



# SHELTER VOICES

## BEYOND WALLS



**S**helter Voices 2023 is the ninth national survey of shelters and transition houses (THs) that serve women and children affected by violence.<sup>1</sup> **This issue of Shelter Voices was designed to contribute to a better understanding of the non-residential and external services and programs provided by shelters/THs, highlighting the range of work happening in these organizations beyond providing a safe place to sleep.**

While shelters/THs are typically associated with providing a safe refuge for survivors of violence, these organizations also provide a large variety of services to not only those living in shelters, but to anyone in the community currently or formerly experiencing violence. In addition, shelters/THs have vast experience in providing training and programming on violence prevention in communities across the country.

### NON-RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Overall, 94% (230) of responding shelters/THs indicated that they offer services, support, and programming to non-residents. These supports are available both in-person and remotely (virtually and via phone), with 70% of respondents indicating that survivors could access services and support through either method. This remote access to support is facilitated through crisis lines, which were operated by 84% of respondents. Figures 1 and 2 show only a small number of the many supports offered to non-residents.

**Figure 1**

TOP NON-RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS & SUPPORTS OFFERED	% OF RESPONDENTS PROVIDING SUPPORT
Safety Planning	89%
Court Accompaniment/Legal Advocacy	74%
Therapy/Counselling for Adults	63%
Transportation	57%
Financial Literacy/Budgeting	52%

**Figure 2**

TOP NON-RESIDENTIAL SERVICE NAVIGATION SUPPORTS OFFERED	% OF RESPONDENTS PROVIDING SUPPORT
Housing/Landlords	76%
Legal/Court System	76%
Mental Health	73%
Government Support/Benefits	73%
Child Welfare/Protective Services	73%

While an integral component of the work of shelters/THs is providing safe shelter for those fleeing violence, this is only one aspect of the work done in these spaces. Non-residential services and supports are a way for shelters to meet people where they are at. For those who are unable, or not ready, to leave violent circumstances, and those who have left the shelter but still need supports, shelters offer a path to healing through system navigation, community connection, programming, and individualized plans and supports. Shelters also offer a continuum of care that can extend long past the time an individual resides in a shelter.

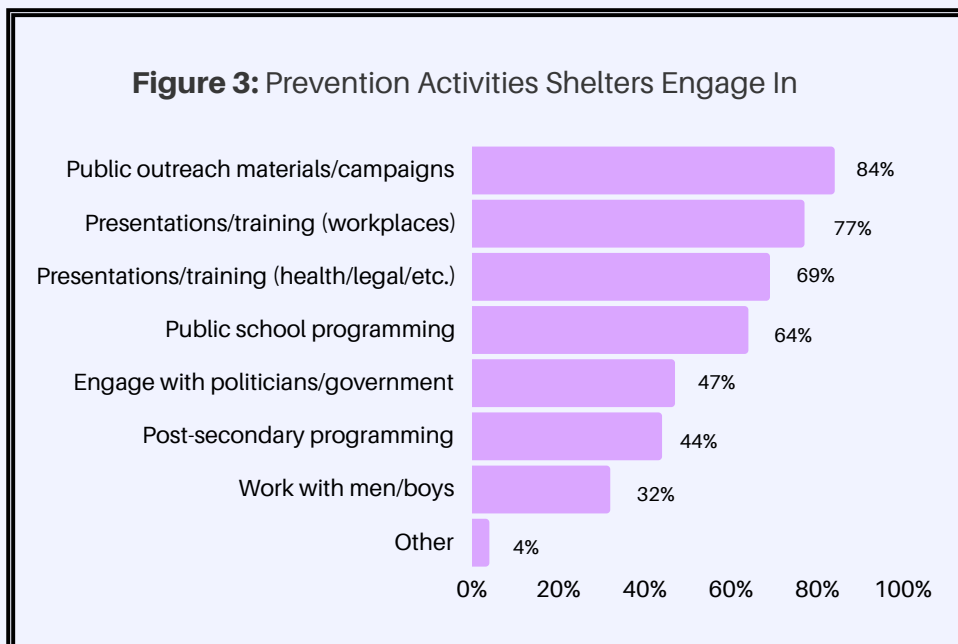
Shelters have limited capacity to provide beds to those in need. While they may have to turn people away from becoming residents, many shelters work to provide non-residential supports to these individuals. Unfortunately, as there is a focus on residential supports and services, there is more limited funding available for, and understanding of, the work that is done to support those who do not stay in shelter.

