issues. The research underlined how women who are leaving violent relationships are open and receptive to the support that transition house staff can provide about alcohol use and other substances and demonstrates the work that is going on day to day in these services to support women in violent relationships with their use of substances.

Partnership working has been important to BWSS and since 2004 it has been specifically partnering and collaborating with organizations with similar philosophies to deliver new services and supports to women. By joining with partners in other specialized fields, such as substance use and addictions and support for immigrant and refugee sex workers, BWSS has been able to 'step into' these areas, bringing expertise of working with women experiencing violence and learning from those with expertise in these other fields. Running groups with co-facilitation between agencies is a model that has served women well and has also built capacity across a range of partner organizations.

BWSS wishes to continue to expand this partnership model and collaborate with a greater range of other organizations in pushing for change in key areas connected to the support and empowerment of women, and in particular of marginalized women with intersecting 'mental health', substance use and addictions concerns. While there are challenges as well as opportunities in coming together, BWSS believes that the time is now right to push forward with a renewed vision of what can be accomplished when people join together. This publication, and the wider series that it introduces, is central to this collaborative agenda. So let's talk!

VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN: WHY THE NEED FOR BWSS?

Violence against women in relationships is a serious and widespread problem for women, their children, the men who abuse them, and for society as a whole. In the 1993 *Violence Against Women Survey* (Statistics Canada, 1993), 12,300 Canadian women over 18 were randomly selected and surveyed about their experiences of violence. The survey found that of those women who had ever been married or lived with a man in a common-law relationship, 29% reported having been physically or sexually abused by their partner at some point in their relationship. More recently, the *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile* (Statistics Canada, 2005) which uses data from the 2004 General Social Survey, reported that approximately 653,000 women were victims of some form of violence by a current or former partner in the five years up to and including 2004. Data from the survey show that the nature and consequences of spousal violence were more severe for women than for men. Women were more than twice as likely to be injured as men. Women were also three times more likely to fear for their life, and twice as likely to be the targets of more than 10 violent episodes (Statistics Canada, 2005).

TEXT BOX: The women who work and volunteer at BWSS hear the very worst that one human can do to another human: they know intimately the extent to which violence is inflicted and harm is done. Our staff and volunteers are witnesses for the unspeakable. Our existence is to make public what happens in private.

Research also indicates that experiences of violence are much higher among certain groups of women than others. One group that experiences higher levels of violence is younger women. A US study, for example, found that 1 in 5 female students reported being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner (Silverman *et al* 2001). Another group is Aboriginal women. Twenty-four percent of Aboriginal women reported

that they had experienced violence in their intimate relationships in the five-year period ending in 2004 (Statistics Canada, 2005). Geographic isolation, lack of access to services, lack of transportation and poverty are some of the factors that increase the risk for Aboriginal women. Living in a context of historic and ongoing colonization also creates layers of heightened vulnerability. This can be demonstrated using BWSS internal statistics: the percentage of women who access BWSS who self identify as recent immigrants is 42% and the percentage of women who self identify as Aboriginal, Indigenous, First Nations, Native, Indian or Metis is 18%. These figures indicate the elevated risk for these groups of women.

RESPONDING TO WOMEN ‘WHERE THEY ARE AT’

TEXT BOX: *“Starting where women are at, working with what is in front of us. From there everything else grows”.*

BWSS was started by five determined women who saw a need and strove to create an organization to meet this need. BWSS began with the creation of support groups for women, first and foremost. These groups were designed to provide information and practical help for women, to relieve the isolation women experienced and to play a consciousness raising role. The support groups have been the ‘bedrock’ or foundation of BWSS throughout its evolution and growth. Another fundamental part of BWSS’s work was the establishment, also in the very early days, of training for volunteer support group facilitators. This training also focused on consciousness-raising and provided the base for the volunteers that came to BWSS to help provide women support. Two other central directions flowed from this: legal advocacy and work to influence policy and practice on law enforcement, and social enterprise. These have since been supplemented with the one-to-one work that has also developed over the last decade, such as Stopping the Violence counselling.

Responding to women’s direct needs is the main agenda at BWSS. In practice this means that no woman is turned away: all women are welcomed. BWSS meets the women who come to them for help ‘where they are at’. That has meant the proactive development of flexible services to try to meet the needs of the women that have arrived at the BWSS door over the last three decades. If women require services that are not provided by BWSS they are supported to make referrals to other agencies and organizations that can help and remain connected to BWSS for support and counselling.

