Feasibility Study: Transitional Housing for Women Leaving Violence

A Report prepared for Rowan House Emergency Shelter
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“Women exposed to any form of violence should have access to safe accommodation and protection. Shelters should be available to all women, and provide services without conditions. Safety and security should be central to all aspects of accommodation and services. Programmes should reflect the voice of survivors, promoting women’s empowerment and right to self-determination” (Gierman, Liska, Reimer, Ridgeway, Delaney, Caminha,... Cairns, 2013).
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A Note on Language

Throughout this paper, the terms ‘victim’ is used to refer to a woman who has been deliberately harmed by the unwanted actions of another, and ‘perpetrator’ as someone who has deliberately harmed another person. Many shelters prefer the term ‘survivor’ to ‘victim’, as it implies inner strength and ingenuity, whereas victim may imply passivity. The use of the term victim in this paper is not intended to imply an identity of a passive person, or acceptance of one’s circumstances. It is by no means intended to dishonour a victim’s dignity or undervalue their strength and resistance. I believe that neither victim nor survivor is sufficient in describing the complexity of a victim’s overall experience. A word alone is by no means sufficient to describe the experience of the victim. It must be up to individuals as to how they describe themselves since all victims have a very different experience. Service providers and advocates can support their decision and use similar language that fits for each individual.

The term ‘sexualized’ violence is used in this report as the preferred language. The term ‘sexual’ assault implies that this form of assault is a sexual act and therefore a mutual act. Sexualized assault is an act of violence and therefore deliberately perpetrated. The term ‘violent relationship’ is not used in this report for the same implied reasons. The term ‘relationship’ implies a mutuality. The language used instead is ‘women leaving violence’ or ‘abused women’ or ‘violent partner’. This language is informed by the notion that all forms of violence are deliberate, unilateral acts of violence (Coates & Wade, 2004).
**Executive Summary**

In Alberta as in countless parts of the world, violence remains a reality in the lives of many women and their children. For women choosing to leave a violent partner, this often means leaving their home, and sometimes their community to access supports that are available. Research indicates that the need for safe housing and the economic resources to maintain safe housing are two of the most pressing concerns among women who are planning or have left their abusers (Clough, Draughon, Njie-Carr, Rollins & Glass, 2013). On leaving an abusive partner and faced with inadequate affordable housing, women are left with a choice between homelessness and returning to the abusive partner (Tutty, Ogden & Weaver-Dunlop, 2008). A recent Canadian study showed that 31% of shelter users intended to return to the abuser because of lack of housing (Taylor-Butts, 2007 as reported in Ponic et al., 2011). For a considerable number of women, leaving becomes a pathway to homelessness for them and their children. The lack of safe affordable housing and a lack of resources could result in women returning to abusive partners out of desperation (DeKeseredy & Hinch, 1991, as quoted in Tutty et al., 2006). Access to safe affordable housing would ensure that women have the choice not to return to their abuser, and ultimately live safe lives.

This paper outlines: the history of Rowan House and its ongoing development of services, including a description of the current services offered; an overview of current housing challenges in Alberta, including occupancy rates and growth; the need for more safe and affordable housing; a description of non-abuse specific and abuse specific housing options, with a comprehensive consideration for a number of factors including accessibility, affordability, and safety; an overview of additional housing models that are being used elsewhere that may be a consideration for the local area; the need for specific housing for women leaving violence; the value of domestic violence specific housing for women as well as the risk for women who use non-abuse specific housing; and barriers for women trying to access housing. Potential funding implications and partnerships for consideration are briefly outlined. Finally, recommendations are made for Rowan House to move forward with an expansion of services around the housing continuum. This paper is specifically relevant for High River and area, but also has implications that can be translated to other rural communities. While no two rural communities are the same, there are underlying commonalities that can be shared across rural areas to look at the bigger picture of homelessness for women leaving violence across Alberta.

**The Feasibility Study**

The mission of Rowan House Emergency Shelter is to provide crisis intervention, long-term support and education for those affected by family violence in rural communities. Rowan House has a clear commitment to addressing family violence in the community,
which has been demonstrated in the ongoing development of programs and services that it provides. Ongoing discussions within the organization as well as with partnering agencies have for a long time clearly identified gaps in housing options and support for women leaving violence. The increasing housing crisis in Alberta has reached critical points in most areas across the province including High River and surrounding areas, and affordable rental accommodation is rapidly decreasing. The environmental disaster of the 2013 floods in Calgary and surrounding areas had a major impact on the Town of High River, leaving residents with fewer housing options than before. Since opening its doors in High River, Rowan House has had feedback from clients and indications from staff that reinforce this knowledge around the gap in housing services. “Finding safe and affordable housing for our residents is a constant struggle, resulting in extended stays which in turn limits the number of admissions to shelter” (front line staff at Rowan House, 2015).

It is well recognized in the domestic violence sector that one component of the gap in the continuum for housing for women lies in transitional housing. This is a form of temporary housing that is meant to bridge the gap from homelessness and emergency shelters to permanent housing by offering appropriate support services. Preliminary discussion within the organization has focused on whether transitional housing should be a part of Rowan House’s continuum of services. There are various models of transitional housing, and one that has proved its success in Alberta is the second-stage shelter model, a form of transitional housing that is specific to women leaving violence. Data gathered from second-stage shelters in Alberta over the years clearly indicate a higher stability rate for women who have access to second-stage housing. Rowan House believes that the second-stage shelter model is potentially a viable option to fill the gaps around housing for women. Rowan House is struggling to support women around the next stage of safe and affordable housing that they need once they leave the emergency shelter. “We are looking at how we can play a part in providing this valuable resource” (Sherrie Botten, ED Rowan House, 2015).

There are three main objectives of this feasibility study. First, to increase knowledge around domestic violence-specific housing, recognizing that public education and awareness are essential in the prevention of family violence. Second, to document the information around the current housing challenges for women leaving violence in order to support the pursuit for funding applications for the sustainability of housing expansion. Finally, the main objective is to formulate recommendations on service provision for housing in the area. This information will assist Rowan House to move forward in their ongoing development of a continuum of best practice services.

History of Rowan House

The history of Rowan House is a remarkable expression of resilience and community spirit. The support to expand, build and rebuild following the disaster of the 2013 flood
is a testament to the communities’ commitment to ending family violence. Initially opening under the name Eagle Women’s Emergency shelter in January 2000, the shelter shared a facility with a group for youth home in Black Diamond. The tiny two bedroom basement suite was only large enough to house two women with up to two children each. The shelter quickly expanded to offer outreach support in 2003, and it was soon realized that a larger facility was needed as more women and children were being turned away than were being housed due to lack of space. A feasibility study was completed in 2006 and confirmed that there was a need for a larger facility, as the existing one simply could not accommodate the need. The recommendations outlined in the study included improved accessibility for women, a high security facility for safety, a minimum of eight beds, and a fully modernized facility with the ability to grow in the future. The analysis was clear that demand for the facility would continue to grow, and it was necessary to have a facility that could grow with the increasing demand. High River was recommended as the location, due to proximity to various facilities such as bus, taxi, hospital, RCMP, high school, adult education, Victim Services, Family Community Support Services (FCSS), and cost of living.

