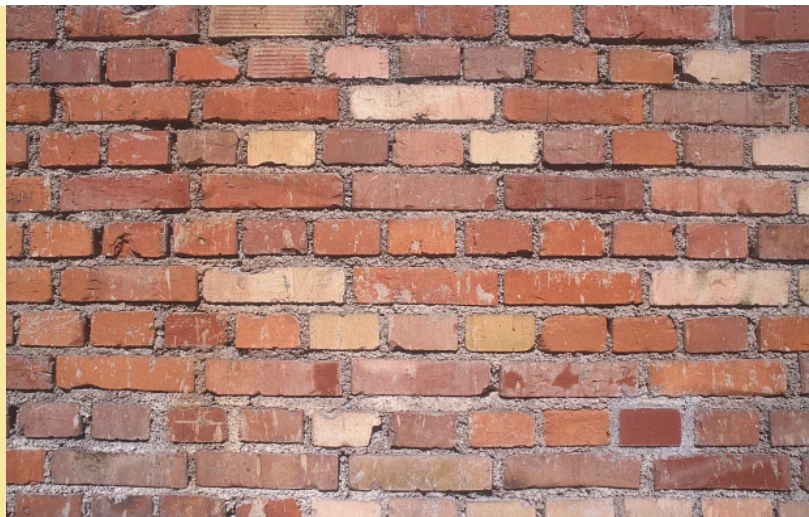




PHASE III PROJECT

BEYOND SHELTER WALLS



DISCUSSION PAPER
NO MORE RUNNING IN CIRCLES



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THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVE, THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY CANADA. WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL FOR THEIR SUPPORT, WITHOUT WHICH CONDUCTING THIS RESEARCH WOULD SIMPLY NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE

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THE CHALLENGE

About 73 women a year die in Canada at the hands of their intimate partners – the men they expect to love and trust. But this is only a very small part of the story of violence against women in Canada.

The fact that one-half of Canadian women experience violence over their lifespan by men known to them and that one-quarter report violence by a stranger means that the rest of the story must also include a frank admission that violence is a normative aspect of being female in Canada (Statistics Canada June 1994). The evidence shows us that it is perfectly ordinary for Canadian women to have this experience, yet honest appraisal of that evidence is potentially deeply disturbing and consequently difficult to come by. The widely agreed upon definition of violence against women sees it as both underlying and perpetuating women's inequality (U.N. 1993). Many women experiencing abuse do not seek help or come to the attention of service providers. Specific factors for this include limited and inconsistent public awareness and outreach activities; lack of a consistent approach to identifying woman abuse, including women themselves not acknowledging that they are being abused; lack of general awareness of existing services; limited or no services in some parts of the country; lack of culturally sensitive services and outreach initiatives, and overarching barriers such as those specifically addressed in this paper (Alcalde & Caragata 2007). As few as 10% of those Canadian women who are abused access shelter, yet these facilities are full nightly across Canada. While some statistical evidence exists that rates of spousal homicide and criminal acts of spousal violence against women committed within five years of Statistics Canada's survey date are steady or on the decline (June 2007), the lifetime rates of violence against women remain high. At the level of public policy, confronting this requires a willingness to consider doing things differently.

Violence against women is the cause of what some have called "homelessness at home" (Novac 2006), a crisis of housed displacement and lost potential that collectively adds up to a reality of gender inequality borne individually by millions of Canadian women from behind closed doors. It is also increasingly recognized to be a significant contributing factor in Canada's rising crisis of homelessness, as women choose literal homelessness in order to live free from coercion and violence (Dale 2007; Novac 2006). Institutional responses to violence against women reveal a value-based orientation masked by bureaucratic equality. It shows that we view women who are abused as unlike other victims of crime: they are not innocent, but culpable in their situations. They must, therefore, "take responsibility" to be deserving of society's support. This attitude shows itself in the individual attitudes of those gate-keeping women's access to the social safety net, and is structured directly into the criteria and regulations that govern institutional mandates. Our policy and service responses are premised on punitive disincentives for

women unable to pick up the pieces after their homes have been fractured by a form of violence endemic to our social fabric. Violence is not a one-time event, and shelters, however critical an emergency response, are not the only answer to the problem. Yet everything about how and with what we respond to violence in the lives of Canadian women ignores these truths.

In preparation for this discussion paper, YWCA Canada's Beyond Shelter Walls project heard from service providers, women in shelters, women eking out survival after shelter, and women cycling in and out of shelter over their lifetimes. In the words of one woman struggling to put her life back together after ending her second significant long-term relationship with an abusive man, "We are Canada's dirty little secret." Low-income women, in particular, report finding more understanding of their real life struggles to raise children, hold down low-paying jobs and build a new future back in the arms of their abusive spouse, than, despite the best of intentions, in the ambivalent embrace of the Canadian social safety net. This "safety net" has them, in their own words, "running in circles."

For women, Canada is a paradoxical paradise. Canadians are beneficiaries of a history rich in women's activism and policy reform, and Canadians have, if not the best, certainly among the most enviable formal gender equality frameworks in the world. At the same time, the success of the struggle to institutionalize women's equality as well as the social services that are intended to mitigate their continued inequality has brought with it a false sense of accomplishment (Denham & Gillespie 1999). Despite huge strides, the job is not yet done. From an original framework intended to eliminate the social conditions that produce violence against women, this project has revealed that many active in antiviolence work are now forced to fit in with service frameworks that reward and punish the women who turn to them, based on predetermined behaviour and success indicators. Individual "success" for women experiencing violence is measured by finite outcomes unrealistic to the complexity of what we know about this type of violence. Additionally, they are outcomes unattainable in the real world of rising poverty, low wages, unavailable housing, and non-existent childcare. The required results reveal that policy is driving the solutions in women's lives, rather than women's lives driving policy solutions. In the words of a woman in the north: "We want to get our heads above water, and we want to do better, but the expectations are too high."

"Beyond Shelter Walls" is a discussion paper on just that: the policy solutions *beyond shelters* that need to take place to provide alternatives to intimate violence. Shelters are discussed in this context because they are the lynch-pin, the centre of a response system that assumes shelters are stable and functioning. This confidence is misplaced; shelters have not been sufficiently funded to keep pace with the collapse of the broad service array that was intended to support their emergency intervention. The review of literature carried out for "Beyond Shelter Walls" revealed a trail of reports documenting both the

success and puzzling demise of second-stage or transitional housing that formed the bridge between shelter and permanent housing (CPR 1997; Cerrie 2004; CERA 2002; Cross 2007; Denham & Gillespie 1999). It was not possible to find a single public report that recommended the cancellation of these programs, and yet this, without fail, is what has happened across Canada (see page 28 for a further discussion of these issues in relation to shelters).

YWCA Canada's cross-country focus groups held to inform this paper show clearly that if we are to move to the next level of policy reform in relation to violence against women in Canada, we have to rethink the very way we think about the issue. It will require reorientation of expected outcomes, as well as substantial and sustained coordination of effort at all levels of government. Some immediate and concrete measures could be taken by the federal government that would have a significant impact. It is hoped that the policy discussions scheduled to take place across the country will determine these within a framework of policy changes.

BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

“Beyond Shelter Walls: System Change, Best Practices and Policy Initiatives to Address Violence Against Women in Canada” is Phase III of a proposed four phase initiative. In Phase I, our examination of emergency-shelter provision to women across the country recommended that a study be undertaken based on women’s direct experiences and interactions with the shelter system (Tutty, L., Goard, C. 2003).

Phase II of the project, completed in June 2006, was an extensive research study that looked specifically at the needs of close to 400 women coming to shelter. This study discovered that a shocking number of women who come to shelter are at high risk of being murdered by their partners, as measured by standardized lethality tests. While shelter stays were crucial to short term survival, the gains of shelter were offset by barriers upon leaving shelter. The Phase II study recommended exploring solutions to these barriers for women by looking at social policy and practice across jurisdictions and sectors, in an integrated, national framework (Tutty 2006).

The overarching goal of the third phase of “Beyond Shelter Walls” is to stimulate the conditions necessary to reduce the likelihood that women who have experienced abuse (and their children) will cycle back into a perpetual spiral of violence and vulnerability. This includes developing recommendations for systemic changes to create the means and conditions for women to more easily and effectively access housing, income, employment and training, child care, health care and legal protection beyond the shelter walls.

“Beyond Shelter Walls” is overseen by both external and internal advisory groups (listed in Appendix A). It has produced a literature review focused on the existing state of research regarding women and homelessness and violence, and a sample of the various recommendations that have been developed in previous reports (Dale 2007).

This discussion paper follows the Literature Review and reflects the results of a series of focus groups held in four regions of Canada: east (Halifax, Nova Scotia and Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island); north (Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, drawing from Nunavut and the smaller communities); West (Kamloops, British Columbia) and central (Toronto, Ontario). To see a list of representatives in the focus groups across the country, see Appendix B. Sessions were held separately for women who were recruited as violence survivors with firsthand experience accessing violence against women services, and those recruited through their professional affiliation with the issue. The statistics on violence against women being what they are, it is likely that there were women who could fit into both categories of affiliation with the issue. In some cases, this was expressly addressed by session participants, such as women who worked in services

identifying their experience as survivors of abuse, and among those using services, as former or current employees of services.

