

FOR OUR FIFTH EDITION OF SHELTER VOICES, 215 SHELTERING ORGANIZATIONS ACROSS CANADA RECORDED HOW MANY WOMEN AND CHILDREN THEY HELPED IN A SINGLE DAY

SHELTER VOICES 2018



Shelter Voices 2018 is our fifth national survey of transition houses and shelters¹ serving women and children affected by violence against women. Women's Shelters Canada liaises with over 525 facilities across the country. For this one-day snapshot² we received responses from over 215 shelters³ across all 13 provinces and territories.

On a single day, 215 transition houses and shelters were housing and helping a total of 3613 women and 2244 children. Of these, 1807 women and 1587 children were staying in shelters benefitting from programming, groups, and services. An additional 1806 women and 657 children received help through outreach programs, without staying in the shelter itself.

47% of responding shelters were full on their snapshot day

218 women and 186 children requested shelter at 105 transition houses and shelters on a single day. Of those 404 requests, 59 requests from women and 41 requests on behalf of children resulted in residential intake, while 159 requests from women and 145 requests from children had to be turned away due to lack of capacity and resources. This means that 75% of potential new residents could not be accommodated that day. 47% of responding shelters and transition houses had no available beds on the day of the snapshot.

Over past editions of Shelter Voices since we started tracking bed availability and turnaway rates, these numbers have remained comparable:

Shelter Voices Year	Turnaway rate (women + children)	% of shelters with no available beds
2015	71%	45%
2016	73%	38%
2017	75%	44%
2018	75%	47%

Did You Know?

Although not all shelters record this information, of the women helped, 102 were known to be pregnant and 94 had been threatened with a gun.

These numbers suggest that a significant proportion of shelters are chronically over capacity, and staff testimony corroborates these numbers.



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June 2018

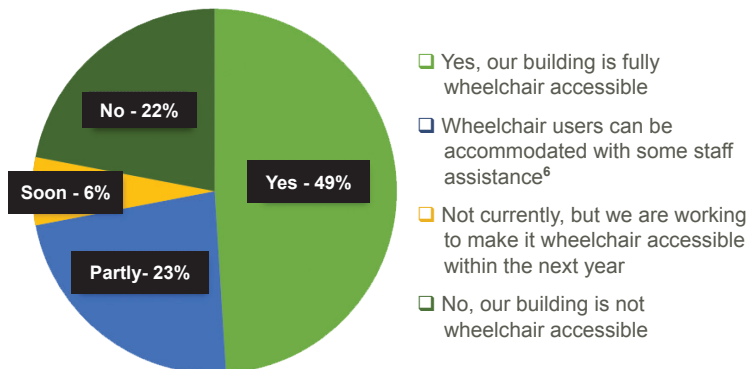
Despite the challenge of many shelters being chronically overcapacity, shelters and transition houses work hard to close gaps in access to their services and to increase the range of help they offer. This year, Shelter Voices collected information on prevalence of wheelchair accessibility, children's counselling and pet sheltering. We focused some additional questions on the impact of pet sheltering on women's readiness to leave an abusive partner, and also showcase some recent Canadian research that reveals violence against family pets as a form of abusive power and control and the measures its impacts on women.

Wheelchair Accessibility⁴

Women with disabilities face approximately twice the rate of intimate partner abuse relative to women without disabilities⁵. Women's shelters have made progress in increasing access for women who use wheelchairs, with 78% self-reporting as fully or partially accessible or in the process of planning retrofits. However, 22% recognize that they are not wheelchair accessible and don't have a solution on the horizon. Many shelters are located in old buildings and would require significant funding to retrofit or build a new accessible space.

Forthcoming survey reports will explore other forms of accessibility.