In 2007, the name of the shelter was changed to Rowan House Emergency Shelter. In the fall of 2008, land was purchased in High River and Rowan House’s Capital Campaign began. In June of 2011 a sod turning ceremony was held and in October of that year, construction officially began. The construction was complete in June 2012, and the new 8500 square foot facility had seven bedrooms, a multi-sensory room, a spiritual room and programming space. The facility was open to clients in July 2012, and was full to capacity within two days. The shelter quickly expanded from the original capacity of 10, to a capacity of 18 by April 1, 2013, with some additional fundraising.

Eleven months after opening Rowan House was hit by the flood of June 2013, which devastated many parts of Calgary and surrounding areas. The shelter lost all of the children’s centre, staff areas and programming space, including the multi-sensory and spiritual rooms, and had to be closed down. Rowan House reopened within 2 months, operating on a smaller scale without the use of the lower floor. By January 2014, Rowan House had secured additional funding and was fully operational with all 24 beds available. The impact of the disaster prompted a review of Rowan House’s practices, ensuring that all services are trauma informed. The recognition of the increased levels of trauma that families experience and the lack of safe and affordable housing for women leaving shelter was the impetus for further exploration of transitional housing options for women.

Current Services

Each day at Rowan House begins with a ‘Resident Meeting’, a time when all residents and staff gather around the dining room table to start the day on a positive note. It is a space for residents to feel cared about, encouraged and supported by staff as well as
each other. A round of gratitude begins the day where heartfelt appreciation is expressed for ‘being free’ and ‘feeling safe’.

Rowan House Emergency Shelter’s purpose is to provide a safe, supportive environment for women and their children fleeing domestic violence. The mission of Rowan House Emergency Shelter is to provide crisis intervention, long-term support and education for those affected by family violence in rural communities. Rowan House believes it is important to support women through a journey of healing through an overall approach that acknowledges mind, body and spirit. The Rowan House name comes from the Rowan tree, also known as the Mountain Ash. The berries, often retained through the winter, symbolize the endurance of life through the dark of the year and the tree itself was said to afford protection to the dwelling by which it grew. Rowan Trees have traditionally been associated with peace, sanctuary, privacy and beauty. The symbolism of the tree reflects the values of Rowan House.

Rowan House facilitates the care of immediate needs such as food, clothing and housing, as well as providing opportunities to nourish the inner spirit. The facility has seven bedrooms, two rooms that can accommodate families, housing a total of 24 women and children. One bedroom is fully accessible for women or children with mobility issues, or can be used for older women or those requiring separation from noise and high activity levels. The facility also has a resource room for residents to use computers to make appointment, work on resumes and send emails, several living areas, laundry facilities, a multi-sensory room, and a large childcare room.

Rowan House provides a spectrum of services including in-house shelter services, outreach, education and prevention. In-house shelter support is available for women and children who find themselves in a crisis situation and in need of emergency housing. Residential services such as food and laundry facilities, crisis intervention, danger assessment and safety planning support, in-house education groups, community referrals and group support are available. Outreach programming provides support to women in the community who do not need to come into the shelter, but require support to keep themselves and their children safe from abuse, as well as for women who have transitioned from the shelter back into the community and require continued support. Outreach programming includes crisis counselling, safety planning, support and referrals to assist clients in meeting basic needs, court and legal support, solution focused counselling, domestic violence education programming, and advocacy to clients in all areas including housing, social services and child welfare. The child support program at Rowan House offers specialized programming for children focusing on building self-esteem and teaching coping skills for managing anxiety. Individual sessions are offered to help foster and strengthen relationships between mother and child, as well as education programming around children exposed to domestic violence. These services are available to in house shelter clients as well as outreach clients. Rowan House is currently running a trial transitional housing program. Rowan House is leasing four units in High River and subleasing the units to women who have accessed the
shelter program. All services operate from a strength based and a response based approach, working within a philosophy of safety, refuge and gratitude.

The Need

Domestic violence is an epidemic in our country. It is a pervasive and complex societal problem. In comparison to national numbers, Alberta’s incidence of domestic violence is amongst the highest of all Canadian provinces. Alberta has the second highest rate of self-reported spousal violence in the country (Alberta Government, 2014). In Alberta, rates of violence against women are 2.3 percent points higher than the national average, and a 2012 study has determined that in every hour of every day, a woman in Alberta is a victim of some form of interpersonal violence by an ex-spouse or ex-partner (Wells, Boodt, & Emery, 2012).

In many communities across Canada and Alberta, available shelter space is inadequate. Emergency shelters are often full and therefore not available. Over the past few years there has been an increasing number of women and children turned away, reflecting an increasing level of need and lack of shelter capacity across the province. Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (ACWS) collects annual data on shelter statistics across Alberta including the number of women and children that are turned away from shelters due to different reasons, mainly insufficient space. On just one day in 2013, 99 women and 87 children were turned away from Alberta shelters (ACWS, 2013). Annual data collected from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014, showed that Alberta shelters admitted 5,710 women and their 5,612 children. In this same time frame 8,427 women and their 8,012 children could not be served by shelters due to lack of capacity and had to be turned away (ACWS, 2014b). In the 2014-2015 fiscal period the number of women and children that could not be accommodated by shelters was at an all time high. In 2014-2015, over 10,000 abused women and their children were accommodated by ACWS member shelters and a staggering 9,073 women and 9,548 children were turned away from Alberta member shelters due to lack of capacity (ACWS, 2015a). A ten-year trend analysis released in 2012, revealed that 103,343 women and 108,955 children were turned away across Alberta Shelters in the span of the ten years considered in the study (ACWS, 2012). These numbers indisputably speak to the inadequate capacity of shelters.

From April 2014 to March 2015, Rowan House was consistently full to capacity, admitting 98 women and 129 children, a total of 227 residents to the shelter program. In the same period, staff provided direct client support to 38 women in the community, and received 1217 crisis calls. During this same time, 201 women and 153 children were turned away either because of capacity, or because Rowan House was unable to meet women’s complex needs such as addictions and mental health (Rowan House, 2015).

Since the opening of the new Rowan House facility in High River in 2012, it has consistently turned away more women and children than have been admitted into the
shelter. Since 2012, 1,081 women and children have been turned away mainly due to issues of capacity (note that 201 of these were due to the floods in 2013), and only 531 women and children have been admitted (Rowan House, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015). Almost double the amount of women and children have been turned away than admitted to shelter. These numbers are consistent with the rates of women being turned away across Alberta shelters.

Figure 2 below shows that the number of residential clients at Rowan House have increased more than four times in six years. Though this can be partly attributed to the change in venue, the fact remains that the numbers have been steadily increasing over the years. There are consistently more women turned away than are admitted to shelter.

Figure 1: Admission vs Turn Away

The number of women and children turned away is of significant concern, and the impact on their safety is severe. More often than not, women return to the abuser because there is nowhere else to go. Housing has been identified as a significant concern, one that can often force a return to an abusive partner (Tutty et al., 2014). The increased number of women being turned away from shelters reflects not only the lack of capacity in emergency shelters, but also a shortage of safe and affordable housing for women after they leave an emergency stay. In an analysis of the ACWS annual data collected, trends over time indicate that 2013-14 saw a marked increase in the average length of stay in shelters across the province (ACWS, 2014b). This results in less shelter capacity to meet the increasing demand of women needing emergency shelter, and it naturally follows that there will be an increased amount of women being turned away. The length of stay in shelters in Alberta is increasing for a myriad of reasons, mainly
because of the alarming absence of housing options that are neither affordable nor secure. Longer stays may also be a reflection of: employment that offers a living wage and affordable child care; the increasing complexity of clients’ needs; an increase in unemployment and downturn in the economy; mental health and addictions needs related to trauma; as well as elevated safety issues. This steady increase around the length of stay for women most certainly indicates a need for increased emergency capacity as well as for transitional housing. ACWS estimates that for every emergency shelter bed, there needs to be two or three second-stage shelter beds in Alberta (Hoffart, 2014).

