

ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2019 - MARCH 2020



**WOMEN'S
SHELTERS
CANADA**

Shelters and
Transition Houses
United to End Violence
Against Women

**SHELTERS
SUPPORT WOMEN
AND CHILDREN
FLEEING VIOLENCE.**

**WE SUPPORT
SHELTERS.**

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 what would become Women's Shelters Canada (then known as the Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses). Together, we have become a national, collaborative voice for change. The organization 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.

A BIG YEAR FOR WSC!

To say that 2019-20 was a big year for our organization is an understatement! We began the year by launching our More than a Bed report, Canada's first comprehensive review of VAW shelters and transition houses. The ground-breaking report includes a wealth of information that allows us to better understand shelters and the wide range of work they do. Since launching the report on May 1, 2019, we have called upon the data and information numerous times to help us make informed decisions about our current and future work. Shelters and provincial/territorial associations are also using the report to point out gaps in funding and services to donors and provincial funders, and to advocate for equitable services across the country.

As for the end of the year, it was the beginning of adapting to a

new way of everything. Although this period only accounts for the final two weeks of the fiscal year, the impact is huge. Confinement and self-isolation due to COVID-19 have extremely devastating repercussions for women fleeing violence. Despite the many unknowns, it was crucial that Canada's VAW shelters and transition homes remain open. And they did. WSC took on the task of distributing \$20.5 million to shelters across the country. We did so in a highly efficient and streamlined manner, setting up the required systems during the last two weeks of March. Shelters began receiving emergency federal funds in the second week of April.



"With the federal dollars, we are able to support families in hotels for a short period of time while we work to find affordable, safe accommodations for them."

Tanya Wiggins, Executive Director
Saskatoon Interval House, SK

What took place in between is also impressive! We began our Circles of Safety project in earnest and held two four-day in-person training sessions with our partners from the shelters in Watson Lake, YT, Peace River, AB, and La Ronge, SK.



We also carried out an extensive research project on second stage shelters. The results of this study will inform our work in advocating for more second stage shelters within Canada's National Housing Strategy.

The final report from the UN Special Rapporteur on VAW's visit to Canada was released and included a clear recommendation for a National Action Plan. WSC continued to provide leadership in working with partners to advocate for this Plan. We were thrilled to see it in the current government's Speech from the Throne in January 2020.

As you will see in the following pages, WSC was involved in a record number of activities last year. We continued to strengthen our connections with our provincial and territorial shelter associations, with individual shelters, and with several government bodies.

We very much work in a collaborative manner and are extremely grateful to the provincial and territorial shelter associations, individual shelters, and our partners for their time, knowledge, and expertise.

Lise Martin
Executive Director

Jo-Anne Dusel
Co-Chair

Gaëlle Fedida
Co-Chair


2019-2020

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

- Supported women's shelters across the country to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures in March 2020
 - Accepted a request from the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) to [distribute \\$20.5 million to shelters across the country](#)
- Released the results of our national comprehensive survey in [two publications](#): *More Than a Bed: A National Profile of Violence Against Women (VAW) Shelters and Transition Houses and Transitioning to a Life Free from Violence: Second Stage Shelters in Canada*
 - Did 20 CBC syndicate radio interviews and a [Canadian Press interview](#) on the *More Than a Bed* report
 - Attended the Fourth World Conference of Women's Shelters in Taiwan and presented these reports along with organizing a networking dinner for representatives of national and regional shelter organizations
- Published our sixth annual issue of [Shelter Voices](#)
- Received a grant from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for a [mixed-methods study of second stage shelters](#)
 - Visited second stage shelters in Newfoundland & Labrador, British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and the Yukon

ON ONE DAY, 312 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN SHELTERS AND TRANSITION HOUSES ACROSS CANADA RECORDED HOW MANY WOMEN AND CHILDREN THEY HELPED. HERE IS WHAT THEY SAID.

