

Forward Together

**Priority reflections on the integration of navigators
as Francophone and Acadian language support
in the violence against women sector in Nova Scotia**

FINAL REPORT

july 2022



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Notice to the reader

Please note that the Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FFANE) does not claim to have specific expertise in the area of family violence. However, as one of the leaders in providing information on and for Francophone and Acadian women in Nova Scotia, it is through its interventions with communities and various levels of government that FFANE is able to identify needs and intervene by supporting and informing Francophone and Acadian communities.

This document contains general information only. Its content is not a scientific or legal document and should not be used as a substitute for professional advice.

Introduction

The Fédération des femmes acadiennes de la Nouvelle-Écosse (FFANE) is a provincial non-profit organization whose mission is to promote the development of the full potential of Acadian and Francophone women in Nova Scotia.

According to the Government of Nova Scotia's 2010 Family Violence Action Plan report and its 2012 update, the government is committed to providing resources on family violence in French whenever possible. Although both of these reports were translated into French, there is no mention of the specific needs and data of Francophone and Acadian women in abusive situations.

The lack of evidence, as well as an event representative of multiple similar stories, prompted FFANE to implement this research.

In October 2021, a Francophone woman in an abusive situation needed support to navigate the legal system. She searched through all the networks of francophone services and organizations in Nova Scotia that she could find on her own, without success.

Through this project, the reading of multiple reports has highlighted the need to have access to an innovative human resource, namely the navigator, to put in place the necessary means, tools and support for Francophone and Acadian women in violent situations.

[...] the quality of a victim's experience with a resource would be critical to their decision to continue to seek and use help. The failure of resources to respond quickly and adequately to victims' needs and to help them achieve a sustainable exit from their situation may discourage them from continuing the process, create frustration, and cause them to return to the abusive partner [...]

This report reflects our community-based research to validate our concerns about the availability of language support in the support system for Francophone and Acadian women experiencing abuse in Nova Scotia.

For the reality of Francophone and Acadian women, the bilingual navigator would reach out, provide a French-language entry point into agencies mandated to serve women experiencing violence. This approach would provide a personalized and culturally appropriate response to Francophone and Acadian women.

This strategy is based on the Fédération acadienne de la Nouvelle-Écosse's (FANE) "Community Action Plan 2021-2026" which aims to "obtain services in French in transition houses and resource centers for women victims of violence."

It also builds on one of the recommendations of the Réseau Santé Nouvelle-Écosse in its 2020 report, "Meeting the Acadian and Francophone communities and their health issues", namely to "develop a provincial strategy for the recruitment of bilingual health care professionals (such as navigators)".

The purpose of this report is to lay the groundwork for the recruitment of a bilingual Acadian navigator by community stakeholders in the family violence service system.

The FFANE is very grateful for the important financial contribution made by the Government of Nova Scotia, specifically the Office des Affaires Acadiennes et de la Francophonie towards the realization of this project. In addition, this community-based research was carried out with the generosity and support of community stakeholders.

The FFANE is reassured that together we can move forward beyond these reflections. Enjoy!

Methodology

On behalf of the FFANE, a team of consultants undertook a four-month "community research" project with the goal of validating with community stakeholders in the family violence sector and the French-Acadian community, the integration of the "navigator" in this system.

This community-based research was intended to validate specific issues, i.e., to research, clarify, and validate our concerns about the availability of linguistic support throughout the continuum of services for francophone women in abusive situations in Nova Scotia.

The actions of this research were guided in close collaboration with community stakeholders (see list in Appendix 2).

The following initial project objectives represent our approach to community-based research:

1. Publish a flash survey of community stakeholders to understand the status of services available to francophone women in abusive situations.
2. Create an algorithm to demonstrate the path of women in abusive situations through the system and the barriers faced by Francophone women.
3. Complete an inventory of the literature on the "navigator" strategy.
4. Make a presentation on the "navigator" strategy to all community stakeholders, either individually or as a group.
5. By the end of the community research, the community stakeholders will adopt to collaborate in the submission of a funding request for the implementation of a navigator.

Since community-based research is a tool for action, the conclusions presented in this report are aimed at translating the results into action.

Statistics

Research calls us to action!

