

Surviving Not Thriving: Barriers to Housing for People Leaving Violence

Priorities and Recommendations
for the Calgary Domestic Violence Collective
(CDVD) and the Calgary Action Committee
on Housing and Homelessness (CACHH)

November 2013

1.0 Background

Understanding the intersection of domestic violence and homelessness is critical in addressing the unique needs of people fleeing violence and preventing housing instability and homelessness in this population. To this end the Calgary Domestic Violence Collective (CDVC) received a small grant from the Calgary Action Committee on Housing and Homelessness (CACHH) to host a workshop to bring together key stakeholders in the domestic violence and housing and homeless sectors to begin to explore barriers and build capacity to collectively address issues at this intersection. This report contains a summary of findings from the workshop as well as community identified priorities and recommendations for action.

1.1 Purpose

The objectives of the workshop were to identify priority strategies for CDVC and CACHH, and develop recommendations for government to support efforts to enable access to safe and affordable housing for people leaving violent relationships.

1.2 Method

A day-long workshop was hosted on October 9, 2013. A total of 55 participants took part in a facilitated process to explore the following questions:

1. What barriers to housing do women leaving violence face?
2. What is already being done to address these barriers in four key areas: Poverty Alleviation; Safe and Affordable Housing for Women Leaving Violence; Systemic Barriers for Women Leaving Violence; and, Health Effects of Violence.
3. What else needs to be done in these four areas?
4. What are the priorities for CDVC and CACHH?
5. What are our key recommendations to government?

Participants provided input into each question, discussed findings in plenary and then voted on priorities and recommendations for action.

2.0 Findings

Below is a summary of findings. These have been organized according to the questions that supported the day's discussion: what are the barriers; what's already being done to address these barriers; and, what else needs to be done in the four main areas (poverty alleviation; access to safe and affordable housing; systemic changes; and health effects of violence)?

2.1 What are the main barriers to housing for victims fleeing violence?

Poverty is the most significant barrier to housing facing people when they leave violence. Poverty typically involves a lack of income and resources to meet basic needs, as well as intangibles such as lack of opportunity, meaningful employment, and social support networks. With limited, and sometimes no resources, employment or social connections, it is often very difficult for people leaving violence to secure housing. Contributing factors include:

- inadequate access to social assistance and inconsistent provision of income supports
- lack of access to transportation

- difficulty obtaining and maintaining employment
- financial abuse by ex-partner; limited or no access to families' finances

Lack of affordable and safe housing is another related and significant barrier. Many people fleeing violence are forced to try to access housing through rental on the private market because social and supportive housing options are not available or have lengthy waiting lists. There is also an insufficient supply of second and third stage shelters. These issues have been significantly exacerbated by the floods in Calgary in June creating a situation in which victims of violence may be forced to stay in violent situations because there is simply no place to go.

Systemic barriers to housing for victims of violence include the complexity of processes to access income, health, legal and housing supports; re-traumatization for domestic violence victims when interacting with justice and social service systems (eg., victims are required to tell their story multiple times to multiple agencies in order to access the services and supports they need); and, experiences of racism and discrimination from landlords and social housing agencies.

Poor health as a result of violence is well-documented and includes physical injury, stress, depression, PTSD and addictions. These **negative health effects of violence** act as a barrier to housing at the same time that living in unsafe and unacceptable housing contributes to compromised health. As such, victims fleeing violence may experience a negative cycle where poor mental and physical health makes it difficult to access appropriate housing and inappropriate housing exacerbates their health conditions.

2.2 What's Already Being Done to Address these Barriers?

Below is a list of efforts identified by stakeholders that are already being made to address the barriers described above. This list is by no means comprehensive but provides a high level overview of initiatives that are already underway.

Poverty Alleviation Efforts

- The Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative
- The Provincial Child Poverty Reduction Initiative
- The provision of income supports from the provincial government such as Alberta Works Women Fleeing Violence fund
- Income support and rental subsidies through social service agencies and faith-based organizations
- Calgary Housing Company
- Calgary Campaign for a Living Wage

Safe and Affordable Housing Efforts

- Second stage shelters
- Calgary Housing Company
- Supportive private sector landlords
- Attainable Homes Calgary Housing Program

Efforts to Address Systemic Barriers

- Calgary Domestic Violence Collective (CDVC)

- Calgary Action Committee on Housing and Homelessness (CACHH)
- SHIFT: The Project To End Domestic Violence at the University of Calgary
- 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness in Calgary
- The review and revision of the City's Affordable Housing Strategy

Health Supports

- Alberta Mental Health supports
- Counselling programs (Calgary Counselling; the Distress Centre; etc.)
- Connect Family and Sexual Abuse Network
- Universal domestic violence health screening at Urgent Care Centres and the Domestic Violence Coordinator in Calgary
- The Alex Health Centers mobile health units (dental, physical and mental health)
- A range of addiction programs some that include a housing component.