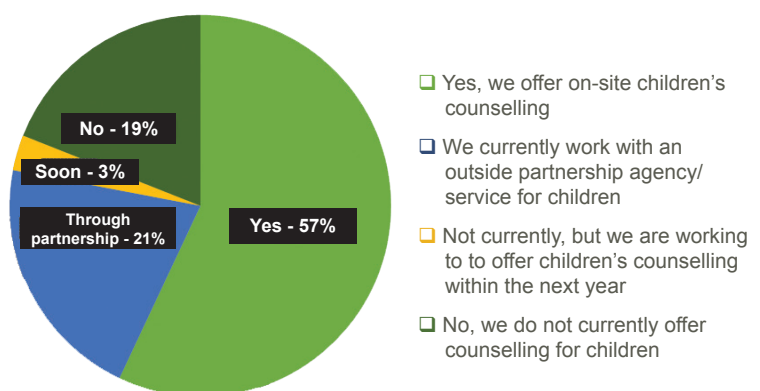
Is your shelter or transition house currently wheelchair accessible?



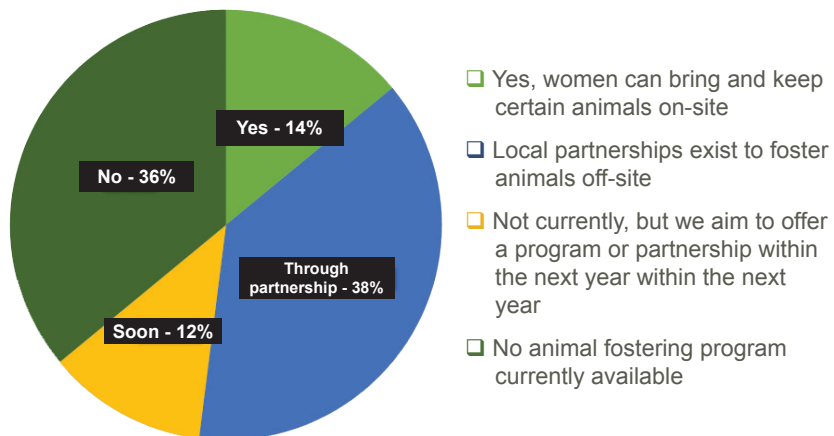
Counselling Programs for Children who have Experienced Violence

Canadian statistics show that about half of women entering VAW shelters bring their children with them, and that 67% of these children are under the age of 10 years old⁷. As the BCSTH's PEACE Program Policy Template and Guide explains, "even when children are not the primary target of the violence, they still experience, are affected by, resist and respond to it."⁸ Shelters increasingly recognize the value of counselling programs that address children's experiences of violence in their home life.. Over half of the shelters who responded to this survey currently offer on-site specialized children's counselling, but 19% of responding shelters do not have this programming available or even on the horizon.

Does your shelter or transition house currently offer specialized children's counselling programs?



Does your shelter or transition house currently offer pet sheltering programs?



Pet Sheltering

There is a surge of growing interest in offering pet sheltering programs for women leaving abusive relationships. Currently, only 14% of responding shelters offer an on-site pet sheltering program, but 38% have a local partnership program they can rely on and a full 12% of shelters are in the process of developing a program or partnership within the next year. However, 36% of shelters are not able to offer any support for sheltering a woman's pets when she leaves an abusive partner, typically due to lack of resources.

“A lot of women see pets as their family, and will refuse to leave their abusive situation without them, especially when the abuser uses the pet as a pawn.” – ShelterVoices 2018 shelter respondent

“We acknowledge the impact of pets on women and DV. We don't currently have the resources to manage.” – ShelterVoices 2018 shelter respondent

AIPARG's New Canadian Research on Animal Abuse and VAW

The Animals and Interpersonal Abuse Research Group (AIPARG) of the University of Windsor conducts new Canadian research on the intersection of abuse against people and animals. Pet ownership is very common: 57% of Canadian homes have pets, and 75% of families with children (ages 6-11) have at least one pet. The majority of Canadians consider their pets to be part of the family.