Le français en Nouvelle-Écosse

- About 10 percent of the population, or 94,310 people, can speak French.ⁱⁱ

La violence conjugale en Nouvelle-Écosseⁱⁱⁱ

- Women continue to be the primary victims of domestic violence in Nova Scotia: 79% female / 21% male.
- What is being reported?
 - In 2020, the rate of police-reported incidents of domestic violence against women (572 per 100,000) was more than 3 times the rate of police-reported spousal violence against men (165 per 100,000) in Nova Scotia.
 - In 2020, the rate of police-reported domestic violence against women in Nova Scotia increased by 8% next to the 2019 statistics, compared to a 1% increase in police-reported violence against women rates for Canada over the same period.
- 34 women were murdered by their intimate partners in Nova Scotia between 2001 and 2020.
- In 2020:
 - Female victims of domestic violence accounted for 90% of the cases identified as risk of death in Nova Scotia.
 - The rate of domestic violence has increased for both women and men in Nova Scotia and across Canada.
 - The most common domestic violence offence was assault for both women and men in Nova Scotia.

Flash survey #1

Curious about the state of abused women accessing support services within the francophone minority community here in Nova Scotia, we published a flash survey. The survey was posted on the FFANE's social media channels on March 18, 2022. We received 42 responses to 3 questions.

Question 1: "Do you know any French-speaking survivors of domestic violence?"

- 60% know a (French-speaking) victim of domestic violence
- 96% know 1 to 5 victims
- 4% know 11 or more

Question 2: "Did these people know that there are support services available? (Example: 911, counselling, transition house, lawyer)"

- Out of 32 responses, 56% knew that there were services available to victims
- 3% did not know

- However, what surprised us was that 41% thought it was possible that victims knew there were services available, but were not sure

Of those who used the services, we received 27 responses that notified us that ____ were used:

- 87% – did not have access to these services in French, while 12.5% received it
- 26% – no services
- 15% – a lawyer
- 15% – did not know who was contacted (if any), which points out how private the victims' decisions are
- 11% – a transition house
- 11% – 911
- 7.5% – counselling
- 4% – housing commission
- 4% – work assistance
- 4% – École Plus at the Conseil Scolaire Acadien Provincial
- 4% – all available resources

Question 3: "Would having access to services in French have made a difference in their situations?"

- 30% believe "yes"
- 15% don't think it would have changed anything at all
- 56% don't know if access to French language services was a deciding factor

From our data, we find:

1. All respondents knew a woman in an abusive situation.
2. 50% of respondents were unsure if women in abusive situations were aware of support services.
3. Close to 75% of respondents did not know if access to French language services would have made a difference.

The navigator position is a pilot project that we want to use to see whether or not having these services will make a difference to women experiencing violence. For a clearer answer about access to supports and which services are most important to women, we need to launch the pilot project to get more detailed data.

This confirms, however subtly, that there is a gap between the need for support and the call for help.

Flash survey #2

At the FFANE's AGM in June 2022, in addition to presenting the mid-term results of this project, we took the opportunity of the gathering of several FFANE friends, members and staff to launch a second flash survey.

At this point in the project, the role of the navigator had evolved to become the "French-Acadian Community Liaison Officer". Here are the results.

	To what point would it be useful?		
The French-Acadian Community Liaison Officer:	Very useful	Slightly useful	Not useful

✓ addresses the concerns of those at risk of violence by promoting education and awareness of domestic violence prevention;	90%	10%	
✓ improves communication between people in abusive situations and support services by providing information, educational sessions, and referral services through direct contact;	95%	5%	
✓ works closely with local, regional and provincial agencies;	90%	10%	
✓ may provide services in local offices, virtually, at home, or at a convenient location within the community;	97%	3%	
✓ provides information, support, and assistance throughout the individual's journey through the criminal justice and family court systems.	97%	3%	

	I prefer it to be a woman	Doesn't matter, man or woman
Does it matter if it is a woman or a man in this role?	33/38 87%	5/38 1,3%

