



STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Presented by: Grace Costa, General Manager of Eva's Satellite, Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women invited Eva's to appear on Monday, October 29, 2018, from 4:30-5:30 p.m.

Format: 7 minute statement by each panelist, followed by open discussion and questions.

ABOUT EVA'S

Eva's Initiatives for Homeless Youth is an award-winning Toronto-based organization that provides shelter, transitional housing, and programming to help young people aged 16-24 experiencing homelessness reach their potential to lead productive, self-sufficient, and healthy lives. Eva's gives youth the tools to transition out of homelessness permanently.

- ◆ Eva's Place: 40-bed emergency shelter and home to the Family Reconnect Program.
- ◆ Eva's Satellite: 33-bed emergency shelter that also specializes in harm reduction for youth with substance use and mental health needs.
- ◆ Eva's Phoenix: townhouse-style transitional housing for 50 youth, providing education support and employment training.

Charity Intelligence selected Eva's as one of Canada's Top 10 Impact Charities.

Eva's serves young people of all genders who become homeless for many reasons. However, it is clear that **young people face systemic difficulties when impacted by violence against women and intimate partner violence**. They seek support from youth-serving shelters & transitional housing providers that are ill-equipped to help them.

RESEARCH: INTERSECTION BETWEEN YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Violence against women and intimate partner violence can push young people into homelessness.

Evidence shows that "the majority of youth experiencing homelessness come from homes with high levels of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; interpersonal violence and assault; parental neglect; and exposure to intimate partner violence" (Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd & Schwan, 2016).

The unsafety of the streets may cause young women to stay in living situations where they are at risk of gendered violence. Young men typically outnumber females 2:1 in youth-serving shelters, but evidence supports that many young women stay in violent situations because the streets feel so unsafe to them (Gaetz, O'Grady, Kidd & Schwan, 2016).

Homelessness exposes young people to extremely high risks of violence. They are nearly six times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population and targeted more than anyone else for all kinds of violent crime, including sexual assault. LGBTQ2S youth, Indigenous youth, and youth who became homeless at younger ages are at highest risks (Gaetz, O’Grady, Kidd & Schwan, 2016).

Homeless young people are especially vulnerable to being trafficked. Covenant House, Youth by The Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research and the Loyola University Modern Slavery Research Project (2017) found that 68% of the youth who had either been trafficked or engaged in survival sex or commercial sex had done so while homeless. Other information they found about high risk include:

- 1 in 5 of all cisgender women experienced a situation considered sex trafficking
- LGBTQ youth accounted for 36% of the sex trafficking victims
- Youth with a history of involvement in the foster system accounted for 27% of all youth engaged in the sex trade and 26% of all youth who were labor trafficked

Canadian Women’s Foundation (2014) notes five risk factors for experiencing sex trafficking: being female and young, being poor, history of violence and/or neglect, history of child sexual abuse, and low level of education. Other risk factors: lack of local employment opportunities, migrant/new immigrant and/or having low levels of social support; being Indigenous; being homeless; living in care, group homes, or foster care; substance use or mental health issues; history of criminal justice system involvement; and gang association.

YOUTH SHELTERS/TRANSITIONAL HOUSING NEED CAPACITY

- In general, federal funding/programming toward youth-serving shelters and transitional housing is low. In Eva’s case, we receive very few directly federal supports even though we are one of the larger youth-serving shelters and transitional housing service providers in Canada.
- Young people escaping gender-based violence come to Eva’s on a regular basis. These include those who face this violence themselves or are exposed to it at home. Adult women’s shelters may be unavailable to them because of their age, because they are unaccompanied by a parent/guardian, because they don’t know they can even access women’s shelters/housing and in our experience, they often have no space.
- Even though they come to youth service providers like Eva’s, we do not often qualify for funds for gender-based violence alleviation, federal or otherwise. This presents a serious barrier to young women in particular, because it means we cannot reserve shelter or transitional housing spaces for them (e.g. through targeted spots). Most days/nights it does mean they cannot find support from Eva’s, because we are often at capacity.
- We are not certain about the “dark figure” of young people who stay in situations of gender-based violence for fear of the streets. However, there are approximately 2,000 homeless youth in Toronto each night, of which about 600 are in youth shelter/transitional housing spaces, (123 of which are at Eva’s). We know this means that a significant number of young people in Toronto, especially young women, may require youth shelter/transitional housing beds to escape gender-based violence but cannot access them.
- Shelters are often the last places funders consider for meaningful programs, yet it is in shelters and with staff there that many young people disclose experiences of violence and trauma, reaching out for supports. It’s in the shelter that we witness what so many young people need in terms of “life skills” but it’s so much more. At Eva’s we meet young people where they are at, and slowly, ever so

slowly they begin to open up about years of violence AND then we need to transfer them often before they are ready to someone else in the community for supports and in doing so, we shut the young person down, leaving them with old patterns, shame, fear, isolation, denial

- For us doing this work, it is more than clear, places like ours and other youth shelter & housing providers need government funds not only to provide spaces to assist young women, but also to maintain employee teams who have the experience, skills, and sensitivity to support those young women escaping gender-based violence.

SOURCES

Canadian Women's Foundation. 2014. "NO MORE": Ending Sex-Trafficking In Canada Report of the National Task Force on Sex Trafficking of Women and Girls in Canada.
https://www.canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/CWF-TraffickingReport-Auto-1_0.pdf

Covenant House Youth by The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research and the Loyola University Modern Slavery Research Project. 2017. Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth.
<https://covenanthousestudy.org/landing/trafficking/>

Stephen Gaetz, Bill O'Grady, Sean Kidd & Kaitlin Schwan. 2016. Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.