Rowan House data mirrors concerns of provincial data around increasing lengths of stay. In the fiscal year of 2014-2015, 47% of women at Rowan House stayed longer than 21 days (Rowan House, 2015) – a strong attestation that they had no where else to go to. Figure 3 below shows that the women who stayed more than 21 days at Rowan House has almost doubled in the past three years and that 43% of women stay more than 21 days.

**Figure 2: Length of Stay in Emergency Shelter**

![Bar chart showing length of stay in emergency shelter](chart)

**Intersection between Family Violence and Homelessness**

There is a clear correlation between family violence and homelessness. This is supported in homeless studies and in fact it is documented that domestic violence is one of the main causes of women’s housing instability and homelessness among Canadian families (Baker, Billhardt, Warren, Rollins & Glass, 2010; Jategaonkar & Ponic, 2011). Pavao et al
(2007) reported that women who had experienced intimate partner violence were four times more likely to report housing instability than women in the general population (Jategaonkar & Ponic, 2011). Despite this clear connection, women have been mostly underrepresented in the writings on homelessness, and the stereotypical image of homeless people is of those living on the street, or in abandoned buildings, and sleeping in parks. This image largely reflects the experiences of homeless men rather than homeless women (Fotheringham, Walsh, Burrowes & McDonald, 2011). While there are a small number of women who fit this picture, the majority of homeless women are instead, part of the ‘hidden homeless population’. How society views homelessness is reflected in the approaches that are taken to irradiate it. The spotlight on the male experience has had an influence on why women are underrepresented and consequently, under-serviced (Fotheringham et al., 2011).

In examining the intersection between family violence and homelessness, how one defines homelessness influences how many women are identified as part of this population. It is imperative then, to look at the broader continuum of definitions around homelessness. Definitions of homelessness vary from narrow to broad. The United Nations divides the concept of homelessness into two categories (UN, 2014). Absolute homelessness refers to literal or visible homelessness, for example, those with no physical shelter of their own. This applies to those who may be ‘living on the streets’ or ‘sleeping rough’. The second category, where there tends to be less consensus on the definition, is relative homelessness, which refers to hidden or concealed homelessness. This applies to people living in spaces that do not meet minimum standards. That is, they lack adequate protection from the elements, access to safe water and sanitation, secure tenure, personal safety, affordability and access to employment, education, and health care (Novac, 2006). Relative homelessness is more commonly experienced by women and youth than by men (Kappel Ramji Consulting Group 2002; Novac 2002 as quoted in Novac 2006). Violence plays a central role in shaping the pathways into homelessness for women and girls and their homelessness is less visible than that of men (YWCA Canada, 2013). Living in a residential environment that fails to meet a basic standard of personal safety such as domestic violence can, under this definition, be considered as relative homelessness. The Canadian Mortgage Housing Corporation further stipulates that housing must be adequate, affordable and suitable (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2012). If housing falls below at least one of these criteria, then the household would be considered in core need of housing.

This latter category of housing for the most part is undocumented. Most research on homelessness is based on those who use shelters and other homeless services, which will most certainly understate the representation of gendered homelessness. Often referred to as couch surfers, this describes people who stay with friends, family, or even stranger’s homes. They are typically not paying rent, their duration of stay is unsustainable in the long term, and they do not have the means to secure their own permanent housing in the future. They differ from those who are staying with friends or family out of choice in anticipation of prearranged accommodation, whether in their
current hometown or an altogether new community. This living situation is understood by both parties to be temporary, and the assumption is that it will not become permanent. In some cases, people who are homeless make temporary rental arrangements, such as staying in motels, hostels, rooming houses, etc. Although occupants pay rent, the accommodation does not offer the possibility of permanency. Many women demonstrate creativity, resourcefulness and incredible persistence to assure the safety and well-being of themselves and their children and implement a variety of strategies, carefully scheduling couch surfing (Clough, Draughon, Njie, Rollins & Glass 2013).

Both housing and freedom from violence are key human rights. Yet access to safe, stable and affordable housing is often violated when women leave violent partners. The first important document that codified the right to adequate housing is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHS), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 (UNGA, 1948). Article 25 (1) states:

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." (UNGA, 1948).

Within the literature on women who have been abused, it has long been implied that housing is a key area of service provision alongside counselling, employment, income support, and legal support. Jategaonkar & Ponic (2011) substantiate the need to provide long-term housing as a key service response to violence against women. Gender and violence are important dimensions that must be considered within the complex relationships between housing and health (Jategaonkar & Ponic, 2011). It is important to extend conceptual frameworks of the housing-health relationship that explicitly takes gender, women’s diversity and violence into account.

**Environmental Scan**

The economic landscape of Alberta over the past decade has had an enormous impact on the housing challenges that women face. Alberta has been one of the fastest growing provinces in Canada over the past two decades. Between 1994 and 2014, the average annual growth (GDP) in Alberta was 3.5%, higher than any other province (AB Canada, 2015). Between 2005 and 2015, Alberta’s population increased by 26%, the highest increase of any province or state in North America (AB Canada, 2015). In 2015 Alberta’s population grew by 1.8%, the highest provincial rate of increase and double the Canadian growth rate of 0.9% (AB Canada, 2015). In shelters, the number of provincially and federally funded beds remained at 718 which was reached in 2012 (ACWS, 2014b). The number of beds has not kept pace with population increases, and this alone speaks
to increasing strain on shelter services in Alberta, and suggests that additional shelter capacity is needed.

The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) conducts a rental market survey twice a year in April and October to provide vacancy availability and rent information. The Calgary Census Metropolitan Area recorded an apartment vacancy rate of 1.4 percent in October of 2014, up only slightly from 1.0 percent in October 2013 (CMHC, 2014). By April of 2015 Calgary reported an overall vacancy rate of 3.2 percent (CMHC, 2015). The slight increase in vacancy rates in Calgary and in Alberta by April 2015 can be attributed partly to the softening economic conditions due to decline in oil prices that has slowed growth in the Alberta economy. Additional explanations include the total migration to Calgary being lower over the past year, while more purpose built rental structures were added to the overall supply of rentals (CMHC, 2015).

Although the vacancy rates have increased slightly in the Calgary area over the past year and a half, the average rents continue to rise. In Calgary, rent for a two-bedroom apartment rose 5.9 percent from October 2013 to October 2014 (CMHC, 2014). An average apartment in Calgary has gone from $1,118 in October 2013 to $1,214 in April 2015 (CMHC, 2015). The same holds true for High River, where the vacancy rates have risen from 0 percent to 3.9 percent in April 2015, and an average two-bedroom apartment price has risen by 7.3 percent (CMHC, 2015). Rent has gone from $877 in October 2013 to $928 in April 2015 (CMHC, 2015). The number of private apartment units in High River has gone down from 132 in October 2013 to 127 in April 2015 (CMHC, 2015). Okotoks’ vacancy rate has risen modestly from 0 percent in October 2013 to 1.9 percent in April 2015, and rent has increase an average of 3.9 percent (CMHC, 2015). Despite this slight increase, the fact remains that vacancy rates are shockingly low across the province, and coupled with higher rental rates, it does not ease the pressure for women leaving domestic violence to secure affordable housing. These numbers from CMHC may also obscure reality to some extent as they are based on conventional units and do not take into account secondary units, which may include basement suits or other units that are illegal under community’s zoning laws.