2.3 What Else Needs to be Done?

Stakeholders were also asked to discuss what else they felt needs to be done in each of the key areas in terms of addressing barriers to safe and affordable housing for people fleeing violence. Considering the complexity and interconnectedness of the issues there was significant overlap across areas. Ultimately, stakeholders agreed that taking a person/family-centered and systems approach to supports is essential if we are going to effectively address the unique housing needs of this population.

Poverty Alleviation

1. Improvements to income supports and Alberta Works programs.
 - Redefine and raise the Low Income Cut Off and child tax benefit
 - Long term financial supports
 - Raise the minimum income threshold to \$1000 before it impacts financial benefits
 - Cost of living increases for seniors, income supports and AISH
 - Increase minimum wage
 - Institute a minimum living wage in consultation with community stakeholders
 - Provide low income transportation supports on an annual basis rather than month to month
 - Extend low income recreation supports so people fleeing violence do not have to continuously re-apply
2. Provide affordable and accessible education programming that provides life skills training, financial literacy, post-secondary education options, self-advocacy and system navigation skills to victims of domestic violence and children exposed to family violence.
 - Child care should be made available to enable participation in this programming
 - Consider compensating for participation in this educational programming
 - For victims who are employed, work with employers to support participation in educational programming
3. Provide affordable and quality child care to women fleeing violence.

4. Build capacity of government and social service agencies to effectively serve people leaving violence. This would include understanding the unique needs of sub-sectors of this population (LGBT, seniors, families, new Canadians, Aboriginal families, people living with disabilities, men) and bringing a trauma-informed perspective to the work.

Safe and Affordable Housing

1. Increase safe and affordable housing availability for victims fleeing violence. Strategies should include:
 - Institute and streamline zoning for secondary suites
 - Invest in second and third stage shelters
 - Increase overall housing stock through new building, re-development, liberating City land
 - Increase housing available for sub-populations (LGBT, seniors, families, new Canadians, Aboriginal families, people living with disabilities)
 - Increase housing available to perpetrators of domestic violence
 - Develop housing cooperatives for people fleeing violence
2. Increase funding for homelessness and housing supports and programming for victims fleeing violence. Including:
 - Increase funding for second and third stage shelters
 - Increase funding for supportive housing programs
 - Increase funding for housing and rental subsidies
 - Harmonize benefits
3. Introduce policy, legislative and procedural changes to facilitate access to affordable and accessible housing for victims fleeing violence. These changes should include:
 - land use bylaws
 - simplification of the process for building and development permits
 - rent caps and rental controls
 - rent subsidy programs
 - policies that require developers to adhere to minimum affordable and accessible housing options with each new development

Removing Systemic Barriers

1. Increase government funding to social service agencies – particularly those working to support healthy relationships and provide services to victims and perpetrators of violence.
 - increase funding to second and third stage shelters
 - increase funding and improve access to treatment services
 - increase supports to unique populations (LGBT, seniors, families, new Canadians, Aboriginal families, people living with disabilities)
2. Lower the threshold for victims of domestic violence to access legal services.
3. Strengthen collaboration and coordination across service providers.
 - build in existing programs that are proven to work

- expand upon and streamline central intake for housing and homeless supports
 - continue to streamline intake process for victims of violence
 - better communication with the courts
 - better communication with police
 - take a housing first rather than a shelter approach to victims fleeing violence
 - a support systems navigation through courts for victims
 - increased understanding of the continuum of care to overlap/duplication of services
 - working with Calgary Housing Company to prioritize people fleeing violence
4. Raise awareness across communities and in the private sector of the need for housing for people fleeing violence.
- develop educational programming for tenants and landlords
 - educate, engage and raise awareness of affordable housing for people fleeing violence with developers, property managers and landlords
 - provide incentives to developers, contractors, landlords and security companies to support safe, affordable and accessible housing for victims fleeing violence

