ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021



SHELTERS SUPPORT WOMEN AND CHILDREN FLEEING VIOLENCE.

WE SUPPORT SHELTERS.

KEY NUMBERS

\$36 million
distributed to 400+ VAW
shelters across the country

\$4.5 million our largest donation to date

webinars produced this year

182 associate member 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 Vision

We are working towards a world where:

- Everybody matters people of all genders, all cultures, all faiths, all abilities are valued and have equitable access to resources, power and justice, and all are safe from violence.
- Society uses an inclusive, intersectional, equity-based lens to make decisions
- Organizations and systems are collaborative and accountable.
- The Earth, on which we all depend for survival, is protected.

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.

VAW AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This year, WSC's annual publication **Shelter Voices** was published in November and focused on the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on VAW shelters and transition houses. A majority of shelters reported a decrease in crisis calls and requests for admittance during the first three months of the pandemic, while a similar majority experienced an increase in those calls and requests when lockdown measures eased. One in two (52%) shelters saw an increase in the severity of violence

that the women they were serving had experienced.

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Comments revealed disturbing trends in the violence frontline workers were seeing, including an increase in physical attacks (specifically stabbing, strangulation, and broken bones), forced confinement, sexual violence, emotional and financial abuse, increased human trafficking, and an overall higher frequency of abuse in all forms.

Findings showed that perpetrators had used the pandemic itself as a strategy to further

abuse and control women who were confined to the home due to COVID-19 restrictions. Shelters saw more cases of survivors reporting controlling behaviour and coercive control. Government stay-at-home orders inadvertently made things worse for women, with abusers even threatening to give women or their children COVID.

This special issue of *Shelter Voices* also included information on capacity, how COVID-19 has impacted the work of shelters, how they have adapted, and what adaptations they plan to keep post-pandemic.

WHAT A YEAR!

While both a cliché and an understatement, it is so true. 2020-21 was a year of firsts for Women's Shelters Canada (WSC). In our letter in our 2015-16 Annual Report, we referred to the organization as "the little engine that could." Never would we have imagined how true that statement would be! As you read through our Annual Report, we're sure you will agree.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted so many lives, including of course those of women and children experiencing abuse. Recognizing this and the impact on VAW shelters and transition homes, the federal government quickly announced and made available emergency funds to VAW shelters, asking WSC to ensure their distribution. By the end of April 2020, we had distributed \$20.5 million, which provided a much needed lifeline for shelters and the women and children accessing their services.

In November 2020, the federal government provided additional funding to gender-based violence organizations, of which WSC distributed \$15.7 million. \$6.8 million was allocated for VAW women's shelters and \$8.9 million was allocated for off-reserve Indigenous women's shelters. WSC advocated specifically for this dedicated amount for off-reserve Indigenous shelters, consulting with our Indigenous

partners. The majority of shelters received their funds by the Christmas holiday. We were thrilled and proud to be featured in CBC's special series on emergency COVID funding as a success story!

"As a result of this funding, we are able to continue to provide the same supports for women and children experiencing abuse, even during a pandemic"

Erin Griver, Director of Women's Services Inasmuch House, ON Despite the urgency of this COVID-related work, WSC continued to support the shelter sector through a variety of projects such as Circles of Safety, research, and knowledge exchange activities.

Another first was the donation of \$4.5 million from the Rogers family. This gift was in recognition of the impact of the pandemic on women and children fleeing violence and the work of shelters in addressing this. Given the many unknowns that have accompanied the pandemic, a significant portion of these funds are being utilized to reinforce the capacity and resilience of WSC and the provincial shelter associations. We all know we are in unchartered territory and it is vital that we be in a position to support the 600+ shelters across Canada. This gift will also allow us to embark on a public awareness campaign, expand our knowledge exchange program, continue to advocate for a National Action Plan, and ensure that Canada's National Housing Strategy responds to the needs of women fleeing violence, including increasing the number of second stage shelters in Canada.

During the 2020-21 year, a number of private sector companies stepped up and relied on the efficiency of WSC to distribute a number of donated products to shelters across the country. Individual donations also increased and we thank Canadians from coast to coast to coast for their generous support.

