



Western

Centre for Research & Education on
Violence Against Women & Children

Centre de recherche et d'éducation sur la
violence contre les femmes et les enfants

RESPECT

at Work • au travail

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and Violence Prevention Fund

Canada

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harcèlement et de la violence en milieu de travail

Canada

Designing Trauma- and Violence-Informed Policies, Training, and Response Plans to Address Intimate Partner Violence at Work

Rika Sawatsky

December 9, 2025



Content Warning

Intimate Partner Violence

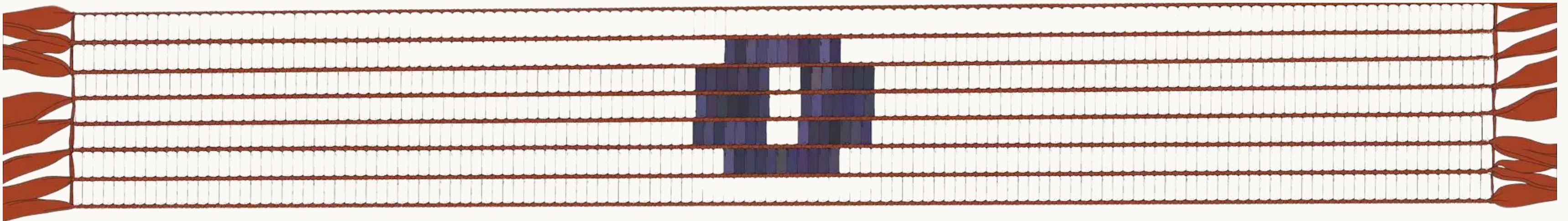
Substance Use Disorder

Stigmatizing Language in Case
Study

Reconciliation

We are all Treaty people who share responsibility for taking action on reconciliation.

- Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada



Reconciliation

92.iii. Provide education for management and staff on the **history of Aboriginal peoples**, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require **skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism**.

- Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada:
Calls to Action

Agenda



What is TVI?

Case Study

Applying a TVI Lens to the Case
Study

Takeaways

Q&A

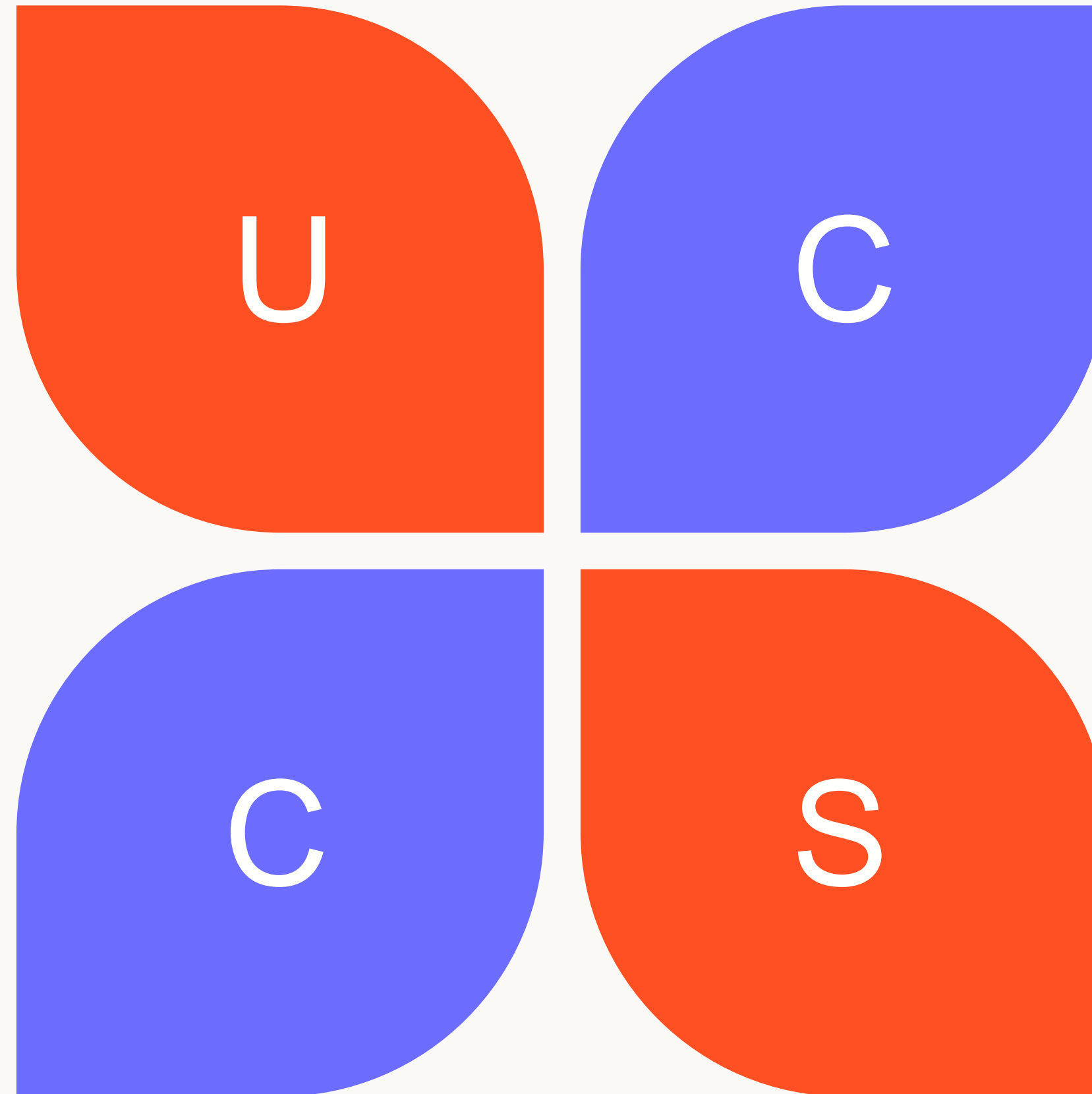
What does it mean
to be trauma- and
violence-informed?

Understand T &

Understand trauma and violence, especially structural violence, its prevalence and its impacts on peoples' lives and behaviours

Choice

Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection



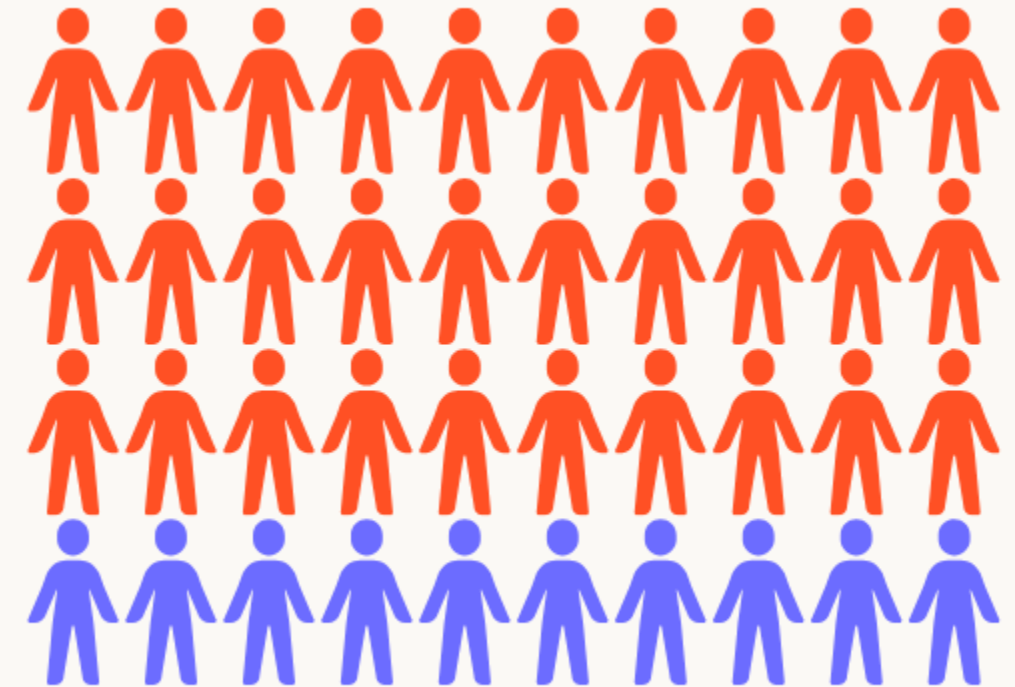
Cultural Safety

Create emotionally, culturally and physically safe environments for management and employees

Strengths-

~~Based~~ strengths-based and capacity-building ways to support employees
- EQUIP Health Care

Universal Approach



75%
of Canadians
experience trauma

- EQUIP Health Care

You don't have
to be an expert

Why TVI?

DID DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT, DATING VIOLENCE, AND STALKING
MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR A VICTIM/SURVIVOR TO WORK?

