

MEDIA RELEASE

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WOMEN AND CHILDREN ESCAPE ABUSE TO FIND THEMSELVES HOMELESS

Women have accomplished great strides in gaining respect, equality, and enhancement of status, which we celebrate every March 8th during International Women's Day. Yet many of our friends have not tasted the fruits of our efforts; they have been abused in their homes in front of their children, all dignity taken. And when they reach out for help, they are faced with a lack of resources to empower their departure into a new, safe life for them and their families. Women and children are escaping abuse to find they are homeless.

Results from a recent survey conducted by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters reveals a desperate need for second stage shelters and affordable housing for women leaving emergency shelters. Emergency shelters provide safe accommodation for women and children fleeing abuse for up to 21 days, while a second stage shelter can provide safe accommodation, supportive programs, and opportunities for up to 6 months. This can give a woman the necessary time to heal from an abusive relationship and find the resources for income and shelter to make a safe home for her family.

Twenty shelters reported that 50% to 100% of their clients need to access Second Stage Housing and the majority are turned away. In Edmonton alone there are 110 emergency beds, but only 20-second stage apartments. Many women are also referred to local housing authorities, some of which give families affected by domestic violence top priority. However, most housing authorities have thousands of people on a waiting list and it could be months before a suitable home is available. Lack of affordable housing is one of the top reasons women return to abusive relationships.

There was strong consensus among women's shelters that every community with an emergency shelter should have ready access to a second stage shelter. "Studies tell us that there needs to be up to 3 second stage beds for every emergency bed. The government must recognize this need for additional, affordable housing for women leaving abusive relations. Not only is there a need for housing, but also supportive programs available during the transition from emergency to second stage shelters. For women who are unable to access either shelters, outreach and follow up programs are also critical and must be funded and supported on an on-going basis" says Jan Reimer.

This year's International Women's Day theme is "She's on a Role!" Our community needs to make this a reality for all women, especially those in crisis.

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