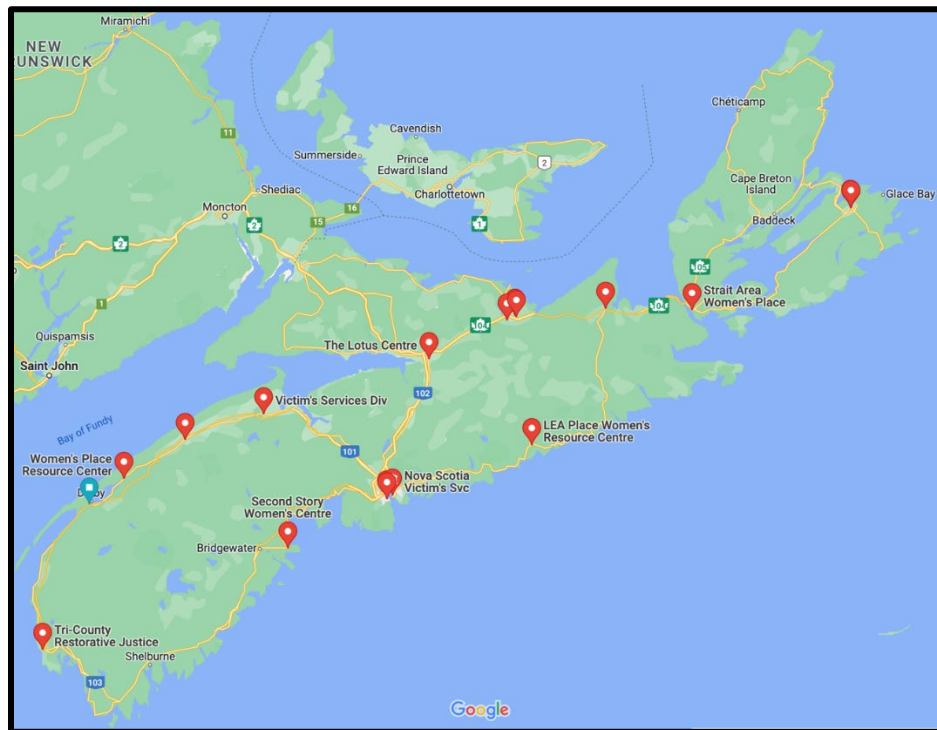
Important takeaway from this survey:

The results clearly, and almost unanimously, demonstrate that the role of the French-Acadian Community Liaison Officer is embraced.

Profile of Violence Services in Nova Scotia

In Nova Scotia, there are many places where women can seek help in many different areas. As you can see from the map below, there are many services throughout the province that allow all women experiencing domestic violence to access support and care.

The map indicates the many resources available to the Nova Scotia community, including: police stations, victim services, transition houses, psychological and physical support services, women's centers, and legal services.



We chose not to create an algorithm as originally intended. It was made clear to us that women undertake a journey, see back-and-forth, through the continuum of services. This became important for us to recognize: Nova Scotia is well equipped with support services. However, the primary challenge is access to these services for Acadian and Francophone women in abusive situations.

Please note that it was impossible to include all of the benchmarks on this map. However, we have listed them in Appendix 3.

Environmental Context

The priority reflections put forward by the FFANE in this report are based on the following strategic foundations. It is obvious from this list that the minimal intersection of the Francophone women's sector with those of violence is only an understatement.

Across the board, we can identify recurring themes of promoting accessibility for all with prevention, support and reduction of inequalities as core principles.

Since 2020, Standing Together is the commitment of the Nova Scotia government to work with community organizations, groups and experts to develop an action plan to disrupt the harmful cycles of domestic violence. The goals of Standing Together are to:

- i. prevent family violence by disrupting cycles of violence and ensuring that Nova Scotians are better prepared to develop healthy, violence-free relationships
- ii. support victims of domestic violence with an improved system of programs that help them rebuild their lives and prevent future violence
- iii. change policies and interventions so that support systems are more responsive to people's needs, understand and promote gender equality and addresses the barriers faced by the most vulnerable Nova Scotians

"Stop the Violence", the Government of Canada's family violence initiative, is committed to preventing and responding to family violence. The objectives of the initiative are to:

- raise public awareness of the risk factors for family violence and that public involvement is essential
- strengthen the capacity of criminal justice systems and social service, health and housing programs to address the problem
- promote data collection, research and evaluation to identify effective interventions

The foundations chosen for this report are essential to the reflection process that the FFANE undertook in its preparation. We agree with them as a priority sector for Acadian and Francophone women in abusive situations.