YES

79%

Domestic
Violence

25%

Dating
Violence

27%

Sexual Assault

35%

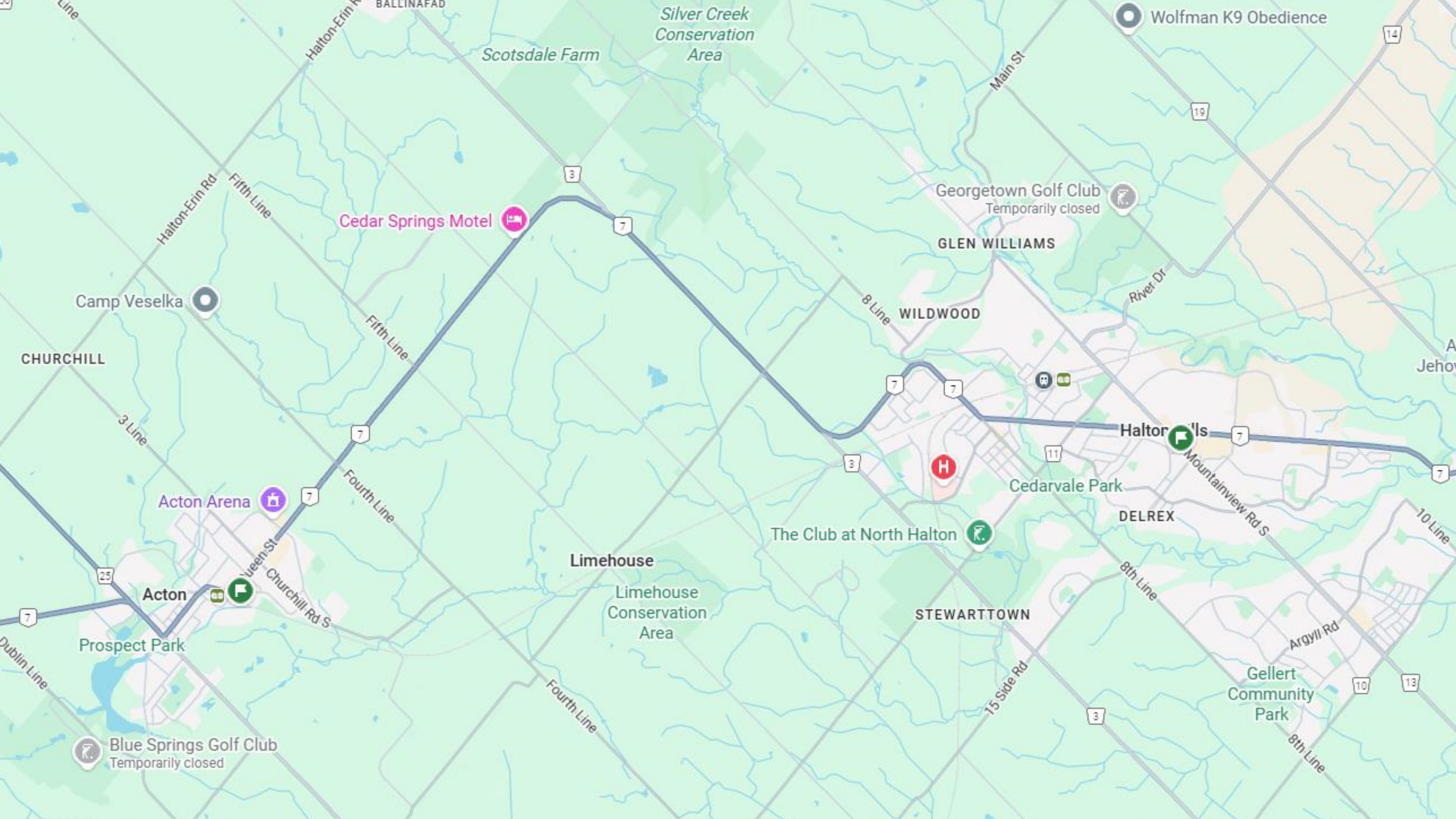
Stalking

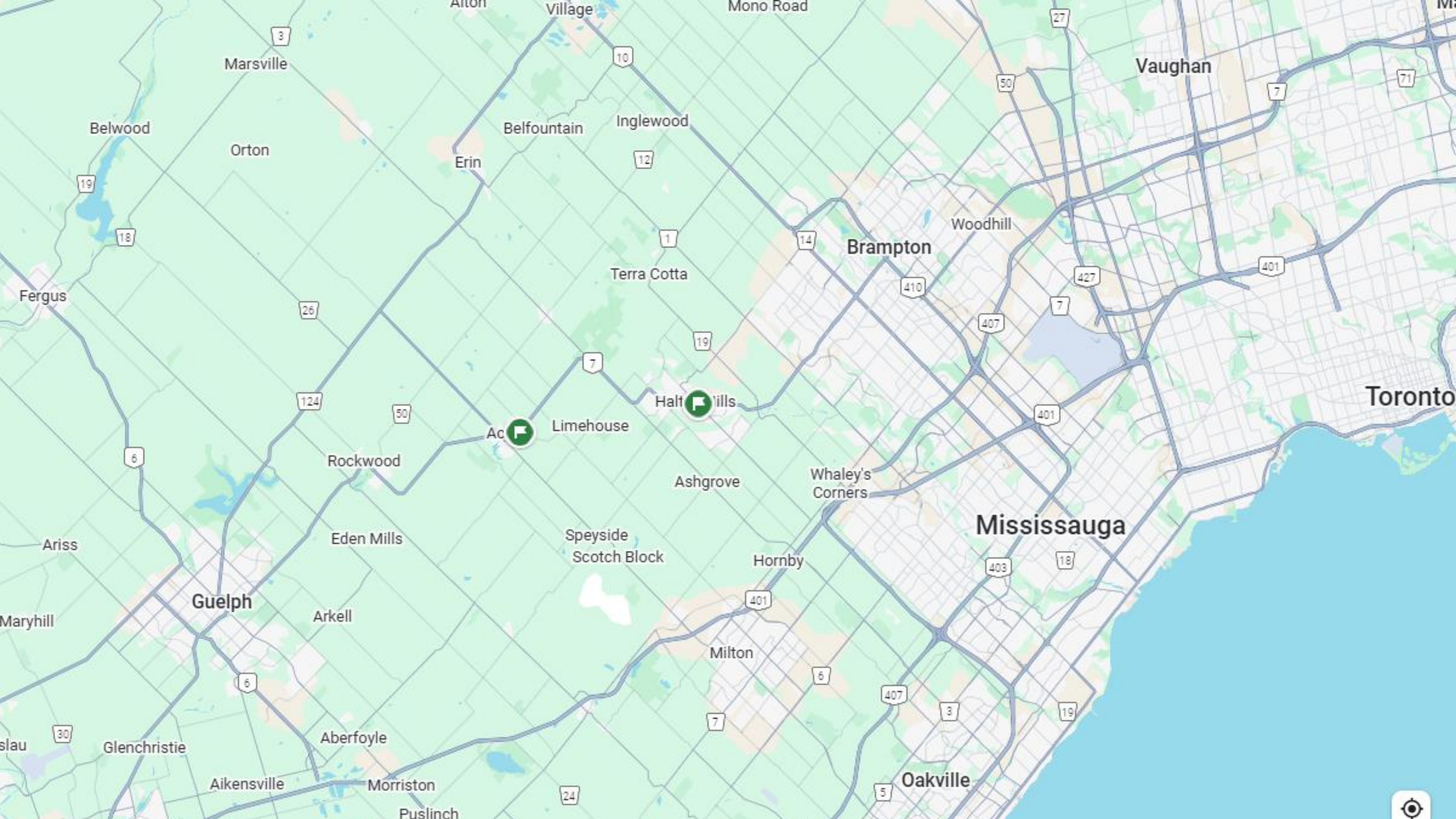
- Futures Without Violence, 2025

Case Study

Liquor Store, 2006 - 2009







Meet Jane

56 years old

Abused by husband for 20 years

Uses alcohol as coping mechanism

Hired by liquor store in September 2004

Works evenings at Wal-mart

Husband doesn't help with bills

Grieving mother's passing

No car

5 pets



Disclosure of IPV

September 2006

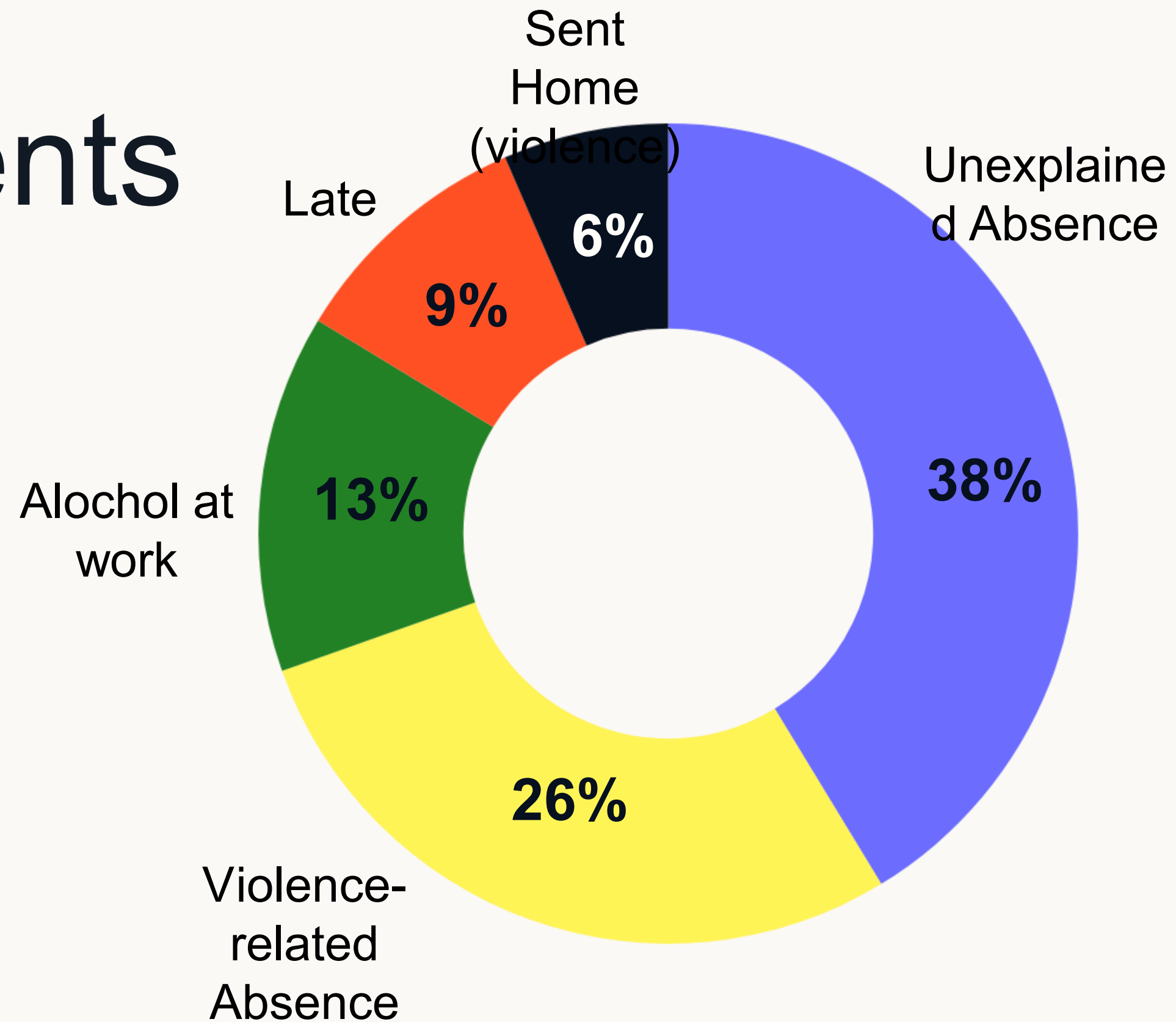
**I've turned to alcohol
for help when I've had
a bad day, but I don't
have an alcohol abuse
problem.**

Leave of Absence

October 2006 - April 2008

**I haven't drank at work
nor had a drink in the
past year, and I'm
ready to leave my
husband.**

Incidents



47 incidents in
the year leading
up to termination
in September
2009

Pattern

Trigger Absence or alcohol

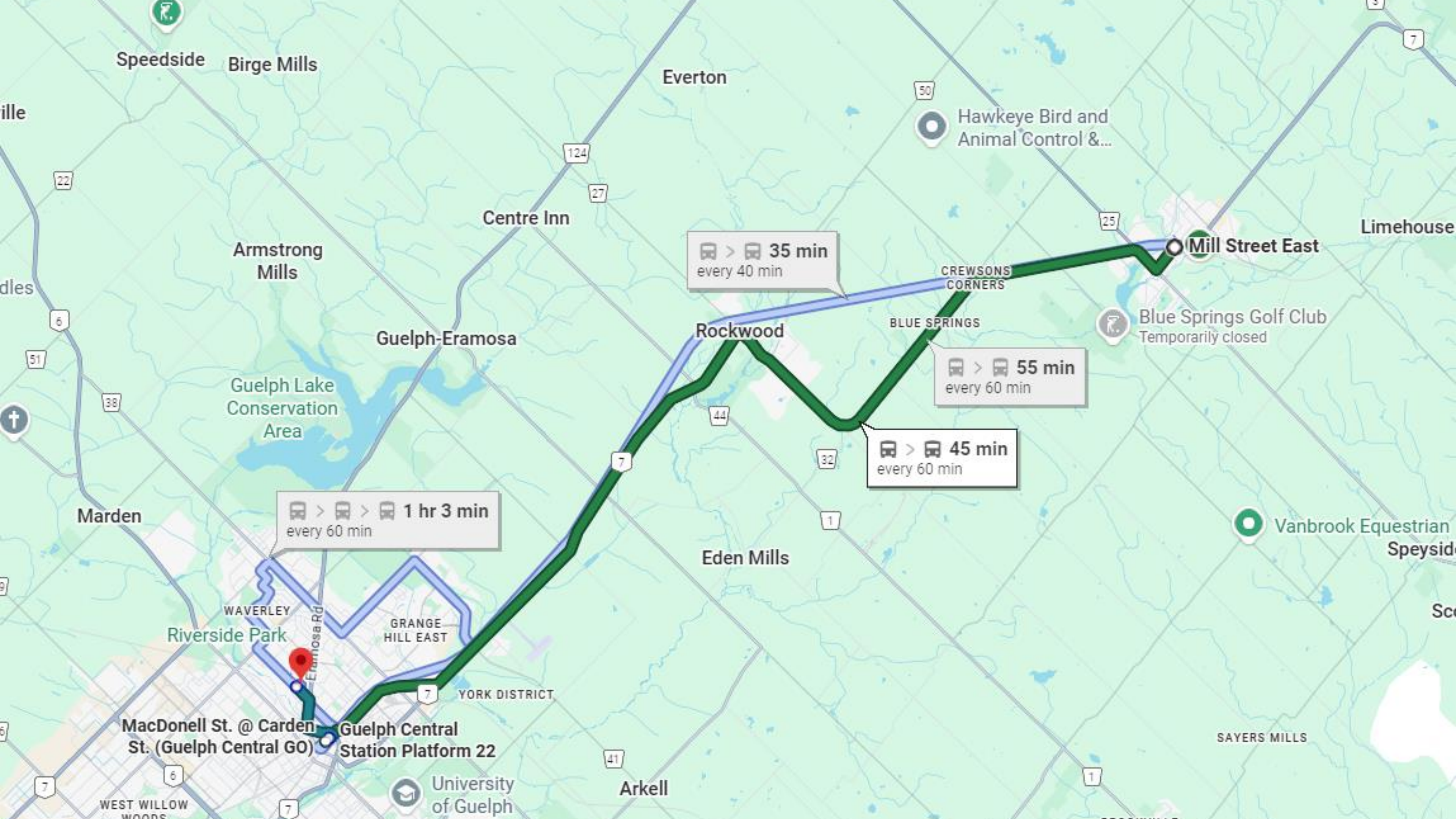
**Store's
Response** **If** you **admit** having a problem and **ask** for help,
we'll accommodate you.