Supporting Health and Well-Being for People leaving Violence

1. Improve accessibility of health services with the following strategies:
 - provision of adequate resources for primary health care
 - increase pool of skilled family physicians
 - decrease wait times for health services
 - increase the number of centralized clinics
 - improve accessibility for sub-population (LGBT, seniors, families, new Canadians, Aboriginal families, people living with disabilities)
 - create women specific health and treatment facilities
 - support expansion of FASD supports and services
 - build capacity of health care professionals to identify and address domestic violence in their patients
 - support transportation to health services
 - expand free and accessible health services such as CUPS and the Alex
 - improve access to mental health assessments
 - create more outreach health services programs
2. Support clients to access programming on healthy relationships, healthy families, pre and post natal care and early childhood development. Support people fleeing violence to be aware of and navigate through health service systems.
3. Create customized health services that take a family-centred approach to enable children to stay with their parents through treatment.

3.0 Priorities

Using a participatory voting system stakeholders were asked to identify their top three priorities in terms of supporting victims of violence to access safe and affordable housing. A list of eleven priorities was identified:

- ✓ Improve accessibility to health services using the strategies outlined above.
- ✓ Support clients to access programming on healthy relationships, healthy families, pre and post natal care and early childhood development. Support people fleeing violence to be aware of and navigate through health service systems.
- ✓ Create customized health services that take a family-centred approach to enable children to stay with their parents through treatment.
- ✓ Provide affordable and accessible education programming that provides life skills training, financial literacy, post-secondary education options, self-advocacy and system navigation skills to victims of domestic violence and children exposed to family violence.
- ✓ Policy, legislative and procedural changes to facilitate access to affordable and accessible housing for victims fleeing violence.
- ✓ Improvements to income supports and Alberta Works programs.
- ✓ Increase safe and affordable housing availability for victims fleeing violence.
- ✓ Increase funding for homelessness and housing supports and programming for victims fleeing violence.
- ✓ Increase government funding to social serving agencies.
- ✓ Develop procedures for safe and affordable housing for both victims and perpetrators of domestic violence where the perpetrator is required to leave the home and the victim is safe to remain in the home.
- ✓ Lower the threshold for victims of domestic violence to access legal services.

4.0 Recommendations for Action

From the long list of priorities set out above stakeholders collectively identified four areas in which CDVC and CACHH should focus their efforts to make change.

4.1 Improvements to income supports and Alberta Works programs. Improvements should include but are not limited to the following:

- Redefine and raise the Low Income Cut Off and child tax benefit
- Long term financial supports
- Raise the minimum income threshold to \$1000 before it impacts financial benefits
- Cost of living increases for seniors, income supports and AISH
- Increase minimum wage
- Institute a minimum living wage in consultation with community stakeholders
- Provide low income transportation supports on an annual basis rather than month to month
- Extend low income recreation supports so people fleeing violence do not have to continuously re-apply

CDVC's role

- ✓ Gather evidence and expertise that demonstrates how current income support policies and thresholds create barriers to safe and affordable housing for victims fleeing violence.

- ✓ Advocate to provincial and federal governments to improve and increase income supports for victims fleeing violence.

CACHH's role

- ✓ Using evidence provided by CDVC advocate to provincial and federal governments to improve and increase income supports for victims fleeing violence.

4.2 Increase in safe and affordable housing availability for victims fleeing violence. Government strategies should include:

- Instituting and streamlining zoning for secondary suites
- Investing in second and third stage shelters
- Increasing overall housing stock through new building, re-development, liberating City land
- Increasing housing available for sub-populations (LGBT, seniors, families, new Canadians, Aboriginal families, people living with disabilities)
- Increasing housing available to perpetrators of domestic violence
- Developing housing cooperatives for people fleeing violence

CDVC's Role

- ✓ Support the work of the CACHH Affordable Housing Working Group to increase availability of safe and affordable housing for victims fleeing violence.
- ✓ Provide input and support initiatives that ensure safe and affordable housing for women with addictions, LGBT, Aboriginal women, seniors and perpetrators.
- ✓ Provide input and support for the creation of additional second and third stage housing, long term housing, social housing and secondary suites.

CACHH's Role

- ✓ Engage with CDVC to strengthen and refine efforts to increase availability of safe and affordable housing for victims fleeing violence.
- ✓ Advocate to provincial and federal governments to increase availability of safe and affordable housing for victims fleeing violence.