TEXT BOX: *No woman is turned away: all women are welcomed.*

The services that have been developed by BWSS are consequently varied and diverse because women need a whole range of practical and therapeutic supports when they are in violent relationships and are survivors of violence-related trauma. BWSS provides a range: crisis intervention, group therapy and support, individual counselling, advocacy, and services that meet women’s practical needs.

TEXT BOX: *“We work with women no matter what their issues are. Over the last year or so I have been working with women who have been part of the Residential School compensation that has been distributed and getting them ready to attend the Supreme Court that happened in October last year. I have been working with women who have homelessness, mental health, addiction and domestic violence issues – we are really open to working with women and if we cannot help them in the moment then we work hard on where they can get that help”*

REACHING OUT TO WOMEN

So how many women are BWSS supporting? Between April 2006 and March 2007 BWSS received well over 4,000 calls from women wanting help and almost 5,500 women accessed the BWSS short-term victim assistance program. 26 support groups were run over that year and each group ran for between 10-14 weeks. Over 1,000 women accessed these groups for the first time or on an ongoing basis. As described above, the support groups are central to the ethos of BWSS in creating a large healing community for women through group-based support and therapy. In terms of the longer term counselling work of BWSS over 2,000 women were referred to the *Stopping the Violence Long Term Counselling Program* and almost 3,000 women accessed this program on an ongoing basis. These numbers demonstrate the efficiency of BWSS who manage to offer women these services with a staff team of 18, supplemented by up to 35 trained volunteers and from just one office base.

TEXT BOX: Everyday the women who work and volunteer at BWSS move the vision of empowerment forward through compassion, energy, passion and determination for ending violence towards women.

EXPANDING THE PROFILE OF SERVICES AND SUPPORT: DIVERSITY AND INNOVATION

Legal advocacy is a central and core aspect of the work of BWSS. Many women who access the services of BWSS need assistance with interfacing with the legal system and this work has been prioritized from the early days of the organization. BWSS has a pro-bono lawyer who runs a clinic on the premises once a week and volunteer lawyers offer a half hour of free advice to women. A new legal project is currently getting underway that will engage immigrant women in closely examining barriers that exist for immigrant women in the legal system. This is a three-year participatory action project with women from three cultural/language communities: Persian and Afghani, Latin American and South Asian women. The project has been designed because of the lack of accessibility of the current system for immigrant women who do not have English but have to self-represent in family court. Women will investigate their experiences of using existing legal services and will develop a toolkit of ways to improve the system depending on what they find.

TEXT BOX: WOMEN EMPOWERING THEMSELVES: ACHIEVING THEIR OUTCOMES

A woman contacted BWSS because she wanted to facilitate a Christmas donation from colleagues at her workplace. When asked by BWSS staff why she wanted to support the organization in this way she explained that she had used BWSS services in the past. She was an immigrant woman who had been sponsored by a Canadian man to come to Canada and had experienced violence in this relationship. She spoke little English. When her Legal Aid ran out, as it often does in complex family cases, a BWSS long-term counsellor helped her to prepare her case for court. The woman also learned English. She presented her case to the judge while her husband came with his lawyer. She achieved her outcome. While the whole process was daunting she felt empowered through the process and said that she had never thought that she would have ever been able to do what she had done.

Advocacy is another big part of BWSS's work with women. Advocacy for BWSS means working with women on their own personal and practical needs but also what is termed *Big 'A' Advocacy*. This type of advocacy has a focus on community and societal awareness of violence towards women and the social justice issues that are so much a part of working with women who experience violence in their lives.

TEXT BOX: *BWSS places colonization and the experiences of Aboriginal women at the centre of the work... everything else jumps off from there.*

For BWSS a central component of this advocacy involves Aboriginal justice issues. As described above, 18% of women accessing BWSS identify as Aboriginal, Native, Métis or Indian. The BWSS approach is grounded firmly in a wider anti-oppression analysis than merely a feminist or gendered analysis of oppression. It is grounded in an analysis of colonization in the nation now known as Canada and looks to this analysis to help to explain the systemic roots of the violence that Aboriginal women experience. As Angela Marie McDougall explains: *'Starting with colonization is a way of making visible what is not visible... it is a way of starting with First Peoples and grounding us...'* BWSS tries to play its part in supporting Aboriginal women to address the staggering and interrelated effects of historic and ongoing colonization, systemic disadvantage and the high levels of violence in their lives. To do this well BWSS has created some unique programming to support Aboriginal women through paying attention to gender, culture, history and tradition. Aboriginal women are centrally involved in designing and implementing this program.