Jane's Reply No → discipline

Example 1

Absence due to being hit/bruising

I haven't continued the group sessions in Guelph because I can't get there and I work nights at Walmart. And my mom died.



Example 2

Physical assault at work

We're prepared to transfer you to another store and to develop a response plan should your husband attend at the store.

Example 3

Sent home with black eye

**I'm still black and blue.
I'm not presentable.
I'm too weak to work.
I'm not eating.**

Progressive ~~Discipline~~

1 verbal warning

4 written warnings

6 suspensions (17 days)

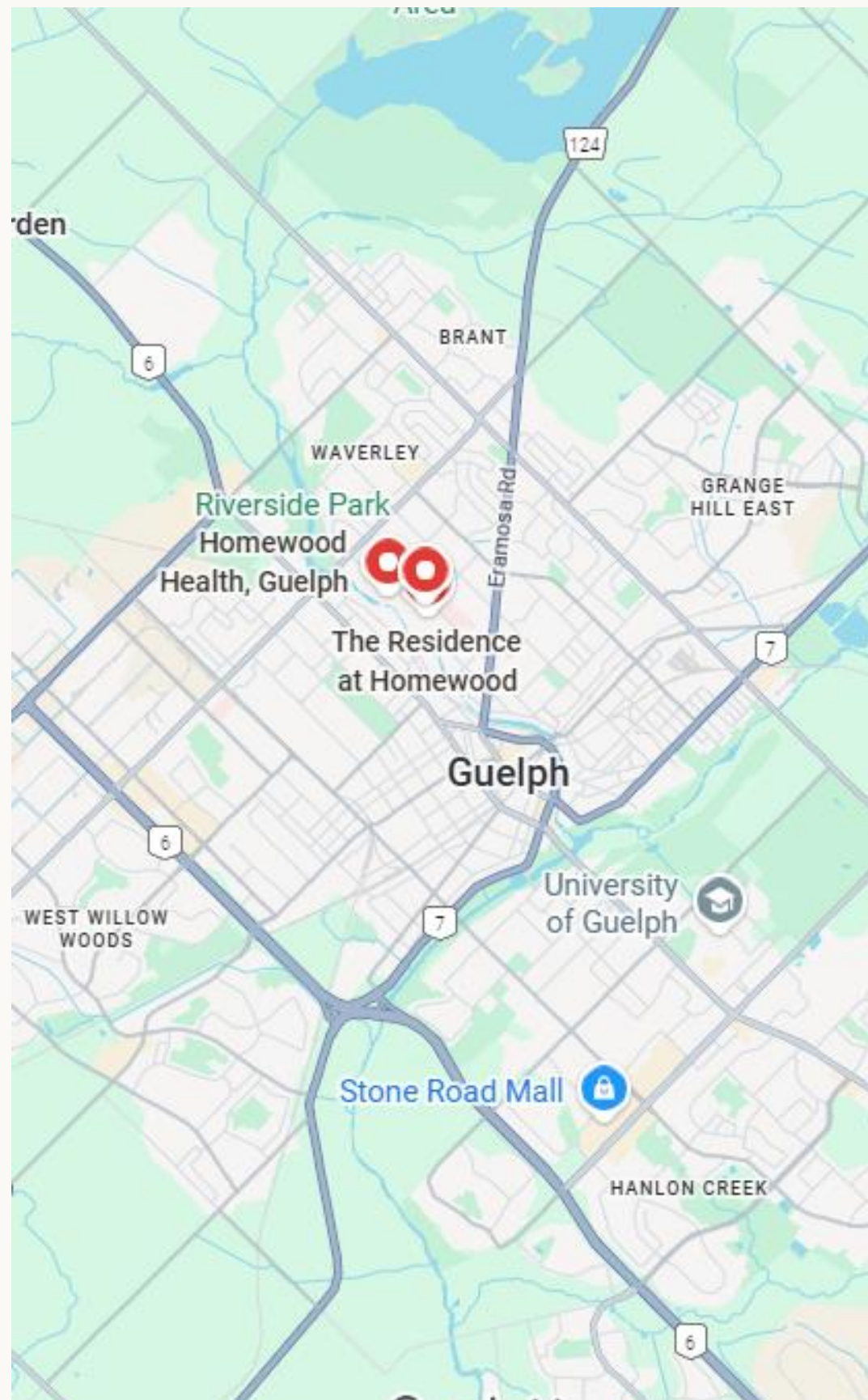
Last Chance

August 8, 2011

By August 31, 2011, provide:

- 1.confirmation of arrangements for enrolment in suitable alcohol addiction treatment program
- 2.duration, dates, and times of participation

I think I started to have an alcohol abuse problem. I'm prepared to participate in treatment.



Store's ~~Recommendation~~

Homewood Health Centre,
Guelph

1-month inpatient program

Wait time: up to several
weeks

Reaching Out

July 14, 2011

**I can't wait anymore.
I'm leaving.**

Reaching Out

September 16, 2011

I need to speak to the District Manager. Can I at least leave a message with you?

Termination Grievance Arbitration

Reasons for missing August 31 deadline

**I didn't ask about a
non-residential option.
I didn't ask for an
extension. I don't
know why I didn't
show up to the
meeting**

Employer's Position

**No medical
evidence**

Substance use disorder
PTSD/concussion
Link to misconduct

**Hasn't
removed
source of**

Subsequent violent incidents prove she
didn't leave her husband

**Hasn't
rehabilitated
herself**

Hasn't accessed EAP
Hasn't sought clinical support
Chose only church support
group

For reasons which are not entirely clear, the grievor consistently denied that she had a problem. These denials effectively limited the Employer's ability to respond to the situation.

- Arbitrator

The grievor **never responded** to the Employer's offers by requesting a transfer or asking for any other accommodation.... The grievor **failed** to take the steps necessary to address the issue.

- Arbitrator

I'm very sorry and ashamed. My
mind wasn't working back then.
I was a different person.

- Jane

What do you
think?



Was “cooperating” in the
accommodation process
realistic for Jane?

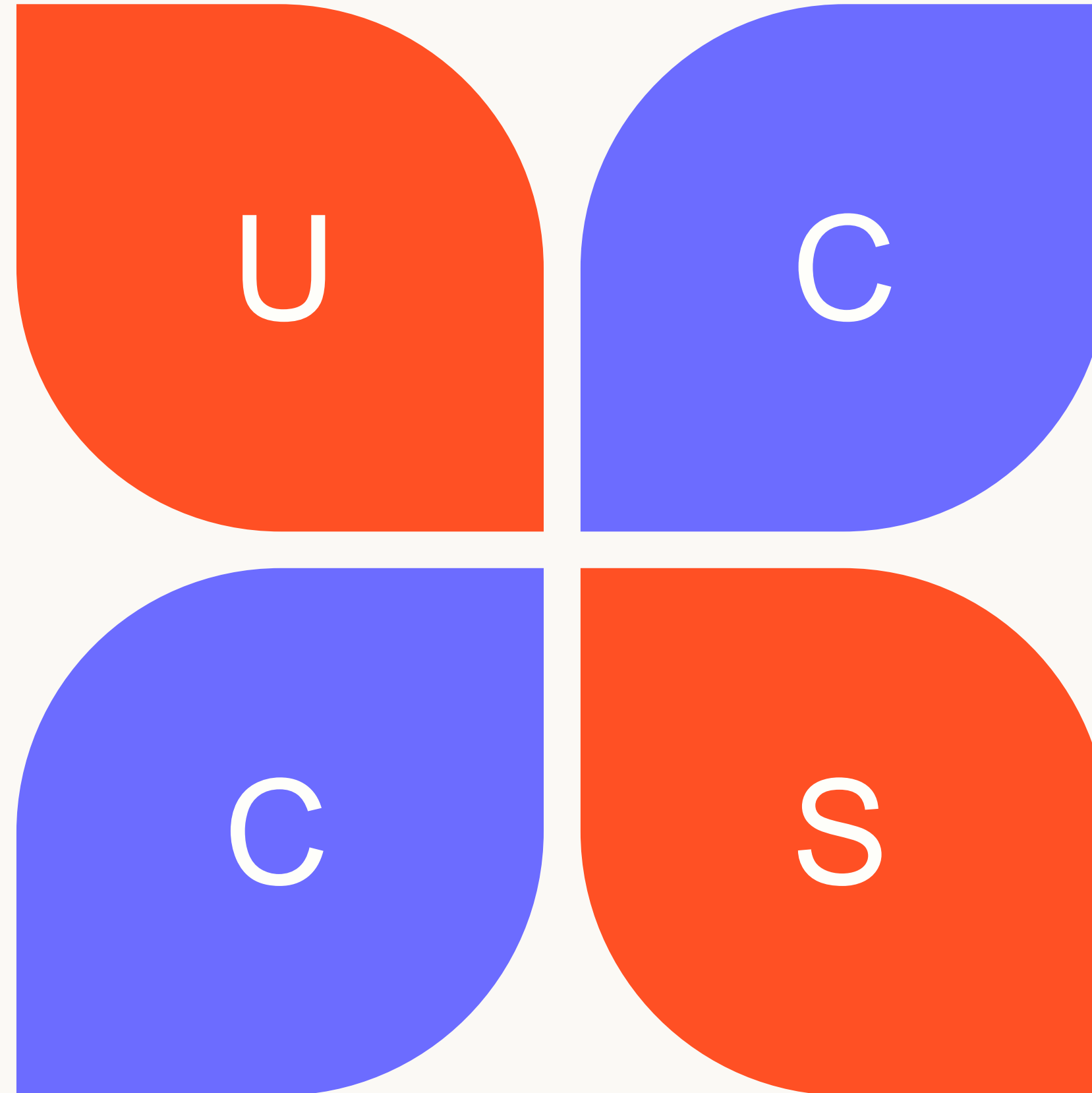
How might a TVI approach have changed the outcome?