The literature review revealed a need to explore the growing link between violence and homelessness, enquire into other areas of policy development, such as income supports, child welfare practices, housing priority systems, criminal justice responses, and to probe the needs of women with addiction issues or histories of mental health issues and formal psychiatric involvement. The questions –reflecting the above areas of focus—were sent out to the parties in advance, and local coordinating teams (usually through the local YWCA member association) were in charge of choosing the participants best able to represent the various perspectives that might be brought to bear on need, best practices, successes, and strategies in keeping with the goals of the project (see project outlines and agendas circulated to participants in advance of the sessions, Appendix C).

The locations were chosen for their capacity to host such a focus group combined with their ability to represent outstanding aspects of the statistical profile of violence against women in Canada (highest incident rates, the north; sharpest drop in rates over 11 years, P.E.I.: Statistics Canada 2007). In addition, variety in city size and provincial policy frameworks were sought, and experience with violence against women and homelessness were essential.

As the research was exploratory in nature, timelines, agendas and question formats were set in advance but not rigid. Time was always left for spontaneous discussion of particular local or regional issues and, since building collaboration is an express goal of the project, time for sharing practices the project team had already gathered from other parts of Canada was also an important part of the focus groups. Notes were taken at each session by the YWCA Canada National Projects Coordinator, Lillia Dahmani. The sessions were facilitated by the lead researcher, Amanda Dale. Notes were assembled at the end of each day, and themes emerged through a thorough reading and highlighting of common themes and issues. As far as possible, exact wording used by session participants was preserved, and transferred into the discussion item section below.

Additional individual interviews were conducted by telephone with the same questions, targeting those individuals and/or regions that we were not able to incorporate into the regional itinerary, including Quebec (see Appendix B). This methodology mirrors steps taken in similar surveys and exploratory investigations (Novac et al. 2006). This paper reflects the findings of the regional focus groups in dialogue with the literature review. It is intended to provoke discussion at future regional consultations and, at a later stage of the project, stimulate a set of policy recommendations in the form of a policy platform paper. Members of the regional consultation groups are yet to be determined, but will include champions, leaders and policy analysts knowledgeable about violence against women.

GOALS

The principal goals of the Phase III project as a whole can be summarized as follows:

- The development and promotion of cross-sectoral collaboration to reduce violence against women.
- Influencing the development of legislative and socio-legal reforms that can play a role in fixing the gaps in policy and practice that keep women and their children at varying degrees of risk from jurisdiction to jurisdiction across Canada.

FOCUS GROUP GOAL

The overall goal of the focus groups was shared with participants, and can be summarized as follows:

- To gather from service providers, advocates and women who have experienced violence and or homelessness, a compilation of recommendations, best practices, policy changes and innovative service ideas that will contribute to the project goals (above). These will primarily be in the areas of but are not restricted to:
 - Income Support
 - Housing: long, medium and short term
 - Other sorts of supports (counselling, outreach, health, training)
 - Safety & Security (may be an element throughout the others)
 - Best Practices (coordination, memoranda of agreement, protocols)
 - Innovations
 - Advocacy campaigns
 - Regional best practices

DISCUSSION PAPER GOALS

The overall goal of this paper can be summarized as follows:

- To summarize the findings of the project to date gathered through the means outlined above, and to present these findings in a format that will provoke discussion, rethinking and reflection at both a macro and a micro level among policy makers, service providers and others on the issue of violence against women in a national context.
- To contribute to the development of a new policy framework for addressing violence against women in Canada.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

As referred to above, the items identified for further exploration in future considerations of violence against women policy and service provision were framed by the evidence of the literature review and tested through focus group discussions held in four regions of Canada. They have been identified through a process of critical reflection, combining the material generated through the focus groups and the evidence of trends revealed through the literature review. The themes chosen summarize categories of experience named by both women actively attempting to live lives free from violence and those providing the services that assist them in doing so. Where there is a difference of perception in these matters, both accounts are represented for the purposes of further debate and discussion at the regional consultations. In summarizing current recommendations tabled for discussion, this paper relied on the following primary sources, referenced fully in the bibliography: Judie Bopp et al, *Being Homeless is Getting to Be Normal* (2006); Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, *Women and Housing in Canada* (2002); Jeffry Griffith's 1999 *Review of the Investigation of Sexual Assaults: Toronto Police Services* and his 2004 follow-up review, the October 2007 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari; the 2006 and 2007 *Pink Books* of the Liberal Women's Caucus; Deb Matthews' 2004 *Review of Employment Assistance Programs in Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Program*; *The Housing Crisis and Violence* by the Pauktuuit Inuit Women's Association (1994); Leslie Tutty's 2003 and 2006 YWCA reports on *Effective Practices in Sheltering Women Leaving Violence in Intimate Relationships*; and, *Platform Statements* of the Women's Housing Advocacy Group 1993. Other literature is cited in text.

CYCLES OF ABUSE AND HOMELESSNESS

What the literature review said

The Beyond Shelter Walls project literature review documented an emerging link between childhood histories of sexual abuse and assault and homelessness in adulthood. In addition, involvement in the child welfare system links strongly with homelessness in adulthood, particularly for young mothers. Homelessness itself is strongly associated with elevated rates of violence, including shocking levels of rape, particularly endemic to the experiences of chronically homeless women with mental health issues. According to one study, homeless women die at 10 times the rate of women in the general population and at the same rate as young homeless men. Most homeless women die from AIDS, drugs, alcohol abuse or suicide (Cheung and Hwang 2004).

Mental health issues among women are strongly linked to life time experiences of violence. In addition, 50% of women across Canada leaving shelters specifically set up to

address partner assault, left the safety of the shelter to go to unsafe, unstable or unknown circumstances. Fully 12% declared they were returning to the abusive spouse, 12% went to family or friends, and the destination of 25% was unknown (Novac 2006, 21). Despite the fact that an estimated 7,500 women and their children stayed in shelters across Canada on a snapshot day in 2006 (Statistics Canada June 2007), they are believed to constitute only 10% of those who are abused at any given time (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics June 2007). Because lifetime rates of violence for women in Canada stand at an estimated 51% by the age of 16 (Statistics Canada June 1993), we can conclude that the problem of violence in the lives of Canadian women remains largely unaddressed by services, overburdened and effective though they are. The minority of abused women who do seek shelter are known to be among those at highest risk for the most severe forms of violence, including murder (Tutty, L., Goard, C., 2003; Novac 2006). Patterns of violence against women show younger women under 25 to be at greatest risk for criminal harassment and sexual assault. Lifetime rates show one quarter of all women had experienced violence at the hands of a current or past marital partner, while the most recent measure of spousal assault occurring within the last five years shows lower rates, at about 7% (Dale 2007).

What the service providers said

“Women don’t want to leave their partners; they just want the violence to stop.” This statement by a participant in the Toronto service providers’ focus group could summarize the overarching observations of focus group participants across the country on the cycles of abuse and homelessness. Service providers found that women will lie to them about returning to their abusive spouse so as to present what they believe to be the outcome favoured by the service provider. No contact rules (between victim and abuser) inherent in some service paradigms were noted by many service providers to be unrealistic to the point of absurdity, particularly in housing, where the price for non-compliance can result directly in homelessness. It was noted that in the Toronto Tent City follow-up study, high rates of violence existed within the couples who had been alternatively housed at the dismantling of the Tent City experiment. However, because the re-housing was done through individual rent supplements, with attached supports, women who wanted to remain in relationship with abusive partners were able to maintain a separate residence, and thereby have more control over the frequency and type of contact. In Halifax, shelter workers point to a cycling of women through the shelter, returning with the same or different partners, and in some cases, over generations, women of the same family repeating the cycle of abuse and homelessness at the same shelter. In the north, a service provider estimated that the depth of the social problems in the northern context—the histories of violence and abuse, the current rates of violence and abuse in all the small communities, colonial acculturation, lack of affordable housing, persistent addictions, lack of employability, huge geographic challenges to gaining safety—mean that as few as 1% of the women who come into shelter are able to move on to healthier relationships.

What the participants said

While always careful to state their gratitude and thankfulness for the protection and support of the services they have accessed, a deeper level of conversation with women in the focus groups revealed a reluctantly exposed pattern of rules, regulations and social control in shelters that unwittingly repeated for women the “imprisoned” feeling of being back with the abuser. As one woman in Halifax put it “It feels like a prison—like my husband— because of the rules and the chores.”

Women in one shelter in the east described a range of situations in their assessment of what was next for them. “Jocelyn” feels she is simply in a “time out” from her episodically abusive partner, and that she and her partner are allies battling poverty and child welfare to be able to raise their children. She would like to reunite with her partner but is unable to repay the arrears she has accumulated (due to a funeral for her father she attended during work hours at her previous job, for which they fired her) on her previous apartment. A punitive income support system sees her lack of income as her “fault” for being fired, and therefore she is accruing debt with them for using their support as she tries to dig her way out of her circumstance. She did not get enough weeks of work to qualify for Employment Insurance. In addition, there is no affordable housing large enough to accommodate her, her husband and their five children.

“Tatiana” speaks of her isolation as an immigrant woman with English as her second language in a small east coast community. She decries the absence of relevant information on violence against women or women’s rights in the immigration package that she was given upon coming into Canada. She says it took her eight years of severe abuse toward her and her daughter before she came across any place to help her. And help only came as a result of her husband kicking her out of the house with nowhere to go in the middle of winter, with no belongings and not enough clothing. She was in a smaller community in Nova Scotia where there was no shelter. When she refused to leave an income support office where she had been told her there was nothing they could do for her, she was eventually told there was a number she could call to ask if there were any shelters in the area. She eventually found that there was a shelter in Halifax, to which she and her daughter hitchhiked.

