

**Written Submission for the  
Members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women  
“Better support for transition houses and shelters serving women and children  
affected by violence against women” study.**

**By: Kate Wiggins  
Executive Director  
Anova: A future without violence**

We are writing with the following recommendations:

1. **Recommendation 1:** That the government recognize shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women as an essential service.
2. **Recommendation 2:** That the government provide a significant increase in core and sustainable funding to shelters and transition houses.
3. **Recommendation 3:** That the government develop a National Action Plan in line with the United Nations recommendations.
4. **Recommendation 4:** That the government recognize the unique experiences of women, including women living in and experiencing violence, in the definition of homelessness whether used locally or nationally.

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 as the Executive director of Anova: A future without violence. We operate 2 high security shelters, one with 40 beds and the other with 27; we also operate a 25 unit rent-g geared- to- income Second Stage complex located in London, Ontario. We primarily serve people experiencing gender based violence. Last year in our shelters, we served 483 women and children and 89 women and children in Second Stage. We referred 117 women elsewhere. However, this is not our whole story as we answered our crisis and support line 10,128 times and had 817 people approach us for help through our counselling and support centre. We served 504 people through our outreach program and 200 clients through our family court support worker program. We taught 41 children strategies for healthy relationships and how to cope in the face of violence. We had 7,800 people attend our public education workshops and saw 643 people who had experienced sexual assault. Finally, we provided youth programming to 576 people.

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 a significant increase in funding in 4 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 those listed above.

Let us be clear, women and children residing in shelter are homeless, and we, in the city of London, are experiencing a crisis in social housing. We provide services to the most vulnerable and marginalized. As with many issues, homelessness has often ignored the unique needs and circumstances of different populations and maintained a one size fits all approach. If we cast a gendered lens on the issue, we see that homelessness is experienced differently for people who are vulnerable to gender based violence and who are often socially marginalized due to gender, identity, race, ability and age - that is why it is so important to have a gender based analysis + and to advocate for this at all levels of government in order to provide the variety of housing stock to meet people's needs.

Gender-based family violence is a key factor contributing to women's housing instability and homelessness in Canada. Women in the GBV sector have not been counted in the homeless numbers locally or nationally, and we want to ensure that their homelessness and housing instability are accurately captured in the local and national analysis.

We are writing with the following recommendations:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. The definition (whether used locally or nationally) of homelessness recognizes the unique experiences of women, including women living in and experiencing violence. The Canadian definition of homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances with people being without any shelter at one end to some being insecurely housed at the other, and that one's shelter circumstances can change at any given time. Nearly 3 times as many female-led households live in subsidized housing compared to male-led households. We need to increase housing stock. Safe affordable housing is a Human Rights Issue.

Anova provides safety, services and support to woman-identified persons in the London and surrounding area who have experienced gender-based violence. 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. Thank you so much for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Kate Wiggins  
Executive Director