Consistent with these documented provincial challenges around housing, Rowan House is struggling to support women to find safe and affordable housing once they leave the emergency shelter.

**Rural Considerations**

Rural shelters in the province such as Rowan House see additional challenges around services. A rural shelter may experience increased demand for broader services from women who, in addition to a history of domestic violence, may also experience a multitude of other challenges such as homelessness, poverty, lack of available housing, mental health, isolation and addictions. In rural areas additional specific services are
often not available, placing further burden on shelters to offer these supports to women. The responsibility to accommodate these diverse needs places additional pressure on existing resources and staff.

The Government of Alberta has made a commitment to end homelessness by 2019. To this end, the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness is working with the seven major cities to determine the individual needs, causes, and potential solutions. These are important steps in the reduction of homelessness, although there has not been nearly as much attention paid to homelessness in rural Alberta. Urban homelessness will not end without addressing rural homelessness. Alberta’s municipalities have found that as much as 40% of their homeless population had in fact migrated from rural communities (ARDN, 2013). It is essential to develop effective rural strategies, in order to address homelessness as a whole. Homelessness in rural communities is primarily hidden (Schiff, J. W., & Turner, A. 2014). Rural communities have limited services available to address homelessness locally, thus migration to larger centres is often relied on as a mitigation strategy (Schiff, J. W., & Turner, A, 2014). Addressing homelessness at a rural level is central to addressing homelessness as a whole across the province.

**Housing**

Housing is by no means a simple subject. There are many challenges around affordable community housing in High River and across Alberta. In addition to low vacancy rates and affordability issues, there are many important considerations when reflecting on housing for women and children leaving domestic violence that make their circumstances unique and require different approaches and service considerations.

The housing continuum is made up of housing options that broadly includes home ownership, market rental housing, non-market rental housing and homelessness (Ponic, Varcoe, Davies, Ford-Gilboe, Wuest, Hammerton, 2011). Market housing is privately owned, where non-market housing is owned by an organization, generally government or non-profit, and includes affordable housing, social housing and rental subsidies. There exists both abuse specific and non-abuse specific housing options. A complete overview of the spectrum of housing that is available may suggest that women have many choices. In fact, the housing options must be examined across a range of different criteria to understand why many of these housing options are not a choice for women leaving violence. Often non-abuse specific options are not feasible or not safe. Abuse specific resources can be inaccessible for numerous reasons such as inadequate space, as well as various admissions criteria.

The different types of accommodation currently available in the High River and Calgary region to women who are leaving a violent partner vary on this spectrum from emergency shelters to private rental as well as specific domestic violence housing. The succeeding descriptions are a consideration of the options that are currently available in
the region, as well as some innovative models that are being used elsewhere that may warrant attention for the local area. It is absolutely pertinent to review all the models through a lens of abuse related concerns such as safety, available support, and accessibility. Tutty (2008) identifies five key variables related to housing for women leaving violence including safety, maximum length of stay, quality of housing, emotional support and access. Additional considerations may include location and funding.

*Non-abuse Specific Shelters*

On one end of the housing continuum are overnight homeless shelters. These shelters are designed to meet the immediate needs of people who are homeless. Shelters are generally available at no cost and provided by government, non-profit, faith based organizations or volunteers. These shelters typically have minimal eligibility criteria, and offer shared sleeping facilities and amenities. They may or may not offer food, clothing or other services. There are no homeless shelters in the rural region of High River, and there are seven such shelters in the city of Calgary (AB Human Services, 2015). Homeless shelters that provide accommodation specifically for women are much less common in Canada (Tutty et al., 2008). There is one such facility in Calgary, the YWCA Mary Dover House, which offers beds dedicated exclusively for women and children who experience homelessness and poverty (YWCA Calgary, 2015).

Short-term supportive housing is temporary housing with support provided to assist clients move towards permanent housing. There are three supportive housing facilities in Calgary, and none in the High River area. Long-term supportive housing provides an unlimited stay at a facility that provides 24/7 supports for clients. There is one such facility in Calgary, and again, none in High River and surrounding rural areas (AB Human Services, 2015).

In regard to permanent rental accommodation, there exists a range of market and non-market options that women leaving violence can apply for along with the general pool of applicants. The criteria frequently depend on income levels, and priority applicants are often assessed on a variety of factors such as number of dependents, and current housing situation. There are varying types of non-market options, which are usually some form of ‘affordable’ housing. This could include social housing, rent geared to income and subsidized rental programs. These housing terms are often used interchangeably and offer similar alternatives, but they each have distinct meaning in their application.

Social housing was first developed in Canada with the intent to offer affordable housing to those with low incomes (Tutty et al., 2008). Social housing refers to those accommodations that receive public subsidies to make the unit affordable to the renter. Affordable housing is considered by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) to be housing that cost less than 30% of before tax household income. The cost
of housing is considered to include rent and any utility costs such as electricity, fuel and any other municipal costs (CMHC, 2015). This is generally the financial criterion that is commonly used as a guide by organizations offering different types of social or affordable housing. There is also a level of acceptable housing that is defined by the Canadian government along three criterion: (a) affordability, such that dwelling cost less than 30% of the before tax household income; (b) suitability, such that dwellings have enough bedrooms per person as defined by National Occupancy Standards and (c) adequacy, such that dwellings are not requiring major repairs (CMHC 2009, as quoted in Ponic, 2011). These criteria are also used as guidelines by housing organizations in order to provide safe and affordable housing options.

In High River and the rural surrounding regions affordable housing is provided by the Town of High River, and the Foothills Foundation. The Town of High River has a total of 30 apartment units available. There are minimum and maximum income levels to qualify for this housing, and applicants must be High River residents or have ties to High River, for example, family or employment. The Foothills Foundation is a non-profit housing management body that provides safe and affordable housing opportunities. They own 22 units of affordable housing in the area, of which nine are in Okotoks, six in Black Diamond, and seven in Turner Valley. Rents for this particular housing are 10% below market rent, and applicants must be employed to access it. The Foothills Foundation also has 21 units of social housing, a category of affordable housing. These units are rent geared to income units, which means that the amount of rent paid is based on a resident’s income. There are 19 units available in Okotoks, one in Turner Valley, and one in Black Diamond. Income levels for applications are different between communities, but are generally below $50,000 and the rent paid is 30% of income. Foothills Foundation has no units in the Town of High River itself.

The Foothills Foundation also has a subsidy program available. This allows for clients who are spending over 60% of their income towards rent with two or more dependents to qualify. The subsidy can be applied to private rental properties. There are currently 80 households in High River on this program, and 170 households across the rural areas spanning from Bragg Creek to Claresholm.

The Calgary Housing company offers affordable housing programs in Calgary, if moving to the city is an option.

**Barriers for Women accessing Housing**

The barriers to housing that women face after leaving an abusive partner arise from the broader context of housing availability and affordability and gendered stereotypes about battered women (Ponic et al., 2011). There are a complexity of issues surrounding domestic violence and safe housing, which often result in the general housing options
not being a viable choice for women fleeing violence. The challenges range from but are not inclusive of accessibility, safety, income, lack of specific services and discrimination.

