

Lana Wells Speech

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Good afternoon everyone. I am so pleased to be here today.

We have spent the last five years researching '*the why*' and '*the how*' to engage men and boys to stop violence against women. And just last week, we submitted recommendations for an action plan to the Government of Alberta in Canada. I would like to share with you highlights of our process to develop this plan – and discuss some of the recommendations.

But first...let me tell you a little bit about the project I am leading. It's called Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence. We are situated within the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary, in Alberta, Canada. Our purpose is to work with and inform governments, community-based organizations, and communities to advance efforts to prevent violence against women and children. We bring best and promising practices forward and support the piloting and scaling of innovative *primary prevention* strategies.

Primary prevention means *stopping violence before it starts*, which means our focus is on the underlying *drivers* of violence against women and stopping first time perpetration. And we all know that policy, legislation, and funding are key levers for social change. Therefore much of our focus at Shift is building the capacity of governments to make evidence informed decisions in these areas.

There are two caveats to this work – First, we could not do this work without a strong infrastructure in the crisis response model. And second, my research is limited to countries similar to Canada – but I am hoping that our process and actions can be translated to what makes sense in your context.

So what have we learned?

Our First learning was about government violence prevention plans.

There's good news...and not so good news. The good news is that more and more, governments realize that men and boys have been excluded from having a meaningful and positive role in addressing violence against women – and they are looking for ways to engage men and boys as part of their prevention strategies.

The bad news is they don't really know how. We looked at 52 government prevention plans, of these, 22 identified the need to engage men and boys in violence prevention, however, of these, only 17 offered any kind of concrete action for doing so. These actions were mostly one-offs, and were typically programmatic responses.

Our first big takeaway was that while many governments understand 'why' engaging men and boys is needed; we now need to focus on 'how'. And the *how* needs to be informed by evidence.

Since there wasn't a comprehensive engaging men and boys plan 'out there' that we could adapt for Alberta, we realized we'd have to create one for ourselves. So we conducted a



comprehensive international literature review to understand best and promising practices. We interviewed leaders throughout the province for their opinions and ideas. And we mapped out the current initiatives that were already underway, so we could leverage momentum and utilize the existing infrastructure.

When we looked at the research literature to identify best and promising practices. We found that most men do not or will not attend a Violence Prevention program and the research suggested that we need to go where men and boys congregate. We need to go to where they **work**, where they **play**, where they **learn**, where they **worship**, and where they **socialize**. And we need to infuse content in these settings and institutions that develop the skills that support gender equality, that build healthy relationship skills, that teach and reinforce positive and healthy masculinities, and that disrupt and stop violence.

To understand what to actually do in these settings and institutions, we produced a paper in partnership with White Ribbon Canada and identified some promising practices that are starting to emerge in the research. But there is such little evaluation and evidence of what works.

So, our next two takeaways were that we – meaning governments in partnership with universities - need to invest in the kind of research and evaluation that will support evidence-based approaches to engaging men and boys. And, second, we need to go beyond the “programs for problems model” and focus on infusing content, messaging, skill building, policies and campaigns throughout settings and institutions where men already congregate. That means partnering with a variety of leaders from all different sectors and communities.

From there, we needed to determine where to start – and what to prioritize. There were two evidence-based approaches that kept showing up in the research: 1. **Supporting positive father involvement**, and 2. **Promoting healthy and equitable relationships with adolescents in school settings**.

Fatherhood is the optimal opportunity to engage men in the prevention of intimate partner and sexual violence against women. We know that positive involvement of men in their children’s lives can prevent intimate partner violence perpetration and victimization of their own children when they become adolescents and adults. For men who perpetrate or are at risk of perpetrating intimate partner violence, becoming a father or wanting to remain involved in their children’s lives, can provide the motivation to avoid or stop violent behaviours. Finally, increased father involvement can shift traditional masculinities and gender norms, and increase gender equality both within families and in society as a whole. In the Canadian context, we knew that fatherhood could be the most effective entry point for engaging men.

As for adolescents, we all know that prevention should start early in life... specifically, adolescence is when values and norms around gender equality are forged. Through educating and promoting respectful relationships, gender equality and building competencies in self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships skills and responsible decision-making with young boys and girls...we believe we can reduce dating violence. And if these

values and skills are not being taught in the home, the next best learning setting is...schools. This is where education systems become key actors in an engaging men and boys strategy.