TEXT BOX: *"More than cross cultural understanding or working with diversity, BWSS programming is feminist anti-oppression work that encourages each woman to be all of who she wants to be, in spite of all of the barriers and forces that are designed to keep her down. Through our advocacy and our activism we are holding systems and institutions accountable and seeking systemic change".*

One of the other core programs BWSS is proud of, is its work with youth. Research shows that young women are particularly vulnerable to abuse in intimate relationships (Silverman et al, 2001). BWSS believes that prevention needs to be a big part of anti-violence work and since 1990 has been running a preventative education dating violence program to raise awareness amongst high school youth in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. In 2006, 8 schools and youth programs participated and more than 600 young men and women were reached in this participatory, mixed gender initiative. This outreach educational work has also led to calls and emails from girls and young women seeking support after the presentations which not only indicates the impact of the sessions but also the integrated nature of awareness raising and education with direct service provision: they cannot be separated. This initiative has now transformed into the Youth Engagement in Violence Prevention Project and is driven and staffed by youth.

While BWSS is fully committed to a local community-based focus the work goes beyond the local: BWSS has a provincial, federal and international presence. The BWSS crisis line has been used to talk to women all over the world and BWSS training materials have been shared with organizations in Liberia, Somalia, South Korea, Japan, South Korea, Australia and the US. BWSS places great emphasis on working together with other organizations, partnering and networking with others within BC, Canada and all over the world to build on and strengthen the advocacy and support they can offer to women.

WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT BWSS'S APPROACH TO WOMEN?

Anti-Oppression Feminism

TEXT BOX: *"Our focus right now is to bring women's voices from the front line to the mainstream".*

At BWSS there is an intimate understanding of how systemic oppression, such as that created by colonization, racism, sexism, heterosexism and homophobia, and poverty, impacts women's lives and structures their experiences of violence. Indeed, at BWSS violence against women is understood as a direct result of systemic oppression. BWSS uses an anti-oppression and feminist analysis in its work with women where women are seen as the experts on their lives and on their healing journey: on what help they need.

TEXT BOX: *'We have the analysis of how women are brought up in the world, and all the struggles that they have, but also that not all women are the same. There are women who are more privileged than others.'*

Because BWSS is run and staffed by women who have also experienced various forms of marginalization, this understanding is not only intellectual but is grounded in lived experience. BWSS staff and volunteers represent the widest diversity that exists within the communities served. This makes a difference. It means that women who come to BWSS are met with a compassion and human connection that can be truly transformational for them.

TEXT BOX: *"One year ago today I walked out of my family home. You were with me when I took my first steps to freedom. You helped me to understand abuse when all I knew was that "something was wrong, and that I couldn't fix it" and how much it hurt. You heard my pain, you let me cry, you supported me, you calmed me, and you reassured me. You guided me to a shelter to live in when I needed to leave. You knew my journey ahead was long and painful. You were there for me. I know that the road ahead is long. I know that there is much pain to come. But my eyes are open now. I clearly see the road ahead and what I need to do to be free. I no longer blame myself for what happened. I have learned to understand abuse for what it is and how it played a major part of my life and marriage" (Taken from a letter by a woman who accessed BWSS).*

BWSS validates women who come for help and emphasises the survival skills women have developed to endure longstanding experiences of violence and abuse. The core work takes an empowerment approach and focuses on a woman's strengths and resources and on her ability to recover from the challenges she is facing.

Harm Reduction

While addressing and planning for women's safety is obviously the initial goal above all else, this is done with a clear emphasis on harm reduction because of the many threats to safety a woman may be facing. Supporting a woman to reduce harms related directly and indirectly to her substance use is also an important part of this work. A harm reduction approach acknowledges that most people find it difficult to make changes in their lives, even when faced with profoundly negative consequences for their health, wellbeing and their safety. Harm reduction focuses on harms in general, rather than the substance use itself, enabling 'windows of opportunity' to be created, both for those who use substances and those that support them. It comes from the premise that small changes in use can reap big rewards in terms of the impact on a person's life. Acknowledging that reducing the harm from violence in a woman's life is a process that can be lengthy and extremely challenging is a vital component of the work.

The feminist principle of meeting a woman where she is at is central to the harm reduction approach because it recognises that many social factors create harm for women. It works without judgment and engages with the complexity of women's lives. It is pragmatic and practical through its creation of different 'entry points' for women to access services and interventions. A harm reduction approach encourages service providers to work with women along a continuum of substance use, not just helping those who are able to abstain.