Although the emergency services such as homeless shelters may be available, they are rarely an option for women fleeing violence. While they provide immediate safety off the streets, homeless shelters and short-term housing do not provide the same safety options as domestic violence specific services, nor do these services address domestic violence in a systematic way (McChesney, 1995 as quoted in Baker et al. 2010). There are often intrinsic difficulties such as mixing female and male residents in the same building, minimal safety protocols to address harassment, and most homeless shelters will require that residents vacate the shelter during the day, making women and their children more vulnerable to stalking and attack from an abusive partner (Baker et al., 2010). A number of women believe that their personal safety is at risk in homeless shelters. American research found that close to one-third (31%) of 99 women who participated in a study were assaulted while staying in homeless shelters (Tutty et al., 2008). Some homeless shelters don’t accept children, or it might not be an appropriate place for children.

Affordable and subsidized housing are an important resource in the housing continuum, but also have significant limitations for women. This housing is usually difficult to access mostly because waiting lists can be excessive - weeks or even years. Normally, residents can stay as long as they want if they continue to meet the income levels for housing, so there is often not much availability. With the overall high cost of living, people are not moving from affordable housing, and as such, women who do qualify for the program are turned away simply because there is not housing available. Many women will not even bother applying because the wait times are unreasonable.

Lack of appropriate Services

Perhaps one of the largest downfalls of affordable housing pertaining to women leaving violence, is the lack of domestic violence specific intervention such as safety planning, advocacy, and referrals to other services. Women must seek out services on their own, or they go without, which may compromise their ability to resolve their issues and maintain their housing (Baker et al., 2010). With no connection to services or supports, it may feel socially isolating for women especially if they have already experienced forced isolation from their abusers (Baker et al., 2010). Housing providers are focused on a move to stable housing, but often have little knowledge or expertise in providing services to survivors and have huge limitations in meeting the complex needs of domestic violence survivors. Participants in an American study observed that service providers working in housing were often under resourced and unable to respond effectively to the safety and housing needs of survivors (Clough et al., 2013). These same participants also identified the importance of a variety of support services.
specifically tailored to address their needs, mainly the importance of trained, compassionate service providers (Clough et al., 2013).

Income

Not surprisingly, income is a critical issue in the ability to maintain housing. Income is often one of the largest barriers for women leaving an abusive partner and seeking housing. Financial abuse is a common tactic used by perpetrators of violence to gain power and control over their partner, and is often used by the perpetrator to reinforce physical and sexualized violence. Financial abuse may be present throughout, or may become present once a victim leaves a partner. Some methods that abusers use to gain financial control over their victim include: intentionally withholding or limiting finances; threatening to punish the victim if they spend money; forcing the victim to obtain credit then ruining their credit rating; running up large amount of debt on joint accounts; or refusing to pay court ordered child support. Financial abuse often gets worse once a victim has left the abusive partner, resulting in huge barriers towards independence for women and their children. Victims of domestic violence often site that concern over their ability to provide financially for themselves and their children is one of the top reasons for staying with an abusive partner. Limited availability of affordable and safe housing in the rental market combined with on-going financial hardship sometimes became an insurmountable barrier (Clough et al., 2013). In an ACWS study, over half of the women staying in emergency shelters returned to the abusive partner, 42% because of a lack of affordable housing and 45% because of lack of money (Hoffart & Cairns, 2011 as quoted in Hoffart, 2014). Financial abuse may include control of the rental lease, credit, or utility bills. The abuser may have them all under their own name, which can result in having no credit history and no landlord references. Alternatively they may put everything under her name and then not pay the bills, or damage the property, leaving her with poor references and bad credit and/or large debt. Both of these scenarios result in huge barriers to independent housing for victims.

In addition to some of the more overt tactics, financial abuse may be inclusive of abuse around employment. The abuser may refuse to allow the victim to work or attend school to open up employment opportunities, or they may interfere with victim’s work performance by harassing them at the work place, resulting in an inability to keep a job. These tactics may result in poor employment references and little experience, making it difficult to gain employment when separation occurs. Victims may also have difficulty in finding living wage jobs that result from limited job experience. Staying employed after separation can be difficult because victims may be dealing with on-going violence, or managing trauma, both of which can compromise steady attendance and work performance. Past exposure to domestic violence has been linked to future unemployment and poverty for women (Byrne et al., 1999 as quoted in Baker et al., 2010). In a sample of women with abusive partners, approximately 50% of those who
worked reported losing a job because of the actions of the abuser (Riger, Ahrens, & Blickenstaff, 2000 as quoted in Baker et al, 2010).

For women on social assistance, there are a number of barriers. Woman cannot afford to live on the dollar amounts that are provided. Rental rates for social assistance need to reflect market realities (ACWS, 2015b). Income support payments do not generally meet the subsistence costs for food and shelter (Du Mont & Miller, 2000 as quoted in Tutty et al., 2008). Alberta has the lowest income payments in the country; for example, a woman with one child receives 48% of what one must make to meet the poverty line (Tutty et al., 2008). In addition to the low income rates, many housing policies require that residents be employed to meet the criteria for affordable housing, which for women on social assistance becomes a barrier to application.

Although Rowan House does not specifically document financial information of clients upon intake, the economic hardship of women leaving abuse are well documented elsewhere. A ten year analysis of women who use shelters in Alberta showed that unemployed women made up an increasing proportion of the shelter population overall, rising from 69% in 2006 to about 75% in 2010 (ACWS, 2012). ACWS reports that the overall population of Aboriginal women and women of other backgrounds (i.e. immigrants, refugees, visible minorities) using Alberta‘ shelters has increased from 64% of the shelter population in 2003 to about 71% in 2012 (ACWS, 2012). These two groups have lower employment rates and income levels related to lack of employment opportunities, discrimination, and cultural and language barriers. Statistics Canada reports that seven in 10 respondents who reported being a victim of spousal violence said that they had also experienced emotional and or financial abuse (Statistics Canada, 2011). The overall rate of poverty in Alberta, meaning those living below Low Income Cut Off (LICO), is 12%, with females experiencing an incidence of 13%, slightly higher relative to the male rate of poverty of 12% (AHS, 2013). These numbers have implications for shelter service requirements, increasing the emphasis on assisting women with childcare, affordable housing, employment opportunities and other sources of income support (ACWS, 2012).

**Discrimination**

Women who are looking for housing often face stigma, discrimination, and stereotypes. Particularly when looking at market rentals managed by private landlords or property managers, several studies have suggested that abused women not only have difficulty finding safe and affordable housing, but also face significant discrimination by landlords who know that they are fleeing abuse (Tutty et al., 2008). A recent Canadian study shows that housing discrimination for abused women exists in the private rental market (Ponic et al., 2011). The study determined that landlords are significantly less likely to rent to women who said they were staying at a women’s shelter. Landlords assumed that a woman in this situation will have difficulty paying rent, or that women would
bring problems or danger to the unit (Ponic et al., 2011). Landlords in another study were seen to be disrespectful or took advantage of women’s urgent housing situation by requiring additional fees as a deposit (Clough et al., 2013). In yet another Canadian study, women disclosed that they have experienced abuse by landlords once in a rental situation. The study showed that landlords were not always respectful of their privacy and some women reported having landlords or property managers who threaten them with eviction unless they had sex with him, or offered to forgive arrears in return for sex (Tutty et al., 2008).

