



BRIEF TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND WOMEN/CHILDREN AFFECTED BY VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

VLMFSS is an organization established to enable racialized¹ women access transition houses and other services and programs. Since its inception in 1991, VLMFSS has served nearly 50,000 racialized women and children who face the challenges of intimate partner violence and/or familial² abuse. We provide culturally responsive services in more than 24 languages. We work alongside various housing arrangements including transition houses, second stage housing, affordable housing and BC housing priority placement to assist the women and children flee abusive relationships to a life of non-violence. We face several challenges in facilitating safety into the lives of the survivors of various forms of violence.

Our mandate enables us to assist women across the Metro Vancouver and work with them in determining safe and respectful pathways: fleeing abusive relationship and accessing transition house and eventually to a safe and affordable place. Our agency provides information and resources in English and languages other than English so women can explore the various alternatives they have when they leave the abusive relationship. Great strides have been made in increasing the awareness in various ethnic communities about domestic violence. Despite our best efforts to assist women who decide to leave abusive relationships and access a transition house, several challenges arise such as long waitlists in transition houses. Single women are initially allowed to stay for 15 days and then the stay is increased depending upon their participation in the program. The average wait times range from six months to a year. Once accepted in a transition house, a woman has 30 days to make complex decisions, e.g. reporting to the police, applying for income assistance, navigate police, legal system, BC Housing, among others. Women who are lucky to find a space in a second stage housing, have one year to put their lives together and are able to cope better. Failing this, they are forced to find housing in the market where the rents are exorbitant which the women cannot afford. They have few options: settle for an undesirable living space, utilise all their resources towards rent facing near starvation or return to the abusive relationship. Women with children tend to choose the last option. During this period, women apply to BC housing but the waitlist is long, approximately 5 years or more, even with priority placement.³ BC Housing provides funding for Rental supplements, a maximum of \$450 for about 20 women a month for a maximum period of 12 months and extended only in exceptions.⁴

This funding is extremely useful in helping women who are at risk of becoming homeless, because they cannot afford the rental costs. Moreover, women with disability and health problems find it difficult to find gainful employment to enable them to become self-reliant after 2 years. The physical and emotional impact of domestic violence take several years before they

heal and allow women to move on with their lives as research indicates that trauma resulting from intimate partner/familial violence manifest in stages over time. In the last 3 months, we have assisted 136 women to obtain some form of shelter ranging from a transition house to affordable housing with minimal success.⁵

Some figures from the BC Non-Profit Housing Association & M. Thompson Consulting (2017, see table 3)⁶ show that 81 have been turned away from Transition Houses and 250 turned away from shelters. Table 34/35: Homelessness is 59% (2138) in Vancouver, and 17% (602) in Surrey. 2573 have been sheltered while 1032 are unsheltered.

Homelessness has increased between 2014 -2017 as follows: Delta/White Rock (142%), Langley (124%), Richmond (84%), Tri Cities (113%), Surrey (49%), New Westminister (25%), Burnaby (19%), and Vancouver (19%). Homelessness for seniors is 49% in Vancouver and 23% in Surrey (Table 38).⁷

As the preceding study indicates, there is a growing shortage of affordable housing. The gap is glaring for women with multiple barriers and those facing domestic violence as the choice is limited.

There needs to be systemic resources to help women move away from unsafe situations. This requires a continuum of services especially living accommodations from transition housing to permanent affordable housing. This ensures safety and security for women and children fleeing violence. Some examples include converting schools that are closing down due to lack of enrollment to affordable living spaces and rent to own housing where women could own the house over a period of 20 – 25 years through rental payments.

¹ Racialized women are women who experience the process of racialization. Fanon (1963, 1967) established links between the structure of colonialism and aspects of psychology. He claimed that the process of racialization affects the human body and the psyche, i.e., violence and psychological disturbance.

Banton (1977) and Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) articulate that racialization is a process derived from the concept of “race” used by the French and British in the beginning of the 16th century to denote lineage or line of descent, e.g., Gauls as indigenous French and Saxons as indigenous British. This belief that humans belong to races was an invention of Anglo-Saxon Protestant West spread to their places of conquest and influence.

² familial abuse include violence/abuse by siblings and members of the extended family such as in-laws, uncles, cousins, etc.

DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, S. D. (1998). *Women abuse on campus; Results from the Canadian National Survey*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

³VLMFSS Semi-Annual Narrative Reports submitted to the BC Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. (2016, 2017).

^{4&5}<https://www.bchousing.org/housing-assistance/homelessness-services/homeless-prevention-program>

B.C. Non-Profit Housing Association and M. Thomson Consulting. (2017). 2017 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver. Prepared for the Metro Vancouver Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Entity. Burnaby, BC: Metro Vancouver.

<http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/regionalplanning/homelessness/resources/Pages/default.asp>

^{6&7}Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver. 2017. Prepared for the Metro Vancouver Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Entity. Burnaby, BC: Metro Vancouver.