SHELTER VOICES



Shelter Voices 2019 is the sixth national survey of shelter and transition houses (THs) that serve women and children affected by violence. Conducted by Women's Shelters Canada, this one-day snapshot reflects a cross-section of the daily reality of shelters/THs across the country, including how many women they are able to support and the challenges they face in doing so. In the context of an aging population, this edition of Shelter Voices also looks more closely at the services that shelters/THs offer to older women experiencing violence.

On a single day, 207 shelters/THs were housing and helping a total of 5,489 women and 3,578 children. Of these, 1,824 women and 1,627 children were staying in shelters/THs, while an additional 3,665 women and 2,951 children were being supported through outreach services and other programming without staying at the shelter/TH itself.

Demand for Shelter Services is Increasing

486 women and 263 children requested shelter at 223 shelters/THs on the snapshot day. Of those requests, 96 women and 60 children were taken in, while 390 women and 203 children were turned away due to a lack of capacity and resources. With 30% of responding shelters/THs having no available space, 78.0% of potential new residents could not be accommodated on the snapshot day.

While the number of women staying at shelters/THs has remained relatively stable compared to previous years, the number of women accessing non-residential services at shelters/THs was much higher in 2019 (see table). In addition, the turn-away rate increased slightly compared to previous years.

Year	Number of women staying at a shelter/TH	Number of women accessing other services	Total number of women helped	Turn-away rate
2019	1,824	2,665	5,489	78.0%
2018	1,867	1,806	3,673	79%
2017	1,423	1,113	2,536	72%
2016	1,748	2,063	4,811	73%

Did you know? Although not all shelters/THs collect the information of the women helped on the snapshot day, shelters/THs answer to the program, and all were asked to have been included by April.

WOMEN'S SHELTERS CANADA **INTERCONNECTED TRANSFORMS CANADA**

APRIL 2019



- Attended the Canadian Domestic Violence Conference in Halifax and presented the preliminary findings from this study

- Received two 4-year grants from WAGE for (1) capacity building and (2) the Circles of Safety Project
- Held a [Community of Practice](#) on navigating immigration systems and access to services with immigrant and refugee survivors of violence against women

- Continued to support the [Community of Practice](#) on supporting trans women in VAW shelters
- Held a focus group and Community of Practice for second stage shelters in February 2020
- Spearheaded the release of a [renewed call for a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women](#)
- Attended the Speech from the Throne
- Hosted two shelter exchanges in April and May 2019
- Partnered with [IKEA](#) to support 15 women's shelters receiving new children's play areas
- Partnered with [H&M](#) for a donation and awareness-raising campaign for Sheltersafe.ca on International Women's Day





- Participated in DAWN Canada's forum on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- Updated our report, [Building a National Narrative: A Select Review of Domestic Violence Policies, Legislation, and Services Across Canada](#)

- Attended Thirty-One Gifts' conference in Ohio and spoke to Canadian delegates about the work they support at WSC
- Participated in a [press conference](#) regarding the UN Special Rapporteur on VAW's report on her official visit to Canada, including a recommendation of a NAP on VAW

- Welcomed the Standing Committee on the Status of Women's [report on VAW shelters](#) and the [Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls \(MMIWG\)](#)



- Attended the Child Welfare League of Canada's Learning Community on Reconciliation
- Reached [100 Founding Donors](#) in our Strengthening Ties campaign
- Member of Min. Monsef's Advisory Council on Gender-Based Violence
- Attended the meeting of the Pan-Canadian Voice for Women's Housing in Winnipeg
- Over 100 shelters were [associate members](#) of WSC
- Continued to build a diverse base of support

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In mid-March 2020, like most offices across the country, WSC's staff team began working from home for the foreseeable future due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet we worked harder than ever!

Through weekly Zoom calls with our provincial and territorial association members, we heard that some women's shelters across the country were experiencing increases in the number of women calling them for help, while other shelters were experiencing drop-offs in calls. Both are concerning, because silence could be a result of women being in self-isolation with their abusers, unable to get away for a minute to make that phone call.

We were also being told by our members that women's shelters were experiencing dwindling food, cleaning, and hygiene supplies. This was especially true for northern, rural, and remote shelters. We worked to support shelters across the country with the resources they need to weather this crisis.