Victim blaming is still widespread in society when it comes to women and violence. Misrepresentation of victims and perpetrators is pervasive. In both professional and public discourse, language is often used in a way that conceals violence, obscures and mitigates perpetrators’ responsibility, conceals victims’ resistance, and blames or pathologizes victims (Coates, Todd & Wade, 2000; Coates & Wade, 2002 as quoted in Wade, 2003). Many will often judge and blame women for poor choices when they are leaving a violent partner. Community members often place more negative judgments on homeless women, seeing them as individuals who have made a wide range of poor choices, and therefore less deserving of help (Tutty et al. 2008). Women are all too aware of this discrimination against them, and will therefore often not provide information to landlords or housing authorities for fear of being turned down for a possible housing opportunity. This brings about further risk for women as without this information the essential supports around safety are not established.

Safety after Separation

It is well documented that a woman is at elevated level of risk when she makes the decision to leave a violent partner. Women and children’s safety is statistically at greatest risk when they have left an abusive partner and it is the time when women and children are more likely to be killed (Ellis, 1992, as quoted in Tutty et al., 2008). Separation from an abuser is an established risk factor for being killed by an intimate partner (Campbell et al., 2003 as quoted in Baker et al. 2010). When women leave their abusive partners, they are an estimated six times more likely to be murdered by their intimate abusive partner (Statistics Canada, 1998, as quoted in Tutty et al., 2008). Women are also more likely to be stalked or harassed once they leave their partner. Women and their support workers consistently describe the severe levels of threats, violence and intimidation that women experience, lasting for years after the separation from an abusive partner (O’Connor, 2006, Homes for Women, 2013, as quoted in Hoffart, 2014).

Most shelters in Alberta now collect data with respect to a women’s risk of femicide, the likelihood of being killed by her intimate partner. This information is collected through a researched based tool called the Danger Assessment, an instrument designed to assess the likelihood of lethality or near lethality occurring in a case of intimate partner
violence (Campbell, Webster, & Glass, 2009). The tool uses weighted scoring and an interpretation of known risk factors. Most shelter workers in Alberta are now trained in the use of the Danger Assessment and scores are recorded in order to track women’s risk levels. Since this data collection began, it has been shown that between 70% and 80% of women in Alberta shelters are in ‘serious to severe’ range with respect to risk of femicide (Cairns & Hoffart, 2009, as quoted in Hoffart, 2014). The ACWS has aggregated data from the Danger Assessment and found that during the 2013-2014 fiscal reporting period, 797 women completed a Danger Assessment in emergency and second-stage shelters, and 66% of these women’s scores indicated they were at severe or extreme risk of femicide (ACWS, 2012). These numbers are significant and point to the compelling fact that safety and security is first and foremost the largest consideration for women leaving violence. Abused women often underestimate the potential for their own homicide (Campbell et al., 2009). This point speaks to the need for specialty services where staff are trained in the Danger Assessment to ensure knowledgeable and effective safety planning.

The social housing approaches used in both Canada and the United States are based on the idea of helping those in greatest need. This approach tends to segregate people by class and gender by targeting low income households into housing projects, which in turn increase the vulnerability of some women. Women may also try to enhance their safety by spending a larger proportion of their income on rent in order to live in a better neighbourhood (Tutty et al., 2008). Conversely, they may look at less desirable properties in private rental to find something they can afford. Many of the affordable community housing options do not include the appropriate safety measures such as security systems, secure neighbourhoods, and restricted access. Even if requested housing programs will not make changes to security systems, due to lack of funding, or even due to policy. These community properties are not appropriate for women who are at high levels of risk for severe physical violence. Once in affordable housing women may be discouraged or even afraid to call the police for fear of being evicted due to noise complaints, or causing trouble. Housing authorities do not proactively support women around their safety.

The choice of housing when looking at private or affordable housing must take into consideration location and must be guided by safety of women and children. Safe accommodation is essential in order to make a successful move away from a violent partner. The location of affordable or community housing is often not safe, and may be easily identifiable to the abuser.

Rowan House has been collecting data with respect to risk levels since 2013, and this data indicates that the women accessing Rowan House are at proportionally similar risk levels to women across the province. In 2013, 72% of women at Rowan House were at serious to severe levels of risk for lethality or severe physical violence, 65% in 2014 and 100% to date in 2015 (Rowan House statistics, 2013, 2014, 2015). The unique safety needs of abused women, especially those whose partners remain threats, must be the
core issue when considering housing (Tutty et al., 2008). The association between higher Danger Assessment scores and the likelihood that a woman cannot find safe housing is concerning because women’s safety should be the primary goal of housing. Rowan House staff have observed that women often don’t understand their own risk until they have entered the shelter and done the assessment with them. Rowan House staff have remarked that many women score high on the Danger Assessment, observing that it wouldn’t be safe for them to rent a house in the community. Rowan House’s Executive Director cites a recent example of a client whose abusive partner had already tracked her down at a previous emergency shelter where she was staying: “Although Rowan House is a reasonably safe place because of security and vigilance of staff, the concern is what will occur once she leaves the shelter”. Figure 1 below displays danger assessment levels of women using Rowan House since 2013. It shows that overall, 74% of women who are in the shelter program are at ‘Severe to Extreme’ risk.

Figure 3: Danger Assessment scores for women Using Shelter

Trauma and Health

Trauma and its related health implications must be a consideration when taking into account housing options for women. Women can often experience a multitude of both physical and mental health concerns related to the trauma and abuse that they have experienced. This can impair their ability to work, seek housing, and make good decisions (Baker et al., 2010). A woman may be managing her own as well as her children’s mental health and physical needs related to the abuse she has experienced.
For women under the age of 45 years, intimate partner violence has a greater impact on health than any other risk factors, including obesity, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and illicit drug use (Cherniak et. al., 2005 as cited in Ursel and Bertrand, 2009, as cited in ACWS, n.d.). The Women’s Health Effects Study of 309 Canadian women who had left an abusive partner within the past 6 years, showed that 82% had at least one active medical diagnosis, 33% were experiencing chronic disabling pain, 57.6% had high level depressive symptoms, and 48% had symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder. In addition, more than half of these women reported fatigue, feeling worried, feeling sad, difficulty sleeping, back pain, headaches, difficulty concentrating, general aches and pains, and bowel problems (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, as cited in ACWS, n.d.). One Canadian study reports that as many as 30% of all women who come into hospital emergency rooms are there with injuries related to intimate partner violence (Basen, 2004, as quoted in ACWS, n.d.).

Substance abuse and addictions are not uncommon for women who experience intimate partner violence. Health issues related to overuse of substances may be a response to stress they are experiencing. Aggregated data (2010) from ACWS for Alberta shelters shows that 28% of women reported having an addiction at the time of admission, including 8% identifying multiple addictions (ACWS, n.d.).

Women may also experience health concerns directly related to the abuse. In some cases women and children have had insufficient or no health care for long periods of time due to control over their personal health care choices by the abusive partner (ACWS, n.d.). Alberta women’s shelters have observed personal health care choices being controlled in various ways such as the amount of food they eat, access to health services in general, cancelling their Alberta Health Care card and abuse around reproductive choices and health such as forced abortion, not being allowed to use birth control, or no access to prenatal care (ACWS, n.d.).

Health is also comprised further by a number of factors: discrimination that women experience by health service providers because of judgment regarding their presentations on their circumstances; assumptions from health services professionals that woman are drug seeking when it is not the case; women may be overwhelmed by their circumstances and experiencing anxiety about interactions with health professionals; and, a reluctance to go to Emergency as they are vulnerable and afraid of the questions they might be asked (ACWS, n.d.). Education to address attitudes and beliefs related to women’s and children’s involvement in domestic violence is needed.

