



**New Brunswick South Central Transition House and Second Stage Coalition**  
c/o P.O. Box 73 St. Stephen, N.B. E3L 2W9

## **THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

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### **THE CURRENT GAP BETWEEN THE NEED FOR AND AVAILABLE BEDS IN TRANSITION HOUSES.**

- Providing beds/shelter is only one part of the important work that our shelters provide to female victims and their children struggling with abuse and violence.
- Focussing on just beds does not allow for an analysis of the breadth and complexity of all the work a shelter provides to it's clients or to the community as a whole.

**Background:** Shelters/resource centres for women struggling with abuse and violence in their lives are extremely complex,intimate spaces where there is a great opportunity for personal transformation in the face of fear and tragedy.

Women we serve are often like refugees/prisoners of war, needing to be debriefed in order to even start seeing new possibilities of life. That kind of work is not done by simply providing a bed to a woman and her children. It requires expertise, hours of time, strategy, deep understanding of the complexities she faces and resources to enable these changes to happen.

Some of our work is supporting women to go from defensive/survival mode to being able to develop a perspective that sees exactly what has happened and how, so that she can let go of the fear, the guilt and believe in the possibilites of a life where she can succeed and feel proud. That takes a lot of work, time and expertise in the field.

### **CURRENT FEDERAL PROGAMS AND FUNDING IN SUPPORT OF SHELTERS AND TRANSITION HOUSES**

- These programs have been extremely helpful in upgrading our aging shelters, creating new more efficient shelters and for the proliferation of second stage facilities that are greatly needed.
- However, programs need to be more transparent and the application process needs to be navigatable without having hiring a special expert or in needing a course to traverse the application process.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS THE GAP BETWEEN NEED AND SUPPLY

– Our funding comes from the provincial government - consequently, we are at the mercy of the constant election loop – in our province, it generally lasts 4 years. It is nearly impossible to develop a sustainable vision and programming to move ahead. We have spent time and energy meeting with, lobbying with and informing a current government and....a few months later, they are replaced by the “other” political party.

–We need a national vision of services for women and children struggling with abuse and violence - that ensures there is some equity between provinces. Some provinces have built into budgets acceptable limits of funding for this work and some provide substantially less. This does not assist in the development of a comprehensive national vision to sustain services and to develop prevention strategies, consequently we need a **National Action Plan!**

**Additional Note:** Shelters that are developed specifically to meet the needs of women struggling with abuse and violence are NOT the same as shelters that are designed to meet the needs of women struggling with chronic or episodic homelessness. Women using our services are, in fact, homeless because most times they are forced to locate new safe and secure housing when exiting our facilities, and that is not often easy. We do understand, that women facing chronic or episodic homelessness often come from a background of abuse and violence and if, in fact, that is the case in her current situation, of course she would fit the criteria for admission to our shelters. However, mixing populations generally speaking has NOT been a good idea. Women fleeing abusive relationships flourish because they are surrounded by other women struggling with the same problems and they are getting support from shelter staff who have developed extensive expertise in supporting these particular women. When there are women staying in shelter who are not in an abusive relationship, it can cause a breakdown in the intimacy created within the shelter where women feel free to talk, if they so choose, about their situation. When there are women staying in the same shelter who have no understanding about the dynamics of abuse, they can question the woman’s choice to leave the relationship, they can easily talk about their current partner in positive ways that can make the woman feel unsure about her decision in leaving, they do not necessary have the same commitment towards privacy and security and they could encourage a woman to return. I realize that there are situations where mixed populations have occurred and the benefits outweigh the negatives. However, I also know, from experience, it can be counter productive. In conclusion, our shelters are not only providing a bed to a woman in need, they provide many other services to residents, external clients, the community at large, other agencies with their common clients, assisting with negotiating the legal process (both family and criminal), providing programs to local schools on healthy relationships and being the public face of one of the most serious social issues our communities are facing.

**Finally, our shelter/resource centres are not “BANDAIDS” – they are change makers. They cannot provide everything a woman needs to rebuild her life but we can create a climate where she is more knowledgeable about the effects that control and abuse has had on her and her children’s lives and more confident in seeking the other supports she needs to succeed.**

**Respectfully submitted by Debrah Westerbug, Coordinator of  
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