At the end of March, we accepted a request from the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) to distribute \$20.5 million of federal government funds to shelters across the country, excluding Quebec and those funded by Indigenous Services Canada.

We continued to support shelters and the provincial/territorial shelter associations in numerous ways, which will be detailed in the 2020-21 annual report.

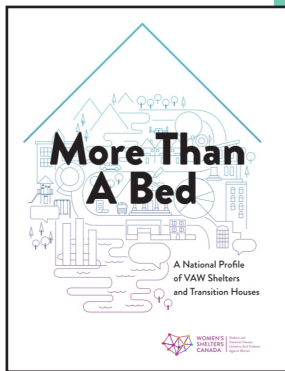
RELEASE OF TWO GROUNDBREAKING REPORTS

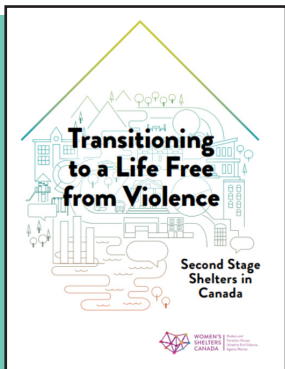
This year, two reports were released based on data from WSC's 2017-2018 survey, the first national inquiry of its kind developed by and for the VAW shelter sector. Overall, 401 VAW shelters participated, a response rate of over 78%, and included responses from every province and territory as well as from rural, remote, Northern, and Indigenous shelters.

On May 1, 2019, WSC released ***More Than a Bed: A National Profile of Violence Against Women (VAW) Shelters and Transition Houses***. This report provides detailed information on the breadth and depth of VAW emergency shelters across the country, clearly showing that they are providing expanding services for a diverse group of women and children, without comparable funding increases.

Nearly two-thirds (74%) of VAW shelters indicated that insufficient funding was a “major challenge.” This is unsurprising given that the majority (64%) did not receive an annual cost of living increase from their main government funder. One in five had not received a funding increase in ten years or more.

On September 25, 2019, WSC released ***Transitioning to a Life Free from Violence: Second Stage Shelters in Canada***. This report illustrates the important work that second stage shelters do in helping women and children transition to lives free from violence. Yet, the vast majority are doing so under increasing financial pressure.





The vast majority (80%) indicated that insufficient funding was a “major challenge.” In Saskatchewan and Newfoundland & Labrador, second stage shelters receive no provincial government funding. There are no second stage shelters in Nunavut, an area of the country that has the highest rates of violence against women and one of the greatest housing shortages. There is also a lack of second stage shelters and supports in rural areas, as well as a lack of

Indigenous second stage shelters on and off First Nations reserves.

To mark the end of the project, WSC held a working meeting called [Shelters in the Future](#) – an opportunity for representatives from VAW shelters and partner organizations to come together to honour the past, examine the present, and look to the future. Fifty participants gathered in Ottawa on May 2-3, 2019 to take part.



Participants also attended a lunch and panel discussion honouring the founders of Canada's first women's shelters, with the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Women and Gender Equality.

FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS

This year, three WSC staff members – Lise (executive director), Kaitlin (communications and development manager), and Krys (research and policy manager) – attended the Fourth World Conference of Women's Shelters in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Over 900 activists, social workers, shelter staff, government officials, and other participants from more than 90 countries gathered from November 5-8, 2019 for the event.



Krys and Lise presented the two recently released national reports (see pages 9-10) to a standing-room-only audience, along with presenters from The Netherlands. WSC also hosted a [networking dinner](#) for 50 representatives of national and regional organizations and helped [Canadian participants](#) connect with each other.



STRENGTHENING TIES

We did it! This year, we reached our goal of 100 men who stepped forward to join Strengthening Ties – a ground-breaking effort to engage men in funding the work to end violence against women. Each of these men has financially pledged to support Women's Shelters Canada for three years.

With Strengthening Ties, we have become the first national women's organization to have men as our primary donors. This success was powered by women. Thank you in particular to the fantastic Kathryn Babcock, who conceived of and spearheaded the idea, and her team at [Capital W](#) and to [Elizabeth Renzetti at the Globe & Mail](#), whose coverage was a game-changer.

