

# ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2018 - MARCH 2019



**WOMEN'S  
SHELTERS  
CANADA**

Shelters and  
Transition Houses  
United to End Violence  
Against Women

## ABOUT US

In 2009, drawn together by a shared vision to end violence against women and the need for a unified voice at the national level, the provincial and territorial shelter associations began giving shape to the Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses. On March 8, 2017 – International Women's Day – the Network officially changed its name to Women's Shelters Canada (WSC). Together, we have become a national, collaborative voice for change. The Network was incorporated and became a charitable organization in November 2012.

### Our Beliefs

- We believe that ensuring women's human rights is a public responsibility, and that governments and communities are responsible for it.
- We believe that women's human rights include the right of all women to live free from violence.
- We believe that to implement these rights, governments and communities need to recognize in their decisions and actions the diversity and dignity of all women.
- We believe that the women's shelter movement plays a critical leadership role in the provincial/territorial, national, and global effort to end violence against women (VAW) and their children.

*Women's Shelters Canada acknowledges that the location of our office and the work that we do in Ottawa is on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people.*

## STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

In December 2018, the Board of Directors, Advisory Council, and WSC staff came together with a facilitator to develop a Strategic Plan, 2019-2022. The vision, mission, and beliefs of the organization were revised and are posted on the website. The following strategic directions were approved:

- Advocate to remove systemic barriers identified by members to improve equity, safety and access to services for all women and children fleeing violence
- Implement relevant strategies and Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People
- Support and amplify the role of women's shelters in community collaborative responses and prevention strategies
- Collaborate with partners on national strategic initiatives and prevention



## STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS

Expanding our reach and our capacity to strengthen connections reflects much of our work in 2018-19. The year began with much anticipation, enthusiasm, and a healthy dose of anxiety as we made the final arrangements for our first national conference for violence against women shelters. What a pleasure it was to welcome close to 600 delegates from all provinces and territories to Ottawa in June 2018. The conference generated such a buzz to the extent that Sophie Grégoire Trudeau reached out to us on the eve of the closing ceremony to ask if she could attend, which she did!



In the first part of the year, we also worked with the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women's team to organize visits to shelters during her official visit in April 2018. She was able to visit shelters in Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Iqaluit.

Data analysis from our first national comprehensive VAW shelter survey was front and center during the year. It provides incredibly valuable information on the work done by shelters across the country, along with their challenges.

In December 2018, we had our first in-person Board of Directors meeting within our new governance structure that includes Public Directors. We welcomed Bev Wybrow, Claudette Dumont-Smith, and Saadia Muzaftar as our first Public Directors. At this meeting, the Advisory Council and staff worked with the Board to develop its strategic directions for 2019-22.

This fiscal year also brought good news in terms of Women's Shelters Canada successfully submitting several proposals. We received a four-year capacity building grant that will allow us to develop and implement both a sustainability plan and a collective advocacy initiative with our provincial and territorial members. We also received funding to develop Circles of Safety in Watson Lake, Yukon, Peace River, Alberta and La Ronge, Saskatchewan. We will be working with Justice Options, a PEI women's organization that initiated Circles of Safety in their home province. This is also a four-year project. Both grants are from the Ministry for Women and Gender Equality. Finally, we received a research grant from the CMHC for a research project specifically on second stage shelters.

As we gear up for a federal election in the fall of 2019, it is important to remember that violence against women is a non-partisan issue and that all parties should recognize the need for a National Action Plan which is comprehensive, intersectional, and well resourced.

We thank the provincial and territorial shelter associations, individual shelters, and our partners their time, knowledge, and expertise.

*Lise Martin*  
*Executive Director*

*Manon Monastesse*  
*Co-Chair*

*Jan Reimer*  
*Co-Chair*  
*(until Jan 2019)*

2018-2019

## REVIEW OF THE YEAR

- Hosted our first national conference in June, [Shelters of the Future: A National Conversation](#), bringing together nearly 600 participants from across the country
- Welcomed three Public Directors as new members of the [Board of Directors](#)
- Added new search features and criteria to [Sheltersafe.ca](#) and it was promoted in a national newspaper
- Released the report, "[Mapping VAW Shelters and Transition Houses: Initial Findings of a National Survey](#)"
- Published our fifth annual issue of [Shelter Voices](#)
- Acted as the shelter liaison for the visit of Dubravka Šimonović, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, during her official country visit to Canada in April
- Continued to advocate for a National Action Plan on VAW, including starting an [online petition](#) that got nearly 15,000 signatures
- Brought together 8 participants from VAW shelters in May 2018 to share their progress, challenges, and lessons learned in the process of making their shelters more [inclusive for trans women](#)
- Facilitated one [shelter exchange](#), bringing the total to five across the country with two more occurring in Spring 2019
- Co-facilitated an [Open Doors](#) training session in Quebec
- Produced a [webinar](#) on WSC's Practice Implementation Manual, a 10-step guide to implementing a promising practice in a VAW shelter
- Participated in Oxfam's How Change Happens Speaking tour in April 2018 as a national partner and connected the tour with local shelter speakers
- Attended the meeting of the Global Network of Women's Shelters in New York