However, it is the thrust of the FFANE, as the voice of Acadian and Francophone women in Nova Scotia, in terms of developing their full potential, to propose a solution to the problem of access.

Issues for women in abusive situations in Nova Scotia

Issue 1 - Improving access to support services

According to the Réseau Santé Nouvelle-Écosse in 2019, one of the five priority health issues for Acadian and Francophone communities is "the difficulty of navigating the health system and knowing what resources are available".

According to the Institut national de santé publique du Québec in 2018, the identification of a domestic violence focal point can contribute to the development of health professionals' knowledge, circumvent these various issues and improve the effectiveness of interventions.

Priority reflections of the FFANE:

- *Barriers to accessing support services for Francophone women in abusive situations must be identified and considered in the planning of this system in order to create a seamless pathway for them.*
- *Recognition of the urgent and fundamental need to offer support in French to Acadian and Francophone women in abusive situations.*
- *Recurrent funding for a support and referral service for Francophone women in abusive situations integrated into a majority language organization.*
- *Engagement des organismes dans le secteur de violence familiale et les associations francophones à offrir des services en français qui soient culturellement adaptés.*

Issue 2 - The need for evidence

The need for a reliable and coherent statistical information system is a must for any system planning, and today, domestic violence is a priority for the FFANE.

More accurate statistical data is needed, otherwise the perception of differences with the general population may be based only on impressions or the simple transposition of existing data.

Statistics offer an essential numerical representation of realities and thus provide an important basis for policy decisions. However, if the conclusion at this point in our work indicates quite clearly the lack of evidence of the risks associated with violence against francophone women in Nova Scotia, the lack is even more glaring with respect to targeted populations such as children, youth and seniors.

Priority reflection of the FFANE :

- *The variable with respect to the Francophone woman in an abusive situation should be captured from the moment she enters the support and justice system, and taken into account in the planning of that system.*

The turning points of the project

We would like to acknowledge the people we consulted throughout the project. Their advice helped us sharpen our pencil and arrive at a winning formula.

The first turning point...

Initially, we thought that the navigator position should be a 24/7 position, like a help line or emergency line. Following our consultation with Ashley Mitchell of 211, we realized, although not perfect, that 911 is the universal emergency line, and for Nova Scotia, 211 is the community service access line.

A nice surprise... 211 has four French speaking navigators on staff. However, in cases where respondents do not speak French, these two services have access to a service called LanguageLine; a translation service offering over 200 languages, of which French is one, possibly international French.

Language insecurity is a recognized fact: in French, the Acadian community prefers to be served by someone who is Acadian.

The second turning point...

Over the course of our consultations, the role of the navigator continued to change dramatically from what we had originally thought.

Following our consultation with Nancy MacDonald of Family Services of Eastern Nova Scotia, the second turning point was established: what she felt was missing "are boots on the ground". A community liaison officer to ensure awareness and promotion of services that exist in the community.

Before creating a new silo, Nancy suggests promoting the use of existing services, because that's how we can improve them. And that's how we can better know and understand the needs of Acadian women in abusive situations.

The third turning point...

As a result of our meetings with the Seniors Safety Officers, there is strong support for the role of community liaison officer. This model is found in the Seniors Safety Officer model, where each person is treated as an individual with specific needs that vary from case to case.

The fourth turning point...

Following our meeting with Trish McCourt of the Tricounty Women's Centre, the key to the success of this position is the geographic location of the Community Liaison Officer. With eight communities served by the FFANE facilitators, the Community Liaison Officer would have more direct access to the Acadian population.

Currently, the area that we have identified as being in immediate need of a Francophone Community Liaison Officer is the south-west coast of the province, the municipalities of Clare and Argyle. With funding secured, Trish McCourt of the Tricounty Women's Centre has also indicated an interest in having this position on her team.

And finally...