During this last year, the importance of collaboration was especially important and we 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

2020-2021

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

- Supported women's shelters across the country to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures
 - 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 in Spring 2020 and \$15.7 million in Winter 2020-2021
 - Coordinated national in-kind donations from Rogers, H&M Canada, L'Oreal Canada, and others
 - Regularly surveyed shelters regarding their ongoing in-kind donation needs
 - Set up a private, closed Facebook Group for shelters and transition houses across the country to connect and share information
 - Gathered and shared an ongoing list of resources and practices being used by the sector to respond to COVID-19
 - Produced a webinar series on pandemic-related topics
 - Participated in various media interviews and supported shelters in speaking to the media
- Received an historic \$4.5 million donation from the Rogers Family Foundation
- Released the findings of our mixed-methods study on second stage shelters, Breaking the Cycle of Abuse and Closing the Housing Gap: Second Stage Shelters in Canada
 - Presented the results to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation and at BCSTH's Annual Training Forum
 - Established WSC Second Stage Shelter Committee to fufill the advocacy recommendations outlined in this report
- Produced a Reissued Call for a National Action Plan on Violence Against Women & Gender-Based Violence, which was

endorsed by **250 organizations** across Canada

- Received funding from WAGE to embarked on a historic project to inform the framework and initial content of Canada's 10-year National Action Plan
- Published our seventh annual issue of Shelter Voices
- Worked with NACAFV on a research study on funding parity for ISC-funded and provincially/territoriallyfunded shelters
- Partnered with Twitter Canada on the #ThereIsHelp search prompt in both official languages to assist victims of domestic and gender-based violence get the help they need
- Held 13 webinars for VAW shelters and transition houses on a variety of topics
- Hosted an online panel discussion on the unique experiences of and barriers faced by immigrant women survivors of domestic violence, inspired by the NFB documentary, *Into the Light*
- Completed trainings for the Circles of Safety project and supported shelter teams in the three participating communities to start their first Circles
- Sent out 4 editions of our redesigned "Shelter News" newsletter and 6 editions of our supporter newsletter
- Provided a capacity building session on the new Divorce Act to the provincial and territorial shelter associations
- Facilitated knowledge-sharing among provincial and territorial shelter associations on developing online training through a new discussion group
- Continued to foster the Community of Practice on Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Survivors of VAW



- Promoted Sheltersafe.ca online, in Horizon magazine, and at Yonge-Dundas Square in Toronto
- Produced a 12-month review of provincial shelter and association updates, Network News, and a 12-month review of poli-



cy, legislation, and government engagement, Policy Shifts

- Completed feasibility study and market analysis for a Group Purchasing Program, funded by the Canadian Women's Foundation Investment Readiness Program
- Initiated the Mapping Project for Canadian Abuser Intervention Programs, recruiting a Steering Committee and consulting on strategy toward a 2022 launch
- Released statements on the mass shooting in Nova Scotia, Black Lives Matter, and the ruling on extreme intoxication
- Produced 10 blog posts, including three guest blogs by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the BC Society of Transition Houses, and the Canadian Council of Muslim Women
- Produced a video series for International Women's Day 2021 of VAW shelters and transition houses across the country speaking to their ex-

perience with the COVID-19 pandemic

- Produced a social media series for Black History Month
- Updated our core values
- Member of Minister Monsef's Advisory Council on Gender-Based Violence
- Member of the Expert Working Group: Specialists Working with Women Survivors at the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women &



- Children, Western University
- Community Collaborator on Victim Services and Vicarious Resilience project at the Victimology Research Centre at Algonquin College
- Partnered with the Victimology Research Centre at Algonquin College on an academic paper on how those who have experienced violence understand their identity as survivors/victims
- Co-authored the report Resetting Normal: Systemic Gender-Based Violence and the Pandemic
- Knowledge Partner: Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), University of British Columbia
- Advisory Group Member: CIHR Health System Impact, University of Toronto
- Gave presentations to:
 - The Standing Committee on the Status of Women, regarding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women
 - The Global Network of Women Shelters on the COVID-19 pandemic and VAW shelters in Canada
 - School of Innovation, Saint Paul University on community-based research and activist scholarship
 - College of Environmental Design, Berkeley University of California on rethinking shelter design during and post-COVID-19
 - Amnesty International Canada's panel on VAW and COVID-19
- Supported the Recovery for All Campaign, spearheaded by the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
- Lise Martin, WSC's executive director, received DAWN Canada's Hummingbird Award
- Over 180 shelters were associate members of Women's Shelters Canada
- Continued to build a diverse base of support

WSC'S DISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL COVID-19 FUNDS

On March 18, 2020 the federal government announced \$50 million to support the sector working to end violence against women. Of this, up to \$26 million was dedicated as emergency funding to support eligible VAW shelters and transition houses. With the exception of shelters funded by Indigenous Services Canada (whose emergency funds were distributed directly by ISC) and those in Quebec (where the Government of Quebec implemented the initiative), the federal government asked Women's Shelters Canada to disburse these funds to all eligible VAW shelters and transition houses across the country. In November 2020, WAGE asked us to distribute an additional \$17.5 million.

