

## Brief from the Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine

Submitted as part of the study by the House of Commons Standing Committee  
on the Status of Women

on the System of Shelters and Transition Houses Serving Women and  
Children Affected by Violence Against Women and Intimate Partner Violence

Over the past few years, workers in the field have noted an increase in the number of vulnerable women experiencing multiple, complex issues (violence, mental illness, financial insecurity, female or out-of-status immigrants, use of psychoactive substances and so on) who are seeking assistance from Laval resources. To have a better view of the extent of the phenomenon, the Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine (TCLCF) [Laval roundtable on the status of women] and its members conducted extensive research to prepare the *Portrait des femmes en situation de vulnérabilité à Laval* (TCLCF, 2015).

This study highlighted the glaring shortage of community housing, particularly for women. The statistics are telling: 98% of the Laval organizations surveyed must refer vulnerable women to other resources and, in 57% of the cases, to other regions.<sup>1</sup> With only nine community housing resources for vulnerable persons in a population of 437,413,<sup>2</sup> including only three facilities for female victims of intimate partner violence, the lack of availability results in daily refusals.<sup>3</sup>

As far back as 2000, Laval had fewer available spaces for female victims of conjugal violence than other regions in Quebec. A shortage of 26 places was noted at that time. In the wake of these findings, 19 places were created in 2005 but none since then, leaving Laval with an ongoing shortage. Ten years later, these safe houses are still reporting comparable or even higher rates of refusal than when the places were added. Their most recent statistics are revealing: in 2016-2017, 401 women were refused for lack of availability and 205 women and children were refused because of issues other than or more urgent than intimate partner violence. Although these figures are alarming, they only partially attest to the extent of the need. In fact, they do not take into account women who were directly referred outside the region owing to a lack of resources, or women accommodated in shelters in Laval because of intimate partner violence but redirected to another resource during their stay because of a predominant issue (mental health, dependency, homelessness, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine (2015). *Portrait des femmes en situation de vulnérabilité à Laval*. Laval: TCLCF, 142 pp. [In French only]

<sup>2</sup> INSTITUT DE LA STATISTIQUE DU QUÉBEC, 2018. *Profile of Administrative Region 13 – Laval*.

<sup>3</sup> 600 refusals at Aviron in 2017-2018, the only community housing resource in Laval for homeless adults. Aviron (2018). *Rapport d'activités 2017-2018*, p.3. [In French only]

The shortage of resources for women in difficulty in Laval and of sufficient places and resources (crisis and second-stage) to deal with intimate partner violence has resulted in a widespread revolving-door phenomenon where women are referred from one resource to another, reinforcing the cycle of instability and threatening their safety. Some women say that they go from one resource to another to avoid being on the street or that they have to misrepresent their situation so that they meet the support organizations' criteria. Others refuse to leave their region and give up their few remaining sources of guidance and mutual support, which is particularly the case for women with children.<sup>4</sup> In Laval, women in difficulty often have to submit several applications for assistance and be systematically refused before they receive the support they need, which contributes to their revictimization and feeds the cycle of violence and exclusion.

In this context of multiple referrals, disjointed assistance and a serious lack of accommodation for women who are victims of intimate partner violence or in difficulty, and their children, we must work tirelessly to establish a resource that provides assistance and shelter for women in difficulty in Laval, and to ensure sufficient funding for shelters under development to assist female victims of violence.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure the development of women-only shelters in Laval that can accommodate children;
  - Offer a continuum of housing (from emergency to long-term)
  - Offer shelter and post-shelter support
  - Offer intervention services for children
  
- Support the development of safe, quality social and community housing that is affordable and subsidized, as well as housing cooperatives for the Laval region.

*The Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine is a regional feminist group working with its members to improve the quality of life and living conditions of women at the social, economic and political levels. It ensures that the rights and interests of women, particularly in Laval, are respected.*

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<sup>4</sup> Table de concertation de Laval en condition féminine (2018). *État des lieux sur les conditions de vie des Lavalloises : des enjeux sous enquête. Hébergement pour femmes en difficulté et accessibilité aux ressources pour les femmes en situation de handicap et les femmes sourdes victimes de violence*. Laval: TCLCF, 11 pp.