“Brenda” was in a relationship with a man of means who became progressively more possessive and abusive and cut her off from family and friends. They shared an addiction she is now trying to beat, but there are no women-only addiction programs in her city (Halifax). She had given up her job when her relationship began, as her husband had the means to support them both. In her view, the cycle of abuse is simple: “When you hit a wall, you end up going back to the abusive partner.”

“Adeena” in the west told us: “I was abused from my parents. My whole life I was abused. I was married at the age of nine. [My husband] started following and stalking my older daughter. If, according to him, she did something wrong, he would say ‘she is your daughter’, and he beat me up. One day my oldest daughter put on lipstick, and he beat us all up.”

As one woman in the west put it at the conclusion of the story of her terrible treatment within the criminal system, “When you see how the system works, you understand why women go back to their abusive partner.”

While careful to tell us that the shelter had saved her life, one woman told us that the issues are too complex for most shelter workers to keep track of along with their job as counsellors: “When you are in a shelter, you have no idea what your rights are. Shelters are not knowledgeable about the court system, the law. You are just running in circles to get yourself standing.”

Proposed solutions to discuss

- Adjusting (service models and therefore) funder/outcome targets to reflect the cyclical nature of violence against women.

Some suggestions:

- Adjust eligibility criteria for EI to catch women on their way down BEFORE they hit bottom (see Income Support below)
- Institute Women’s Advocates (not lawyers) unaffiliated with any particular shelter but, on the model of the Hostel Outreach Program for homeless women in Toronto (CRC), a community-based advocate who can follow women from service to service as a door-opener, with specialized knowledge.
- Ensure charter rights and equality provisions for women are included in immigration packages and that public legal education in plain language offers practical steps to be taken if these rights are violated in marriage or at work.

MENTAL HEALTH & ADDICTIONS

What the literature review said

In a context of generally poor health outcomes for homeless women (Khandor & Mason 2007; Witzman 2006), the convergence of mental health and addiction issues with homelessness is now generally seen to be legitimate fodder for health research and policy response, although definitions of terms are still inconsistent from report to report (CPHI 2007). There are clear patterns of homelessness and mental health issues for women, and these are strongly linked with childhood sexual abuse, rape in adulthood and other forms of violence against women. In some cases violence against women is seen to be etiological to homelessness—chronic or episodic—as well as to involvement in the psychiatric system. In other approaches, mental illness is seen as the precipitating event to a lifetime struggle with homelessness and subsequent vulnerability to violence. Addictions have been increasingly linked with this nexus of issues, increasing the complexity of associated variables and complicating the range of service responses required. At the same time, a separate body of knowledge has advanced about the needs of women for whom the “battered women’s” shelters were intended. In this literature there is a reluctance to be associated with the stigmatized world of addictions and mental health, arguing instead that the desire to group these issues obfuscates the clear responsibility for assisting women whose only need is to be fully protected by the law, and given access to reasonable and sustainable means for building lives free from violence.

There is data that shows a significant overlap of populations between homeless shelters (where the majority of women are actually escaping immediate partner assault) and so called assaulted women’s shelters (where women with core addiction and mental health issues are now also seeking support). It is also the case that the literature shows many women’s shelters do an uneven job of accommodating and accepting women with mental health and addiction issues.

On the one hand, this can be principally seen in the context of massive closures of psychiatric facilities as well as cuts to income support programs and other services and the resulting deepening of poverty and associated living difficulties into the assaulted women’s shelter sector, where previously more straightforward cases of domestic violence might have been the norm. On the other hand, there seems also to be an attitudinal barrier in some violence against women’s services that categorizes women who exhibit challenging behaviours after a lifetime of psychiatric intervention, severe abuse and street involvement as abusive themselves, rather than as women who are exhibiting maladaptations to the abuse they have survived.

What the service providers said

Service providers in the homelessness sector expressed frustration with the barriers their participants face when accessing violence against women's services. Violence against women service providers expressed frustration that women in their services are forced to witness challenging, bizarre and at times violent behaviours in the very place they have come for refuge from abuse. In some cases, these more complex histories are sufficient to bar women access to violence against women shelters. In one focus group a service provider stated simply: "We can't take addicted women." In the north, addictions were identified as the number one barrier to women moving out of the cycle of violence, its dynamics were cited in the following way: "Women come to the shelter intoxicated and seeking help with their crisis. When they are sober, they no longer think about their futures, they only think about their next fix". Service-providers from all regions were very clear about the need for gender-specific detoxification beds and addictions programs that integrate the realities and dynamics of violence against women.

What the participants said

Echoing the service providers, some women in each of the regional focus groups spoke passionately of the need for appropriate addiction counselling services. Elizabeth in the west told us, "I wanted to stay in that relationship even though I was getting beaten—but it was the only thing I knew. He used to call me a monster in front of the kids, and so I backed off [trying to defend myself]. I started using drugs, and ended up being a hard core drug addict." She went on to let us know clearly that she does not see the level of compassion or understanding for the effects and reasons for addictions that she expects from those who are in the services intended to assist women to move on from violence, services where she herself has been working in a maintenance capacity: "There are drug addicts behind the building, in the alley. It hurts when I see my coworkers kick them out. I was part of them. People need to understand what is going on. I am clean today and hope I will be for the rest of my life. There is no compassion. We are living in fear."

In the north, an Inuit woman named "Darlene" told us that even though she herself does not have a problem with alcohol or drugs, she comes from a family and community where these things are endemic: "We need treatment for abused families, for alcohol and drugs too. You reach out for help and you wind up the victim. They take away your kids and don't help you."

Proposed solutions to discuss

- Host a national forum to share new approaches to sheltering women, including integrating specialized addictions, immigration and trauma counselling into generalized VAW services.
- Engage provincial health ministries and local health departments in devising solutions to the intersections of violence against women, health, mental health and addictions and homelessness.
- Host a national forum to allow key stakeholders to meet and discuss common purposes and mandates with respect to women, abuse and housing.

CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES, CUSTODY AND ACCESS & CHILDCARE

What the literature review said

Where child protection authorities assist and support an assaulted woman in making choices in her life that can remove her and the children from the abuser, they can play an important and positive role. However, where the role of child protection authorities becomes punitive, i.e. “you must leave this man or we will take away your children because you are failing to protect them from harm.”, they acts as part of a pattern of disincentives for women to disclose abuse in the first place (Cross 2001). Perhaps the biggest contradiction is between the attitudes toward woman abuse in child protection and in family law. As set out above, in most jurisdictions, witnessing abuse and violence is now considered, to be a child protection issue and in some circumstances, is enough reason to involve child welfare. However, this attitude still does not apply when it comes to custody and access. Except in Ontario, there is no requirement that judges consider abuse of the mother by the father in making determinations with respect to custody and access. Alberta’s *Family Law Act* requires the court to take family violence into account, but doesn’t specify abuse by the father of the mother. It includes any family violence that took place in the household.

Many judges suffer from the misapprehension that if it is “only” the mother who is being abused, there are no negative inferences to be drawn about the father’s appropriateness as a caregiver. As a result, a father who has been abusive to his partner will likely be granted unsupervised access to his children at the same time as child protection authorities tell the mother that she may be unsuited to parent her children because she has failed to protect them from witnessing her abuse (OWJN).

What the service providers said

In Ontario, there have been some positive steps taken to address these concerns. The governing body for Ontario's Children's Aid Societies (CASs), in collaboration with the violence against women sector, has created a curriculum on the topic of woman abuse. This curriculum is now being taught to all CAS and VAW workers in the province. While it is, in part, an educational tool, it is primarily an effort to foster collaboration at the local level between the sectors so that, working together, they can better ensure the safety of women and children and work to hold perpetrators of violence accountable. This training is mandatory for all CAS workers but could benefit from an evaluative review and update before being adopted in other jurisdictions.

What the participants said

Women were emphatic in their feeling of betrayal by the courts and their custody arrangements. In the west, one woman told us, "the law is here to protect the father and his relationship with his children, not the mother."

Another woman in the west told us of her struggle to have the very real threat of death by her husband taken seriously: "he told me, I can kill you [all] and put your bodies in the garbage," and yet he walks freely while she has to go into hiding.

Another told us, "He decided to plead guilty, and now he has the right to visitation."

Describing the impossible predicament women face who try to change their own and their children's lives by leaving abuse, this woman in the west explained: "My children were apprehended [because] he was abusive, with a criminal record, and it took me five months to get them back. They were abused in foster care."

Another told us the reason she didn't want her son to be forced to visit with his father: "I want my son to be a good guy, not like his father." Even when many in the system cast them as vengeful Medeas, this woman's reasoning for trying to get sole custody was typical: "My ongoing concern is my children and my safety."

Proposed solutions to discuss

- The best interests test must clearly acknowledge the negative impact on children not just of their own abuse but of witnessing the abuse of their mothers by their fathers. If the witnessing of abuse is considered serious enough to warrant the removal of children from the non-abusive parent, then it surely must be considered serious enough to be considered in making custody and access determinations (OWJN).