The general public often perceive shelters/THs as only working with women who experience violence. While this is the primary population supported by shelters/THs, organizations also provide non-residential supports and programming to children and men. Supports for children were provided by 70% (213) of respondents, while supports for men were provided by 34% (214) of respondents. Among those organizations offering supports to men, 62% (73) were providing supports to men who perpetrate abuse and 78% work with men who experience abuse.

**PREVENTION**

Also often unknown, shelter/TH organizations do substantial violence prevention work. These organizations are engaged in advocacy, education and training, and awareness raising through their daily activities, as well as specialized prevention programming. A large majority (91%, 230) of respondents were engaged in prevention work (Figure 3).

Shelters/THs spend a significant amount of time doing prevention, training, and awareness activities, with 27% of respondents indicating that they spend 20 or more hours per month on this work (Figure 4). These activities receive limited funding, despite their importance in contributing toward reductions in gender-based violence. While 60% indicated that some of this work is funded through operational funding, much of this is being done without consistent funding. Organizations remain committed to doing prevention work, with 39% stating that they do this without receiving any funding. Without consistent resourcing, however, this vital work is unsustainable.





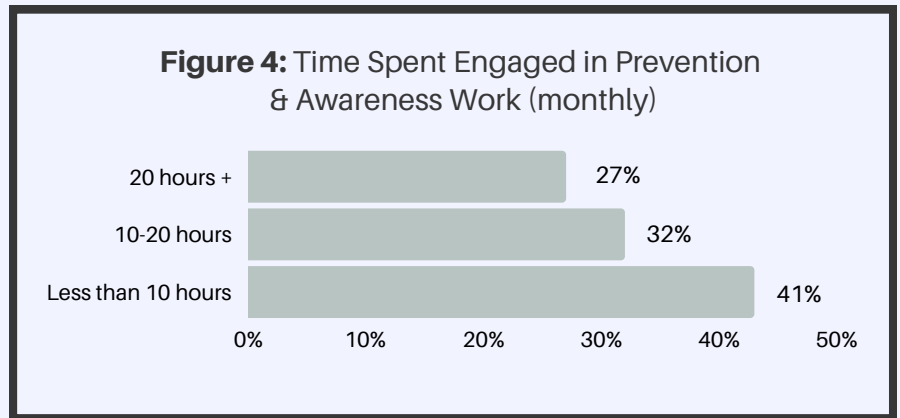
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*Each funding source is so small. We have to piece it all together or work off the side of our desks to do prevention.*

*Lack of sustainable funding is 95% of the problem. We are ready to do so much more prevention work if we had the sustainable funding.*

## CHALLENGES

Much of the funding shelters/THs receive is focused on providing a bed and supports to those fleeing violence within the shelter, while fewer resources are allocated to non-residential services and prevention work. This is reflective of the top response to the challenges of providing non-residential supports, which was funding (74%, 188). This was followed closely by staffing issues (67%), which we explored through the Feminist Brain Drain study<sup>2</sup> and *Shelter Voices 2022*.<sup>3</sup>



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*Funding is such a challenge. It deserves to be mentioned twice!*

*Having the organizational infrastructure and time to develop programs and supports due to lack of funding for staffing is a challenge. It is very challenging and requires a lot of outreach and engagement to lead these types of programs. All agencies and service users are overwhelmed and continue to be in survival mode.*

While organizations may be experiencing challenges in continuing to offer non-residential services and supports, they are largely not reducing their program offerings. More than three-quarters of respondents indicated that they had not cut or reduced these supports in the preceding 12 months.<sup>4</sup>

Among the 20% (188) that had to cut or reduce services, 53% indicated that this was due to a lack of funding, with 37% pointing to staffing issues. In addition to those who reported cuts or reductions to service in the last year, 16% (229) indicated that they are anticipating cuts and 22% were unsure if they would need to reduce programming in the upcoming year.