It is vital that there be a better understanding that many of the health concerns and illnesses experienced by women be understood as a natural response to the violence and trauma that women and children have experienced. Without the context of the violence women have experienced, many of these health concerns are easily mistaken for mental health, attention seeking behaviour, drug seeking behaviour, poor choices etc. Many of the ways in which women resist abuse have been ignored or recast as
pathology (Wade, 1997). When service providers do not bring an understanding of trauma and how certain symptoms demonstrate a response to trauma, misdiagnosis and inadequate treatment will result. Services must be specific to meet victims’ needs. Understanding these symptoms as responses will assist women to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment and will help women understand the connections between their experience of trauma and their current strategies for coping, both adaptive and maladaptive. Engaging women in conversations about the details of their resistance helps women experience themselves as more capable of responding effectively (Wade, 1997).

**Support and Parenting**

If women are going to be able to successfully rebuild their lives after leaving an abusive partner, they need to be able to access affordable and reliable childcare. The lack of affordable childcare can result in the inability of women to access social services necessary to find affordable housing. If for example, the perpetrator refuses to pay child support, then the woman may not have the ability to make her rent once she is on her own. She may not qualify for housing because of matrimonial assets.

Women with children who become homeless or who are forced into living in inappropriate housing are at risk of child protection involvement. Canadian research shows that women’s children are being apprehended if the women are homeless or are living in substandard housing (Tutty et al., 2008). Whitzman’s (2006) study in Ontario indicated that the two major reasons that women hide their homelessness were to avoid child welfare involvement and to protect their children from teasing at school (Tutty et al., 2008). Hiding the housing issues may involve living in inappropriate areas, or lying to housing authorities, which eventually may result in eviction anyway.

**Policies / Criteria**

Over or under housing may be a barrier for women with children. Housing authorities follow standards for the number of rooms that are appropriate for families. The standards dictate that a woman with three children should be housed in a four bedroom unit, although, it may be appropriate for two of the children to share a room. Inflexibility of the housing standards have denied many women housing, when essentially the housing would have been suitable.

Priority access is rare for abused women in affordable housing. In order to get priority with general housing authorities (which is never guaranteed), or in order to get financial assistance from fleeing violence, many women are asked to provide proof they have been abused with documentation such as police or medical reports. This obviously
excludes the vast majority of women who do not contact police regarding a physical assault, and women whose partners are not primarily physically abusive.

For women leaving a violent partner who are unemployed, or on a single income they often will not meet the minimum income levels to qualify for some of the affordable housing. And their income levels become a major factor in leaving the abuse. Human Services in Alberta will provide a small financial benefit for women in order to cover the cost of establishing a residence in the community in order to remain independent of the abuser. A woman may be eligible for a one time allowance of $1,000 for this purpose (Human Services, 2015). This policy is intended to ensure the ongoing safety of victims of abuse. The policy states that a verbal substantiation from the client or workers knowledge is needed, and if in doubt, evidence from another professional source is needed, i.e. police, physician, women’s shelter (AB Human Services, 2015). This policy can actually inadvertently work against women’s safety. Many front line workers have reported challenges with women not being believed by workers and needing support of a professional to prove their circumstances in order to receive this benefit. A woman may not have had any police or medical involvement, and may not have professional involvement to advocate for them. The policy then unintentionally creates barriers for this support. Clough (2013) reports that participants in her study often felt overwhelmed by the social service agency bureaucracy.

Municipalities who oversee housing, such as the Town of High River, often have criteria that includes proving their residency before they will be considered for housing. Yet, many women fleeing particularly dangerous partners will move across the country in an effort to remain hidden from them. In addition, women whose communities do not have shelter will have to go somewhere else, and then they are not considered residents. These policies do not seek to support or make welcome women from other communities. Women would have fewer barriers if these criteria/policies were flexible.

Policies related to having rent arrears also create barriers. Some housing authorities require a clean rental record for a minimum of twelve months. Some women may have lived with their partners in social housing, but when they try to establish a separate home they are held responsible for their abusive partner’s behaviour if he did not pay the rent or if he damaged the unit.

**Rural Considerations**

The nature of rural shelters leaves further considerations. Rural areas in the province see additional challenges around services. Rural shelters may experience increased demand for broader services from women who, in addition to a history of domestic violence, also experience other multitude of issues such as homelessness, poverty, lack of available housing, mental health and addictions. In rural areas these additional specific services are often not available, placing further burden on shelters to offer
these supports to women. The responsibility to accommodate these diverse needs places additional pressure for staff training to be more encompassing.

Women who live in remote or rural Canadian communities and are abused by their partners tend to have few alternatives since shelters or other violence against women services are more difficult to access. Based on per capita, the funding for shelter beds may be lower due to population, which means beds are often not available. Maintaining confidentiality or anonymity, particularly in community housing, is difficult and affects her safety. Not having a car to drive elsewhere to access services, general transportation is lacking. Limited transportation is often identified as a barrier to leaving (Novac, 2006).

**Considerations for Immigrant Women and Aboriginal Women**

The overall population of Aboriginal women and women of other backgrounds (e.g. immigrants, refugees, visible minorities, etc.) using Alberta’s shelters rose from 64% of the shelter population in 2003 to about 71% in 2012 (ACWS, 2012). These two groups have lower employment rates and income levels related to lack of employment opportunities, discrimination, and cultural and language barriers.

Immigrant and refugee women may lack social supports that could provide alternate housing options and resources for them. Immigrant women who are sponsored by their husbands may jeopardize their immigration status if they leave their spouse. Women may be told by their partners that if they leave, he’ll break sponsorship and she’ll be deported. Or they just don’t know their legal rights (Tutty et al, 2007). In addition, they do not generally qualify for social services, financial support, and affordable or subsidized housing if they are not permanent residents. There may be language barriers to becoming independent, especially is her partner isolated her from language classes.

Aboriginal women using Alberta’s shelters come with unique characteristics, experiences and needs when compared to women from other backgrounds on a number of important variables. The additional barriers for Aboriginal women and children accessing shelter are multiple and complex. It is widely known that Aboriginal women are more likely to live in a social environment in which substance abuse, spousal violence, lack of housing and poverty are widespread. Close to half (48%) of Aboriginal women who experienced violence by a current or former partner, reported the most severe forms of violence, such as being sexually assaulted, beaten, choked, or threatened with a gun or a knife (Brennan, 2011). It is of significance that a larger proportion of Aboriginal women (72%) scores indicated that they were at severe or extreme risk of femicide, compared to women with European origins (68%) and non-European and non-Aboriginal women (53%) (ACWS, 2012). Discrimination for Aboriginal women and children is rampant within our municipalities, our province, our country both at societal levels and legislative levels. Aboriginal women and their children are sometimes deemed ineligible for provincial support due to their First Nations status,
while at the same time their Band does not provide support leaving them without support due to jurisdictional disputes (ACWS, 2012). Aboriginal women with First Nations Status often face institutional discrimination in the guise jurisdictional responsibility (Tutty et al., 2008).

Shelter service provision must reflect the unique experiences of Aboriginal and immigrant women. Creating cultural sensitivity and competency amongst shelter staff ensures an inclusive setting for all women and children. From a practice perspective, it is important to emphasis knowledge of front line workers, and acceptance of individual uniqueness. Inherent in this is staff being able to recognizing their own biases and prejudice. The complex combination of abuse types emphasizes the need for a careful and comprehensive assessment of each woman’s circumstances to inform shelter services.