In addition to confirming the need for a specific resource for Acadian women in violent situations, these conversations led us to drop the role of the navigator, for a role that would be better suited to meet the needs of this clientele. The Community Liaison Officer for the municipalities of Argyle and Clare would have the responsibility and role of:

- To address the concerns of people in abusive situations by promoting education and awareness about family violence prevention;
- To improve communication between people in abusive situations and support services by providing information, educational sessions and referral services through direct contact;
- Work closely with local, regional and provincial agencies;
- Offer services in local offices, virtually, at home or at a convenient location in the community;
- Provide information, support and assistance as the case moves through the criminal justice system.

Conclusion

The perspective of women in violent situations is one of equity and inclusion. The results of our work to date show that the perspective of Acadian and Francophone women in abusive situations is not well reflected in the planning and delivery of violence services in Nova Scotia.

The strategic foundations at the provincial level also lead us to note that women in situations of violence find :

- Accessibility for all
- Respect and dignity
- The reduction of inequalities
- Promoting recovery
- Quicker access
- Identify the risks of violence early on, and
- Address the deep gaps in services for vulnerable children and youth.

The purpose of this report was to present our recommendations following the priority reflections on Acadian and Francophone women in abusive situations in Nova Scotia.

Recommendation 1: As promised by the Nova Scotia government in 2020 in their "Standing Together" strategy, the FFANE, through this research, validates the objective:

- to "change policies and interventions so that support systems are more responsive to people's needs, understand and promote gender equality, and address the barriers faced by the most vulnerable Nova Scotians.

Recommendation 2: Therefore, FFANE recognizes the urgent need for the Government of Nova Scotia, through the Department of Community Services and the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women :

- establish the permanent position of Community Liaison Officer in the municipalities of Clare and Argyle; and
- works closely with Tri-County Women's Centre to provide appropriate ongoing funding.

Recommendation 3: The FFANE takes this issue very seriously. Therefore, given our expertise in the Acadian and Francophone communities, FFANE requests financial support for:

- translate this report into English so that the key community players in this project can benefit from the impact of our research;
- actively support the planning and development of the next phase (see recommendation 2).

The community actors have shown us their generosity and support throughout our process. We would like to thank them for their guidance in helping us sharpen our pencil and arrive at this winning formula.

The FFANE is very grateful for the important financial contribution made by the Government of Nova Scotia, specifically the Office des Affaires Acadiennes et de la Francophonie towards the realization of this project.

Appendix 1 - Community Stakeholders Consulted

Contact list:

NAME	ORGANIZATION	CONTACT
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Ruth Doucette	Juniper House	ruth@juniperhouse.ca
Sarah MacDonald	Mobile Crisis Line	sarahj.macdonald@nshealth.ca

Appendix 2 - Literature Review

The literature review consisted of an inventory and review of relevant publications that addressed the importance of the Community Liaison Officer role. These readings helped us to understand the role of the navigator and perhaps later transform it into the role of the community liaison officer.

According to Inform'Elles in British Columbia, for the reality of Francophone women in Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs), a Community Liaison Officer could be a Francophone or bilingual worker who provides a French-language entry point into organizations mandated to serve women experiencing violence. This type of approach would make it possible to offer personalized and culturally appropriate support to Francophone clients while making Anglophone agencies aware of the need for these services.

Definitions and the importance of the role

- [...] the term pivot refers to an anchor, a root, something solid, but also to an axis of rotation. The pivotal player is seen as an integrating agent.^{iv}
- This role is carried out with a view to empowering patients, within an interdisciplinary team and in collaboration with community resources.^v
- For the reality of Francophone women in OLMCs, the Community Liaison Officer could be a Francophone or bilingual worker offering a French-language entry point within organizations whose mandate is to serve women in violent situations.^{vi}
- The provider responsible for coordinating services for an individual and their family.^{vii}
- The Community Liaison Officer [...] ensures that the person and his or her loved ones are accompanied and supported [...].^{viii}
- The Community Liaison Officer [...] prevents the person and his or her loved ones from being left alone with the many steps to be taken. He/she ensures the communication of information between the person and his/her family, and the care and service providers.^{ix}
- [...] the strategy of a Community Liaison Officer within a non-French-speaking organization to provide front-line service to Francophone women. In addition to providing support and referral services to women, this strategy would raise awareness of the Community Liaison Officer's agency and partner agencies.^x
- The implementation of a Community Liaison Officer function aims to improve the continuity of services required by a person and their loved ones.^{xi}