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*The demand for community-based services is increasing. We have already met our targets for the entire year, and we are only halfway through the year. We have recently implemented a waitlist for the first time ever because our program staff cannot keep up with demand.*

Without stabilization funding, many feared that they would not be able to maintain new programs that they had developed over the last three years with COVID supports. They also expressed concerns that, without investments, it would be difficult to meet the high demand for services that organizations are currently experiencing.



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*The funding for residential programs is stretched beyond affordability, thus making programs for non-residents almost prohibitive. The continued operation of these programs is questionable.*

*There is so much to do and not enough funding, staff, or time. We are stretched thin, and the demand is growing.*

## INNOVATIONS

Shelters/THs may be struggling to navigate funding and staffing issues, among other challenges, but they continue to be innovative regardless. Organizations were asked to share innovations they had implemented during the pandemic and intended to maintain, as well as more recent innovations that they had launched. In response, there were over 350 answers. Figure 5 captures the most common themes of activities launched during the pandemic, while the quotes represent just a few of the responses. Similarly, Figure 6 shares the themes of activities launched in the last 12 months, as well as associated responses.

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*We offered virtual counselling, safety planning, and groups during the pandemic for our outreach clients. We continue to offer virtual as a means to access service if the client prefers, however we are doing in-person as well now that pandemic guidelines have changed.*

Figure 5

TOP PANDEMIC AREAS OF INNOVATION
Adoption of New Technology, Including Virtual Services
News & Increased Programming & Outreach
Staff Training, Wellness & Support
Future Pandemic & Emergency Preparedness
Creation of Connections & Collaborations
Mental Health & Health Supports



*We built on-site pet kennels and have a mental health counsellor on-site one day per week.*

*We began an art therapy program to support ex-residents and others who have experienced gendered violence.*

*We increased communication and community partnerships. These relationships allow us to do more with less.*

*We started a new prevention program for youth wanting to address gender-based violence.*

*We collaborated with partners to offer trainings and workshops for service providers and other workplaces like the city government.*

*We progressed our EDI processes.*

*We sponsored a plot in the community garden for our ex-residents who were interested in growing fresh produce. Our outreach worker planned events around the gardening activities.*

*We produced a free web series [which highlights the work occurring in the shelter], and two intervention tools in the form of board games.*

The above quotes represent only a small cross-section of the many ways organizations are trying new ideas to remain responsive to their communities, despite working in deeply challenging funding environments. Often, we hear that shelters/THs are not innovative or open to change, but the multitude of responses to these questions shows the ways that organizations are working to lead change on gender-based violence while supporting those experiencing violence. Imagine what they could do with sufficient funding.

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*Shelter Voices* is produced by Women’s Shelters Canada. We work as a unified voice for systemic change to end violence against women, while providing leadership for collaboration and knowledge exchange among shelters and transition houses across the country.

Photos from **Unsplash**.

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

1 The survey received responses from 233 VAW shelter organizations representing 397 shelters/THs, including emergency, second stage, and mixed shelters. This included responses from every province and territory, urban and rural areas, and Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit) shelters.

2 Women’s Shelters Canada Feminist Brain Drain Study, <https://endvaw.ca/feminist-brain-drain>.

3 Women’s Shelters Canada. (2022) *Shelter Voices 2022: Labour Issues and the VAW Sector*. <https://endvaw.ca/shelter-voices-2022>.

4 September 1, 2022 – August 31, 2023.

**Figure 6**

TOP RECENT AREAS OF INNOVATION (LAST 12 MONTHS)
News & Increased Programming & Outreach
Creation of Connections & Collaborations
Prevention, Training & Awareness
Addition of New Staff Positions
Organizational Changes