So our next key takeaway was that throughout the lifecycle – there are key points to effectively target men and boys in prevention activities. And in order to do this work, we have to call on different ministries throughout government to lead and mobilize a variety of prevention strategies. AND, we will need to build capacity to deliver at the local level.

So what did we end up bringing forward to the Government of Alberta?

Here are some of the recommendations that we've made and why we think they're important.

- First, Alberta needs to develop, implement and monitor a gender equality plan. We all know that one of the root causes of Violence Against Women is gender inequality. We need to have better policies on accessible and affordable child-care, wage parity and income support, reproductive health choices, and support more women in leadership.
- Second, we need to build the capacity of policy makers, funders, and community based leaders and boundary spanners to reinforce and advocate for gender equality, promote and build healthy masculinities, build healthy relationship skills, teach non-violent men and boys the skills required to challenge violent masculinities and sexism. We need to do this by leveraging healthy people and their spheres of influence so they can go where men already congregate, where they work, play, pray and socialize to infuse policies and practices. This approach will improve reach.
- The third recommendation is that the government needs to rewrite the Education Act and mandate curriculum to ensure it's based on a human rights approach that builds values and skills on advancing and reinforcing gender equality, that builds social and emotional learning and competencies, supports healthy sexuality, media literacy, and the promotion of healthy masculinities and by-stander skills. We need socially just and safe schools! There needs to be standards and measures attached to contracts with school divisions. Students' progress would be monitored according to benchmarks for gender equality, social skills and emotional well-being, similar to those developed for literacy and numeracy. Of course, educators need to be trained, schools need to commit to whole school approaches and school jurisdictions need to develop policies to this effect.
- Fourth, the government needs to develop a comprehensive fatherhood action plan that includes father friendly policies and investments across the prevention continuum. Several Nordic countries have increased father involvement and leveraged this approach as a vehicle to advance gender equality in the home and in the workplace. These policies have been accompanied by other policy changes that will be required such as increased publicly-funded child care, opportunities to have more flexibility in the scheduling of work hours, and work cultures that support fathers' efforts to give priority to their involvement with their children.
- Our fifth recommendation is that the government fund existing momentum and leadership that is on the ground. We found 1 best practice program, 5 promising practices, and 17 programs "in development" – we need to scale the best and promising practices and better support the 'in-development' programs with research, evaluation, and capacity building. The

government needs to invest in developmental, formative, and outcome evaluation to understand what works in the Alberta context.

- Our sixth recommendation includes a significant investment in a comprehensive multi-faceted social marketing strategy that is evidence-based. This strategy must be connected to the women's sector and community based organizations already doing work in this field.
- Our seventh recommendation asked that the Government of Alberta develop and fund an accreditation program and process that recognizes workplaces that are taking active steps to prevent and respond to violence against women. The Government of Alberta should be the first organization to go through the accreditation process.
- Our eighth recommendation was about creating a 'community of practice' – by regularly bringing together researchers, service providers, and policy staff to build a network in order to ensure dissemination of the latest research and to keep the field up-to-date with emergent evidence informed policy and practices.
- Our ninth recommendation was about inspiring change – at the local level. We suggested that they fund local VAW plans with specific criteria, and one being the development of a local men and boys VP plan so they can advance a community development approach to engage local leaders, systems and programs in collective impact and change.

Lastly, we have recommended that we “work shop” the recommendations with policy makers from across government and community leaders to refine the recommendations and to facilitate a shared vision and collective impact approach.

So where do we need to go from here?

The plan we've developed is limited and provisional - based on what we know at this point. We need to be much further along than this if we are going to meaningfully engage men and boys in preventing VAW. To do that, we need to come together internationally to invest in understanding the 'how' of engagement, in developing the evidence base to direct our efforts, and in sharing our ongoing learnings with one another. My hope is that in five years' time, our understanding of how to engage men and boys is so much richer, more detailed, more sophisticated that the plan we developed in 2015 is obsolete and we have to develop a new plan to capture all that we've learned about how to do this work better.

Thank you for your time today. I look forward to our discussion