



Atlohsa Native Family Healing Services Inc.

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Zhaawanong Women's Shelter
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Transitional Housing
219 St. George Street
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Registered Charity
#13064 5203 RR 001

November 9, 2018

Dear Members of the Status of Women Committee,

As the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls prepares to hear its final submissions this Fall of 2018 in Calgary and Ottawa, it is arguably more important than ever that policy makers consider the systemic issues behind the epidemic of MMIWG, and notably, the link between violence against Indigenous women, housing and homelessness. Recent statistics show that Indigenous women are 2.5 times more likely to experience violence and 6 times more likely to be killed than non-Indigenous women. Violence is the leading cause of Indigenous women's homelessness, and Indigenous peoples are significantly over-represented in the homeless population nationwide. Homelessness and precarious housing increase the risk of violence, and contribute to the risk of being trafficked as well as the high number of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

As the Status of Women Committee prepares to undertake a study on supports for the transition houses and shelters for women and children affected by violence, we at Atlohsa Family Healing Services Inc. in London, Ontario, believe it is crucial for the FEWO Committee to consider the prevalence of violence against Indigenous women in Canada and the current funding gaps that Aboriginal shelters and transition houses in Canada experience compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. These recommendations are in line with the 94 Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

Despite the high numbers of Indigenous women experiencing violence, most shelters for women experiencing violence are over capacity and few are equipped to understand the unique cultural needs of Indigenous women. Atlohsa Family Healing Services Inc. has operated Zhaawanong shelter for Indigenous women and children since 1992. The establishment of Zhaawanong shelter follows from recommendations stemming from the first ever Needs Assessment Study of intimate partner violence against First Nations women in 1986. Zhaawanong Shelter provides 24 hour emergency shelter and support mandated to prioritize service for Indigenous women and their children who are at risk of violence, abuse and/or homelessness. In the 2017/2018 fiscal year, Zhaawanong provided support to 209 participants (156 children, 53 women). Through Zhaawanong's 24 hour crisis line, 468 services were provided, and safety plans developed with 257 women and 64 children. Zhaawanong is nearly always at or over capacity, and staff often have to refer Indigenous women to other shelters. Due to experiences of violence in non-Indigenous violence against women shelters or emergency shelters, many Indigenous women choose to return to unsafe situations or sleep outdoors or in another unsafe location. Due to funding restrictions, Zhaawanong operates with only a single staff overnight and on weekends.

Celebrating 30 Years of Service



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Since 2011, Atlohsa has operated an 11 unit transitional housing program for Indigenous women and their children. During the 2017/2018 fiscal year, the program supported 16 women and 7 children. This program operates with no dedicated funding. As the supportive housing unit does not currently have full-time support staff on-site, support is offered on an as-needed scheduled basis by staff who work out of all three of Atlohsa's locations, including Zhaawanong shelter and the downtown head office. Recently within the supportive housing unit, front-line staff have noted increased instances of human trafficking cases, theft, drug and alcohol abuse, Elder abuse and unauthorized visitors. Presently, the organization has limited funding and resources to fully support the women through these incidences which are potentially re-traumatizing. Atlohsa has had to increase staff support at the supportive housing unit by reallocating staff from its head office on a rotating basis to discourage suspected traffickers from the premises and to provide support to the women.

Indigenous women's shelters and transition homes are severely underfunded when compared to non-Indigenous shelters and transition homes. Atlohsa is on the Board of Directors of Aboriginal Shelters of Ontario, which will be providing recommendations directly to the MMIWG Inquiry this fall on the impact of these gaps in funding on service delivery. Other organizations such as the National Aboriginal Circle against Family Violence have lobbied the government to close the gap in funding for Indigenous women's shelters and transition homes. While the mandate of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls will be complete in 2019, recommendations have little power to compel action on the ground to end the cycle of violence for Indigenous women. It is crucial that the Status of Women Committee study consider the legacy of colonization and its implications for Indigenous communities in Canada in order to help support policy that can create real change in our communities.

Miigwech-Yaw[^]ko-Anushiik

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