- Consider a framework for respite care for women with children at the time of departure from the family home to free up time for all the appointments and errands that are required at a time of crisis. Federal funding for adequate shelter-based care where safety issues are already accounted for might be the best place¹.
- Amend the federal Divorce Act regarding custody and access decisions to conform with Section 24 of Ontario's Children's Law Reform Act, which includes consideration of family violence in determining custody, and refine to include specific consideration of dominant aggressor frameworks of determination, in keeping with what is known about patterns of violence in families.
- Section 16(10) of the Divorce Act requires the custodial parent to be willing to ensure maximum contact between the child and parent who has access. This should either be removed or rewritten to protect abused women and their children from a spouse with a history of abusive behaviour.
- Immediately fund the national framework for childcare lost after the last federal election. We still need legislation and adequate federal funding to build universal access, provincial action plans and a commitment to community based, not-for-profit early learning and child care.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME SUPPORT PROGRAMS

What the literature review said

Canadian women earn 71 cents for every dollar that men earn. This wage gap has not changed significantly in the last decade. In spite of improvements in the statistical averages of women's education achievements, women's earnings continue to be well below those of men. This leaves women at a heightened risk of poverty, both in the aftermath of leaving an abusive partner, and in old age. Forty-seven percent of single parent families are poor, and more than one-third of single women over 65 live in poverty. Minimum wages remain frozen at rates that trap women working in the low wage, part-time and precarious categories. This makes women the biggest part of the vast majority of Canadians who do not qualify for the Employment Insurance program they pay into over the course of their working lives. Stated simply, by leaving an earning male spouse, women face the very real possibility of a lifetime of poverty. They and their children therefore risk a great deal in their bid to live free from violence.

Women leaving abuse often must rely on income support programs regardless of their pre and post-marriage employability. Cuts to social assistance programs, along with many years without cost of living increases, mean that women on benefits receive shelter

¹ While exceptional for its breadth of support, the MISWAA policy solutions were inattentive to the needs of women experiencing violence and control in their households, and many of the proposed means measurements were based on household incomes, and not on individual incomes thus overlooking women's unique relationship to the labour market and the gender power imbalance that the statistics on violence against women in Canada suggest

allowances that cover less than 50% of what is needed to pay average rents in many parts of Canada. In addition, income support programs are largely acknowledged to be outdated in their philosophy, delivery mechanisms and impact (Picault & Pigott 2006; Matthews 2004). Specific measures like drug benefits and other supports to the working poor are seen to be one of the keys to unlocking the trap of welfare and supporting people at the low end of the wage scale to break some of the most unendurable aspects of poverty. Some, like the MISWAA task force in Ontario, have designed solutions that take income support out of the old welfare mechanisms and place them instead in the tax system, believing that the battle to redeem the image of income support delivered in this way has been long-lost (Picault & Pigott, op cit). Others disagree. In the words of one report aimed at reform of the social assistance system:

- The philosophy underpinning the current [income support] system is that people will abuse social assistance if given the opportunity. As a result, the system relies far too much on sanctions and prohibitions as its guiding principles and, in many ways, actually inhibits people from moving toward social economic independence.
- An alternate philosophy should be based on the assumption that people will choose to better their lives and those of their children if given appropriate opportunities... encourage success and seek to address the particular needs and challenges that each individual faces (Matthews 4).

Such challenges are particularly acute and evidently unaccounted for in the experiences of women leaving abuse. Low wages combined with no adequate, affordable or quality childcare make leaving an abuser a sentence to poverty for women and their children. On the other hand, relying on income support of any kind opens their lives to intrusion, loss of privacy, aspersions cast on their motives for leaving their partners (and the contradictory experience of state intervention in their parenting if they do not leave), as well as levels of support that leave women in the position of choosing between paying their rent and feeding the kids (Hurtig 1999). All of these systemic responses combine to make single parenthood a terrifying prospect, and abuse much less frightening to endure in comparison.

What the service providers said

Those providing service to abused women were clear about the obstacle formed by income support programs and, in a shocking number of cases, the attitudes of individual workers to women building violence free lives for themselves and their children: “Women don’t want to go back to social services [income support], deal with the workers. Women are terrified, they are afraid of losing their children. They are afraid of being told, ‘Oh, you again!’ by the social worker.”

Service providers said, “the issues the women are facing are not acknowledged, and there is no goodwill.” Such things as disqualifications for earning money, or losing earnings dollar for dollar, effectively enforce poverty and reliance on social assistance.

Commenting on the unrealistic expectations built into the “welfare to work” orientation of income support programs in her jurisdiction, but common to varying degrees across the country, one service provider said that, in her experience, “women can’t work when they are in an abusive situation.” Those who have piloted employment programs for women still living in shelters also agree that this period in a woman’s life is too chaotic to benefit from these interventions. Highly successful wrap-around employment programs for women once they have left shelter, however, are in evidence.

In addition, service providers spoke repeatedly of the need to recognize that for working class and northern women, there is an enormous gap in employability and mentoring programs to address their low formal education levels and historic marginalization from the labour market. Their comments echoed the research showing that creating a system responsive to women experiencing violence requires a shift in focus to seeing sustained employment as a process, and not an event, and recognizing that for those with multiple barriers to employment, social assistance is not temporary (Matthews).

What the participants said

In the north, where isolation is sometimes deadly for women, they tell us that the regulations of social assistance prohibit them getting a phone: “you have to pay rent, utilities, all that and you are not allowed a phone”. Social assistance in the North also “claws back” the GST credit they are due.

Vera came to the north from New Brunswick with her two children and \$200 five years ago in order to escape a violently abusive partner. She stayed in the shelter, and then transitional housing, eventually making her way into municipal housing. She began casual work in a reasonably well-paid job. Her job was misconstrued as full time by the housing authority (a matter still under dispute), and they charged her for arrears, docking her pay. The stress of the debt threw her into a crisis, for which she then had to take a leave from work.

Employment Insurance has a long disqualification period, and income support would only grant her \$120 a month in the interim, calculating her rental subsidy as direct income. Having successfully left abuse, raised her children and found employment, Vera is rapidly losing ground. No one seems willing to assist, except the shelter she once stayed in, which gives her food when they can. Vera says what is echoed by policy analysts, antiviolence workers and research alike: “Income support and housing operate within a punitive framework. They are here to punish you, instead of helping you.”

Proposed solutions to discuss**At the Federal level**

- Direct the value of the Spousal Credit – the tax deduction for a spouse at home - directly to the spouse (in most cases, a woman).
- Develop employment strategies in a nationally funded envelope to deliver life skills-based employment programs for women who have recently left violence.
- Extend upgrading and employment training supports to low wage earners.
- As part of an integrated federal/provincial/municipal strategy to address violence against women, include a proviso not to pursue child support if violence is a factor and possible continued consequence (requires adequate training for workers) in income support guidelines.
- Implement pro-active pay equity legislation as recommended by the 2004 Federal Pay Equity Task Force.
- Restore the requirement for provinces to recognize the former Designated Groups Policy that addresses the training needs of equity-seeking groups in the development of employment programs.

Proposed solutions to discuss**At the Provincial level**

- Adjust the shelter portion of social assistance to meet the average rent of each municipality.
- Implement an integrated child benefit platform for all low income parents that pays benefits outside the social assistance system.
- Provide basic health care (prescription drugs and vision care) as well as dental coverage to low-income workers.
- Increase basic needs allowances and index social assistance benefits yearly to the cost of living
- Increase the minimum wage to \$10 per hour nationally.
- Facilitate the recognition of internationally trained professionals through leading a process of co-operation between all three levels of jurisdiction and community and professional stakeholders.
- Reverse policy focus of addressing easier-to-serve clients through Federal Labour Market Adjustment Agreements, and gear more training programs to the most disadvantaged women.

HOUSING

What the literature review said

Housing is a lynchpin in finding solutions to violence against women in Canada. Violence in the home is often the precipitating or significant contributing factor to the initiation of homelessness, and the absence of available safe, supportive and affordable housing is a key factor in women being trapped in abusive relationships. Housing is emerging in the literature as the single most reliable preventative to recurring bouts of family violence.

Women's homelessness and housing needs are distinct from those of men, and are imbedded within the context of poverty, social, racial and gender inequalities, and violence against women. Women form the majority of occupants of lower income housing, and make up slightly more than 51% of the population in general, yet the planning and design of housing and communities remains largely blind to gender differences in housing needs. Given the scope of violence against women in Canada, it is striking that almost no thought to the safety of women in housing goes into its design and development, except among specialized providers.

While vacancy rates are climbing in the upper end of the rental market, now largely composed of condominium landlords, most women are unable to afford these rents. Forced into expensive units due to the lack of alternatives, women face a chronic predicament of living beyond their means with little money left for food and clothing. This leaves even those who are housed one step away from homelessness. Shelter workers report that women who have used non-portable rent supplement programs in privately owned housing are vulnerable to unscrupulous landlords who are privy to personal and financial information. They are subject to threats and sexual harassment because they are reliant on the subsidy to afford the rent.

Exposure to sexual harassment for women-led households was identified in the 1996 study *Borderlands of Homelessness*. Women preferred other women as neighbours and those fleeing violence particularly sought out women-only housing to ensure a sense of personal safety for themselves and their children.

Women still bear the primary burden for unpaid care giving and domestic responsibilities within the home. As noted, women still earn less than men, with the result that women have less money for housing and less security of tenure. Women are also more likely to be dependent on public transit, and thus have less access to jobs and services outside the central areas of large cities. Women-led households are more likely to rent, and tenants are less likely to have control over the spaces in which they live.

