

November 8, 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 Women's Place of South Niagara. We are a 30 bed shelter located within two shelters in the Niagara Region. Serenity Place in Welland a 10 bed shelter and Nova House in Niagara Falls a 20 bed shelter. We primarily serve women and their children fleeing violence and abuse. Last year, we served 193 women and 117 children and had to turn away 297 women and children wanting to access our shelter services due to lack of space.

Our services are vitally important for the safety of women and children within our community and here are some quotes from clients about what these services meant to them:

"I really appreciate this agency for helping me and my children at such an unfortunate time in our lives. If it wasn't for this agency I could honestly say I don't know what I would have done to protect my children and myself. I also really appreciate all the services and sensitivity of all the staff in this agency. THANK YOU VERY MUCH!" – Women's Place Client

"There is nothing better than finding a safe and friendly environment in the scariest times of ones' life. I consider myself very lucky for the help and support that I received here. Thank you." – Women's Place Client

"The women that work at this particular agency have been a great help for me. I cannot thank them enough for all of the counselling and support they have given to me. Thank God for these types of places for women. They are an amazing bunch of women that have made a world of difference in my life. I will be forever grateful!" – Women's Place Client

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 base funding in 2 years. 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 through safe shelter, we also offer programming such as counselling, legal advocacy, housing supports and child and youth counselling.

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.
- We believe that is vital for us to fulfill our mission to end abuse and violence against women that the Government needs to fund shelters/transition houses to provide community education and intervention with adolescents and young adults.
- 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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