Understand T &

Understand trauma and violence, especially structural violence, its prevalence and its impacts on peoples' lives and behaviours

Choice

Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection



Cultural Safety

Create emotionally, culturally and physically safe environments for management and employees

Strengths-

~~Based~~ strengths-based and capacity-building ways to support employees

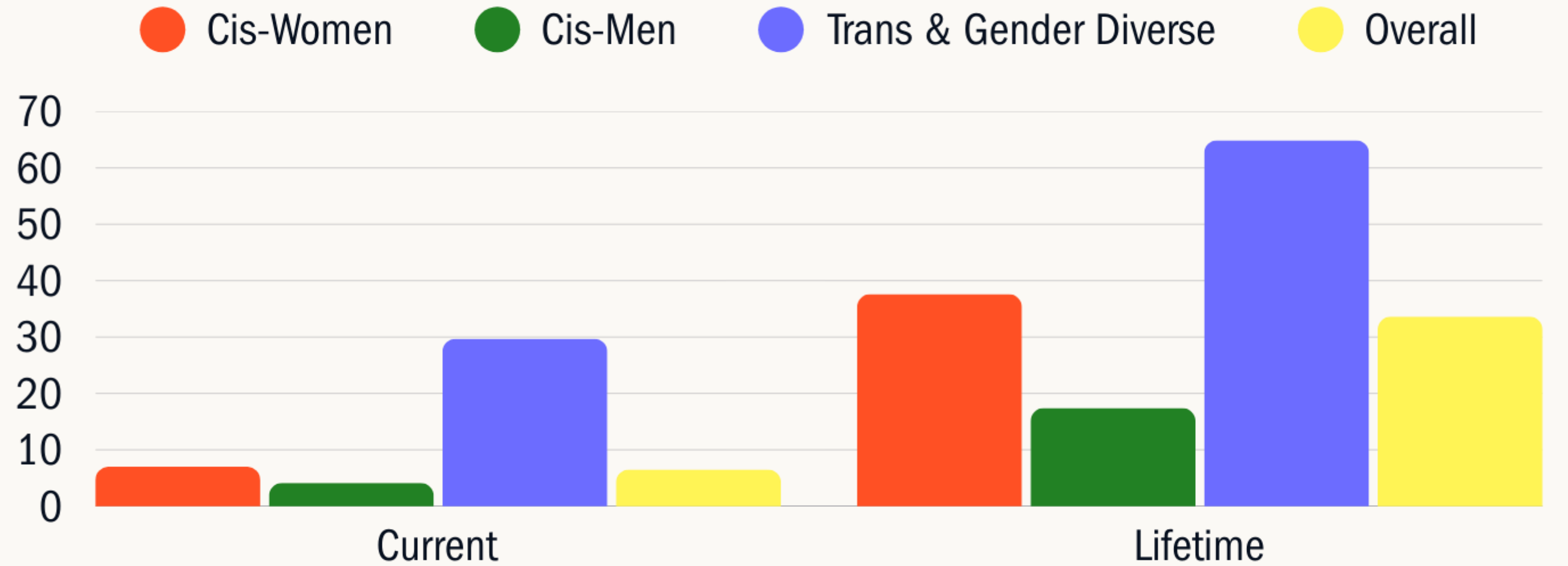
- EQUIP Health Care

Understand T &
Understand trauma
and violence,
especially structural
violence, its
prevalence and its
impacts on peoples'
lives and
behaviours



Do your policies show that you
get it?