A Holistic Approach

Indeed, emotional, intellectual and spiritual safety, as well as physical safety, is considered as part of a holistic approach. Working holistically is a part of BWSS's approach to all women who come to them for help

but is especially important for the organization's approach to working with Aboriginal women as Mona Woodward, BWSS's First Nation's Women's Crisis Worker, describes:

"The approach I come from is to take a holistic approach so when I am working with an Aboriginal woman I work by taking into consideration her cultural and spiritual traditions and work from a framework that includes her spiritual aspect. Some of this may be saying a prayer and incorporating that in the healing process. By doing that many woman say that they are getting to their true self – as the Creator made them. It makes a significant difference to the way that they feel about themselves".

Working with the Interconnections

Actively working with the interconnections between women's experience of violence and abuse and consequent 'mental health problems'¹ and use of substances is also vital to the work of BWSS.

TEXT BOX: *'Working with the interconnections has been my life's work and I really like how we are doing it'* (Angela Marie MacDougall).

There is now a well-documented link between childhood abuse and neglect and use of licit and illicit substances as an adult. Girls and women who have been sexually abused are more likely to use substances, to use them earlier, more often and in greater quantities (Poole and Dell, 2005). Links between substance use and ongoing or current violence has also been firmly established. A significant proportion of women using transition houses, sexual assault and related anti-violence services experience problems related to substance use (Greaves *et al*, 2006).

Many women who try to get help for their substance use have experiences of violence or abuse as children or adults. A US study has shown, for example, that 57% of women in residential drug treatment had experienced emotional abuse, 49% physical abuse and 40% sexual abuse (Palacios *et al*, 1999). Another US study reports that among methadone-maintained women, 60% reported physical and or sexual abuse by an intimate partner with the risk being significantly greater for those with a history of childhood physical or sexual abuse (Gilbert *et al*, 1997).

A broad range of physical and mental health concerns have been shown to be associated with violence against women in relationships. In terms of the association between violence, childhood abuse and trauma, and what are commonly known as mental health problems, the links have also now been firmly established in the literature. For example, for women with violence, abuse and trauma histories, the risk of developing mental health problems as an adult is heightened. Between 50-70% of women who seek mental health services report childhood sexual abuse trauma (See Duncan at <http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas05/Vistas05.art60.pdf>).

Research shows that prolonged abuse and the associated psychological trauma may disrupt and alter brain chemistry leading to the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (see Haskell, 2003; Herman, 1992; Levine, 2005). In addition to this, mental health problems such as depression, suicide attempts and self harm are frequently symptoms or effects of current abuse. It is also now known that pre-existing mental health problems can be exacerbated by abuse and violence in adult life. Despite these links, mental health and psychiatric services have traditionally ignored the connections between violence, trauma,

¹ We use the terms 'mental health' and 'mental health problems' in this piece with inverted commas. This is because BWSS is not comfortable with these ways of understanding or labeling women's reactions to violence or abuse. BWSS therefore problematizes these terms, viewing them as labels that individualize and pathologize women's ways of coping. This will be explained in more depth in another publication in the series specifically addressing women's 'mental health'.

mental health problems and substance use and this largely continues to the present day, reinforced by the dominant bio-medical approach to mental illness and emotional distress.

BWSS meets women with a very different approach. BWSS understands that the fear women live with everyday plays a huge part in creating additional stress and distress for those who are experiencing violence or who are still living with the effects of trauma related to abuse and violent past experiences. In their work with women staff at BWSS will focus on the fear itself, and the reasons for a woman's fear, rather than get caught up in using labels to categorize her reactions, such as 'depression', 'anxiety' or 'bi-polar disorder'. Because of this approach women talk openly about their fears, their stress and distress and their substance use. They talk about how all those pieces join up for them in their lives. Harm reduction work can then be done where appropriate and where women are happy to do this.

TEXT BOX: *"Trauma gets stored in the body. We work with the body reactions not just the memory".*

When beginning to work with a woman who comes to BWSS an intake assessment is done with her where each question asked assumes that she may be using substances or have 'mental health' issues. Conversations take place around these areas of a woman's life without seeing them as separate or different and without moving to blame or label the woman. A woman's mental distress and 'unwellness' and her use of substances may be considered to be part of her way of resisting the impact of violence and inequalities on her life. According to BWSS, the role of women's resistance in surviving their life circumstances deserves exploration. The role of education is also vital and women are taught skills such as self-regulation and boundary maintenance that can help them to gradually start to manage their fear responses. The counselling women receive, both short and longer term, draws on a range of modalities and traditions such as narrative therapy, art therapy, bodywork, cognitive work and motivational interviewing. Staff receive training from experts in these fields in order to integrate these approaches in their women-centred, feminist and anti-oppression framework.

