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Submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women: November 2018

Comox Valley Transition Society (CVTS) has been in existence since 1987. CVTS operates a spectrum of services for women escaping violence, women recovering from addiction, and women who are homeless and/or living in deep poverty. These services include Lilli House, a 14 bed transition house.

We are pleased to submit the following comments to the Committee.

As the crisis of homelessness has grown, transition houses have had to expand their mandates and lower barriers to admission in order to accommodate growing numbers of women who are homeless and living with addictions and/or mental health challenges. While these women are not necessarily fleeing violent relationships, there is no question that they are at risk and transition houses have responded. Addressing the need for more homeless shelter spaces that are dedicated to supporting homeless women with more complex needs who are not fleeing violence would assist transition houses to focus support on those women who are fleeing violence.

Our transition house, like many others, was opened in the early 1990's. Like many others, we are experiencing a gap between the physical layout of the house, with a high percentage of single rooms, and the need for family spaces. Given the mix of residents at any given time, ranging from mothers with children to women who have been living on the streets, and the inherent challenges of communal living, it would be helpful to have areas of the house where a family could perhaps have a small common room and a separate washroom. This would involve renovations that are beyond the capacity of an organization like ours without dedicated funding for that purpose.

We would like to see the reinstatement of the Shelter Enhancement Program, which provided funding over several years for renovations and updates to support accessibility, safety, and the soundness of the physical structure. Transition houses experience a great deal of wear and tear and need regular maintenance, as well as more expensive items such as a new roof or a new septic system. This is important, not just to keep up the integrity of the building but also to provide women and children, at some of the worst points in their lives, with a residence that conveys the message that they are important and deserving of comfort in a well maintained home.



It cannot be emphasized enough that the lack of housing has had a huge impact on women and their children who are experiencing violence. Over the last decade in particular, our transition house, like many others, has seen women staying for increasing lengths of time as they are unable to find housing. The result is that beds are always full and we are unable to bring in many women who are currently in crisis. Because of the desperation to find housing, some of our residents take rentals that are unsafe or unsuitable and end up back in our transition house, resulting in further blockages in the system. We probably have enough beds to serve our community; the lack of housing causes us to turn women away.

The following are some of the situations we have recently witnessed in our transition house. These are common situations. Our staff are doing the best they can but we are at the crisis stage.

- Woman unable to find housing suitable for a child that is affordable
- Woman has no credit or references
- Woman with PTSD as a result of violent relationship who is unable to share housing with others
- Woman with two teenagers and two toddlers unable to find anything affordable
- Woman with three children and currently pregnant unable to find anything affordable
- Young woman who hasn't rented before and has no references
- Woman who has a difficult time setting boundaries with visitors who sabotage her rental
- Woman whose child is in foster care as a result of violence in the relationship. Child won't be returned until she has suitable housing.

Increasing federal investment in housing would support transition houses. We are desperate for housing, particularly Second Stage housing for women and children leaving the transition house, where they would have an opportunity to continue to receive support while rebuilding their lives, thus freeing up the transition house to take in women currently in crisis. This would save lives.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Ney, Executive Director

