

To the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thank you for your invitation to hear the voices of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence, especially those in the remote areas such as the Westcoast Transition House.

The issues that women fleeing violence on the west coast of Vancouver Island are unique and varied. Like many other communities on Vancouver Island there is a shortage of housing, and much of the available housing is financially unattainable for these women. The Westcoast Transition House serves Tofino and Ucluelet, as well as the First Nations of Hitacu, Macoah, Esowista, Ty-Histanis, Opitsaht, Ahousaht and Hot Springs Cove. Many of the women from First Nations communities are left with little choice but to return to their communities where their abusive partner and families still live. Living off reserve is not a realistic option because it is unaffordable to do so. Women are forced to choose to be homeless or to return to their abusers.

Not only does the lack of affordable and subsidized housing affect women who are fleeing abuse, but it also creates situations where women are at risk of or exposed to violence due to homelessness. As there are no shelter services available on the coast, we also serve women who are homeless in order to prevent or remove them from harm.

Our communities span 80km across the coast and some are only accessible by water or air. However there is no public transportation in our area. For women and children seeking refuge, getting to a safe space is challenging to overcome even when they are not in a heightened emotional state. Although we provide transportation to the transition house, some of these remote communities have no cell service or public phones to contact us to request transportation.

While it is not the case for all women, many of them are also dealing with issues such as poverty, addiction, mental health issues, and intergenerational trauma. The current level of support women receive in transition houses cannot address all of these issues. However, specialized services such as medical specialists, legal aid offices, and treatment facilities are all 2 to 6 hours away. This often involves women leaving the transition houses for a short period of time to access necessary services and returning later. How can we address these intersectional issues independently while they perpetuate each other?

Because of limited funding, we are unable to recruit and retain qualified individuals to our sector while the women we serve require in depth knowledge of violence, abuse, mental health, substance use, and intergenerational trauma. Those with such qualifications are attracted to high paying jobs which are most often in larger centers with more housing opportunities. Without the human resources in-house or nearby, we cannot provide the wraparound services that these women so desperately need.

As we struggle to deal with the aftermath of these issues, no resources are left to run programs for the entire family, including the men who perpetrate violence against the women we are trying to serve. These men are often victims of violence and abuse themselves. Programs aimed at the abusers themselves can serve as an early intervention as well as work towards prevention of future violence.

With issues such as:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of subsidized housing
- Lack of shelter services
- Lack of public transportation
- Lack of specialized services such as medical specialists, legal aid offices, and treatment facilities
- Lack of resources for recruitment and retention
- Lack of wraparound services

we are fighting an uphill battle. Given our composition, not only do we need more beds in our transition house and a separate shelter, we also need to address the housing crisis which is especially problematic

in resort communities where the cost of living is so high and the income differential is so wide. More social services such as public transportation, various medical and legal services need to be provided based on need not on profit. It would also be beneficial for agencies to have sufficient funding to expand our services to support workers and to support the entire family of women and children affected by violence. As our sector try to work towards more collaboration with other service providers such as RCMP and MCFD, more education and cross training would alleviate the need for front line workers to advocate for these women who might not have a voice.

Thank you again for your consideration and I look forward to the Committee's report on this important matter.

Respectfully Submitted
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