

York Region

**Violence Against Women [VAW]-French Language
Services [FLS] Referral Agreement**

February 2019

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PREAMBLE

Ontario's francophone community makes up approximately 4.9% of the province's population, representing the largest francophone community in the country outside the province of Quebec¹. Ontario's francophone population is very diverse. It is made up of Francophones born in Ontario and other parts of Canada, as well as welcoming francophones from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East², and may include Aboriginals, newcomers, immigrants, refugees, persons of diverse ethno-cultural and religious backgrounds, persons of colour, older adults, LGBTQ communities, persons who are Deaf, deafened, oral deaf or hard of hearing, persons with disabilities, persons living in rural/remote areas and persons living in poverty³.

Central Ontario has experienced a significant growth in its francophone populations between 2006 and 2011. For example, the francophone population in the Greater Toronto Area (including Toronto, Durham, Halton, Peel and York) increased from 110,265 (or 2.0% of the total population) in 2006 to 124,875 (2.1%) in 2011.⁴

York Region has more than 17,355 francophones (1.6% of the overall population). The cities of Vaughan and Markham have the largest population of francophones, followed closely by the city of Richmond Hill. Francophone females make up over 55% of the francophone population in the Region. 5% of the total francophone population of York region are recent immigrants arriving between 2011 and 2016. Francophone immigrants make up 41.7% (7,285 immigrants) of the francophone population in York. The most common regions of origin for francophone newcomers in York Region are: Asia (15.3 per cent), Africa (14.1%), and Europe (10.8%). 44 per cent of francophone immigrants who lived in York Region are members of a racialized group⁵.

Francophones in Ontario face the unique and unexpected challenges of not being able to access services even though French is one of Canada's official languages. In York Region, francophone residents report experiencing difficulty connecting with other francophone residents and groups because of the small population and dispersion. For francophone women who belong to communities facing intersecting forms of oppression, the challenges are two-fold: finding other francophones in York Region, and connecting with others in the community for networking and support through a language barrier because people in these communities may not speak French.⁶

¹ Statistics Canada 2011 census

² https://www.grants.gov.on.ca/prodconsum/groups/grants_web_contents/documents/grants_web_contents/prdr014793.pdf

³ https://www.grants.gov.on.ca/prodconsum/groups/grants_web_contents/documents/grants_web_contents/prdr014793.pdf

⁴ <http://ontario400.ca/en/statistics/>

⁵ Statistics Canada 2011 census

⁶ http://www.york.ca/wps/wcm/connect/yorkpublic/d4a5bbc1-a331-43dd-b1cf-634c19fde02e/5081+portraits_web.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=d4a5bbc1-a331-43dd-b1cf-634c19fde02e

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the Ontario government introduced an inclusive definition of francophone to better reflect the diversity and growth of the province's francophone community. The new definition defines francophone as *"Those persons whose mother tongue is French, plus those whose mother tongue is neither French nor English but have a particular knowledge of French as an official language and use French at home"* this includes many recent immigrants.

In Ontario at present there are 26 geographical areas designated under the French Language Services Act. Starting July 1, 2018, the City of Markham in the Regional Municipality of York becomes a designated area⁷.

The French Language Services Act, 1986, addresses an individual's rights to communicate and receive services in French from Government of Ontario ministries and designated agencies. Effective July 1, 2011, the Government of Ontario has adopted under the *French Language Services Act (FLSA)*, a regulation on the delivery of services in French by third parties service providers on behalf of government agencies. The regulation requires that Transfer Payment Agencies provide an *active offer* of FLS to the public. The purpose of this VAW-FLS Referral Agreement is to support agencies in York Region's VAW sector in working together to fulfill the requirement of *active offer* and to ensure that appropriate FLS referrals are being made.

Active Offer of FLS

The concept of *"Active offer"* requires long-term planning and monitoring in order that it be incorporated into the development of VAW programs and services. It is critical in order to provide all their clients with services of equal quality.

