



November 12, 2018
Standing Committee on the Status of Women
131 Queen St., 6th Floor
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Canada

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

We understand that the Committee is conducting a review of the network of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence and that the Committee will be examining:

- 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 to you on behalf of La Gigogne. We are a 12-bed shelter in Matane in the Lower St. Lawrence region with a population of close to 22,000 in the Matanie RCM. Our clients are primarily women and children affected by domestic violence. Last year, we served 42 women and 39 children, but we had to turn away 23 women and children because we were already at capacity or for other reasons (homelessness, women without income, drug addiction, mental health issues). In the Matanie RCM, there are no other housing resources for women in crisis who are not victims (add) of domestic violence.

In our experience, shelters do receive equitable funding in every province or territory. The work we do is essential; the lives of women and children are literally at stake. We offer more than just a place to escape the violence, even though that is a very important part of what we do. As you know, in Canada, a woman is killed by her partner or former partner every six days. In addition to ensuring that women and their children are safe, we offer programs that include one-on-one sessions with mothers and their children to strengthen their relationship, help manage emotions, provide counselling, etc. We also offer post-shelter services and external services for women who want to take back control of their lives.

One of the services we offer is a transition house, L'Entre-Temps, which provides six safe housing units on a temporary basis (anywhere from three months to two years) for women who have experienced domestic violence and for their children. Twice a year, we offer group sessions once a week for 15 weeks. We run a 24/7 telephone help line and an awareness program for those who want more information on domestic violence and how to identify it.

Another service La Gigogne offers is Alpha de la Matanie, which provides literacy services, introduction to reading, writing and numeracy skills for young children aged 2 to 4 and their parents, as well as introduction to computer skills and many other projects.

We would like to share the following recommendations:

- Given that the epidemic of violence against women is ongoing, shelters and transitional housing for women and their children affected by violence need to be recognized as an essential service.
- Shelters and transition housing are currently seriously underfunded. We recommend a significant and long-term increase to core funding. This funding should be put toward increasing the number of beds and shelters available, but it should also be available to hire staff and provide services. There is no use in building a shelter and then having no one to run it.
- We support the call of Women's Shelters Canada for a national action plan. The Government of Canada should develop a national action plan based on the United Nations recommendations. This national action plan, just like the national housing strategy, should involve both the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments. In Canada in 2018, every woman should have access to comparable services, no matter where she lives.

We invite the members of the Committee to visit our shelter if you are ever in the area, and/or to contact us by phone if you have any questions or would like more details about the work that we do.

Yours sincerely,

[signed]

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cc: Mr. Rémi Massé
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