

VAW & Homelessness

There is an undeniable overlap between the VAW sector and homelessness one feeds into the other and vice versa. Each day when VAW shelters across the country are forced to turn away women and children due to capacity issues those women and children fall into the homelessness stream / shelter systems. Unfortunately the severe underfunding of the homelessness shelter systems most often reliant on municipal funding and functioning from a housing first model means these women and children never receive the counselling and services they are entitled to and would benefit from. I would argue that this lack of interventions perpetuates the cycle of violence continuing as there is lack of intervention and counselling to address the abuse that has taken place, placing the family at greater likelihood of repeating the cycle and not successfully re-establishing independently, free from abuse.

The other reality is that VAW shelters providing limited stays in communities where there is lack of safe affordable housing push women out of the VAW system and into the Homelessness stream if they cannot achieve their goal of securing safe affordable housing in the allotted time.

Speaking to the Homelessness stream, women have often advised that their homelessness is cause for them to be in abusive relationships, having to make the decision to select one abuser to live with rather than the many abusers they will face if forced into a position of absolute homelessness and into the streets.

We can no longer pretend that there is not a correlation and definitive overlap between these VAW and Homelessness sectors, to do so is to be irresponsible and deny all women the right to adequate services. The funding provisions to the homelessness sector helps to create this unnatural divide for fear that the funding could be effected. There should not be a distinction in women so as to treat homeless women as second class citizens within the shelter systems. If you need to have a visual of the difference in level of service the Community of Windsor Ontario invites you to witness the distinction of difference between VAW and homelessness for women where they consistently have to defer abused women and their children to the homeless shelter due to capacity issues.

In such communities where there is an utter lack of affordable housing women are pressed to make the decision between choosing substandard housing, unaffordable housing or in many cases a return home to the abuse due to the lack of ability to find safe affordable housing. More housing is needed desperately, and if this is not possible then an allotment to afford the housing that is available is needed.

How do you Strengthen Shelter Services?

By having Strong Shelter networks. There is a necessity due to the vastness of our country for provincial shelter associations help to collaborate efforts of the shelters from across the province, they are hubs of information and training, in the provinces where there are research centres of excellence such as (RESOLVE, Muriel McQueen, Learning Network, FREDA etc.) they build ties that speak volumes to the collective work that can be done and the trainings that can be taken

by frontline staff of shelters to build their knowledge and expertise. The biggest hardship for these associations and provincial organizations is that they are not funded and depend on membership to survive in most cases - this taps into the already underfunded shelters to pay to belong. This cost, oft times being too high for smaller shelters to budget. Those shelters in the most distant and rural places being left behind. When access to information that strengthens the services are limited, abused women and their children are the ones that suffer. Provincial Shelter Associations need to be funded. As part of their budgets annual conferences should be a part of the consideration allowing shelters to collectively gather for information sharing, learning, training and development

A stronger network leads to a reduction in need for funds from the government, as they create a more efficient use of services, knowledge sharing, hubs of learning and training building on collaborative work, they connect and bring together across barriers and distances where shared experiences inform the work and create best practices. A strong network of women's shelters, and transitions houses is vital to the provision of strong informed, supported services for women and children across Canada.

There is great potential of Provincial Shelter Associations to do even more if funded appropriately to do so. Now envision what this collaborative work might look like, under the leadership of an already strong Canadian Women's Shelter Network's - witness their website and what they have managed to accomplish. This coordinated with the various research centres and there just might be an end to violence against women in our future.

In contrast if we continue down the path of not adequately addressing the issue front and centre with the backing and support that is so desperately needed. The casualties on this war on women will continue to rise. In 2017 we were able to say that 1 woman is killed every 6 days by her partner, this is not so in 2018 the number is now a woman is killed ever other day

<https://thebigstorypodcast.ca/2018/09/18/femicide-statistics-rate-canada-definition/>

https://sjwomenscentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CFOJA-REPORT_4-MONTH.pdf

How are we going to soldier on?

In summary there needs to be an increase to capacity for VAW shelters forced to turn away women and their children. There needs to be a total revamping of the homelessness shelter systems to be on par for services to the women and children they serve so that they are adequately cared for; as mentioned this is where women and children are deferred to when turned away by the VAW shelters and the overlap is undeniable between the two sectors. Strengthen Provincial Shelter Associations by funding them to be the cohesive glue of the shelters. Finally create more safe, affordable housing and if unable to do so immediately moment then provide allotments that will allow women to obtain the available safe housing that is not affordable to them.