"Active offer", means that services in French are obvious, easily available and accessible, and publicized so that Ontario's French-speaking population is informed about the services available in French and can access those services. An active offer of service happens when francophone members of the public are informed of the availability of services in French, have access to these services, and are satisfied with the quality of these services.⁸

To promote an *"active offer"* of FLS, partners to this Agreement will:

- Educate staff and management on the *FLS Act* and the FLS requirements for Referral Agencies.
- Ensure visual cues in the service environment to let the public know that services are available in French.
- Provide an active offer of French language services in both French and English (i.e. on the phone, at the reception desk, at admission, in print, etc.).
- Develop mechanisms for non-bilingual staff to handle requests for services in French in person or over the phone.
- Identify and carry out an assessment of bilingual staff and the resources needed to

⁷ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/government-services-french>

⁸ From "OPS Framework for Action: A Modern Ontario Public Service", 2006

ensure an active offer of FLS (i.e. language testing and training, bilingual tools, etc.).

- Develop a mechanism to identify French-speaking clients in order to facilitate needs assessment and matching of clients with French-speaking staff or making a referral.
- Engage with French language services and members of the francophone community as active partners in designing programs and services that meet the community's own needs (i.e. FLS Committee, consultations, etc.).
- Integrate FLS in strategic plans and develop policies and procedures pertaining to FLS (i.e. in HR policies, complaint mechanism, etc.).⁹

2. THE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN/ FRENCH LANGUAGE SERVICES AGREEMENT

This Agreement establishes a formal partnership between Violence Against Women (VAW) services in York Region and OASIS centre de femmes (OASIS), la Maison d'hébergement pour femmes francophone (La Maison) and Colibri - Centre des femmes francophone du comté de Simcoe (Colibri), to facilitate access to services for francophone women survivors of woman abuse and children who are witnesses to such violence.

Principles/Values that Guide the Agreement

The Referral Agreement is based on a collective belief that:

- Violence against women is a serious societal problem that negatively affects the health, well-being, and development of women, children, families, and communities of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, socio-economic classes, religions, ability levels, and professions. This violence is intensified depending on women's intersecting identities.
- All women have a right to a life without violence
- Violence is gendered, and women are disproportionately affected by violence as a result of their gender and their marginalized position in society.
- Violence against women and children is unacceptable.
- The safety of women and children supersedes all other considerations.
- All women survivors and children exposed to woman abuse have a right to services and supports.
- Francophone women who experience woman abuse and children who witness abuse have various and unique needs which impact access to appropriate services. These needs must be recognized and addressed.
- "Providing service of equivalent quality in both official languages is a matter of professionalism, respect, integrity and social justice"¹⁰.
- All partners will put aside their own specific interests in order to advance the needs of francophone women and their children who witness abuse.

⁹ Adapted from North East Local Health Integrated Network; French Language Services Toolkit: Employer Fact Sheet

¹⁰ "Dyane Adam, National Report on Service to the Public in English and French: Time for a Change in Culture, p. 4.

Partner Roles & Responsibilities

Referral Agencies

The role of Ministry of Children Community and Social Services [MCCSS] funded VAW agency partners to this agreement will be to meet all of the responsibilities, expectations and requirements as set out by the *Service Description Schedule for Non-Designated Transfer Payment Agencies Required to Offer Services in French in Areas Designated Under the FLSA*.

This will be accomplished by:

- ensuring signage in service environments on how to obtain French language services appears in French and are visible;
- ensuring that public awareness, education and outreach activities promote the availability of services in French;
- ensuring websites, general phone messages, intake forms, awareness and promotional materials provide information on how to obtain services in French, and actively offer French language services;
- ensuring that agency staff and volunteers are aware of the requirements of an active offer and how to make referrals to designated French language services;
- referring and facilitating connection of French-speaking clients to OASIS, Fem'aide, La Maison; Colibri, and other agencies servicing the French-speaking community;
- regularly monitoring and participating in the evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the Referral Agreement.