It is but a beginning in engaging men as donors – but what a great start! The names of the Founding Donors of the Strengthening Ties campaign can be found on our website: www.endvaw.ca/strengthening-ties.

Thank you to each and every one.



PARTNERSHIPS

This year, we partnered with both IKEA and H&M.

IKEA

Women's Shelters Canada partnered with IKEA Canada to create a better everyday life for children residing in women's shelters

nationwide. **IKEA provided 15 local women's shelter in its store regions with custom play areas**, for a total commitment of \$50,000 in home furnishings value and services.



WSC selected local shelters through an application process based on need, with priority given to WSC associate members and Indigenous shelters. Each shelter that applied and was not selected received a \$100 IKEA gift card.

The partnership announcement was shared at the IKEA Burlington store, with Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality, Lise Martin, WSC's Executive Director, and Diane Beaulieu, Executive Director of Halton Women's Place. Along with an IKEA representative, they hosted a discussion on the importance of play in creating safe spaces for women and children.

According to Statistics Canada, of the women in shelters with parental responsibilities, 76% were admitted with one or more of their

children. Of those children, approximately 81% are under the age of 11.

“Play is an essential way that children can process and heal from their experiences with domestic violence, and these new, custom play areas will help facilitate that,” said Lise Martin.

Thank you, IKEA!

H&M

For International Women’s Day 2020 – March 8 – H&M partnered with Women’s Shelters Canada to support [Sheltersafe.ca](https://sheltersafe.ca), an online clickable map for women to find their closest women’s shelter and its 24/7 crisis number.



From March 1-8, H&M customers could make an in-store donation in any store across the country. H&M matched customer donations, up to \$10,000. In total, WSC received \$22,402.51. We are grateful for H&M’s support as well as the awareness-raising this did for Sheltersafe.ca.

Early into the COVID-19 pandemic, H&M again partnered with WSC to distribute [\\$300,000 worth of products](#) (equalling more than 20,000 garments) to women’s shelters in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, and Montreal.

Thank you, H&M!

SUPPORTING IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE

In May 2019, Women's Shelters Canada held a [Community of Practice \(CoP\)](#) on navigating immigration systems and access to services with immigrant and refugee survivors of violence against women. This CoP brought together 17 shelter workers from nine different provinces and territories for 1.5 days of discussion and learning.

Shelter staff who work with immigrant, migrant, and refugee women often provide support to women as they interact with immigration authorities, submit various types of immigration applications, and attempt to access social services.

These are complex processes, and shelter staff may not always feel that they have the expertise or resources to navigate them effectively.

To address this challenge, WSC brought together shelter staff who work with migrant, immigrant, and refugee survivors so that they could share knowledge and promising practices, build relationships with other practitioners, learn from experts, and generate a path forward.



Based on these discussions, we produced:

- [A list of promising practices](#) for shelters that work with immigrant, refugee, and migrant survivors
- [A list of resources](#) that shelter staff may find helpful as they support immigrant, refugee, and migrant survivors
- [Calls to action](#) for all levels of government, aimed at strengthening safety for refugee, migrant, and immigrant survivors of violence

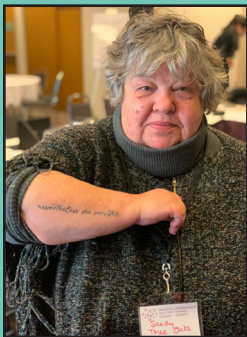
Participants continue to share and work together through regular conference calls.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: SECOND STAGE SHELTERS

In February 2020, WSC held a Community of Practice (CoP) for second stage shelters. This CoP brought together 17 second stage shelters from six provinces for a two-day gathering in Ottawa.

The gathering was made possible through WSC's grant from CMHC to conduct a mixed-methods study on second stage shelters. This study aims to address the gaps in second stage housing research and discover the breadth of programming and supports provided and how they help prevent women from returning to their abusers or becoming homeless.