IPV Prevalence



- CREVAWC, 2014

Defining IPV

Physical abuse

Psychological abuse, including coercive control

Damage to property, including pets

Forced confinement

Deprivation of basic necessities

Stalking/harassment

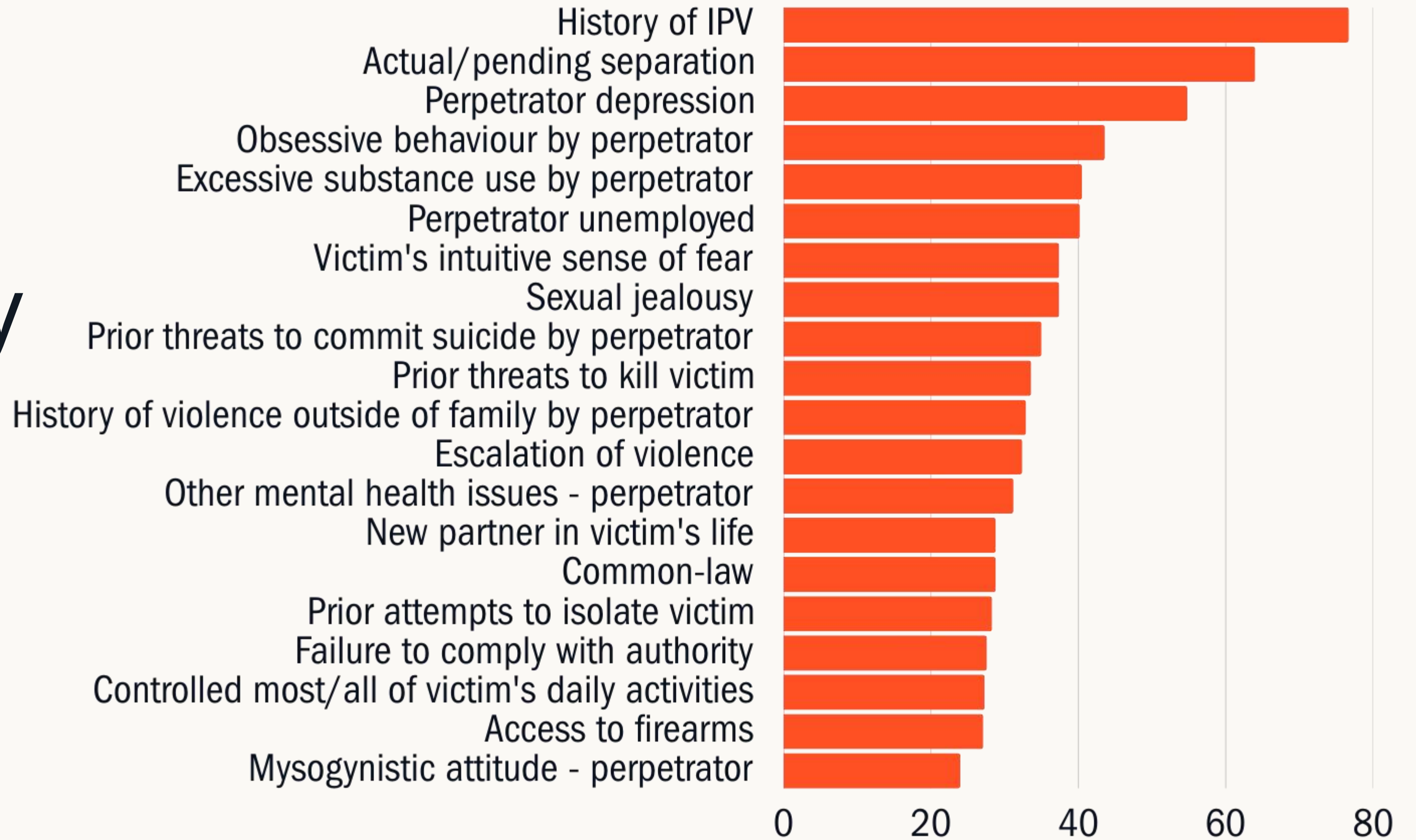
Financial abuse

Human trafficking

~~Cycle of violence~~

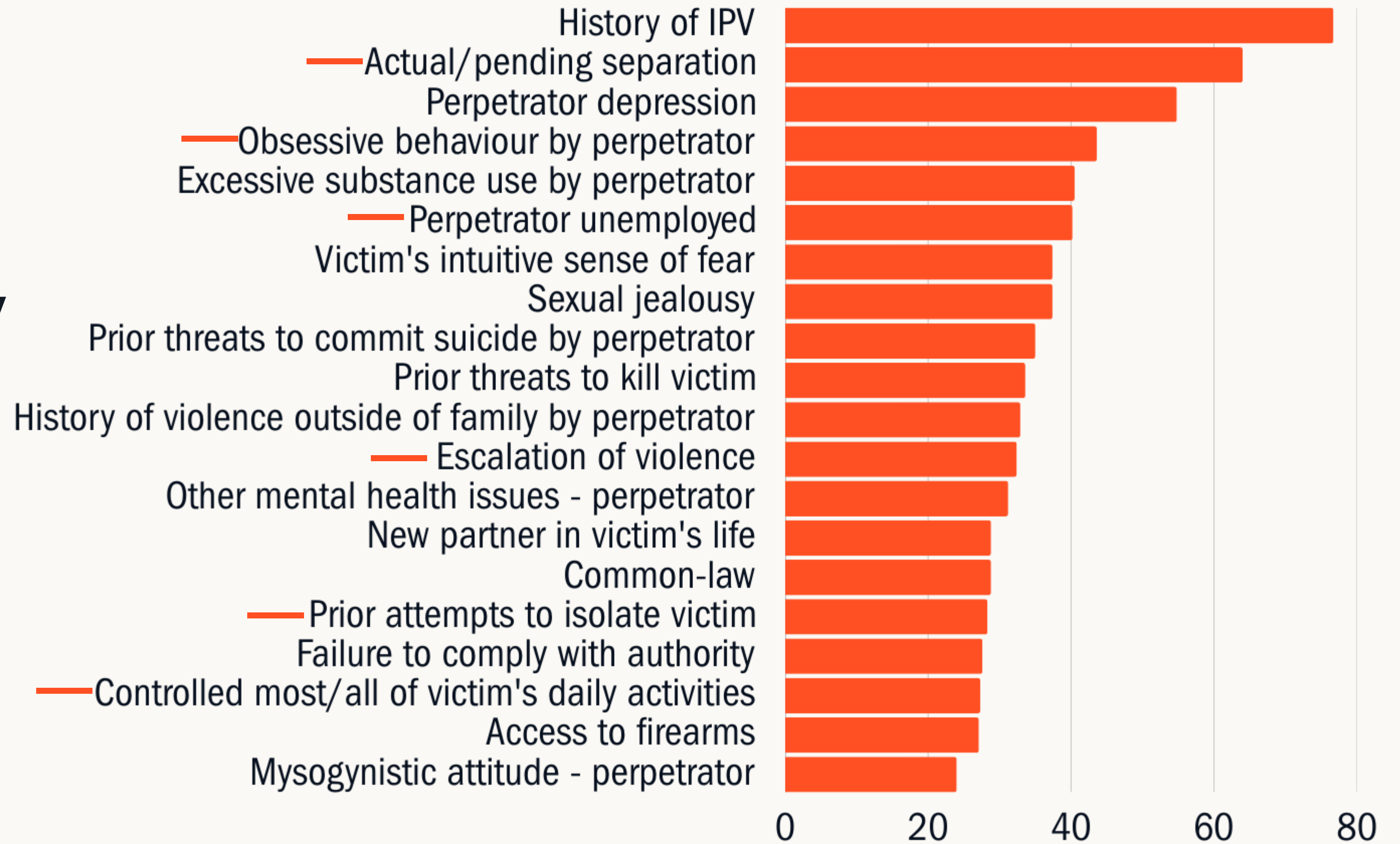
Violence is constant

Lethality



- DVDRC 2022-2023 Annual Report

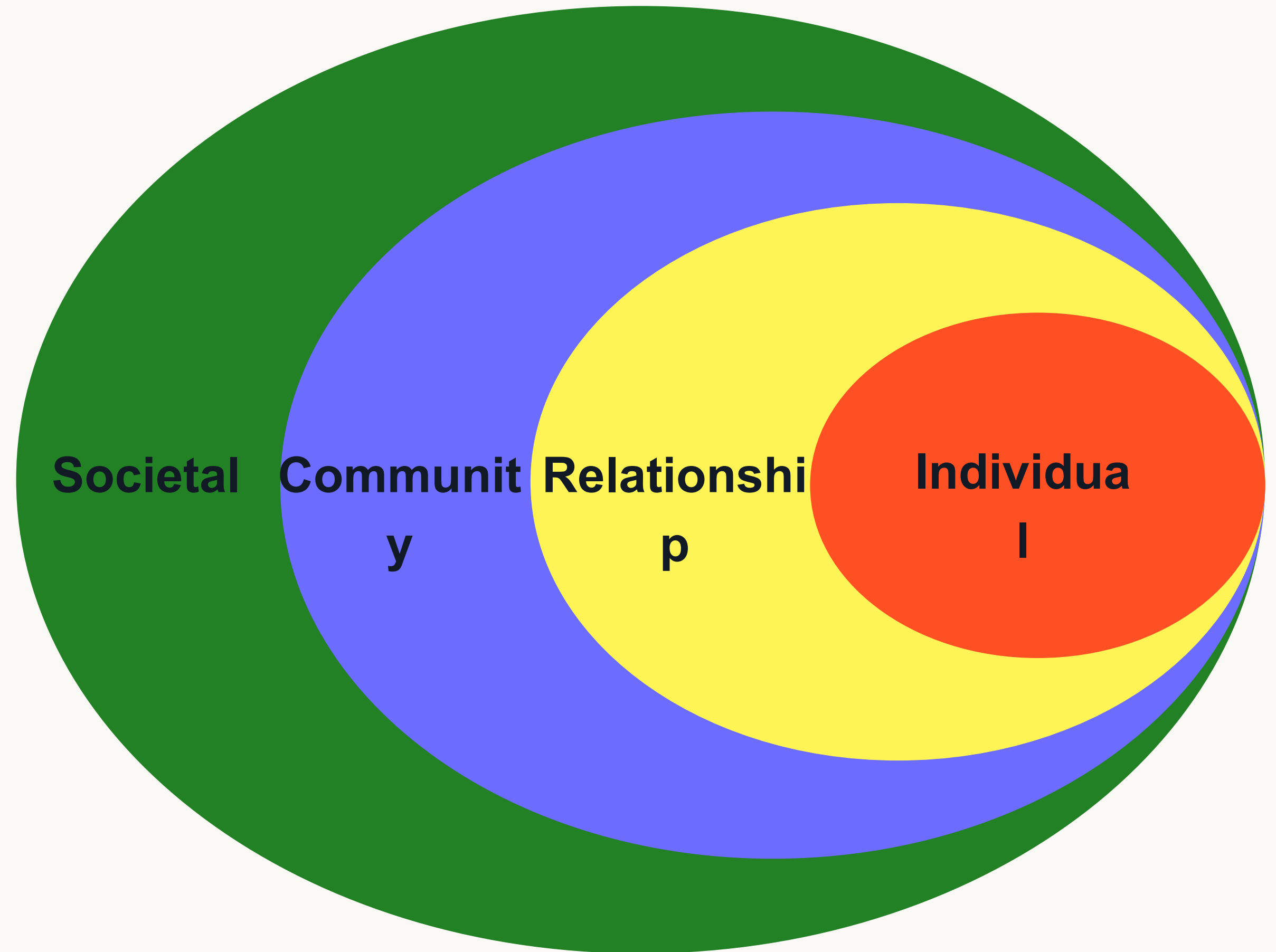
Lethality



- DVDRC 2022-2023 Annual Report

Structural Violence

(Socio) ecological
framework



Structural Violence

Rural x Older
Women

75

%
higher IPV
rate than
rural



traditional
gender
roles

45

%
higher sr.
IPV rate
than rural



lack of
access to
resources



self-blame
& secrecy



lack of
shelters



isolation



limited
employe
nt

- Learning Network, 2021

Leaving

It takes an average of

7

Health Impacts

Head injuries &
concussion

Strangulation

Chronic Pain

Sleep Disorder

PTSD

Depression

Shame/Guilt

Substance Use Disorder

- Statistics Canada

Health Impacts

**My mind wasn't
working back
then. I was a
different person.**

Head injuries &
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Substance Use Disorder

- Statistics Canada



Safety

Create emotionally,
culturally and
physically safe
environments for
management and
employees

Is it safe to disclose IPV at your workplace?

Fear of Retaliation

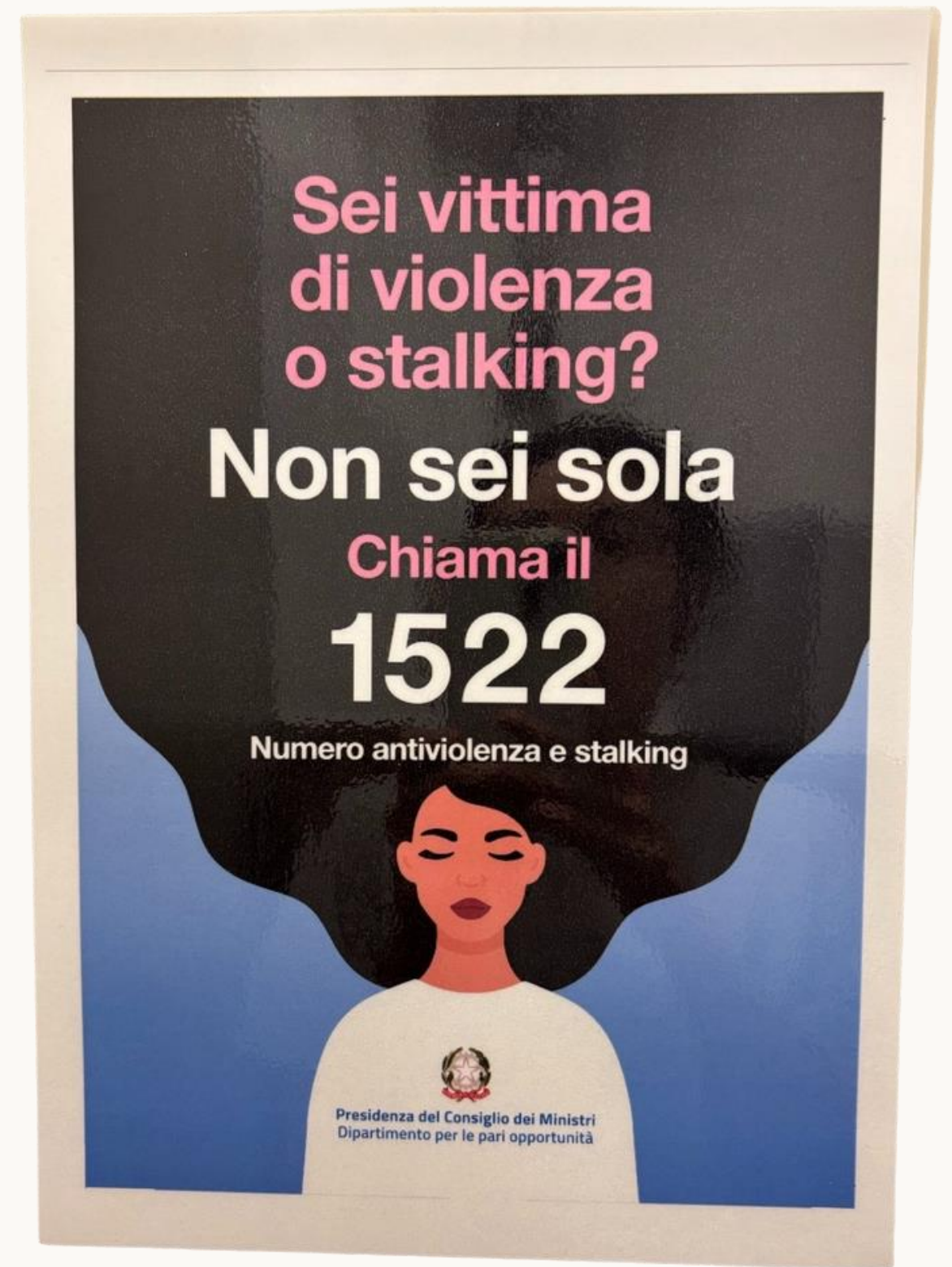
Employer Action	White	Black	Latino	Total/All
Employer did not respond negatively	35%	30%	35%	34%
Created unsafe work environment	26%	21%	26%	26%
Denied a promotion or opportunity	7%	14%	23%	17%
Fired due to threat from person who hurt	7%	13%	12%	8%
Fired for attending legal proceedings	6%	6%	9%	6%
Fired for taking time off to get better	10%	9%	14%	10%
Given fewer hours or responsibilities	18%	14%	16%	16%
Harassment or discrimination	24%	30%	27%	25%
None of the above	18%	20%	21%	19%