FLS Service Providers

The role of designated French language service agency partners to this Agreement, namely OASIS, La Maison, and Colibri is to:

- accept referrals from non-FLS VAW service providers (subject to capacity);
- advise partnering agencies of any changes to service including service disruptions or new programs/services;
- share with partnering agencies any promotional materials or resources, as appropriate, to help support an active offer and referral to FLS;
- facilitate clients' connection to other appropriate French language services;
- keep other partners abreast of emerging needs or issues relevant to this Agreement.

Areas of Collaboration

Intersection Points	Agreed Upon Referral Process
A French-speaking woman contacts a VAW agency and is in imminent danger.	All VAW Workers will: Assess the level of risk and contact police if needed. and/or If language is a barrier contact Fem'aide by 3 way call. Fem'aide is a 24hr service.
A French-speaking woman requests emergency shelter.	All VAW workers will: Facilitate access to a shelter by contacting La Maison or Fem'aide by 3-way call. La Maison and Fem'aide are 24 hour services If necessary, offer transportation for the woman to get to a shelter. La maison will assume costs from any TTC or GO train location in Toronto. If there are immediate safety issues the service in York will assume all costs for the transportation. or Provide the woman with contact information for La Maison or Fem'aide and encourage her to call.
A French-speaking woman requests crisis support and intervention services.	All VAW Workers will: refer or connect the woman to Fem'aide. and/or if available facilitate immediate access to the most readily available French-speaking counsellor.
A French-speaking woman requests legal support & advocacy services	All VAW Workers will: Refer the woman to OASIS or Colibri.

	And/or contact OASIS or Colibri to schedule an appointment with a French-speaking counsellor. And/or request the services of a trained French speaking community interpreter through MCIS.
A French-speaking woman requests Transitional & Housing Support Services	All VAW Workers will: Refer the woman to OASIS or Colibri. And/or contact OASIS or Colibri to schedule an appointment with a French-speaking counsellor. And/or request the services of a trained French speaking community interpreter through MCIS.
A French-speaking woman requests sexual assault counselling & advocacy services	All VAW Workers will: Refer the woman to OASIS or Colibri. And/or contact OASIS or Colibri to schedule an appointment with a French-speaking counsellor.
A French-speaking woman requests ongoing counseling.	All VAW Workers will: Refer the woman to OASIS or Colibri, or a local agency with a French-speaking counsellor to schedule an appointment with a French-speaking counsellor
A French-speaking woman requests support for her children who have witnessed abuse, or a worker deems such services to be of benefit.	All VAW Workers will: Refer the woman and her children to Colibri, OASIS, or La Maison.

French-Speaking Woman Declines Offer of FLS

Partners agree that, where possible and available, immediate connection to French Language Services should be the practice of first choice i.e. OASIS, Fem'aide, La Maison or Colibri. However, in a situation where a French-speaking woman declines referral to a FLS partner or services are not readily available or accessible, but the woman requires and/or requests interpretation in order to access services and supports for herself and her children, interpretation services may be accessed from MCIS.

Even in such situations it is important that VAW workers continue to make an active offer of FLS, meaning that the woman continues to be advised of her right to access services in French throughout her involvement with VAW services.

Intake

All partners' intake processes will include questions that satisfy the *FLSA's* "active offer of service" requirement.

Where a woman indicates a preference to be served in French or where a woman is French-speaking and language is a barrier the following information will be provided in French:

- information about services offered OASIS, Fem'aide, La Maison or Colibri and other relevant FLS, and provide connection to these services;
- information about the limits to confidentiality;
- information about what will be shared for referral purposes and obtain consent to release this information.
- program information and forms requiring a woman's signature during intake [i.e. *confidentiality agreements, consent to release, program participation agreements, guidelines or program information*].

Conflict Resolution Process

Individual specific issues are defined as issues involving communication, role clarification, and process of interpretation of information with respect to referral procedures. The steps outlined in this procedure are progressive. Differences of this nature can usually be resolved at any step.