Individual Awareness Raising and Collective Education

Another key aspect of the work at BWSS is the individual awareness-raising element of the counselling that women receive, as Rosa Arteaga, Manager of Direct Services and Programs explains:

"Women come to us thinking that they have a problem or that they are the problem and they ask us to help them to remove this problem because it is painful. And then something that they become aware of is that the problem is the result of different circumstances and that they are not the only ones that feel that or who have experienced that. They are part of a society and a world that has created the oppression. Also they realize that they have the power to make different choices now. They have gained the resources, the knowledge, the self-awareness, and now they have the power to make choices within their world just by understanding the bigger picture".

In their work with BWSS, women often develop increased self-awareness and confidence through this analysis and through the exploration of the powerful systemic and relational dynamics that have shaped their lives since they were very young. They develop knowledge about their situation, become more aware of their ability to make choices, and of their rights. The support groups are central to this process.

TEXT BOX: *"They have a new awareness of their own strength and their own powers and start voicing themselves. To have a voice in different areas of their lives has really empowered them and they walk away feeling more confident about who they are as a woman and that they do deserve to be treated with dignity and respect in decisions concerning their lives and the lives of their children".*

Connecting with BWSS is often life changing for women:

'Women want to volunteer here. They want to give back. Sometime they bring food or gifts for other women. They offer to write something. Many women I meet outside of BWSS tell me that they accessed BWSS in the past and now they are a social worker, for example, and their experiences with BWSS really changed their lives around and helped them to get to where they are now'.

This impact includes women that go through the 12-week BWSS Victim Service Worker Training Program that has run for almost 30 years training women to become intake and crisis line workers.

THE TIME IS NOW: STEPPING UP TOGETHER FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

TEXT BOX: *"...we deal with all kinds of issues because we are not choosing who we work with. I have lots of different experiences because we work with women no matter what is going on for them. Whoever comes, I help. Whoever comes is a woman who needs help. It is beautiful, it is amazing, because of all of the knowledge that comes through from the work".*

Those that work at BWSS are clear that their work with women educates them enormously, mostly because of their policy of working with all women and turning no woman away. This has brought them to the point of being confident in their ability to be able to represent women's interests within broader policy and service contexts. BWSS believes the time is now right to move discussions about what women need from support services into the areas of health, 'mental health' and addictions.

This publication has just managed to scratch the surface of BWSS's approach to working with women who experience violence. The aim of this publication, and the consequent series, is to share the BWSS approach to working with women, often on the margins of social and community life, with others who are also keen to move practice forward. The rest of the series will expand on the themes of colonization and BWSS's Aboriginal women's programming, the work with women who are in severe emotional distress, on integrated approaches to women's substance use, on BWSS's equity hiring practices and commitment to their staff and to organizational development, and on the need for a dynamic leadership from the anti-violence sector to push for integrated responses to women with multiple challenges.

The series will aim to inspire the anti-violence, feminist, women's community to build their internal and organizational capacity to take the lead in representing the interests of women in a range of settings beyond those directly connected to anti-violence work. A number of organizations are pushing integrated approaches forward in their work and have a huge amount of experience and expertise to share with the movement as a whole. One example of this is the Building Bridges initiative by the Provincial Woman Abuse Response Program at BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre which has done much to draw attention to the importance of this work (Godard and Cory, 2008). This initiative brought together community and health partners in province-wide discussions, consultations and educational forums in 2006 and through 2007 to further knowledge and to develop a provincial strategy.

As well as highlight areas of best practice, the forthcoming BWSS series will also identify issues and challenges for workers, teams, organizations and communities in moving forward into collaboration and leadership. There are indeed many challenges. The organizations that serve women across the province are fragmented and conflicts can easily develop that undermine the cohesion that does exist. Many organizations and workers feel that their legitimacy and expertise is challenged daily. Now would be a good time to name the challenges, suggest possible ways to address and move beyond them, and look to the future for a new way to come together in our work that serves women.

TEXT BOX: *"We are not alone. We have huge support from women who have accessed BWSS. We have around 500 women that we see every month, we have thousands of women who have*

accessed our services who have expressed how they have become empowered, how their lives have changed and how their children's lives have changed because of their work with us. So I see us at BWSS as taking leadership as a group of women. We need to take the first step and the first step is huge”.

Please join BWSS in creating this new dialogue and taking these first steps together. We are the leaders. Be brave.

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