



Brief on the system of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence

Members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO):

Carrefour pour Elle, the first safe house for women in difficulty with children in Quebec, opened its doors in 1975. Its mission is to assist and shelter women in difficulty and women affected by spousal violence, with or without their children. Our main goals are to provide the women and children we shelter with physical security and emotional support, help them assert themselves and break away from their experience of violence through a process of devictimization, and present awareness workshops.

In our 43-year history, we have responded to more than **232,800 service requests** from women and sheltered **15,179 people** (7,197 women and 7,982 children). Over the past five years, we have sheltered an average of 103 women and 105 children each year. Last year, our occupancy rate was 97%, and the average stay was 35 days. Our service area is located mainly in the Réseau local de santé Pierre-Boucher. It is worth noting that there are two safe houses within the Agglomération de Longueuil: ours and the Pavillon Marguerite de Champlain.

Our observations

Like all other support and safe houses in Quebec, we are currently in a grim situation. Every year, many women who ask for shelter in our facility are turned away. A total of **434 women** had to be referred to other facilities because we did not have space for them, because we were unable to provide temporary accommodation for unattached women, or because they were living within the security perimeter. Those women were victims of spousal or family violence and sometimes even institutional abuse. They were in precarious, vulnerable situations, and they were at risk of becoming homeless.

We also note that women receiving shelter are staying longer in safe houses, because their situation is more complex and requires more attention. We should point out that about 20% of women receiving shelter are recent immigrants and that in some cases, their devictimization process is complicated by their immigration status. In addition, many residents have trouble finding an apartment because they do not have the financial resources and have to wait for an affordable housing unit to become available.

In fact, across the entire range of services we offer (crisis line, shelter, emergency meetings, external follow-up, etc.), we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of requests for assistance and services over the past five years. Meanwhile, we should point out, there have been hardly any increases in our funding from the provincial **Programme de soutien des organismes communautaires** [community organization support program] to offset inflation over the years. Since 2004, we have seen the shortfall climb to about \$200,000. Our facility's financial situation is being compromised by the choices being made by decision-makers, which has led to restructuring of our services, forcing us to make cuts and even reduce some external services. As a result, we are unable to improve our range of shelter services. Our federal funding, from the **Community Action Program for Children**, has been

increased to account for inflation only once since 1995. Over the years, that has forced us to make significant cuts in family intervention hours under our external services program.

Recommendations

Our safe house is in dire need of more funding for its core mission in order to maintain and even enhance our current range of services. For example, a significant increase in our funding would enable us to provide more external services. We would be able to provide one-on-one follow-up or more support and awareness groups for women who are not receiving shelter.

We could expand our safe house if we received substantial funding to establish a planning, development and implementation process. We could consider adding a third floor to the current building, which would give us three or four more rooms. To do that, we require funding for the strategic planning, conceptualization and tendering phase and the construction phase, and we would need to be assured of recurring funding to hire more caseworkers and maintenance staff.

We also recommend creating a new second-stage facility in Longueuil. It would be a secure, supervised apartment building where women with high security needs could live for up to one year. They would receive assistance and support while waiting for a municipal public housing unit. This project should be coordinated with the community.

Another recommendation would be to set up a medium-term shelter facility for unattached women who have addiction or mental health problems or are at risk of becoming homeless. Supervised apartment buildings managed by an existing community organization would be a vital addition in the Agglomération de Longueuil. We are currently on a committee of the Table itinérance Rive-sud with various community and institutional partners with the goal of ensuring that this critical project is carried out.

Lastly, we believe it is important to increase the number of social housing units available to women affected by spousal violence. The needs – for affordable housing, housing cooperatives, non-profit housing organizations, or rent supplement programs – are acute in the Agglomération de Longueuil.

Thank you for listening to our analysis and recommendations.

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