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| Step 1 | Workers discuss issues with each other and seek a resolution. |
| Step 2 | Workers involve their immediate supervisors to seek resolution. A face-to-face meeting is preferred. |
| Step 3 | Managers/Directors are involved and will determine how issues will be addressed and ultimately resolved. |
| Step 4 | Managers/Directors will assess whether the type of issue has systemic characteristics and where the advice of the signatory agencies would be beneficial to determine how to address similar situations in the future. |

Systemic Issues are defined as legislative or policy/procedures issues relating to the mandate of the respective signatory agency. They might be related to administrative or procedural differences between agencies requiring a systems response to harmonize policies; differences in service philosophy; and/or resource shortages. All steps in this procedure may be followed as required:

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| Step 1 | Workers inform their supervisor and/or Manager/Director |
|--------|---|

- Step 2 Managers/Directors forward the issue in writing to their Executive Director/CEO.
- Step 3 The Executive Director/CEO will convene a meeting of the VAW/FLS Agreement partners' Executive Director /CEO Group including OASIS, La Maison and Colibri, who will determine what actions are required to resolve the issue.
- Step 4 The decision is communicated in writing to all signatory agencies.

Monitoring

Partners to the agreement will maintain information about the number of requests, the number of referrals, and where referred. Partners will meet as required to discuss the implementation of the Agreement and deal with any issues arising.

Term

This Referral Agreement may be reviewed and or updated upon the request of any or all of the parties to this agreement, otherwise the term and conditions of this Referral Agreement will be in place on a continuous basis unless terminated by all parties or superseded by another Regional Referral Agreement.

Commitment to Collaborate

We are committed to ongoing collaboration to increase our capacity to ensure francophone women and their children have access to French language services, and to work towards the provision of a similar range of services as are available to English speaking women and children. Partners to this agreement recognize and respect the rights of all French-speaking women who are survivors of woman abuse and their children who witness abuse to receive services in their own language and will work diligently to ensure that all of their services and activities, through visible and clear articulation, actively offer the option of accessing services in French and to continue to enhance the capacity of all MCCSS funded VAW services to address the needs of francophone women and their children.

We, the signatory agencies, agree to engage in collaborative actions to ensure that francophone survivors of woman abuse and their children who have witnessed violence have the same access to quality services in French as English-speaking individuals. These actions will be in accordance with our respective mandates, and in compliance with requirements for third party VAW agencies and designated FLS service providers and the terms of this Agreement:

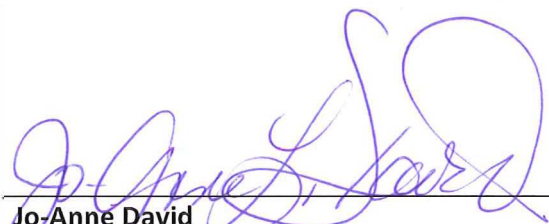
List of Signatories & Signatures



Alison Peck
Cedar Centre



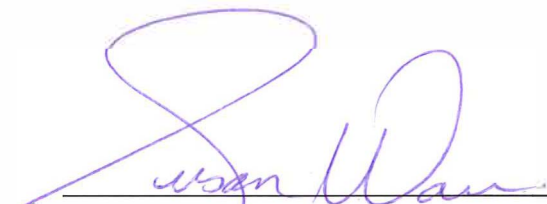
Dada Gasirabo
OASIS Centre de femmes



Jo-Anne David
Colibri - Centre des femmes francophone du
comet de Simcoe



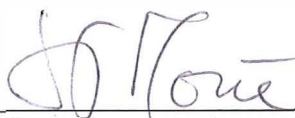
Michelle Smith
Sandgate Women's Shelter of York Region



Elisha Laker
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Liora Sobel
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Jeanne Françoise Mouë
la Maison d'hébergement pour femmes
francophone



Lorris Herenda
Yellow Brick House



Jackie Benn-John
Women's Support Network of York Region

Appendix a.

AGENCY PROFILES

Cedar Centre

The Cedar Centre provides trauma-specific therapy and support to children, youth and adults who have experienced childhood interpersonal trauma (abuse-related traumas). The Centre works from anti-racist and anti-oppressive frameworks, and focuses on the development of trauma-specific therapy plans designed to meet each person's unique needs, strengths and challenges.

