

PEI Family Violence Prevention Services is a non-profit organization dedicated to the eradication of violence on Prince Edward Island. We run an emergency shelter and transitional housing. While we often have the capacity to respond to emergency shelter requests, the need for transitional housing far outweighs our available units. We run both second and third stage housing. With second stage women and any associated children are able to stay for up to a year. With third stage housing the units are permanent until such time a woman decides to move on. All units are for women only, or mother led families. Through a funding subsidy with CMHC these units are rent geared-to-income, and are kept in very good repair.

The demand for these units far exceeds our availability. In our Second Stage facility we have 8 units. It runs at 100% occupancy. Although there is some turnover, as soon as a unit becomes available we fill it with a resident in our emergency shelter. There is very little turnover in our third stage building. Very few women are choosing to leave. The available units in Charlottetown are at an all-time low. The vacancy rate in our city is under 1%. Women are being forced to stay in unsafe situations in order to have a roof over their heads. It is a very unfortunate situation.

Women are having a very difficult time finding units. We see women being turned down for apartments because they have children, or because they are on financial assistance. Although this is not allowed, it is difficult for women who are trying to meet their basic needs to fight each landlord that treats them unfairly. We have a woman with four children in our emergency shelter at the moment who has been looking for an apartment since May. We feel that she won't be able to find a unit big enough to allow her to have all of her children with her. If we had a three-bedroom unit open in our third stage housing we would be able to house her. She was told there are 62 families ahead of her looking for a three-bedroom unit from public housing.

At one time Financial Assistance would not allow a woman to rent an apartment over her rental ceiling. This is no longer the case. It is so difficult for women to find permanent housing that they are allowing people to make ends meet however they can. Women fleeing violence are very vulnerable and it is a tragedy that we cannot respond to their needs.

While everyone at all levels of government are discussing housing and creating solutions, the fact remains that many women right now have nowhere for them to go. This puts them in the difficult position of staying with family, staying with someone and possibility offering favours in order to stay there, or potentially facing the street. Homes are getting divided because temporary accommodations aren't large enough to accommodate all members of the family. I see children going downhill in school performance when dealing with the stress of being imminently homeless.

I don't write to offer solutions, but rather to show the impact on women who are trying to get by in this housing crisis. Women are more often the ones caring for children, and they often have lower income than men seeking shelter. Poverty, violence, low levels of employment, and poor public transportation are issues we see our clients facing each day. I hope some solutions begin to address growing problem.