Overnight, we had to pivot to carry out this essential work as WSC is not a funding organization; we work to support shelters through programming, research, and advocacy. This was the first time in our short history, with our five-person staff team, that we would be distributing millions of dollars to over 400 of shelters from coast to coast. Our efforts were featured on CBC's *The National*.



COORDINATING IN-KIND DONATIONS

A summer 2020 survey of **associate members** showed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected in-kind donations to VAW shelters and transition houses in two main ways: (1) many shelters decided to no longer accept in-kind donations from individuals due to potential contact with the virus and (2) more in-kind donations were needed than ever before due to cancelled fundraisers and the need for products such as PPE and cleaning supplies.

Thankfully, this corresponded with an increase in private foundation grants and corporate in-kind donation offers at the national level, with Women's Shelters Canada able to provide liaison support for large scale donation initiatives to our network of women's shelters, including:

- Through WSC's partnership with Rogers (see page 22), coordinated the distribution of 1,215 phones, SIM cards, and service packages to over 250 shelters
- In partnership with Shoppers Drug Mart (see page 23), liaised with rural shelters resulting in 52 large donations of products

 \$300,000 worth of H&M clothing donated to shelters in both March 2020 and March 2021

Coordinated a donation of nearly 13,600
 Vistaprint 3-layer reusable face masks to nearly 100 shelters.



 Partnered with Food Banks Canada to ensure women's shelters could access the food they needed through their local food banks

Partnered with YWCA Canada and the Canadian Women's Foundation to distribute a large donation of Uber Ride and Uber Eats service codes to 123 women's

service codes to 123 women's shelters across Canada

 Facilitated donations of products from L'Oreal Canada, Jamieson Vitamins, CGI Inc, and StellarBeauty to shelters across the country



KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE DURING A PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic forced much of our knowledge exchange to move online. In the early months of the pandemic, we set up a private Facebook group so that shelter staff from across the country could connect with each other and share information during a period of massive adaptation. We also gathered practices and resources from across the country and compiled them into a Google Doc that shelters could turn to for ideas as they shifted their operations to meet the challenge of COVID-19. With more people using and becoming comfortable with online communications tools, Women's Shelters Canada set up a webinar series to address some of the needs related to the pandemic. These webinars included such topics as:

- Adapting Residential Services at VAW Shelters in the Face of COVID-19
- Implications for Fundraising for VAW Shelters during COVID-19
- Tools, Services, and Supplies for VAW Shelters during the Pandemic
- Creating a COVID-19 Isolation Site for Survivors of Domestic Violence

These early sessions were a big success, and as the pandemic continued, it became apparent that VAW shelters and transition houses were looking for ways to stay con-



nected and continue learning from each other and from experts in other sectors. In response, WSC has made webinars a regular feature of our knowledge exchange programming. Over the past year, we have offered webinars on topics such as:

- Culturally Relevant Services for Indigenous Survivors of Domestic Violence
- Harm Reduction & Trauma-Informed Practice at VAW Shelters and Transition Houses
- Innovative Approaches to Transitional Housing for Survivors of VAW
- Changes to the Divorce Act: Implications for Supporting Survivors of Domestic Violence



All of WSC's webinars are recorded and can be viewed on our website.

In addition to this new programming, WSC's other knowledge exchange work continued – with some adaptations for COVID-19, of course!

The Community of Practice (COP) on Supporting Immigrant, Refugee, and Non-Status Survivors of VAW welcomed new members from across the country in October 2020 and met virtually six times throughout the year. The COP discussed COVID-19 adaptations, strategies for supporting women without status, and human trafficking. The COP also wel-

comed guest speaker Jamie Liew, who provided insight into the impact of COVID-19 on Canada's immigration system.