Other barriers to women attaining appropriate, secure, and affordable housing arise specifically from the physical and social needs that distinguish them from men: as primary caregivers to all generations of family, women need housing that is within close proximity to social infrastructure: schools; hospitals; and community centres. High levels of violence against women occur both in public (strangers) and private (partner, family member, acquaintance, landlord assault) yet the design of most city, neighbourhood, open public spaces and housing fails to address this issue. Studies of alternative housing have shown that some women have a clear preference for women-only housing with moderate design alterations that address safety concerns. This has particular relevance to those more marginal populations of women who frequently wind up cyclically homeless due to exploitative conditions unwittingly built into the designs of mixed gender low-income housing (Novac and Brown 1996).

What the service providers said

Universally, service providers saw housing as the key support missing in women's transition from shelter to sustainable violence free lives. In the north, a particularly Draconian collusion of housing and income support seem to trap women indefinitely.

One shelter manager describes how it works:

“A woman comes into the shelter. She receives food and clothing. If you have a place to go, Income Support covers the rent. They give her a two month grace period, and then she has to come up with a “productive choice” for moving off income support. This cannot be raising your children. Women usually go back to school as their “productive choice”, and then they realize that they have many obstacles to moving forward in this path –children, addictions issues, and the abuser stalking them. The productive choice is cut. Then, she owes the whole rental subsidy back to Income support. They are set up to fail.”

What the participants said

A woman in the west put the issue of stigmatization succinctly: “There are stigmas against us getting our housing. We have a bad reputation, because they think our ex partner could come. If you are coming from a shelter, you can't have the place.”

Jocelyn, whose story from the east began this paper, could not find housing under similar punitive regulations, in addition to which her family size exceeded unit sizes in almost all social housing across Canada. “When I tell people I have 7 kids, they either hang up the phone or call me crazy,” she said.

Proposed solutions to discuss

- Develop a system of portable rent supplements linked to the woman rather than the unit, with attached supports
- Develop a National Housing Strategy with a gender perspective including: Low-rise, mixed income developments with design features that allow for maximum supervision of children from within units (such as those designed around green space and playgrounds); low-rise and multiple-bedroom units for extended family use; fully accessible disabled units to integrate those with disabilities into the mainstream of our communities; and, close proximity to social infrastructure, as well as well-travelled, well-lit areas with public transit routes.
- Using government-owned land for innovative affordability schemes such as 'grow homes' projects, and setting aside a high proportion of these homes for women led households.
- Encouraging women's participation in self-built housing projects through peer support.
- Using property tax abatements to encourage social housing and affordable housing schemes that combine commercial and residential uses along main streets.
- Women-only buildings to increase safety and security for women and women-led households.
- Creation of a consistent framework of tenant protection and rent regulation laws across the country that meets standards set in international housing rights law.
- The internal design of houses to accommodate a range of households: disabled, single parent, elderly, three generation, several sharing adults, changes from one household into another.
- Tax exemptions for shelter allowance for low income renters.

MEN & BOYS

What the literature review said

Long-term solutions to keeping women and their children safe from violence must inevitably include men and boys. Without change in the expectations and behaviour of men and boys, as well as of women and girls, nothing but a recycling of victims awaits with a woman who leaves one abuser likely to find another abuser, and the man who abused her likely to abuse his next partner. A variety of programs aimed at curbing men's violence against women, have been delivered and instituted over the last decade. To date, these have not been systematically evaluated to determine their long-term effectiveness.

The nature of the violence that men themselves experience in the familial context is relatively unknown, and has been marked by a defensive social agenda to discredit the violence that women experience. Thus far, the research does not support an equation of the types, extent and frequency of violence that women and men experience at each others' hands. Leslie Tutty has concluded that the little research that has been done "raises more questions than it answers" (1999). There is, however, some evidence that boys who experience abuse at the hands of caregivers in their childhood and youth have an increased likelihood of becoming homeless. In addition, if they witness their father abusing their mother, they are at increased likelihood for abusing their common-law spouse, girlfriend or wife when they are older.

What the service providers said

Women's service providers spoke about the need to work with men, but expressed their frustration that this necessitated working within the criminal justice system, where results are at best ambivalent, and at worse put women at further risk (see Policing and the Criminal System, below). Service providers were sceptical about the usefulness of abuser programs, particularly those that are court-mandated. Often these are referred to by workers as "abuser schools", where men share and upgrade tactics they use to control and menace the women in their lives. They also observed that where violence perpetrated by women against men is not defensive in nature, it is exclusively in relationships where drugs and alcohol dominate the dynamics between the couple.

"Beyond Shelter Walls" also includes oversight by a men's organization that engages men who are not themselves violent but who might be catalysts for change in the lives of men who are. They develop resources for educators that are tied to curriculum expectations, and that assist adult men in working on gender equality issues with boys. This organization sees the greatest promise in this incremental approach to redefining masculinity and power, peer to peer (see Public Education and Social Marketing, below).

What the participants said

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, in most cases, women who are abused want the abuse to stop, not the relationship to end. They express frustration that it is they who expose their lives to the intrusion of a multitude of state and community services in order to "fix" a problem that is clearly not theirs in origin.

In all regions of Canada, women in the focus groups mentioned the trend of dual charging, a procedure where police arrive at the scene of a "domestic" and immediately charge both parties, usually without any determination of primary or secondary aggressor, and with no accounting for defensive versus aggressive wounds. The women

who had experienced this trend saw the charges against their long-time abusers dismissed and their own parenting called into question, prompting referrals to child welfare.

Proposed solutions to discuss

- Collate existing program evaluations and undertake an extensive, longitudinal evaluation of the variety of Partner Assault Programs to determine their effectiveness in reducing and eliminating violence against women and, where evidence shows success in reducing violence, a review of opportunities for expanding programs.
- Public education/social marketing campaign funded from the national level that innovatively tackles notions of male superiority without finger-wagging, addressing head on the skills it takes to challenge your peers.

POLICING AND THE CRIMINAL SYSTEM

What the literature review said

Violence against women in spousal relationships appears to take place within a pattern of repeated and escalating incidents of violence (Statistics Canada 2006). However, nearly three-quarters of spousal homicide perpetrators had no prior contact with police for spousal assault (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics 2007), indicating that the criminal justice system is not necessarily the most logical place for investments where the goal is to stem escalation and incidents of violence against women. Immediate safety for the woman, deterrents in the form of disincentives for the men, would be the goals in this area. Often, policing and the criminal justice system is the site of measurably outdated thinking and practices in this area (Griffiths 1999 & 2004; Doe 2003), with some notable exceptions. Exceptions, however, do not a reformed system make, and with statistics as low as 10% of all assaultive crimes against women getting reported to police, it is an area that could potentially absorb enormous resources with little impact. In addition, police in all parts of Canada where we held focus groups were noted to be engaged in a trend of dual charging, a practice that has, in some cases, meant that the women who have acted in self-defence at the time of an assault have been mandated to partner assault programs to reform their behaviour (Pollack, Green and Alspach, 2005). Yet engagement with men, because of the criminal aspect of violence against women, necessitates appropriate adjustments and reforms in order to prevent the most appalling breaches of security and safety. These, most notably, are in the areas of no contact orders and the enforcement of family court orders that place women at further risk from their abusers (see Child Protection Services, Custody and Access and Childcare, above).

Most provinces and territories have implemented legislation that deals specifically with violence in intimate relationships. The title of the legislation as well as what forms of violence it addresses varies from one jurisdiction to another. For example, Manitoba's law can apply to a young woman who is being abused by her ex-boyfriend, but might not do much for an older woman who is being abused by an adult child. The domestic violence law in Nova Scotia only applies to spouses, partners who have lived together or parents of the same children. This limited definition means that many women, who are facing abuse at the hands of other family members, boyfriends, caregivers, etc, are unable to benefit from the domestic violence legislation (OWJN).

What the service providers said

Some service providers felt strongly that there is a role for a clear and well-established risk-assessment process to be employed across the differential responses and interventions that women encounter in their attempts to leave an abuser. This would assist a more focused response in cases where it is most deadly for women, and these might be cases where a default waiving of silos, barriers and procedures that can become deadly could take place. This is particularly relevant in the area of policing. Service providers were quick to point out, however, that the real bottleneck in the system has arisen in the disposition and judgement of domestic violence cases, where the impartiality of the judiciary has often screened them from updating their evidence based knowledge of the roles of women, and the extent and nature of the violence they face in their homes.

Protection orders are seen by service providers as "ambivalent" in the protection of women and their children, and in the case of those regions with newly implemented legislation, results are as yet unknown. It was felt that where there is new legislation it needs to be followed by extensive training of enforcement bodies, lawyers and judges, and increased resources and access to legal representation and social services (OWJN). In Prince Edward Island, Victim Services was able to chart increased enforcement with periods of community-initiated training of police and court officials. Many felt that protection orders that are not adequately enforced have the effect of providing a false sense of security instead of much needed prevention and protection against violence. More women appear to seek protection orders if they could do so through community-based services (such as women's shelters) and not just through the police, since this not the most common point of contact women will access during an abusive episode. This fact was acknowledged in the recent set-up of the Emergency Protection Order (EPO) system in the Northwest Territories, where shelter workers themselves can initiate an order because shelter is the most common access point for women who are abused.