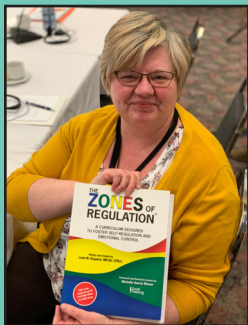




The CoP involved a focus group directly linked to the study. It also provided second stage shelter representatives with the opportunity to learn about innovative practices, such as those related to delivering programs for children in second stage housing who have witnessed abuse and securing operating and programming funding for second stage shelters.

This CoP will serve as a network of peer support and collaboration around emerging issues in second stage housing across Canada.

The results of the mixed methods study will be released in September 2020.



ADVOCATING FOR A NAP ON VAW

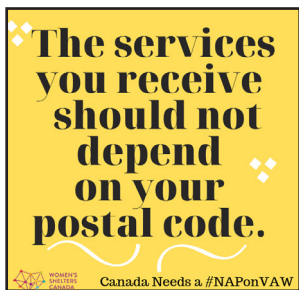
During the 2015 federal election campaign, WSC, along with 20+ collaborators, called on all parties to include the development and implementation of a National Action Plan (NAP) on Violence against Women (VAW) in their party platform.

Fast forward to 2019, Canada remained without a NAP on VAW. We collectively issued a [renewed call](#) for all federal parties to incorporate a NAP on VAW into their platform and to refer to the [2015 Blueprint](#) as a starting point. Shelters and other organizations were encouraged to endorse the renewed call.

We need a multi-pronged, coordinated, pan-Canadian approach to ending violence against women. A NAP on VAW must be adequately funded and resourced, involving all levels of government as well as consultation with frontline workers and survivors. Women in Canada deserve nothing less.

The Liberals, NDP, and Greens all [committed to implementing a NAP on VAW](#) in their party platforms. After the election, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau included a commitment to the NAP on VAW in his Speech to the Throne, which WSC attended.





During the election, WSC also took part in the Up for Debate campaign, a pan-Canadian conversation on women's rights and gender justice and produced [a one-pager](#) of questions for candidates on ending violence against women. WSC also sent letters to all the federal party leaders with the same questions from the

one-pager for local candidates and posted the responses we received on our website.

CIRCLES OF SAFETY

In 2019, Women's Shelters Canada began a four-year project to share and adapt [Circles of Safety](#) – a promising practice developed by Justice Options for Women in PEI – with shelters in rural, remote, Northern, and Indigenous communities. A Circle of Safety is a trauma-informed, survivor-centered, collaborative approach to safety planning that brings together a survivor, service providers, and informal support networks to generate creative, holistic solutions for safety. WSC is working with Justice Options for Women, Piwapan Women's Centre (La Ronge, SK), Peace River Regional Women's Shelter (Peace River, AB), and Help and Hope for Families (Watson Lake, YT) to adapt and implement the practice in these communities.

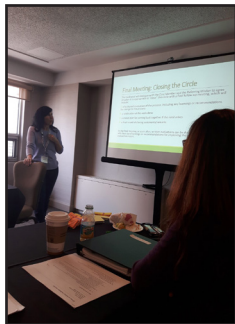


This year, WSC brought together three staff from each shelter with two trainers from Justice Options for Women for two rounds of training. From November 25-29th, 2019, par-



ticipants gathered in Ottawa to learn about Circles of Safety and the interest-exploring process they are based on. Then, from February 4-7th, 2020, participants reconvened in Edmonton to solidify their skills and work through some of the logistical and operational components of running Circles of Safety.

Next year, we're looking forward to completing the training phase and piloting adapted Circles of Safety in each community!



WHO WE ARE

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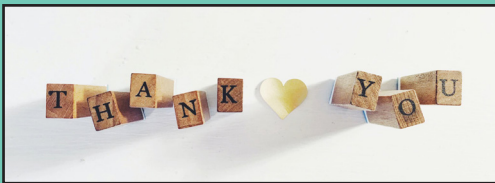
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We would also like to thank the individual donors who have helped us achieve our goals this year.



Visit 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

[Women's Shelters Canada](#)

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