The Circles of Safety project also moved forward, despite the pandemic. Over the course of fall 2020, we offered virtual training on Circles of Safety to additional shelter staff and service providers in the three participating communities and worked with each shelter on their plans for adapting the PEI model for the unique realities of their community. The three participating shelters are now piloting the adapted programs in their own community.



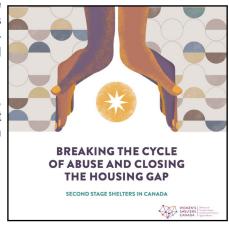
STUDY ON SECOND STAGE SHELTERS IN CANADA

This study is the first of its kind in Canada to examine the spectrum of supports for survivors of IPV and how second stage shelters address and close housing gaps and break the cycle of abuse.

From 2019-2020, WSC conducted a research study **Breaking the Cycle of Abuse and Closing the Housing Gap: Second Stage Shelters in Canada**. We gathered information in an online survey as well as through in-person interviews and on-site visits in the Yukon, British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. We heard from executive directors, frontline workers, and current and former residents of second stage shelters. In February 2020, WSC hosted a pan-Canadian focus group with 16 participants

from second stage shelters to discuss some of the preliminary findings and recommendations.

On September 30, 2020, the full report was launched at an **online event**.



Key Findings:

- Second stage shelters are a unique type of transitional housing. They provide specialized wrap-around supports for IPV survivors.
- There are different models of second stage shelters in Canada, based on local needs, availability of resources, funding, and capacity of VAW organizations.
- Service providers and current and former residents of second stage shelters emphasized the importance of having time and space to pause and plan for the next steps. This enables survivors to identify and achieve their short and long-term goals, acquire housing, begin the healing process, and live violence-free lives.
- 4. Survivors identified building community and networks of support as critical aspects of their healing journey. Living independently but within a community of women with shared experiences helped women break the silence around abuse, feel less alone, and build new friendships.
- Second stage shelters are integral to the continuum of supports for women and children fleeing violence. Yet, comprehensive and sustainable funding to do this life-saving work is a major challenge facing second stage shelters.
- Frontline workers in second stage shelters are experts in gender-based violence and offer programs, counselling, and support for current and former residents. However, recruiting and maintaining quality staff is a challenge.

Key Recommendations:

- The number of second stage shelters for IPV survivors must be increased across Canada to prevent violence, abuse, and femicide.
- The number of second stage shelters in rural, remote, and northern communities must be increased.
- The number of second stage shelters in Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) communities must be increased across the country.
- Sustainable, core operational funding for all second stage shelters is required, as are yearly increases in accordance with standard of living costs.
- Funders must financially support the range of services that second stage shelters provide.
- Immediately increase social and affordable housing units while also increasing second stage shelters for IPV survivors who need more support.
- Address the disconnects between VAW shelter/anti-violence sectors and government funders and establish collaboration and communication among them.

The full report, executive summary, and set of 7 infographics are available on our website.







ADVOCATING FOR A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN ON VAW/GBV

In early 2021, Women's Shelters Canada embarked on a historic project to inform the framework and initial content of Canada's 10-year **National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence** (GBV). Funding from the Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) made this possible.

In February, we began convening the first discussion sessions with 40 experts from across the country. This project, with its ambitious timeline, tackles four of the five pillars that have been identified by the federal government in their vision of the National Action Plan. These

pillars are: prevention; support for survivors and their families; promotion of responsive legal and justice systems; and social infrastructure and enabling environment.

With the leadership of WSC's staff and contracted Strategic Engagement Specialist, Dr. Amanda Dale, four working groups have the mandate of developing rec-



ommendations that, together, will provide a framework and initial content that will inform an intersectional 10-year NAP. With tight timelines and ambitious aims, the working groups will complete their work in Spring 2021.

PARTNERSHIP WITH ROGERS

Women's Shelters Canada was thrilled to be the recipient of a generous **\$4.5 million donation** from the Rogers family to improve the lives of women and children fleeing violence, the largest in WSC history.

A significant portion of the funds were distributed directly to provincial and territorial associations to help build the capacity of the Violence Against Women (VAW) sector across the country. The remainder of the funds are being used to further the capacity of women's shelters and transition houses across the country to support women and children fleeing violence in an ever-shifting climate. This includes increased training for shelter workers; ensuring that shelters can continue to work together and learn from each other in a new, more digitally-focused context; enhanced work on the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and the National Housing Strategy; and a national awareness campaign, scheduled for Fall 2021.