- Futures Without Violence, 2025

Communication S



Bell
Let's Talk



What to expect

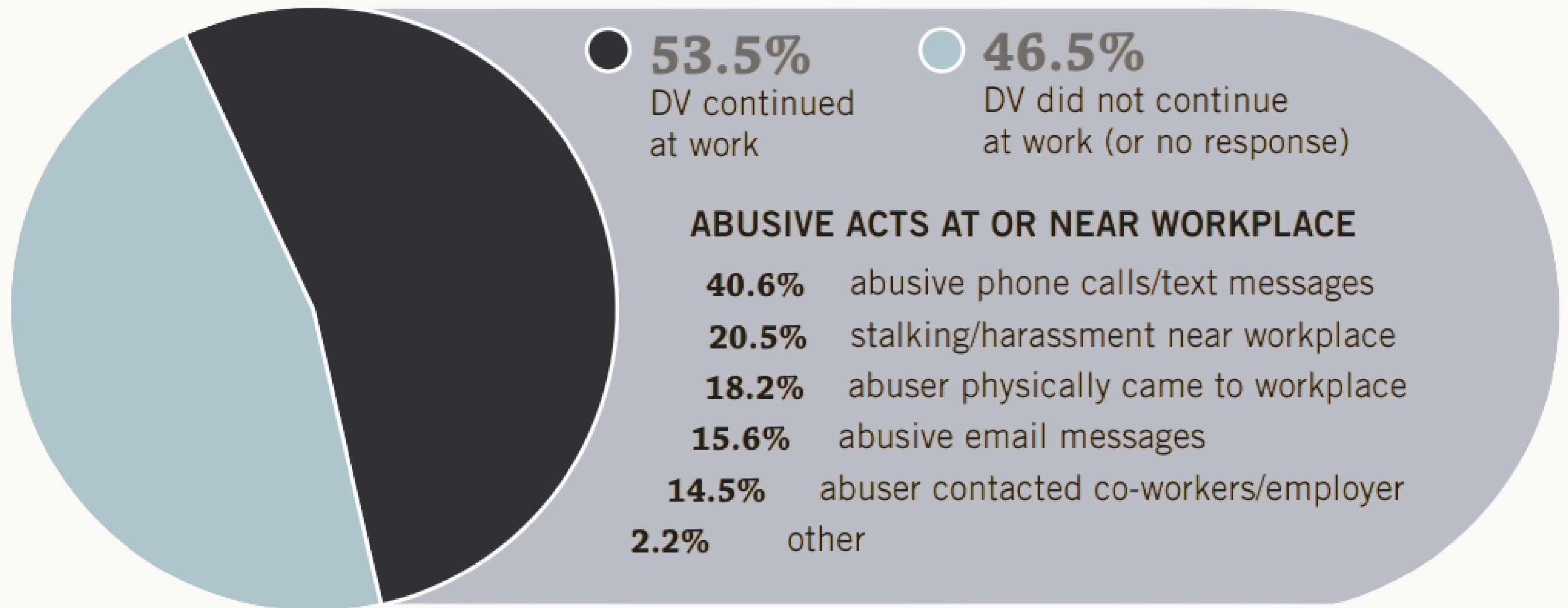
Confidentiality

No judgment

Survivor-centric

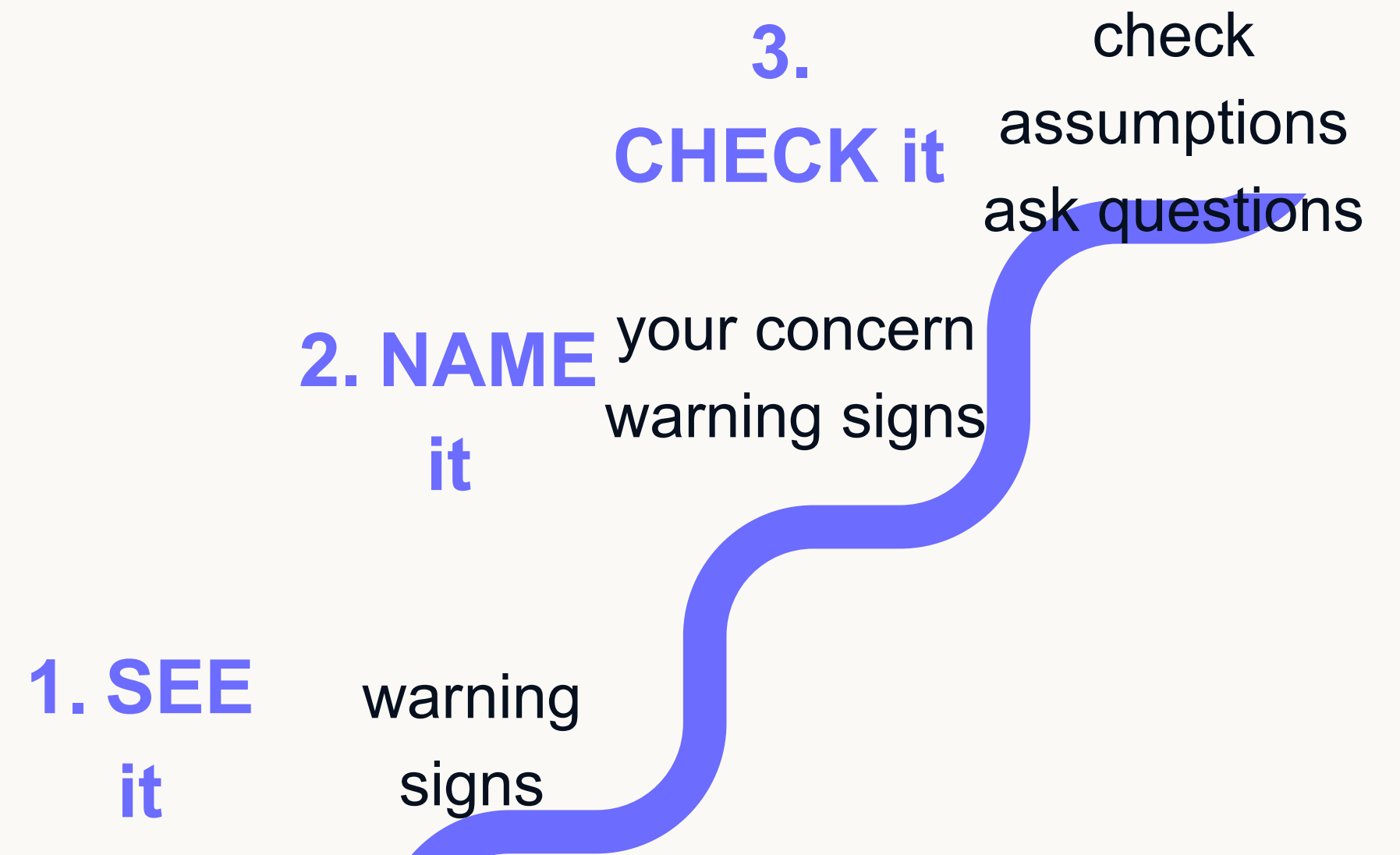
Is it safe for colleagues to check in?

Recognizing IPV



Checking In vs Reporting

SNCit Conversation
Framework



- CREVAWC

Is it safe for managers to do the
work?

Team-based TVI

Team-based debriefing

“Trauma review”

Buddy system

“Tap out”

Supports



Do you reinforce safety in your process?

Manager Training

Reflective Practice

What's going on with me?

How can I engage with
everyone?

What can I do about the
context in which I work to
improve cultural safety for all?

~~What's wrong with this
person?~~

**What happened, and is
it still happening?**

- EQUIP Health Care

Intersectional Accommodation

**Failure to address
domestic violence
issues interferes with
treatment
effectiveness and
contributes to
relapse.**

– Treatment Improvement Protocols, 1997

Accommodation vs Discipline

The Worker has taken out of the realm of conjecture that domestic violence is connected to sex and gender, and like sexual harassment, is a form of **sex discrimination**.

- The Worker v Translink Security Management Ltd, 2025
BCHRT 122 at para 81

Accommodation vs Discipline

There is a logical connection between domestic violence and the ground of **marital status**. By its very nature, this type of violence occurs within the context of an intimate relationship....

- The Worker v Translink Security Management Ltd, 2025
BCHRT 122 at para 82

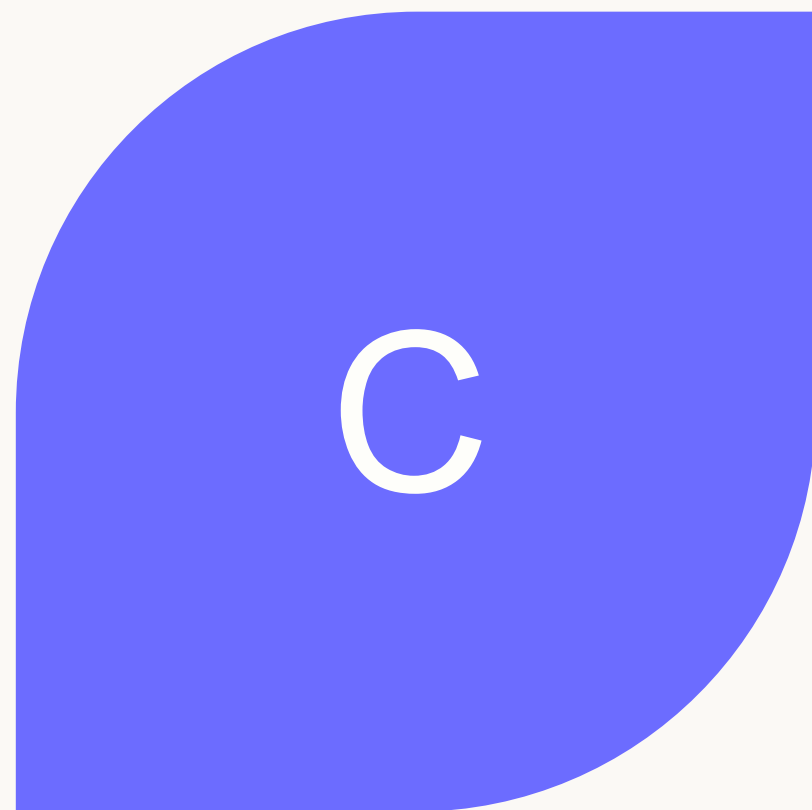
Absence Management

**Women wanted
employers to offer
paid leave or
additional sick leave
to help cope with
intimate partner
violence, including
time to move house
or access**

~ WomanACT, 2022

Choice

Foster
opportunities for
choice,
collaboration, and
connection



Real Choice

One option that comes to mind is x. If you're up to it, let's walk through what each step might look like to see if there are any challenges we should consider.

Know your community resources

Shelters. 0 tolerance **vs** harm
reduction

Inpatient programs: single **vs**
multidisciplinary



S

**Strengths-
Based** strengths-
based and
capacity-building
ways to support
employees

Get curious

What's the story behind the behaviour?

“Non-cooperative” = brain functioning in a way necessary for self-preservation

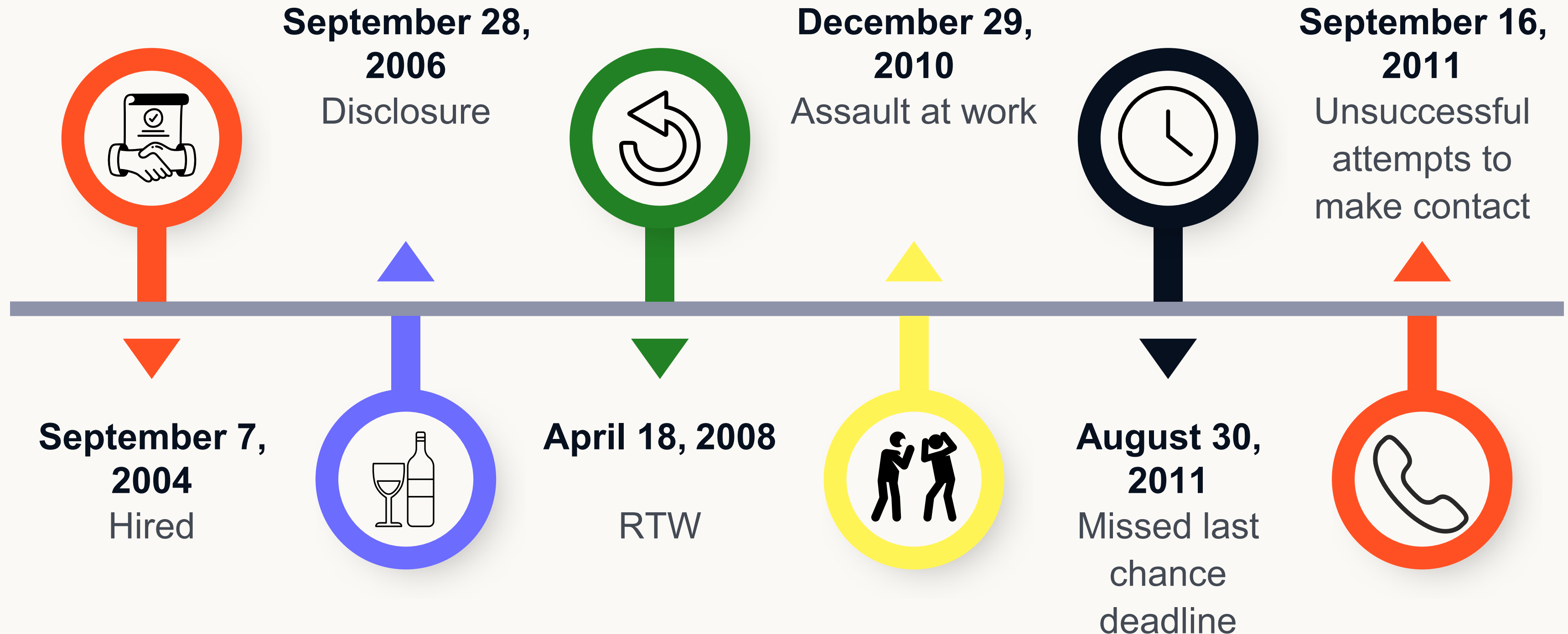
What they've achieved on their own despite their struggles = a lot of positives to build on

Blaming a person for the reaction we're seeing just adds on to the stigma they've already experienced. They just internalize the stigma further and leave without help.

