

November 26, 2008

City of Calgary
P.O. Box 2100 Station M
Calgary, AB T2P 2M5

Dear Mayor Dave Bronconnier and Calgary Councillors,

We believe that Albertans need to find new ways – and better ways – to end domestic violence in our communities.

Across Alberta, more than 12,000 women and children stayed in Alberta's 41 shelters last year. Nearly 14,500 Albertans were turned away from shelters because they were full. About half the residents in women's shelters are children.

We know you are concerned about the unacceptable rate of domestic assaults, severe injuries and homicides you have witnessed in your own region. With that challenge in mind, we offer *Second Stage Shelters: Closing the Gap*, A practical guide for your community.

We are sending this report to local leaders across the province as a call to action. Our latest research suggests that Alberta needs new Second Stage shelters urgently. We need you as an ally in our effort to open them.

As you know, emergency women's shelters can only provide safe temporary accommodation for women and children in crisis. Emergency assistance is essential but it does not fix the problem. Where are these families supposed to go when they leave the emergency shelter?

Housing costs in Alberta have soared in a decade of rapid economic growth. An influx of new workers compounds the severe shortage of affordable housing.

It is impossible for an Alberta woman to leave a violent abuser, and protect her children from violence, if she can't find an apartment or small home she can afford on her own at a traumatic time in her life.

Second Stage shelters provide safe accommodation with supportive programs for six months or more. They give a woman the necessary time to heal the wounds of an abusive relationship, to find counseling, a job or educational opportunity and a safe home for her family. Second stage shelters are often apartment buildings with enhanced security and onsite support – and they offer essential stability for children who need to attend local schools.

The enclosed guide offers step-by-step assistance for communities that want to introduce a Second Stage shelter. We urge you to visit your local women's shelter, and speak to the board and executive director about the possibility.

We also ask you to stand beside us, with

- A resolution from your municipal council, as we ask the Government of Alberta to increase its operational support for this worthwhile program.
- Support for second stage housing as a priority for your local community's housing and preventative social service programs.

A link between family violence and homelessness has been well documented. Second Stage housing therefore is a critical component of any strategy to end homelessness.

To date, the province does not have an ongoing funding program for Second Stage shelters. Yet, we know that outcomes for women and children who stay in Second Stage Shelters are excellent. Stable families no longer need emergency services such as police, ambulance, or child welfare interventions. Yet, only two of the Second Stage programs in Alberta receive partial funding from the Women's Shelter Program administered by Alberta Children and Youth Services.

We hope this practical guide will better inform you of the great work that Wings of Providence and La Salle "A Safe Place for Women and their Children" is doing in your community. You may be particularly interested in the social return on the investment case study which demonstrates the positive economic and social impact of supportive housing. We welcome your questions, your comments and any assistance you can provide.

Sincerely,

ALBERTA COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS

Jan Reimer
Provincial Co-ordinator

cc: Edmonton Women's Shelter Ltd
La Salle "A Safe Place for Women and their Children"
Lurana Shelter
Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton (SAGE)
Wings of Providence