4.3 Support policy, legislative and procedural changes to facilitate access to affordable and accessible housing for victims fleeing violence. These changes should include:

- land use bylaws
- simplification of the process for building and development permits
- rent caps and rental controls
- rent subsidy programs
- policies that require developers to adhere to minimum affordable and accessible housing options with each new development

CDVC's Role

- ✓ Conduct research to inform policy makers about the unique needs and specific strategies for increasing affordable and accessible housing for victims fleeing violence.

CACHH's Role

- ✓ Working with CDVC to inform policy makers about the unique needs and specific strategies for increasing affordable and accessible housing for victims fleeing violence.
- ✓ Continue with initiatives and advocacy work towards increasing affordable and accessible housing stock for victims fleeing violence.

4.4 Increase funding for homelessness and housing supports and programming for victims fleeing violence:

- Increase funding for second and third stage shelters
- Increase funding for supportive housing programs
- Increase funding for housing and rental subsidies
- Harmonize benefits

CDVC's Role

- ✓ Support CACHH efforts and advocacy for funding to increase housing stock for victims fleeing violence.
- ✓ Support CACHH efforts to advocate for operational funding to support housing programs.
- ✓ Support CACHH to develop key messaging for government.

CACHH's Role

- ✓ Continue initiatives and advocacy to increase affordable and accessible housing stock.
- ✓ Develop key messaging for government.
- ✓ Work with CDVC to ensure this work takes into consideration the unique needs and circumstances of victims fleeing violence.

1. Appendix A: Participants

	Organization	Name
1.	Distress Centre	Ryan Widmer
2.	Community Corrections	Tracey Flynn
3.	NeighbourLink	Nikki Golnik
4.	Neighbourlink	Chelsea Edwards
5.	Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society	Leslie Hill
6.	Brenda's House	Kate Lepine
7.	YWCA of Calgary	Valerie Tkacik
8.	The Alex	Samla Silim
9.	The Drop In Centre	Cindy Kempes
10.	The Drop In Centre and SCORCe	Estellita Bellerand
11.	Calgary Counselling Centre	Christine Berry
12.	Aboriginal Friendship Centre Calgary	Helen Hamlin
13.	Jewish Family Services Calgary	Hazel Orpen
14.	Alpha House Calgary	Kaylee Villadsen
15.	Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society	Eileen Bell
16.	Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter	Gladys Kivia
17.	Rowan House	Pam Baudistel
18.	Calgary Sexual Health Centre	Shannon Clark
19.	Calgary Police Service	Emma Parker
20.	YWCA of Calgary	Radenka Llic
21.	Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter	Lissa Samantaraya-Shivji
22.	Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter	Amy Broadwell
23.	Elizabeth Fry Society	Katelyn Lucas
24.	Aboriginal Singles Housing Program - Aboriginal Friendship Centre	Marian Weiss
25.	St. Jude's Health Management Institute	Drew Brown
26.	Elizabeth Fry Society	Barbara Hagen
27.	Calgary Sexual Health Centre	Dawn Nealon
28.	HomeFront	Lindsay Senger
29.	Rowan House	Sherrie Bolton
30.	YWCA of Calgary	Suzanne Shust
31.	Brenda's House Childrens Cottage	John Makuach
32.	Peer Support Services for Abused Women	Shannon Smith
33.	Edan Counselling	Jane Oxenbury
34.	Brenda Strafford Society	Sandy Scobie
35.	Alpha House	Russell Wood
36.	Alberta Justice and Solicitor General	Adyeska Sandino
37.	Alpha House	Tim Heavy Shields
38.	Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society	Allison Mclauchlan
39.	Alpha House	Michelle Grant
40.	Brenda's House Children's Cottage	Debbie Marxmeirer
41.	YWCA of Calgary	Elsbeth Mehrer
42.	Child and Family Services Authority	Ken Froese
43.	Distress Centre (SCORCe)	Cathy Deck

	Organization	Name
44.	Inn from the Cold	Angela Clarke
45.	Alberta Council of Women's Shelters	Carolyn Goard
46.	Sonshine Community Services	Geri Karsten
47.	United Way of Calgary	Diane Altwasser
48.	Sonshine Community Services	Joy Johnson-Green
49.	Calgary Police Service	Christine Robinson
50.	Human Services	Jocelyn Adamo
51.	Calgary Legal Guidance	Rachel Shepherd
52.	Calgary Legal Guidance	Keith Shustov
53.	Peer Support Services for Abused Women	Andrea Silverstone
54.	Discovery House Family Violence Prevention Society	Brigitte Baradoy
55.	Calgary Domestic Violence Collective	Corinne Ofstie