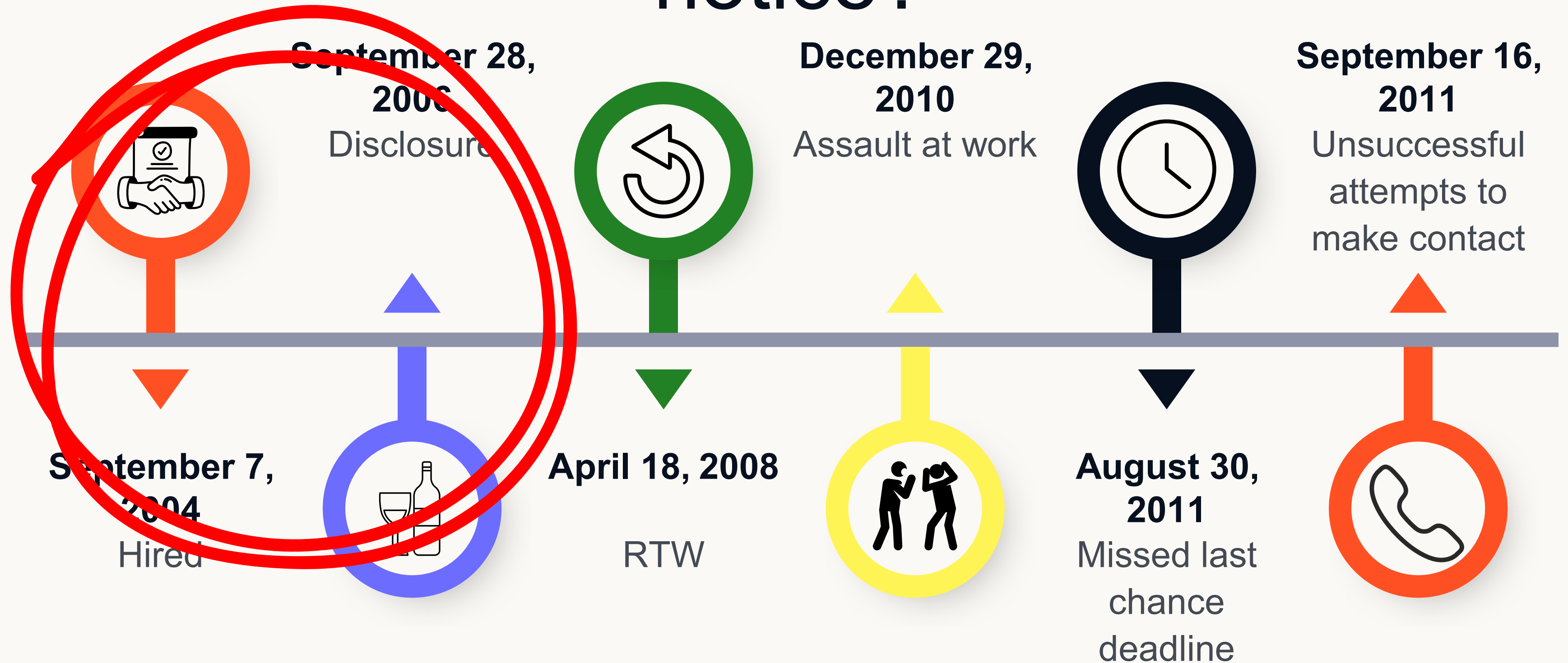
- EQUIP Health Care

Let's apply these
TVI principles to
Jane →

How many missed opportunities did you notice?



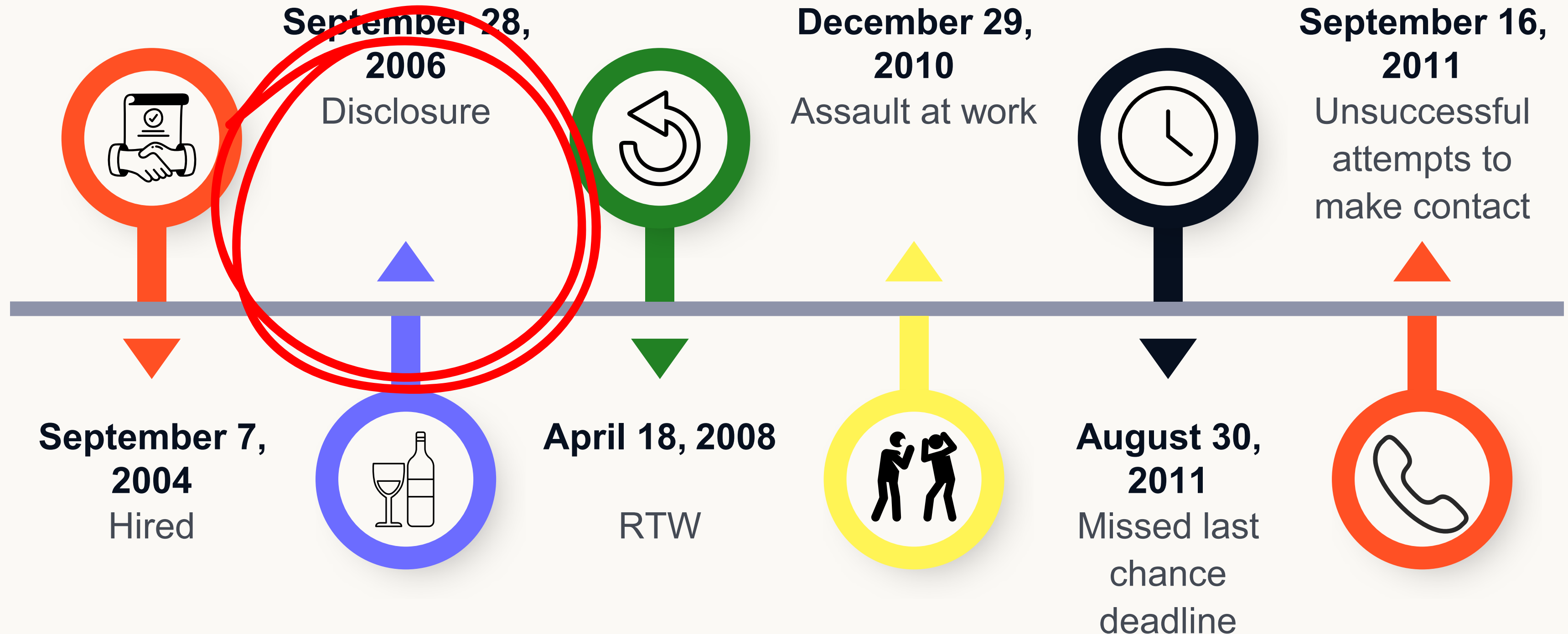
How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the policies
showed Jane that the
store “gets it”?

What if her coworkers
knew how to check in?

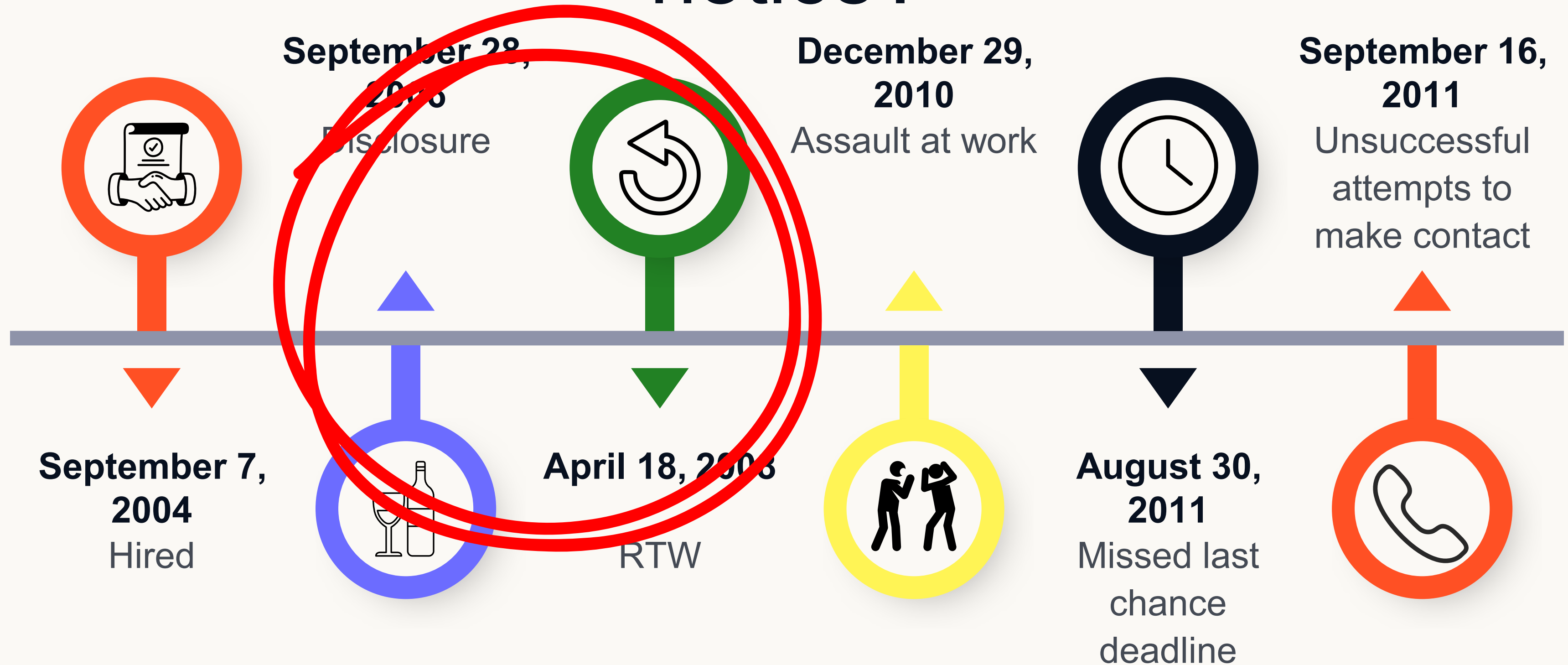
How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the store had asked, “Would you feel comfortable sharing how your use of alcohol relates to the abuse you’re being subjected to?”

What if the store had asked, “Can you share with me the approach you take to staying safe at home? If you feel up to it, let’s build on that to create a safety plan for the workplace and while you’re on leave.”