- Grew the Founding Donors of our [Strengthening Ties campaign](#) to 70 men
- Consulted with Federal Government: CMHC Human Rights-Based Approach to Housing Roundtable (June 2018); Bill C-65 An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (harassment and violence), the Parliamentary Employment and Staff Relations Act and the Budget Implementation Act, 2017, No. 1 (May 2018)
- Presented a brief and recommendations to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Committees Directorate on Bill C-71 An Act to amend certain Acts and Regulations in relation to firearms
- Appeared [as a witness](#) at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women Committee's study on the system of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by VAW
- Submitted a brief on Bill C-78: An Act to amend the Divorce Act
- Member of Minister Monsef's Advisory Council on Gender-Based Violence
- Member of Steering Committee of Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing Symposium
- Met with approximately 100 shelter directors in Alberta, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Nunavut (teleconference) to engage in a conversation on shelters of the future
- Member of the national planning committee of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence Campaign
- Facilitated and presented at a community classroom for Octopus Books in Ottawa on the challenges facing VAW shelters in Canada
- Over 100 shelters were [associate members](#) of WSC
- Continued to build a diverse base of supporters

# CANADA'S FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR VAW SHELTERS

To mark our five-year anniversary, Women's Shelters Canada held its [first national VAW shelter conference](#). Drawing nearly 600 participants, Shelters of the Future: A National Conversation took place in Ottawa from June 13-15, 2018. There were 58 concurrent sessions with over 150 presenters as well as two moderated plenary discussions on (1) Creating Change and Movement Building and (2) Reducing Barriers to Accessing VAW Services.

A solidarity fund facilitated the participation of four key groups: representatives from indigenous women's shelters, representatives from rural and remote shelters, women with lived experience, and women living with a disability. 45 women received full or partial scholarships to attend the conference.

The conference highlighted the work of shelters and shelter workers; provided capacity building opportunities; and contributed to the development and enhancement of policy linked to the issue of VAW. It was a chance to re-energize and empower themselves, to see that they are not alone in the work they do. And it was another step towards our goals of ensuring comparable services are available to all women fleeing violence, no matter where they live.

*"Thank you for organizing this essential forum and keeping these necessary discussions moving forward."*

*"It was one of the best conferences I've ever attended. Really appreciated the way survivors' voices were centred. Thank you for all your work!"*

## SHELTERS SAFE.CA FINDING SAFETY 24/7

[ShelterSafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca) is an online resource helping women and their children seeking safety from violence and abuse. The clickable map serves as a quick way to connect women with the nearest shelter or transition house (TH) that can offer safety, hope, and support. Over 460 shelters and transition houses are currently listed, with their consent, on [sheltersafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca), representing 80% of VAW facilities across the country.

On the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, WSC launched new search features on [Sheltersafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca). An improved search and map function now enables searches by address, city/town, landmark, or shelter name. Users can also adjust the search radius and see which shelters/THs are located across provincial and territorial borders. This is useful for those women who may need to leave their region due to safety concerns or who want to access a shelter in an area near family or friends. The zoom feature on the map is limited so that the exact location of the shelter/TH remains confidential.

Shelters/THs are now also searchable by the following criteria:

- Pet sheltering programs (onsite or offsite)
- Physical accessibility (fully or partly)
- Children's programs (onsite or offsite)



## ADVOCATING FOR A NAP ON VAW

This year, WSC continued to advocate for a [National Action Plan \(NAP\) on Violence Against Women](#). In June 2017, the Government of Canada announced its Strategy to Address and Prevent Gender Based Violence. While this is a step towards a NAP, it differs in that it only deals with federal institutions. Canada needs a NAP on VAW to ensure that women in all areas of the country have access to comparable levels of services and protection. A NAP would ensure a shared understanding of the root causes of VAW as well as coordinated and effective efforts across the federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal levels.

In April, 2018, WSC acted as the shelter liaison for the visit of Dubravka Šimonović, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, during her official country visit to Canada in April. She visited shelters in Winnipeg, Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, and Iqaluit. One of her final recommendations was that Canada commit to a NAP on VAW.

WSC also initiated a [petition on Change.org](#) asking Prime Minister Trudeau to commit to a NAP on VAW in the wake of the Toronto attack, which garnered nearly 15,000 signatures.

In Fall 2018, the Standing Committee on the Status of Women did a study on the system of shelters and transition houses serving women and children affected by violence against women and intimate partner violence. Lise Martin, executive director, appeared before the Committee as a witness and staff from WSC attended every session. WSC [produced a blog](#) describing the highs and lows of the process and successfully advocated for an additional session to hear specifically from Indigenous women's organizations.