What the participants said

Women speak of the extreme risk they continue to face in spite of decades of supposed attitude change, training, accords and protocols agreements with police and crowns:

“It’s your word against his.”

“I asked my daughter to call the police. When the police officer came, saw all the children crying, and my face black [and blue] (I also lost a tooth), they took him out of the house and arrested him on Saturday. They released him on Sunday. We were left with no food to eat. [Before that] the only time I had been out of the house was to give birth. I didn’t speak English, and I never went out.”

“The day the Judge finds our eight bodies then they will think they made a mistake [to let him out on bail].”

“There is no legal protection. I can only rely on God.”

“[Getting] legal aid is virtually impossible.”

“There is no consistency; you always deal with a new judge.”

One woman described her decision to arm herself in order to ensure she wasn’t killed when the system failed her. “I was dumped here [in Kamloops] by a stalker truck driver. He came back to find me and threatened me with a shotgun. I called the police. They phoned the shelter and asked me to come to their headquarters. I went there with a knife on my person, and they asked me why I was there with a knife. I answered, ‘for my own protection.’ They had told me the guy was released 20 minutes before. I was scared that he would come snap my neck as he had told me he would. People need to be more educated. They have no idea about what happens to abused women.”

Proposed solutions to discuss

- Increase federal contributions to provincial legal aid under the Canada Social Transfer, ensuring they are dedicated to civil legal aid under the CST and that women have access to legal representation in family matters.
- Evaluate the existing system of Emergency Protection Orders that allow the removal of abusive men from their homes to measure the effectiveness of these measures in protecting women and helping them avoid the cycle of homelessness, poverty and re-abuse.

- Fund research on the phenomena of dual charging, including a literature review and national study on its occurrence and context with an aim to holding a national symposium and developing a proposed training module to set a national standard in policing on this issue.

THE NORTH IS DIFFERENT

What the literature review said

Being a Territorial woman and in particular an Aboriginal woman in the Territories, puts women at higher risk than other Canadian women to experience violence in domestic partnerships. Rates for sexual assault are two to three times higher in the Yukon than in any of the other provinces, 3-6 times higher in the Northwest Territories, and between 7 and 14 times higher in Nunavut (Statistics Canada 2006, 70). The rates of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, alcohol and drug addiction, all set the stage for long term needs of a highly vulnerable population. The particular context of an enclave economy based on resource extraction, a highly transient working population, deep-rooted issues of acculturation, poverty, addiction, and abuse and a social services sector with uncertain funding and depressed wages makes for a noticeable deterioration of women's rights and basic safety. In the parts of the country where the problems are the most pressing and apparently intractable, we have, as a nation, placed the least resources (YWCA Yellowknife 2006).

What the service providers said

Anti-violence workers and agency leaders have reached a breaking point. Faced with the country's highest concentration of social problems, their low funding levels make them unattractive to the people with the very skills they require and they are losing the staff they need. Community development models of building capacity within the communities experiencing high levels of multi-generational violence seem natural starting places for solutions. These, however, have not been seriously attempted with anything like the level of commitment required.

One Inuit woman charged with running the only shelter left in the northern communities said, "We provide service for 13 communities in the area [a huge geographic area]. They don't realize the cost of maintaining the shelter. Our operational budget is only \$140,000 per year: we can't run a shelter on this!" Another stated simply: "Inadequate funding of shelters in the north is a total set up. It is women from the same communities that are affected by violence that run the place. We are underfunded, untrained and unsupported. Then, when our shelters close, like the one in Tuk did, they say, 'See, they can't make a go of it.'" Even those services that are funded for a full year of operations are unable to keep

pace with inflation, rising housing costs for their workers, or the relatively plush wages in the government sector. This leaves organizations central to the delivery of government social priorities in the peculiar predicament of losing their most skilled workers to their funders.

The YWCA shelter for assaulted women and their children in Yellowknife—a major destination for women from across the Territory—was threatened with closure late in 2007 because it was unable to retain enough staff to operate safely due to depressed wages. The Centre for Northern Families’ shelter for women and children has had similar struggles. As the lynch-pin in the delivery of the Emergency Protection Order system, this lack of recognition of the real cost of operation on the part of the funder appears both short-sighted and unabated.

In addition, service providers spoke clearly of the particular administrative and community-based predicaments facing northern women and service providers saying, “A woman will keep abuse a secret because she doesn’t want to put shame on her husband. Federal funding would be better for us because then there is less community involvement. However, federal funding does not come to the north because there are no reserves.”

Poignantly referring to the devastating impact of colonialism and its continued dynamics in the north one service provider added, “The wound is immense and they are giving me a Band-Aid to heal it.”

Those who work with women experiencing violence find that there is little public or professional understanding of the dynamics of abuse and addiction in the north or indeed of women’s basic right to privacy: “Women in the north have a feeling of being watched. The worker is out and sees her in a bar, and the next day she gets a notice that her cheque is being docked.”

The sheer rates of violence make escaping it nearly impossible for even the most persistent and brave: “In the smaller communities, the chances of finding a healthy partner that is not your cousin are very slim, and almost impossible. Abuse is condoned at the community level. In the smaller communities, there are no homes. Women have to move [and leave everything].” Providers were clear in their recommendation that the Federal government needs to expand its role in social housing and thereby increase the number of units in circulation.

There is a well-documented legacy of colonial policies that institutionalized childhood rape and assault in school systems designed for Aboriginal people, as well as ensuring two generations of Aboriginal peoples had no experience of parenting. Likewise, Inuit peoples lost traditional livelihoods and social ties through forced relocations. Yet, this devastated

community has no framework or strategy for healing the multi-generational trauma that continues to affect each new member born to the community today. “The community does not offer anything to deal with trauma. There are no counsellors in the community, except the shelter workers,” a service provider explained.

What the participants said

Finding safety in the north takes on a whole different dimension for women. Extreme levels of violence, isolation of communities, and the history of loss of identity, culture and community make the decision to leave an abuser that much more difficult. Child welfare, carrying the threat of losing children and community has deep resonance here. Modern examples show that a colonial approach to service provision is not yet a thing of the past. In addition, the very real possibility of homelessness in the north has deadly implications for women who leave what scarce housing there is in order to build lives free from violence (YWCA Yellowknife 2006). All this exists in the context of no priority housing access system for women leaving abuse.

May, an Inuit woman from a remote community in Nunavut told us, “I was barricaded in my own house for five years. I feel better here [Yellowknife]; I just need to have my girls with me. My mother was murdered by my father. I tried committing suicide so many times. I even asked my ex to kill me because I could not live barricaded. I went to foster homes. I came here for health reasons.”

In downtown Yellowknife, services are still dangerously thin on the ground: “There is no 911 here, because it is too expensive. The RCMP’s number is long to dial and then they put you on hold.”

Proposed solutions to discuss

- Removal of Housing Authority barriers to Territorial women accessing priority housing.
- Development of broad-based community wellness strategies specifically related to domestic violence and substance abuse treatment and prevention.
- Increased emergency shelter beds in Inuvik and Hay River.
- Creation of supportive housing options for women with special needs.
- Specific housing options with full support for young women who choose to leave the extreme violence of their communities in order to prevent the slide in to a repetition of the cycle of abuse, exploitation, addiction and family violence.
- Mentorship and training programs specifically for women experiencing violence.
- Northern-specific poverty reduction strategies with full range of innovative income supports and removal of barriers to employment.

According to a 2004 Amnesty International report, Indigenous women in Canada are five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as a result of violence. “The Native Women’s Association of Canada estimates that as many as 500 Aboriginal women have gone missing or been murdered over the past 30 years. Deep historical, social and economic factors contribute to the epidemic of violence against Native women both inside and outside their communities” (NFB 2007). A key issue for First Nations women and their children in finding responses and solutions to epidemic levels of violence is that they are under separate jurisdiction from other Canadians. Throughout the consultations, First Nations women reported the “Catch-22s” they encountered trying to put their lives back together in the aftermath of a violent relationship as differing levels of government and agencies pin-balled them from one to the other. In addition, funding levels for First Nations child welfare, education, housing, and health services are lower, and conditions for Aboriginal families both on reserve and off are appalling.

As “Sandy” in Kamloops told us, “Finding out which category I fit in because I am in town and access the welfare system is difficult. Which Aboriginal association am I allowed to access? Dealing with Native social services is a battle.”

Proposed solutions to discuss

- Cultural-based counselling through an Aboriginal counselling program, including possibly “on the land” programs (no phones, no alcohol, and no drugs).
- Financial resources to Aboriginal women’s organizations be increased to the same level as their male-led counterparts.
- National adoption of “Jordan’s Principle” that the jurisdiction of first contact should pay for services to Aboriginal people and final responsibility be determined later. In cases where there is a dispute about the jurisdiction of first contact, the federal government would cover the cost of the necessary services and pursue payment later.
- Institute a nation-wide violence prevention strategy by, for and about Aboriginal peoples under the leadership of Aboriginal women, allowing for flexibility in policy, programming and funding. The strategy would include culturally appropriate holistic services for victims of violence, abusers and families, addressing the jurisdictional issues affecting both First Nations and Inuit women
- Fund a targeted national Aboriginal housing strategy both on and off reserve with a built-in gender impact analysis that included the dynamics of violence in Aboriginal homes.
- Inclusion of Inuit women’s organizations in local policy-making
- Institute Inuit-specific housing policy ensuring adequate standards

LONGER SHELTER STAYS AND CUTS TO SERVICES

What the literature review said

While this paper sets out to grapple with changes to services and systems beyond the walls of the shelters, the research and focus groups pointed to the critical nature of the bottleneck forming inside their walls. Earlier phases of the YWCA's work show that women who use shelters are at severely high risk of being murdered by their partners once the protection of those emergency measures is removed (Tutty 2006). As discussed at the beginning of this paper, shelters are full nightly. In the face of a deterioration of social housing stock not properly maintained through capital investments, minimal investment in new housing stock, no new investments in an almost stagnant number of women's shelters since the mid-1990s, the loss of transitional housing programs has been the proverbial icing on the cake of barriers to women trying to leave abuse. With nowhere to send women after shelter, the context for sheltering has ceased to be temporary.