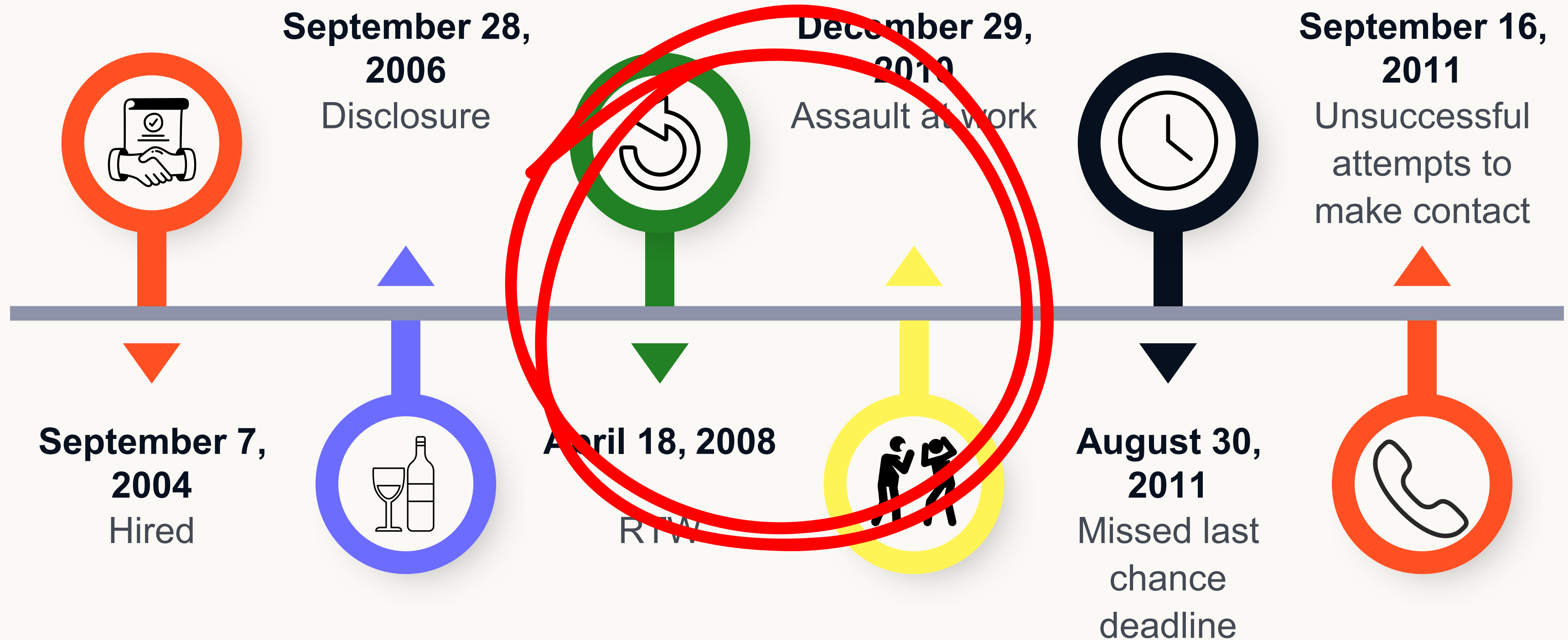
How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the store had asked, “Is there anything that might make it difficult for you to go to these sessions?”

What if the store had checked in with Jane to see if the counselling sessions and safety plan were still working for her?

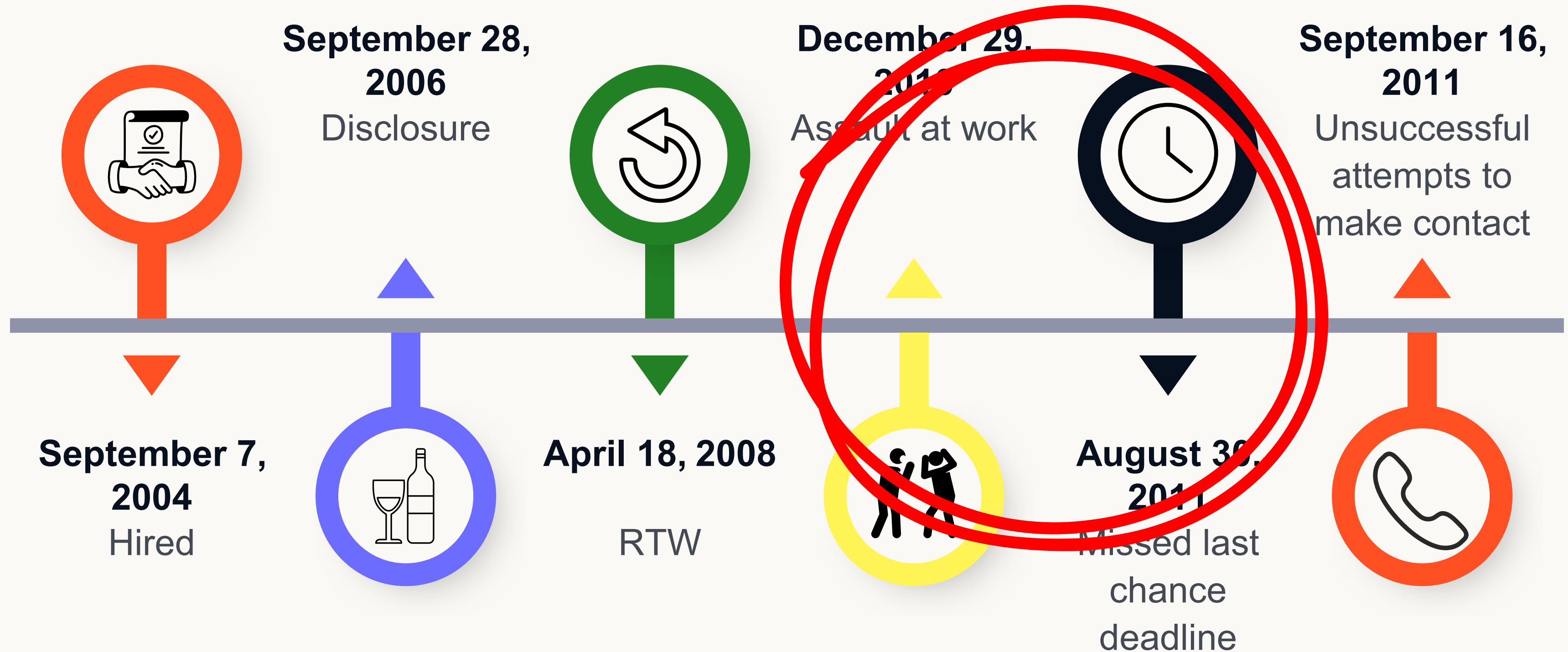
How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the store had said, “We can see you’ve been working hard and that our initial idea had some external barriers we hadn’t thought of before. Would you feel up to talking about what might work better for you?”

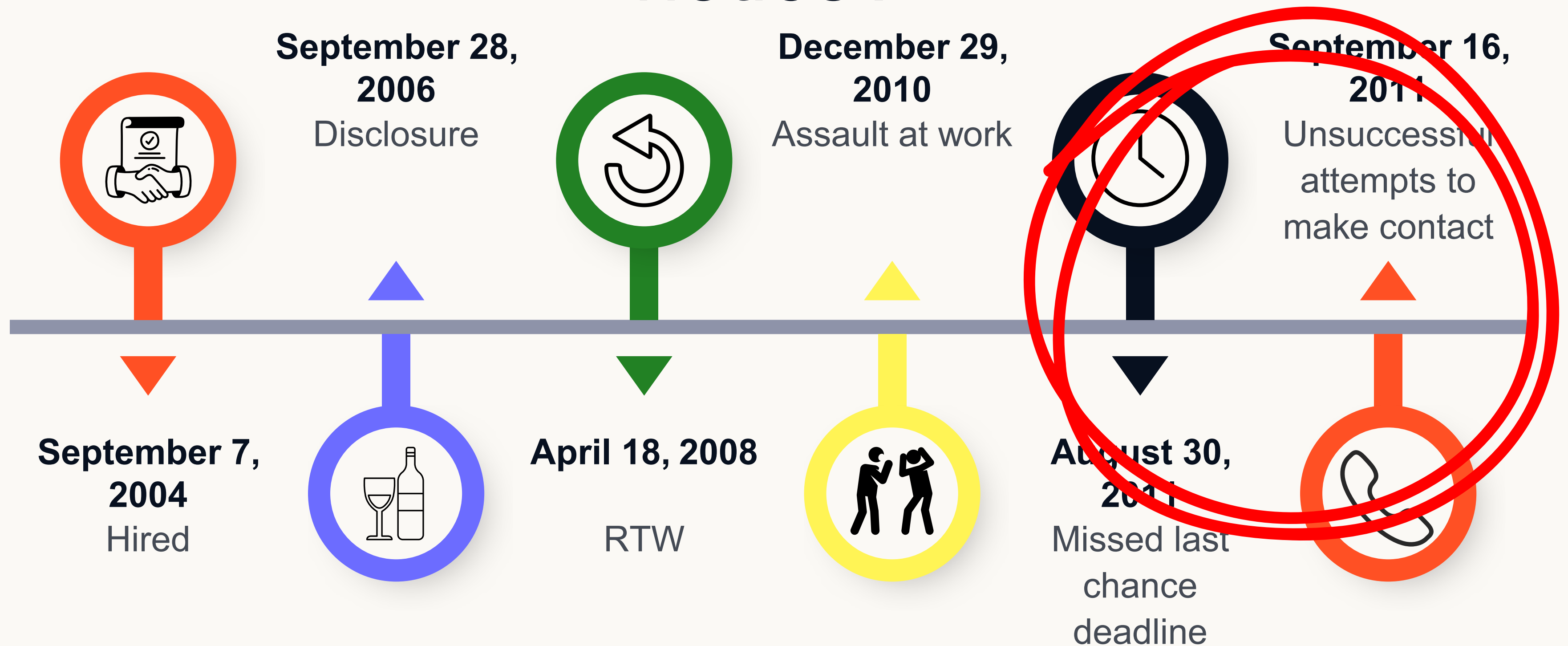
What if the store had responded, “We have a legal duty to create a safety plan, and here’s what that’ll involve. And if you change your mind, we’d love to get your input.”

How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the store had recognized that she was absent for legitimate reasons and was facing escalating danger?

How many missed opportunities did you notice?



What if the manager had ended the call, or at least acknowledged Jane's presence?

What if the District Manager had a tap out protocol?

Do you think the outcome would have been different?

Recap

Policies

Do you define IPV?

Do you name the risk factors?

Do you acknowledge structural violence?

Do you eliminate fear of stigma/judgment?

Do you explain what to expect?

Training

Do you teach everyone how to SNCit?

Do you provide continuous team-based TVI training?

Does HR know how to administer intersecting accommodations for substance use and IPV?

Do you know when discipline vs accommodation is appropriate?

 [**dvaatwork.c**](https://dvaatwork.ca)

 [**equiphealthcare.**
ca](https://equiphealthcare.ca)

Response Plans

Do you focus on the survivor's strengths?

Do you explore **real** options?

Are you plugged into your local community?

Do you explore barriers despite lack of engagement?

Do you conduct risk assessments and create safety plans despite lack of

 dvatwork.ca

 equiphealthcare.ca

Bigger Picture

C Suite buy-in

Build an interdisciplinary, organization-wide team

Workplace Violence Policy

Communications

Training

Child abuse reporting

Accountability for person doing harm

Risk assessments & safety planning

HR accommodations

Unique vulnerabilities awareness

Digital abuse flagging

Financial abuse workarounds

Community engagement

Q&A

Get in Touch



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OPSEU (Anagnostopoulos) v Ontario (LCBO), 2017 CanLII 25442
(ONGSB, Watters) <https://canlii.ca/t/h3jqd>

dvatwork.ca

equiphealthcare.ca

CREVAWC et al, “Can Work Be Safe When Home Isn’t?” (2014)
<https://www.uwo.ca/projects/heritage/heritage3/img/survey-report.pdf>

Ontario, “Employment Standards Act, 2000 Policy and Interpretation
Manual: Domestic Violence Leave”
<https://www.ontario.ca/document/employment-standard-act-policy-and-interpretation-manual/part-xiv-leaves-absence#section-13>

Resource Page

<https://www.theduluthmodel.org/>

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Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, “Treatment Improvement Protocol Series: Substance Abuse Treatment and Domestic Violence” (1997) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64437/>

workplacesrespond.org

WomanACT, “Intersections Between Employment and Safety Among Racialized Women” (2022) https://womanact.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/WomanACT_Intersections-between-employment-and-safety-among-racialized-women.pdf

Learning Network, GBV in Rural, Remote, & Northern Communities (2021) https://www.gbvlearningnetwork.ca/our-work/issuebased_newsletters/issue-35/Issue-35.pdf

Resource Page