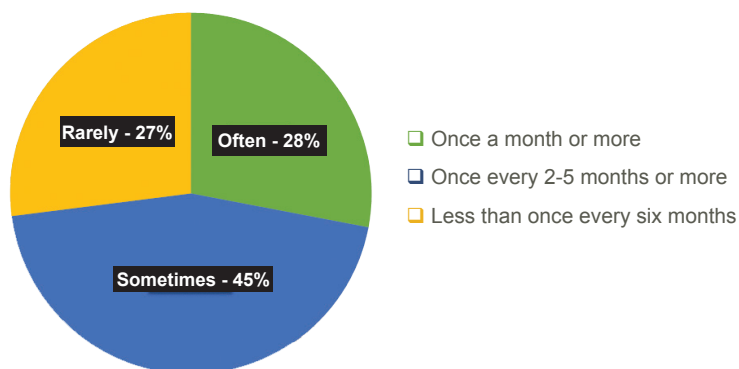
In research conducted across 16 Canadian shelters, researchers found that while threats to the safety of a household pet increased women's desire to leave, 56% delayed leaving due to concern about pet's safety. 47% would have left earlier if could have brought pet to shelter with them. 60% of women covered in the AIPARG study left their pet with her abuser, and approximately 33% considered returning to her abuser because he had her pets.

To learn more about AIPARG's new Canadian research on the intersections between animal and interpersonal abuse, visit <http://www.uwindsor.ca/aipabuseresearchgroup/>

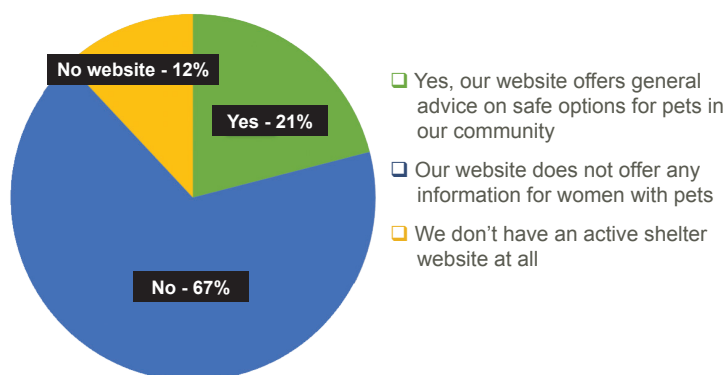
Shelters are contacted by a steady flow of women seeking safety for their pets as part of their own process of leaving abuse.

Although 52% of shelters in this survey have either on-site or community-based pet sheltering options available for women, only 21% of shelters offer information on their website about pet safety options. Shelters often lack the resources to update their websites or to offer a website at all, so many women remain unaware of the wide range of services available and may be discouraged from approaching shelters.

How frequently do women reach out to your shelter seeking help for themselves and their pet?



Does the website of your shelter or transition house include information to women seeking safe options for their pets while fleeing abuse?



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“Collaboration with community partners has taken several years, ensuring solid contract, safety measures, financial means are in place prior to launch has been vital.”

– ShelterVoices 2018 shelter respondent

Shelter Voices is produced by Women’s Shelters Canada (formerly the Canadian Network of Women’s Shelters and Transition Houses). We represent a strong, unified voice on the issue of violence against women on the national stage. Through collaboration, knowledge exchange, and adoption of innovative practices, we advance the co-ordination and implementation of high quality services for women and children accessing shelters.

Learn more at www.endvaw.ca and on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram at [@endvawnetwork](https://www.instagram.com/endvawnetwork).

¹ “Women’s shelters” and “transition houses” are regional synonyms and are used interchangeably in this report.

² Respondents picked a day in March or April 2018.

³ This response rate represents about 41% of the women’s shelters and transition houses in Canada.

⁴ We recognize that wheelchair accessibility is only one aspect of accessibility for women with disabilities.

⁵ Violent victimization of women with disabilities, 2014 <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2018001/article/54910-eng.htm>

⁶ Partial accessibility can remain isolating for women who require mobility support, as they may not have independent access to all areas of the shelter.

⁷ “little eyes, little ears: how violence against a mother shapes children as they grow” 2007, Alison Cunningham & Linda Baker, the Centre for Children and Families in the Justice System <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/prevention-resource-centre/women/little-eyes-little-ears-violence-against-a-mother-shapes-children-they-grow.html#Fac>

⁸ PEACE Program Policy Guide and Template, 2017, BCSTH <https://bcsth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PEACE-Program-Policy-Template-and-Guide-2018-Final.pdf>



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