

ON ONE DAY, 242 SHELTERING ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS CANADA RECORDED HOW MANY WOMEN AND CHILDREN THEY HELPED

SHELTER VOICES

A day in the life of Canada's shelters for women survivors of abuse

This first pan Canadian annual survey gives us insight into a typical day in the life of women's shelters and transition houses across the country, bringing us the voices of the women on the front-lines. Shelter workers from 242 shelters responded to our call. Shelters in all provinces and territories, with the exception of Nunavut, participated in the survey. Shelter Voices aims to shine light on the issue of violence against women and to break barriers by revealing what is happening.

Shelters contribute more than a safe place to stay. They provide vital services and resources that enable women who have experienced abuse, and their children, to re-build self esteem and take steps to regain a self-determined and independent life. They are a focal point connecting women to the services available which are far too often insufficient and uncoordinated.

Women's shelters and transition house workers are leaders in bringing about change and advocating for an end to violence against women. Listening to their voices and the voices of the women they accompany is key to deliver solutions to end violence against women.



ON ONE DAY, **242** SHELTERS
IN CANADA HELPED **4,178**
WOMEN AND **2,490** CHILDREN.

ALTHOUGH NOT ALL SHELTERS RECORD THIS INFORMATION, OF THE WOMEN HELPED, 116 WERE KNOWN TO BE PREGNANT; 184 WERE KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN THREATENED BY A GUN.



Canadian Network of Women's
Shelters & Transition Houses

Réseau canadien des maisons
d'hébergement pour femmes

March 2014

On this same day, **286** women and **205** children could not be accommodated.

“I came here scared and confused. They made me realize that I am worthy of so much more.”

“I like it here because no one is shouting.”
— from a child

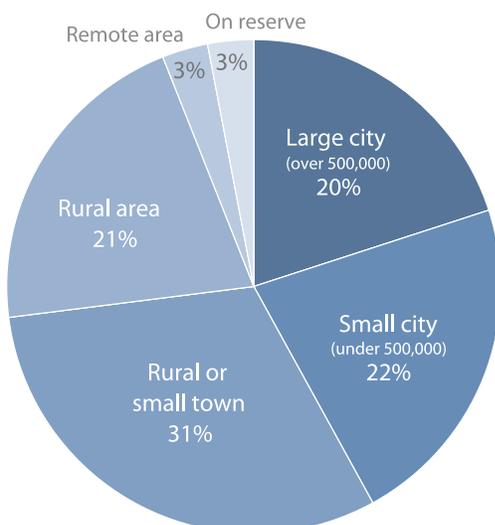
PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING SHELTERS

Of the participating shelters, **84%** were first stage emergency shelters, generally with a length of stay of several weeks offering a communal living environment, **9%** were second stage housing, providing longer lengths of stay in apartments, while the remaining **7%** were a mix of other shelter accommodation. **71%** of shelters were accessible to women with reduced mobility.

SPECIALIZED SERVICES FOR SPECIFIC AT-RISK WOMEN WERE OFFERED IN **79%** OF THE SHELTERS

- **63%** provide specialized services for Aboriginal women
- **58%** provide specialized services for women with disabilities
- **51%** provide specialized services for women dealing with substance abuse
- **43%** provide specialized services for women with mental health issues
- **34%** provide specialized services for trafficked women

SHELTER LOCATIONS



PREVENTION

Prevention is key to ending violence against women.

- **93%** of shelters were involved in some form of prevention work
- **83%** initiated public awareness campaigns
- **76%** were involved in providing education to service providers
- **69%** carried out school based programs

One thing that would make things better? “Access to safe, affordable and permanent housing options. We find that this is one of the main reasons that women end up going back to the abusive relationships time and time again.”

PRIVATE THOUGHTS ON A PUBLIC CRISIS: SURVIVORS SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS

- “It was not my fault.”
- “Thanks so much for all you have given. Your support and house gave me a safe refuge from the storm of my life.”
- “Don’t give up on us because so many of us have already given up on ourselves.”
- “In one day I went from being acutely stressed to hopeful.”
- “I came here a caterpillar and left a butterfly. Thank you for your help and support. I couldn’t have done it without you.”
- “This is the best and safest place to live ever!” — from a nine year old child
- “I need you, please don’t give up on me.”

IF YOU WERE ABLE TO CHANGE ONE THING

Shelters were asked if they were able to change one thing that would make things better for abused women and their children what would it be?

- Affordable and safe housing
- Comprehensive and promptly responsive legal system
- Income and social support
- Interconnected and continuous services

“Greater financial support from social services so women are not choosing between a life with violence or a life in poverty.”

“Immediate court decisions that would allow moms to start rebuilding their lives.”

“Recent immigration changes (Bill C–38), disadvantages immigrant women who are victims of abuse — they are doubly victimized.”

“Need for greater education within schools as violence starts earlier and earlier.”

“Coming from a life of abuse, I have never been treated with such kindness and respect.”

“It’s so hard to watch how the system wears women down, especially when they have so many barriers, that they want to give up. That’s why we care so much because every woman should feel like she has a chance to make it.”

MAJOR CHALLENGES

“Oftentimes, I am in awe of the resilience of the women we help. It truly amazes me.”

Shelters identified the following as their three major challenges

- **70%** Lack of government funding
- **62%** Gaps in services and supports for marginalized women
- **62%** Lack of supports when women leave shelters

“It is demanding work that never ends, but it is so important – seeing women regain control of their lives.”

AS WORKERS, SHELTER WORKERS IDENTIFIED THEIR **TOP 3** ISSUES

- **60%** Concern over inability to effectively address increasingly complex issues client face
- **51%** Feeling of not being able to affect the systemic causes of the issues facing clients
- **46%** Low pay

VOICES FROM SHELTER WORKERS

Shelter workers are well aware that in many instances, shelters are the only hope for women and their children in escaping abuse. Their capacity to help women makes their work very rewarding while the lack of resources, services, collaboration of legal, financial, social systems makes it exasperating.

- “We do our best to help people at their worst. It is hard work. It is exhausting and rewarding, tragic and heart warming.”
- “Seeing women growing strong, confident, and empowered is extremely rewarding.”
- “The women and children we help often have no one else to help them... Shelters are their only hope for getting to safety.”
- “The needs are not only increasing, they are also becoming more complex and challenging.”
- “It is the most rewarding feeling when you see a child smiling.”

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- Affordable and safe housing
- Funding and supports for shelters
- Financial security
- Reversing the culture of violence
- Accessible and responsive legal system



Shelter Voices is produced by the Canadian Network of Women’s Shelters and Transition Houses, a coalition of 12 provincial and territorial shelter networks representing over 350 shelters across Canada. The network works as a unified voice to collaborate, educate, and innovate for systemic change that ends violence against women, making Canada a model for safety in the world. The CNWSTH thanks the Canadian Women’s Foundation and its partners as well as the National Union of Public and General Employees for their contributions to Shelter Voices. Printing provided by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers.

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