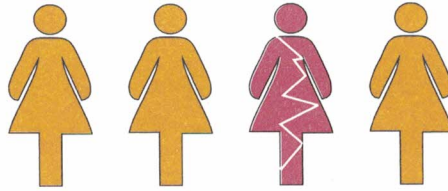


South Central Committee on Family Violence Inc.

O/A Genesis House

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November 7, 2018

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

I 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 Genesis House. We are a 16 bed shelter located in Winkler, Manitoba. Our service area is rural and very large. We serve two First Nation Communities, as well as a large new comer population. Challenges often faced by our clients include transportation for continued services of the shelter and our ability to provide service to women in the language of their choice. Our inability to provide outreach and accommodate counselling for women in a language they can understand place many of our clients at an increased risk. We primarily serve women and their children fleeing violence and single women fleeing violence. Last year, we served 46 residential women and had to turn away many women that do not fit our mandate of family violence, often dealing with mental health or addiction issues. There is no homeless shelter or crisis stabilization unit in our service area, and no public transportation available to access programs in an urban center.

In one dire situation we have served a woman residentially for eight months due to language barriers and issues related to immigration and family court. Our provincial length of stay is thirty days. However, with complex issues related to family court and immigration and with no place to call home and no supports in this country, this immigrant woman would not have been allowed access to her young daughter for months. Single women and women that have children in care are unable to find safe affordable housing in the rural areas. Often times part of the criteria for child protection services includes having safe and adequate housing. In our region, other than senior housing, there are no units available through social housing for single people.

Understanding the women that require the supports of a shelter is imperative. Women with developmental disabilities are falling through the cracks. Sexually trafficked women are falling through the cracks. Women with FASD are falling through the cracks. Women with addictions/mental health issues, aging out of child protection services, are all at increased risk of falling through the cracks because they require a network of support services that in most cases is simply not available and they are often too high risk to house communally with others in a residential program staffed by only one person.

My agency often is not at capacity residentially, however our provincial mandate does not allow for all types of women to access. Funded as we are currently it also would not be safe to start opening up our service to all types of women's needs.

It is my 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 twelve 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, we also offer programming such as counselling for women and children (residential and non-residential) support groups for women and children (residential and non-residential), assistance to apply for protection orders, court mandated programming, parenting education and support, advocacy, referrals, and public education.

I am in support of the following recommendations based on my work in this field since 1992:

- 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. I 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. Often in the rural area we serve as women's resource centres as well as the only advocate/voice for women's issues in the region.
- A continuum of care and support after leaving an abusive relationship is imperative to ensure that women will have the best chance for success.
- A wraparound or HUB model of care with paid and unpaid helpers would provide opportunity for stronger support teams that would lead to better outcomes for women, most of which have complex needs that cannot be met by one agency alone.
- Globally housing first models supported by appropriate transitional care are showing promise and should be explored.
- I 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.

I would welcome a member of the committee to visit our shelter when you are in our area, or feel free to reach out by phone if you have any questions or would like to discuss these concerns further.

Sincerely,



Angela Braun
Executive Director

CC: The Honourable Candice Bergen, MP Portage Lisgar