We fulfill our mission through:

The **Child, Youth and Family Program** is a family-centered, strength-based service for children ages 3-18 and their caregivers that develops and reinforces the family and support systems surrounding the child. Using a variety of modalities such as Trauma Focused-CBT, Somatic Experiencing, and EMDR, individual therapy builds upon the strengths and resources that exist within the child, the family and their environment.

Cedar Centre's **Adult Program** is designed for people who have experienced interpersonal childhood trauma. This service involves individual trauma therapy and group therapy, and begins with our *Skills Training in Affect and Interpersonal Regulation (STAIR) Group*. Once the STAIR group is complete, participants begin Individual Therapy with a Cedar Centre therapist. Trauma therapy enables participants to address specific themes related to their trauma and uses approaches including Somatic Experiencing, EMDR, CBT and DBT. During individual therapy, participants will also take part in at least one *Resourced and Resilient Group*.

Once the STAIR group is complete, participants begin Individual Therapy with a Cedar Centre therapist. Trauma therapy enables participants to address specific themes related to their trauma and uses approaches including Somatic Experiencing, EMDR, CBT and DBT. During individual therapy, participants will also take part in at least one *Resourced and Resilient Group*. This 10-week, gender-specific group offers enriched psycho-education about trauma and allows the opportunity for participants to process how symptoms of childhood trauma continue to impact the present.

Cedar Centre's **Outreach and Prevention Program** provides information, resources and public presentations to community groups, schools and helping professionals related to the issue of interpersonal violence with a particular focus on Childhood Sexual Abuse. Cedar Centre's *Speakers Bureau* is a tremendous asset to this program and provides the opportunity for public presentations by individuals who have completed Cedar Centre's Adult Program and are committed to sharing their important perspective of lived experience.

Family Services of York Region

FSYR is a Not for Profit, charitable organization committed to excellence in the provision of counselling for children, youth, women, men and their families including counselling for women and children who have experienced violence in the family. All counselling services seek to promote the fullest development of the individual. We believe in family in all its diversity.

FSYR is an accredited Counselling agency under Family Service Ontario's, Canadian Standards of Excellence Accreditation Program. We are an inclusive, diverse organization offering services in 11 languages. Interpretation services are also available in some of our programs. FSYR is the proud host and lead agency for the York Rainbow Support Network, whose vision is to create A Face, A Space and A Place for the LGBTTTQ Community in York Region. All services are LGBTTTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two Spirit, Queer) Positive.

Counselling Services are available at our office locations across York Region as well as online

Sandgate Women's Shelter of York Region

Sandgate Women's Shelter of York Region Inc. is a feminist organization, dedicated to empowering all persons who identify as women and their children in and around York Region who have experienced violence in a confidential, supportive, respectful and inclusive manner. We are committed to advocating for social change within systems and institutions impacting women and children in order to promote equity for all persons and contribute to the eradication of violence against women and children. We organize, participate in, and/or support community events and public education initiatives designed to increase individual and community awareness of issues relating to violence against women and children, and work cooperatively and collaboratively to establish effective partnerships, and support joint initiatives with other agencies and organizations, which respect and support the philosophy, vision, mission, beliefs and guiding principles of Sandgate Women's Shelter of York Region, Inc.

Services include:

- emergency shelter
- crisis support
- safety planning
- short and long-term supportive individual and group counselling
- housing and legal support
- transitional housing, information
- referral services, and practical assistance

Women's Centre of York Region

Women's Centre of York Region is a rape crisis centre dedicated to providing free, confidential services for women who have experienced sexual violence. We are committed to the

eradication of sexual violence through a grassroots, feminist, antiracist, anti-oppressive framework.

The following is a list of the services we offer:

- 24-hour crisis counseling on our crisis line
- Counseling
- Support groups and workshops
- Outreach and public education
- Systems support and advocacy
- Community-based training

Women's Support Network of York Region

Women's Support Network of York Region (WSN) is the community-based sexual assault centre in York region, with 30 years' experience working with survivors of recent and historical violence, sexual exploitation, community violence, youth, and marginalized communities. WSN provides free services including:

- 24 hour crisis line for survivors of sexual violence
- Crisis and case management support for survivors of sexual exploitation through human trafficking
- Crisis and ongoing counselling
- Safe Passages Healing Retreat for trafficked and sexually exploited survivors
- Online chat and SMS platform
- Groups/Workshops
- Practical assistance, such as access to food vouchers, transportation, personal hygiene items for marginalized survivors of violence
- Prevention education and outreach to isolated survivors

WSN's work is guided by survivors of sexual violence and their experiences of stigma, isolation, service access (or limitations to this); as well as new trends of gender-based violence in the community.