What the service providers said

Shelter providers described the impossibility of responding to the demand for their services in a climate that forces them to discharge women to unknown housing status, has cut their operating budgets, and has forced them into fundraising to make up shortfalls, putting them in direct competition with well-oiled fundraising machines, such as hospitals. Particularly in smaller communities, shelters find that their issue remains highly controversial, because it requires a tough pill of self-examination for individuals who might be asked to give.

Because of affordable housing shortages, even in jurisdictions where housing priority applications are available for women who can demonstrate violence in their domestic partner relationship, shelters are much more than the emergency stopovers that they were set up to be. Staffing levels appear inconsistent across the country, causing support levels for women to vary widely depending on jurisdiction.

In addition, housing women for up to two years in some cases while they await complicated federal immigration decisions, court proceedings, or simply out-wait the waiting list of the local housing authority means shelters are managing very different support issues, including parenting, employment, and the long term effects of trauma. There has been little to no acknowledgement of this profound change in the nature of sheltering in the decades since shelters first opened. Indeed, in many cases, even the basic elements of sheltering have not yet been incorporated into the funding models. As one service provider reported, "We have only one worker between 4 p.m. and midnight, and that is the time when all the abuse occurs."

Proposed solutions to discuss

- Immediately expand the provision of transitional, supported housing that provides a bridge between shelter and permanent housing.
- Roll out training for all coordinated housing access centres and third party referring organizations to ensure criteria for abuse priority for subsidized housing is offered consistently in all provinces and territories and is understood by providers.

WOMEN OF COLOUR, IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN

The literature review revealed only nascent information and action plans that specifically address the needs of immigrant and refugee women, as well as women of colour.

Shelter workers of colour, and immigrant women working in the shelters in smaller centres spoke of the lack of appropriate services to refer women to, the lack of language specific information and of the need for specific outreach and community building in order to let these women know that the services were there for them.

Tatiana, mentioned at the outset of this paper, spoke of the need for a campaign that would inform immigrant women of their rights under Canadian Law throughout the immigration process. Clearly, the deepening of poverty in Canada has both gendered and racial aspects (United Way) and addressing this in the context of violence requires particular attention.

Proposed recommendation to discuss

The Beyond Shelter Walls project consider making a recommendation for a study that specifically looks at the lack of culturally competent violence against women services for women of colour, and for immigrant and refugee women in the context of deepening poverty.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MARKETING

General attitudes toward women and girls were often cited during the consultation as at the heart of many of the obstacles that women face in leaving abuse behind. While Canada prides itself on being a nation of equals, the substantive nature of this equality was called into question by many consulted in this process. While not expressly called for, one possibility for consideration is a large scale public campaign with collaboration

between the provinces and Territories and the federal government to develop a federal national public awareness campaign to highlight the magnitude of the problem of VAW and a call to action within equality rights framework. This would need to include a sub-campaign focused on the social behaviour of men, challenging abusive attitudes and behaviours and misuse of power.

A related but distinct matter was raised in the consultations with respect to the need for a model of Just Governance that builds on the leadership of women from all three political parties in Canada. Having public policy match the values of Canadians, and Canadian women in particular is seen as a key long term goal in the climate change this discussion paper proposes to invite.

Proposed recommendation to discuss

Foster collaboration between the provinces, territories and the federal government to create a large scale national public awareness campaign highlighting the magnitude of the problem of violence against women and the social behaviour of men which underlies it.

HOW IT ALL FITS TOGETHER: RUNNING IN CIRCLES

Researchers in Canada and the United States have demonstrated statistically that the decline in spousal homicide rates is linked to increased availability of resources and a rise in women's socio-economic status (Statistics Canada 2006). In the current economic boon in Canada shows that those who are *not* being buoyed are predominantly racialized communities, people of colour, and overwhelmingly women –particularly lone parents— both within those communities and more generally. Where the boon seems most extreme, rates of violence against women are going up, not down, as relayed by the shelter staff at the YWCA in Calgary, and supported by Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada 2006). Given the rates of violence against women in Canada that introduce this discussion paper, it seems reasonable to conclude that the women of Canada have noticed that leaving a violent male partner will adversely affect their social and economic prospects, perhaps in ways that are more difficult to live with than the abuse itself. Service providers relayed their understanding of this reality clearly in the following statements:

“There was a case in our shelter of a woman who came to the shelter with a newborn baby. She could not take care of the baby alone, and we have strict policies surrounding women leaving their babies with other women in the shelter. She could not take care of her baby alone. Stuck with arrears from her abusive relationship, she was not eligible for a housing unit. So, she ended going back to the abuser.”

“People have the feeling they are being abused by the system” (service provider in the north).

“A woman came to the shelter with three children and a newborn child. She got a unit. She had all her children with her, but she had no follow-up, and no support. This woman could not cope with her new life without any of her family. She lost her children, and she lost her unit.”

In the end, contradictions in the systemic responses to women attempting to leave violence create a vacuum in which many women return to their abusive partners.. While most women who use shelters report their shelter experiences in a positive light, saying that they feel supported emotionally, that they receive important information and that they are often able to take important steps forward in their own process to move towards lives free from violence, their experiences with the other systems they encounter are not generally as helpful. Limited access to affordable, safe housing, inadequate income support, a lack of return to work supports, no national child care strategy and unsupportive family and criminal law responses are all negative experiences that too often result in women feeling that they do not have a real choice to make. It is our hope that the policy framework to be developed through a process of regional consultations will be able to change this.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PHASE III ADVISORY COMMITTEES

External Advisory Committee

Name	Agency	Email/Contact info
Jackie Matthews	N.B. Coalition of Transition Houses	syn456@nb.sympatico.ca N. B. Coalition of Transition Houses P.O. Box 342 - St. Stephen, N.B. E3L 2X2 Tel: (506) 466-5879
Elaine Smith	Transition House Yarmouth, NS	Juniper House P.O. Box 842, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia B5A 4K5 junipered@eastlink.ca
Todd Minerson, Executive Director	White Ribbon Campaign Men working to end violence against women	365 Bloor St. East, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4W 3L4 Tel: (416) 920-6684 tminerson@whiteribbon.ca
Jennifer Hagedorn, Provincial Coordinator	Manitoba Association of Women's Shelters	p: 204 897-3907 jennifer@maws.mb.ca
Diane Delaney Coordinator	PATHS - The Provincial Association of Transition Houses and Services of Saskatchewan	1940 McIntyre Street Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 2R3 - 306-522-3515 Email: paths@sasktel.net
Sipporah Enuaraq Coordinator	Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association	Suite 400, 56 Sparks Street, Ottawa, ON, K1P5A9 - info@pauktuutit.ca
Louise Riendeau Coordonnatrice des dossiers politiques	Regroupement provincial des maisons d'hébergement et de transition pour femmes victimes de violence conjugale	Casier postal 55005, CFP Notre-Dame 11, rue Notre-Dame ouest - Montréal QC, H2Y 4A7 - (514) 878-9134 poste 223 politique@maisons-femmes.qc.ca
Pamela Harrison, Coordinator	Transition House Association of Nova Scotia	319-1657 Barrington St Halifax, NS B3H 4K2 - Phone: 902.429.7287 coordinator@thans.ca
Louise Kitzul Acting Director	North East Crisis Intervention Centre	Admin @ NECIC [admin.necic@sasktel.net] 103 McKendry Avenue East Box 2066 - Melfort SK S0E 1A0 Tel: 752-9464 /Fax: 752-3122
Wendy Komiotis ED	METRAC - The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children	158 Spadina Road, Toronto, ON M5R 2T8 Phone: 416-392-3135/ 416-392-3031 executivedirector@metrac.org
Keely Halward Women's Services Coordinator	BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses	BCYSTH, Suite 507, 475 Howe St, Vancouver, BC, V6C 2B3 - Tel: 604-669-6943 ext 224 keelyhalward@bcysth.ca
Michele Johnson And Beverley Jacobs	Native Women's Association of Canada	Six Nations of the Grand River P.O. Box 331, Ohsweken, Ontario N0A 1M0 Tel.: 519.445.0990 mjohnson@nwac-hq.org bjacobs@nwac-hq.org