Annex 3 – Liste des services de soutien

Women's Centers :

Second Story Women's Centre
Jane Paul Indigenous Women's Resource
Centre
Antigonish Women's Resource Centre
Pictou County Women's Resource & Sexual
Assault Centre

LEA Place Women's Resource Centre
The Lotus Centre
Dalhousie Women's Centre
Women's Place Resource Centre
Strait Area Women's Place
Canada Status of Women

Transition Houses :

Cape Breton Transition House
Transition House Association of Nova Scotia
(THANS)
Tearmann Society for Abused Women

Chrysalis House Inc
Bryony House
Juniper House
Naomi Society for Victims Of Violence

Legal Services:

Tri-County Restorative Justice
Legal Information Society of NS
Coverdale Courtwork Society
Association des Juristes d'Expression Francophone
de la Nouvelle-Écosse
Nova Scotia Legal Aid
Yarmouth Law Office (Nova Scotia Legal Aid)
Antigonish Law Office (Nova Scotia Legal Aid)
Sydney Criminal and Family Law (Nova Scotia
Legal Aid)

Port Hawkesbury Law Office (Nova Scotia Legal Aid)
New Glasgow Law Office (Nova Scotia Legal Aid)
Truro Law Office (Nova Scotia Legal Aid)
Dartmouth Family Law Office (Nova Scotia Legal Aid)
Halifax Family Law Office (Nova Scotia Legal Aid)
Dalhousie Legal Aid Service
Kentville Law Office (Nova Scotia Legal Aid)
Bridgewater Law Office (Nova Scotia Legal Aid)

Police Services:

Nova Scotia Victim Services
Pictou County Municipalities Crime Preventions

Victim's Services Division

Health Services :

Adsum House
Halifax Sexual Health Centre
Avalon Sexual Assault Centre
Elizabeth Fry Society Of Mainland Nova Scotia
Family Service of Pictou County

Family Service of Antigonish
Family Service of Port Hawkesbury
Family Service of Sydney
Family Service Association

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- ⁱⁱ Tiré du Site de l'Office des Affaires acadiennes et francophone de la Nouvelle-Écosse
- ⁱⁱⁱ Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women (2021). Domestic Violence in Nova Scotia. 2 pages.
- ^{iv} Conseil québécois de lutte contre le cancer (2000). L'intervenant pivot en oncologie. P. 15 de 35 pages.
- ^v Conseil québécois de lutte contre le cancer (2000). L'intervenant pivot en oncologie. P. 15 de 35 pages.
- ^{vi} Inform'Elles (janvier 2021). « Avancer ensemble : État des lieux », *Besoins, barrières et stratégies pour améliorer les services à destination des femmes francophones en situation de violence en Colombie-Britannique*. P. 21 de 26.
- ^{vii} Gouvernement du Québec - Agence de la santé et des services sociaux des Laurentides (mai 2011). Cadre de référence régional sur l'intervenant pivot; Plan d'accès pour les personnes ayant une déficience. P. 1 de 18.
- ^{viii} Gouvernement du Québec - Agence de la santé et des services sociaux des Laurentides (mai 2011). Cadre de référence régional sur l'intervenant pivot; Plan d'accès pour les personnes ayant une déficience. P. 4 de 18.
- ^{ix} Gouvernement du Québec - Agence de la santé et des services sociaux des Laurentides (mai 2011). Cadre de référence régional sur l'intervenant pivot; Plan d'accès pour les personnes ayant une déficience. P. 4 de 18.
- ^x Inform'Elles (janvier 2021). « Avancer ensemble : État des lieux », *Besoins, barrières et stratégies pour améliorer les services à destination des femmes francophones en situation de violence en Colombie-Britannique*. P. 24 de 26.
- ^{xi} Gouvernement du Québec - Agence de la santé et des services sociaux des Laurentides (mai 2011). Cadre de référence régional sur l'intervenant pivot; Plan d'accès pour les personnes ayant une déficience. P. 1 de 18