WSN's sexual assault centre services are rooted in a socially contextualized analysis of sexual violence. This includes a gender-based analysis of sexual violence, and an understanding that different people experience violence differently: for example, that gender, race, age and other social determinants influence one's experiences of sexual violence and healing supports.

Yellow Brick House

Yellow Brick House offers a wide range of free and confidential services to women and children impacted by domestic violence and abuse. We provide 4 main services

A 24/7 crisis line where women can immediately access support and be provided with information and options

- Emergency Shelter through two locations which provide a safe and secure home and programming for women and children who have left abusive and violent situations and assist them to transition back to the community and learn to rebuild their lives with courage and confidence through our diverse programs.
- Transitional Housing where women leaving our shelters can access short-term housing at below market rates and continue to access our services such as, counseling and legal support. Women and their children can remain in transitional housing for up to 6 months.
- Individual and group counselling and support to assist with the effects of violence in their lives and provide skills and information. Our Let's Talk Child Witness Program is a 10-week program for kids age 4-15 to talk about their experiences in a safe, supportive environment. Creative play to help kids share what is hidden or confusing to express in words.
- Mothers in Mind – parenting group for mothers and toddlers/babies, to improve emotional attachment within the mother-child relationships.
- Court support and assistance through our Legal Support Program.
- Public Education to facilitate discussions in institutions, among professional groups and the community at large about the harmful effects of domestic violence.

French Language Violence Against Women Services Serving York Region

Colibri - Centre des femmes francophone du comté de Simcoe

Colibri is a non-profit charitable organization and designated French Language Service. It is a prevention center dedicated to providing free and confidential services to Francophone women (16 years and up) who have experienced, are experiencing, or may be at risk of experiencing domestic violence and/or sexual assault in Simcoe County. Colibri works toward creating a community where women and girls are empowered, respected, and valued.

Services include:

- Individual and Group Counseling
- Transitional and Housing Support
- Family Court Support Services
 - Development and implementation of security plans
 - Documenting incident history for court cases
 - Accompaniment to court proceedings
- Representation and accompaniment
- Referrals to specialized services and resources within the community

All services are free and confidential.

La Maison d'hébergement pour femmes francophone (La Maison) is a designated agency under the FLSA and operates an emergency shelter where French-speaking women, 16 years and older who identify themselves as having been sexually, physically, or emotionally abused by their partners, or significant others, and their children can receive help and support to gain their autonomy.

Oasis Centre des femmes is a multidisciplinary centre operating in the GTA including York Region. The mission of Oasis is to offer services to francophone women 16 years and older who are affected directly or indirectly by any form of abuse or violence, with the goal of improving their living situations and allowing them to become fully autonomous. All services and programs are offered in French and from a feminist perspective.

Our services and programs include: **Individual support and follow up**, with such services as; crisis intervention, counselling, transitional and housing support, and family court support for women survivors of any form of violence; **Community support** for personal, as well as social and economic development for all francophone women through the following programs: Immigrant and refugee women networking, Élan (employment preparation and career planning), Entrepreneurship training, and a Micro-financing project; **Prevention programs and related activities**, offering educational opportunities and community liaison to raise awareness of all issues related to violence against women. Since its inception, 20 years ago, Oasis has continued to demonstrate its leadership and expertise. Now, more than ever, we are convinced that personal support must be combined with a community response that addresses the

systemic barriers which isolate women and prevent them from leaving abusive relationships. We not only continue to push further to address inequalities and tackle women's poverty through our analysis and feminist approach, but we also develop approaches and strategies for the development and recovery of women's economic power.