Internal Advisory Committee

Name	Member association	Email/Contact info
Sheila Loranger Michele Walker	Kamloops YMCA-YWCA	sheila.shelter@kamloopsy.org Michele.shelter@kamloopsy.org
Kristine J. Cassie	YWCA Lethbridge	kcassie@ywcalethbridge.org
Lyda Fuller	YWCA Yellowknife	lydafuller@yellowknife.ywca.ca
Jill Wyatt	YWCA Calgary	jwyatt@ywcaofcalgary.com
Silvia Samsa	YWCA Toronto Shelter Manager	Silvia Samsa [SSamsa@ywcatoronto.org]
Laurie O'Shaughnessy	YWCA Edmonton	laurie.oshaughnessy@ywcaofedmonton.org
Ginette Demers	YWCA Sudbury	g.demers@ywca.sudbury.com
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Barb Macpherson	'Saskatoon YWCA	bmacpherson@ywcaskatoon.com
Donna Brooks	'Prince Albert YWCA	pa.ywca@sasktel.net

APPENDIX B: LIST OF FOCUS GROUP REPRESENTATIVES

PRINCE EDWARD ISLANDS - NOVEMBER 15TH, 2007

Jane Ledwell
Researcher/policy analyst PEI Advisory council on the Status of Women

Lisa Murphy
Director, PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women

Gloria Dennis
Queens Outreach Coordinator, Transition House Association

Susan Maynard
Provincial Manager, Victim Services Office, Ministry of the Attorney General

Cindy Banks
Shelter Worker, Transition House Association

Daneen MacDonald
Shelter worker, Transition House Association

Sandy Kowalitz
Shelter worker, Transition House Association Advisory council

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA - NOVEMBER 19TH 2007

Bryony House Staff and Board of Directors

KAMLOOPS, BRITISH COLUMBIA - NOVEMBER 29TH 2007

Arjun Singh,
Kamloops City Council

Louise Richards,
Elizabeth Fry Society

Charlie Rennie,
Interior Community Services

Lisa Gammel,
Kamloops Police Based Victim Services

Jody Beesly
Kamloops Sexual Assault Center Community Victim Services

Sharon Todd
Children, Youth and Adult Counselor
Kamloops Sexual Assault Counseling Center

Lidys Garcia
Kamloops Immigrant Services for Spanish speaking community all at large

Nadine Ryan
Ministry of Children and Family Development

Sharon Noble
Kamloops Family Justice Center

Sheila Loranger
YMCA-YWCA Kamloops

Michele Walker
YMCA-YWCA Kamloops

YELLOWKNIFE, NWT - DECEMBER 4TH, 2007

Ann Kasook,
ED, Inuvik Transition House

Cavelle MacNeil,
Program Director, Centre for Northern Families

Lyda Fuller,
ED, YWCA Yellowknife

Kate Wilson
YWCA Yellowknife, NWT

Bonnie Almon
Fort Smith Sutherland House

Lisa Quinlan
Alison MacAteer House,
YWCA Yellowknife, NWT

Marsha Argue
YWCA Yellowknife (on contract)

TORONTO, ON - DECEMBER 12TH 2007

Joyce Brown,
Ontario Council of Alternative Businesses
Sheryl Lindsay

CRCT - Outreach program for women in and out of shelter with serious mental health issues and trauma

Sylvia Novac
Researcher / Community housing manager, university of Toronto

Brenda Ponic,
St Joseph Hospital Women Health center

Silvia Samsa,
Arise, YWCA Toronto

Susan Clancy,
Sistering

Vivien Green,
Field education manager, Ryerson University

APPENDIX C: PROJECT OUTLINE AND AGENDA

PROJECT OUTLINE

Description

Beyond Shelter Walls is a project of YWCA Canada and its member associations engaged in violence against women service provision and advocacy, as well as the provision of shelter, transitional and permanent housing for women. It is Phase III of a four-phase research project begun in 2003. Previous phases surveyed the range of shelter provision for women escaping violence, as well as the needs and recommendations of women themselves. The need for this phase of the project was identified in previous research.

Project Goals

The development and promotion of cross-sectoral collaboration to reduce violence against women. Influencing the development of legislative and or socio-legal reforms that can play a role in fixing the gaps in policy and practice that keep women and their children at varying degrees of risk from jurisdiction to jurisdiction across Canada.

Project Statement

“A continuum of violence, with distinct gender dimensions, taking place across the lifespan of a growing group of Canadians is playing a starring role in Canada’s growing housing crisis” (Dale, Amanda. *Project Literature Review: Beyond Shelter Walls*. Toronto: YWCA Canada, 2007, p.4).

With a focus on housing-related issues relevant to women and their children as they are leaving violence in their intimate relationships, this project will gather existing and develop emerging best practices and policy solutions to address the reality of the continued risk for homelessness and further violence women experience post-shelter.

Methodology

Beyond Shelter Walls is overseen by both external and internal advisory groups. It has produced a literature review focused on the existing state of research regarding women and homeless and violence, and the various recommendations that have been developed in previous reports. On the basis of this and the exploratory research conducted in focus groups with women and service providers as well as policy advocates in four regions of Canada (the west, the east, the north and the south), the advisory groups will make recommendations for a Policy Paper to be work-shopped back in the regions later in the project. This will lead to a final consensual set of policy and process recommendations to be advocated at a federal level.

The discussion groups themselves will be conducted with members recruited through a process initiated by YWCA Canada and augmented by the members of the advisory groups. They will be conducted as a facilitated discussion based on questions presented below. There will be a division between those groups for women who have or are currently using services for VAW or homelessness, and those groups set up with service providers and policy analysts/policy makers and advocates. Additional individual interviews will be conducted by telephone with the same questions, targeting those individuals and/or regions that we were not able to incorporate into the traveling version. This methodology mirrors steps taken in similar surveys and exploratory investigations (Novac, Brown, et al. *A Visceral Grief: Young Homeless Mothers and Loss of Child Custody*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 2006.).

Definition of violence

Any act that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. (United Nations). The project thus sees violence against women as a *range and continuum of violence* within a social context that links this violence with inequality.

Definition of Homelessness

“People are considered homeless if they lack adequate shelter in which they are entitled to live safely”. Daly (1996, 1, as quoted in Novac 2006, 2).

Focus Group Goal

To gather from service providers, advocates and women who have experienced violence and or homelessness, a compilation of recommendations, best practices, policy changes and innovative service ideas that will contribute to the project goals (above). These will primarily be in the areas of (but not restricted to):

Income Support

Housing: long, medium and short term

Other sorts of supports (counseling, outreach, health, training)

Safety & Security (may be an element throughout the others)

Best Practices (coordination, memoranda of agreement, protocols)

Innovations

Advocacy campaigns

Regional best practices

AGENDA
PHASE III - BEYOND SHELTER WALLS
FOCUS GROUP WITH WOMEN SURVIVORS

(Site and date)

15 minutes

1. Welcome
2. Introduction to project
3. Introductions
4. Facilitated Discussion on the following Questions:

15 minutes

Large Group

1. How did you become involved in this meeting today?
2. What are you hoping will come out of this experience for you?

1.5 hours

Small Groups (depends on group size)

3. Where are you at in the process of getting where you want to be?
4. Say as much or as little about your situation as you are comfortable with to help us understand your answer to
 - a. Was there anything that was particularly helpful in your experience of resolving your situation (was it violence and or housing related? If so, how)?
 - b. Was there anything that was a particular obstacle in resolving your situation? If so, how?
5. Do you have any specific recommendations to:
 - a. Service providers?
 - b. Police?
 - c. Lawyers?
 - d. Politicians?
 - e. Employers?
 - f. Anyone else?
 - g. Where there housing supports that would have kept you safe and out of the shelter system?
6. Any recommendations for additional things this project should be looking at?

15 minutes

Evaluation Questions for end of the session:

1. Did you have an opportunity to raise all the issues of concern to you?
2. If we held another meeting like this, is there anything we could do to make your participation easier, or the atmosphere more welcoming?

AGENDA
PHASE III - BEYOND SHELTER WALLS
FOCUS GROUP WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

(Site and date)

Focus Group Goal

To gather from service providers, advocates and women who have experienced violence and or homelessness, a compilation of recommendations, best practices, policy changes and innovative service ideas that will contribute to the project goals (above). These will primarily be in the areas of (but not restricted to):

Income Support

Housing: long, medium and short term

Other sorts of supports (counseling, outreach, health, training)

Safety & Security (may be an element throughout all areas)

Best Practices (coordination, memoranda of agreement, protocols)

New ideas

Advocacy campaigns

Regional best practices

15 minutes

1. Welcome
2. Introduction to project
3. Introductions
4. Facilitated Discussion on the following Questions:

1.5 hours

1. What are the primary issues you are seeing with regard to women, violence and after-shelter safety for them and their children?
2. Have you had any successes in your region in the areas of:
 - a. Programs
 - b. Advocacy Campaigns
 - c. Policy changes
 - d. Income support
 - e. Housing models/policies
 - f. Funding agreements
 - g. Private sector cooperation/partnerships?
3. Have you developed any models that you feel would benefit women beyond their stay in the shelter, even if these have not been supported or tried? If so what are they?
4. What would you say are the biggest barriers to keeping women out of the cycle of violence in your region?
5. What have been the most beneficial interventions you have found with women and their children experiencing violence and or homelessness?
6. What would you say are the key policy changes needed at the federal/provincial and municipal levels to assist you with the barriers you have to keeping women safe in your region?
7. Are there any models you are aware of for creating safety that prevent women entering the shelter system in the first place (such as removing abusers from the home, etc.); or for those women who do not access shelters?

15 minutes

Evaluation Questions for end of the session:

1. Did you have an opportunity to raise all the issues of concern to you regarding women, violence and after-shelter safety?
2. Is there any additional preparation that would have made the meeting more effective?

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