

November 5, 2018

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women,

We understand that the Committee is conducting a study on the network of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence and that it will examine:

- the current gap between the need for and available beds in shelters and transition houses;
- current federal programs and funding in support of shelters and transition houses; and
- possible solutions to address the gap between need and supply.

I am writing from Yellow Brick House. We are an organization offering 41 beds and 10 cribs in two different shelters in York Region along with second stage housing with 8 apartment units. York Region is the fastest growing region in Canada with an influx of new immigrants.

We primarily serve women and their children fleeing violence and last year, 234 women and 132 children stayed in our shelters while 344 women and 488 children had to be turned away due to lack of space.

Hayden and his mom escaped to our shelter last winter in urgent need of a safe place to stay. At four years old Hayden was small and shy. Like so many children, Hayden had seen and heard the horrifying verbal and physical abuse his mom had experienced. He was a child who was **aware - and always afraid**. That winter morning, as usual, after dropping Hayden off at daycare, his dad then drove his mom to the TTC station. He watched her go through the turnstile, monitoring her every move, before making his way to work. She hid in the station, waiting until he was gone. Running she retraced her steps, quickly

Administration

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picked-up Hayden and came directly to the safety of our shelter. We had our last 2 beds available. Each year hundreds of women and children, like Hayden and his mom, who were scared for their lives, are looking to escape to the safety and support of a shelter to rebuild their lives. Hayden received child counselling to recover from the impact of trauma. Hayden's mom received individual counselling to leave the nightmare behind so that she could live without violence with her son in a community where she can rebuild her life from start.

These are lives we get to help change every year.

It is our understanding that shelters and transition houses do not have equitable funding across the provinces and territories. For us, we have not had an increase in funding in several years. In fact one of our shelters that opened in February 2012, has not yet received sustainable shelter bed funding since opening.

The work we do is imperative; the lives of women and children are literally at stake. We provide more than just safe shelter from abuse, which is also important. As you know, in Canada, a woman is killed by her partner or former partner every 6 days. In addition to ensuring the safety of women and children, we also offer programming such as family court support, transitional housing support, group support for both women and children and child witness group services.

We are writing with the following recommendations:

- Given that violence against women is at an epidemic level, shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women must be recognized as an essential service.
- Shelters and transition houses are currently grossly under-funded. We recommend a significant increase in core and sustainable funding. This funding should increase the number of beds and shelters available but must also cover staffing and service provision. Building a shelter without providing for its staffing is not helpful.

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- We support Women's Shelters Canada's call for a National Action Plan. The Government of Canada should develop a National Action Plan in line with the United Nations recommendations. This National Action Plan, like the National Housing Strategy, should cover the Federal government as well as provincial/territorial governments. In Canada in 2018, every woman should have access to comparable services no matter where she lives.

We invite a member of the Committee to visit our shelter when you are in our area and/or to connect with us by phone should you have any questions or clarifications about the work we do.

Sincerely,



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