## SUPPORTING TRANS WOMEN IN VAW SHELTERS

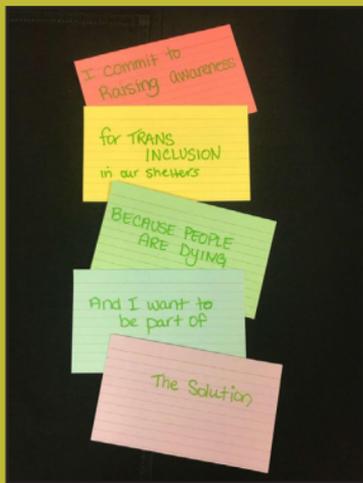
In May 2018, WSC brought together eight participants and two co-facilitators from across the country for a [Community of Practice \(COP\) on Supporting Trans Women in VAW Shelters](#). Throughout the two-day meeting in Regina, COP participants shared their successes, challenges, and lessons learned from the process of equipping their shelters to better support trans women. They also worked together to identify promising practices and useful resources that could be shared with other shelters and transition houses that are working on becoming more inclusive of trans women.

WSC compiled this information into a final report, short video, and six case studies.

*“People in crisis recognize people in crisis.”*

*“Better training helps calm fears and raise confidence.”*

*“Historically, intersex and gender queer people went to women’s spaces because they were safer spaces to be in.”*



## ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

Women's Shelters Canada has over 100 individual shelters [associate members](#). Together our impact is greater. As a recognized, collective, pan-Canadian voice for the women's shelter sector, this support enables transformative work at the national level and improved connections between shelters in all regions of the country.

Membership Benefits Include:

1. Being part of a recognized, collective pan-Canadian voice on VAW and shelters/transition houses
2. Priority access to shelter exchange program and WSC workshops and webinars
3. Sectoral updates, policy analysis, and resources via a quarterly newsletter
4. Free give-aways from sponsors
5. Listing on our website plus social media follows and shares

So far, WSC has facilitated five [shelter exchanges](#) across the country, with two more planned for Spring 2019. Participants found the exchange to be a meaningful opportunity to learn about how other shelters operate and to identify similarities and differences. They came away with plenty of new ideas to implement in their home shelter, plus a feeling of reassurance that they are not alone in their work.



## STRENGTHENING TIES

This year, we continued to recruit men to be founding donors of the [Strengthening Ties Campaign](#), getting closer to our goal of 100 prominent men supporting violence against women's shelters.

Until now, private donations to Canada's shelter system have primarily come from women. Strengthening Ties gives men the opportunity to change that. It is a specific invitation to men to become part of this initiative through a financial pledge, providing both connection and critical funding to the shelter system.

The short-term vision for this circle of male allies is to address the gender balance of supporters for women's shelters and transition houses in this country. The long-term vision involves a much loftier goal: to end the need for shelters in Canada, period.

As Elizabeth Renzetti put it in her [article in The Globe & Mail](#), "There is money out there, as yet untapped. It's in the wallets of men who have been too uncomfortable to step forward, or perhaps have never been asked. They might not have known how to make a tangible difference, until now."

The names of the Founding Donors of the Strengthening Ties campaign can be found on our website: [www.endvaw.ca/strengthening-ties](http://www.endvaw.ca/strengthening-ties). We thank them for supporting our work to end violence against women in Canada.

## WHO WE ARE

### Board of Directors

Amy S. FitzGerald  
Claudette Dumont-Smith  
Jo-Anne Dusel (as of Jan 2019)  
Lyda Fuller  
Marlene Ham  
Manon Monastesse  
Saadia Muzaffar  
Jan Reimer (until Jan 2019)  
Ellen Ridgeway  
Beverley Wybrow

### Volunteers

Peeha Luthra  
Jennyca Jean-Denis  
Melytsah Louis

### Staff

Lise Martin  
Kaitlin Bardswich  
Krystle Maki  
Heather Stewart  
Leah Stuart-Sheppard  
Patricia Hendrick

### National Conference

#### Staff

Emily DaSilva  
Claire Fitzpatrick

*L to R: Peeha,  
Krystle, Lise, Kaitlin,  
Heather, and Emily at  
the end of the national  
conference*



## DONORS

Women and Gender Equality Canada (formerly Status of Women Canada)

Justice Canada

Canadian Heritage

Canadian Federation of Nurses Union

Canadian Labour Congress

Canadian Union of Postal Workers

Canadian Union of Public Employees

Canadian Women's Foundation

Facebook

Happy Trails Racing

Leacross Foundation

National Union of Public and General Employees

Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association

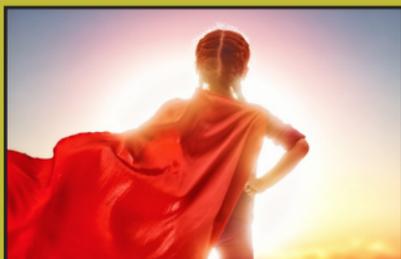
Public Service Alliance of Canada

Telus

The Tenaquip Foundation

United Food and Commercial Workers

We would also like to thank the individual donors who have helped us achieve our goals this year.



# Visit [www.endvaw.ca](http://www.endvaw.ca) to:

- access our programs and reports
- access videos about shelter work across the country
- see our financial statements
- read press releases and updates
- find out how to support our work
- sign up for our quarterly e-newsletter

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YouTube: <http://bit.ly/2udQYqb>

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