WSC also partnered with Rogers on a large in-kind donation program of cell phones, sim cards and service packages to VAW shelters and transition houses across the country. As of March 2021, over 1,215 phones have been received by over 250 shelters.

WSC and its 14-member provincial and territorial shelter associations are incredibly appreciative of the Rogers family's generous donation, which is supporting a multi-pronged approach to address intimate partner and family violence across Canada. We do not want to "return to normal" after the COVID-19 pandemic when it comes to violence against women; this donation will help us move forward by keeping women and children safe.

PARTNERSHIP WITH SHOPPERS DRUG MART

In Summer 2020, Women's Shelters Canada was approached by Shoppers Drug Mart regarding a national partnership that would benefit both WSC and hundreds of VAW shelters across the country. Shoppers Drug Mart runs the **LOVE YOU program**, which provides 100% of customer donations to a local women's charity.

Due to the increased incidence of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, Shoppers Drug Mart decided to support VAW shelters and transition houses in October 2020 as part of the LOVE YOU program. WSC worked with Shoppers Drug Mart to connect individual Shoppers' pharmacies with local women's shelters. We also coordinated an in-kind donation of products to 52 rural and remote shelters that were not located near a Shoppers' pharmacy.

Additionally, WSC worked with Shoppers Drug Mart to promote Sheltersafe.ca online and in store and to provide information for stores that received inquiries from customers about the website and domestic violence in general. Shoppers Drug Mart also made a donation to WSC of \$50,000.



CORE VALUES

In March 2021, WSC updated its **core values** to better reflect the organization. They are:

- Women (both cisgender and transgender), girls, non-binary people, transgender men, 2-Spirit people, and their children are targeted by gender-based violence and must receive protection and support. Freedom from gender-based violence is a human right.
- Protecting and advancing the right to live free from gender-based violence is a public responsibility of all governments and communities. The women's shelter movement plays a critical leadership role in the provincial/territorial, national, and global efforts to end gender-based violence.
- As part of an intersectional feminist human rights movement, it is essential to centre the voices of those experiencing multiple systemic forms of gender-based violence and oppression. This includes but is not limited to women, girls, and gender-diverse people who are also Black, racialized, immigrant, disabled, Indigenous, lesbian, gay, bisexual, 2-Spirit, transgender, queer, asexual, and/or intersex.
- Ending gender-based violence requires a gender justice perspective that addresses its social determinants. These factors include misogyny and patriarchy which intersect with racism, colonialism, homophobia, transphobia, transmisogyny, ableism, classism, ageism, and more, as well as poverty and lack of access to high-quality infrastructure and services.

WHO WE ARE

Board of Directors

Amy S. FitzGerald Claudette Dumont-Smith (until July 2020)

Jo-Anne Dusel

Gaëlle Fedida

Lyda Fuller

Marlene Ham Saadia Muzaffar

Shiva Nourpanah

Beverley Wybrow

Staff

Lise Martin

Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich

Krys Maki

Cyndia Mondésir (from

January 2021)

Brittany Skerrit (from

November 2020)

Heather Stewart

Leah Stuart-Sheppard

Patricia Hendrick

Intern

Julie Smith



DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

Grants

Women and Gender Equality Canada Justice Canada Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Canadian Women's Foundation Twitter Canada

\$10,000-\$25,000

Anke and Kirk Simpson H&M Canada Nuvo Pharmaceuticals Inc. L'Oreal Canada RP Investment Advisors LP

\$1,000-\$10,000

Abundance Canada
Boiler Inspection & Insurance Co Cda
Canadian Counselling & Psychotherapy Association
Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions
Centre of Excellence for Women's Health
Centre of Excellence in Next Generation Networks
Centre for International Governance Innovation
Dannyco Profession

>\$1 million

Rogers Family Foundation

\$25,000-\$50,000

Royal LePage Shelter Foundation
Shoppers Drug Mart Life
Foundation

Deciem Inc

Healthcare Supply Chain Network

Innovapost

Juniper Park\TBWA Communications ULC

LDH Scissors Inc.

Longview Asset Management Ltd.

Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation

National Union of Public and General Employees

Prana Vida

Raincoast Distribution Group

RP Investment Advisors LP

ShorePeakGEN Fund

The Songbird Series

Teachers Life Insurance



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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