**Domestic Violence Specific Housing**

In addition to the general non-abuse specific housing options for women, there exists a spectrum of specific domestic violence support in Alberta and across Canada. This support includes a continuum of housing options and services ranging from crisis and emergency through to community housing that are exclusive to women leaving violence. The terminology varies slightly across Canada to identify similar types of shelters and services, and the types of services also vary slightly. Women’s emergency shelters, as they are most commonly known in Alberta, are also referred to as safe homes or transition houses in British Columbia. Second-stage shelters are also referred to as transitional housing. There also exists a category of what is referred to as third stage shelter housing, and many shelters also offer community outreach services and support for housing. The fact is that the bulk of the efforts to provide housing to abused women still fall within the realm of emergency facilities, primarily on the grounds of lack of funding.

**Women’s Emergency Shelters**

The institutional and the grassroots response to abuse has been to develop shelters to provide at least temporary safety and service (Tutty et al., 2008). There is no doubt that emergency shelters for women leaving abuse are an essential life saving resource for many victims (Baker et al., 2010). Women’s shelters can often be a first step in a longer journey to accessing resources for long-term safety and stability. Women’s shelters provide a high security environment for women and children leaving family violence. They provide basic crisis services including safe accommodation, meals, information, safety planning, referral, support and advocacy. Specific programs for children exposed to intimate partner abuse are now common, as well as prevention and education programming. The accommodations are often a shared room, with some offering
private or family rooms. Emergency shelters are intended to be short-term resources for women and in Alberta, the 21 day length of stay is often dictated by funding. Alberta has the shortest maximum lengths of stay in Canada (Tutty et al., 2008), with 30 days being the average, and stays varying from a few weeks to a few months. Domestic Violence shelters help to mitigate risk at various levels and offer support to women and children so they can be empowered to make decisions that support their safety. Services are entirely committed to the needs of those who have been abused.

As described earlier in the document under the need section, women are often turned away from shelters due to capacity issues, and shelters across Alberta have been consistently turning away more women than they admit. Increased lengths of stays in shelters is resulting in less capacity for the increased demand and the fact is that many women cannot even access emergency shelters when needed. Coupled with these availability issues, shelters often have limitations around rules and policies. It is not uncommon for shelters to screen out women with active alcohol and drug addictions, suicidal ideation, or active mental health concerns. While these practices are in place in residential facilities to ensure the safety and health of women and their children, they may also pose barriers to women in need of housing services. Shelters often have evening curfews, no overnight guests, no alcohol, and require that women submit to housing inspections. Exclusionary criteria are common also in relation to funding (21 day maximum stay), and mandated programming while in the facility. Shelters do not often accept young boys over a certain age, so women with teenage sons either have to separate from their sons or find another alternative.

There are six Emergency Shelters in Calgary and area with a total of 191 beds available. Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter (50), YWCA Sheriff King (42), Awotaan Healing Lodge (27), Wheatland Shelter in Strathmore (25), Eagles Nest in Morley (23), and Rowan House (24). There are 38 women’s emergency shelters in Alberta, and all have contracts with the provincial government for funding. Aboriginal Shelters also receive funding from the federal government. The number of federally and provincially funded beds in Alberta was 616 in 2010, 631 in 2012, and 710 in 2014 (ACWS, 2014b). The funding that most shelters receive from their provincial governments has never covered the total cost of providing shelter (Tutty, 2006). Shelters are typically reimbursed for 65 to 80% of their costs, with the rest made up from fund-raising activities (Tutty, 2006). Most shelters struggle to make do with limited resources. Lack of funding to women’s shelters is a severe enough problem that it has received international attention. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations recommended that all levels of government in Canada increase “its efforts to combat violence against women and girls and increase its funding for women’s crisis centres and shelters in order to address the needs of women victims of violence” (Tutty et al., 2008).
Second-Stage Shelter

The vision and mission of second-stage shelters across the province are similar, in that they all strive for communities that are safe and free of family violence, and provide specialized residential services for abused women and children to enable them to live safely and have long-term stability in the community.

The option of second-stage housing provides women with a transitional step between the short-term measures of an emergency shelter and living independently and safely. Second-stage shelters are a longer term housing option for women that still provide the extra security and ongoing support services such as longer term counselling and advocacy. Typically, they are apartment style residences where women and their children have their own space to live with the added comfort of security. Length of stays vary but are often between 6 months and 2 years. Alberta refers to this housing as second-stage housing, and it is also referred to as transitional housing in other parts of Canada and the States. They vary in services and set up, but all act as a step in the journey after emergency shelter prior to independent living. There are currently twelve second-stage shelters in Alberta (Hoffart, 2014).

Second-stage shelters offer not only the physical safety that some women need, they offer the emotional support for women while they rebuild their lives. Second-stage shelters will often keep the rental lease and utilities in the program’s name in order to make it more difficult for the abusive partner to find the woman. The services at second-stage shelters vary but generally offer long-term practical support around transit, food and necessities, counselling, workshops and programming, ongoing safety planning, assistance with child care, support, advocacy and referral around custody issues, legal advice, financial aid, employment and education. Services are specifically tailored to women leaving violence, to empowering women towards independence and a life free from violence. Wrap around services refer to special domestic violence interventions that ensure women and children’s safety, and provide specific programs for women and children supporting their healing from trauma, life skills and education programming supporting women to become economically self-sufficient and specialist addiction and mental health programming. Services are often on site. Staff are knowledgeable in the complexities of violence against women and trained in safety assessment and planning. An evaluation of 68 second-stage shelters in Canada concluded in general that women who had stayed in the second-stage facilities were highly satisfied compared to those who had accessed other assisted housing options (Tutty et al., 2008).

As with emergency shelters, second-stage shelters are often full and difficult to access. Similar to emergency shelters in Alberta, second-stage shelters have seen a marked increase in the average length of stay. Second-stage shelters saw a 10% increase in length of stay across Alberta in 2012-2013 (ACWS, 2014b). Waiting lists for these accommodations can vary, but can be as high as 24 months. Some programs will not
have waiting lists at all because most women cannot wait that long and need to find other options. There are other limitations to second-stage shelters. Second-stage shelters are less common than emergency shelters, and as such, preference is often given to women at high risk from their previous partners. There are 13 second-stage shelters in Alberta as compared to 38 emergency shelters in the province (ACWS). This fact may exclude some women whose risk level is lower. Second-stage shelters also have exclusions similar to emergency shelters such as no alcohol or drugs, mandated programming, and many shelters are unable to meet the needs of women with serious mental health concerns. Some require women to meet criteria such as a successful stay at an emergency shelter, which excludes women who may have stayed elsewhere during their crisis period such as at a friend’s or family’s place. Rules and policies set in place often have the consequence of creating barriers for women to access this housing option. Although an important resource, second-stage housing is still limited.

ACWS identifies a lack of clarity surrounding the terminology. One of the challenges of the work of second-stage shelters is the lack of clarity associated with how the term ‘second-stage shelter’ is defined and understood by different audiences, including funders and the general public (Hoffart, 2014). The government as well as other funding bodies use multiple definitions to define different types of housing, none of which reflect the gendered nature of homelessness for women leaving violence. Nor do they describe the continuum of work being offered by shelters. ACWS with sixteen member associations have worked together since 2010 to provide support for second-stage shelters to develop a common logic model. The work represented a significant time investment by the eight participating shelters, and the success in creating a common logic model is a step towards improving their individual and group capacity to implement knowledge-based improvement to services for women and children. ACWS and eighteen of its member organizations are currently engaged in a second-stage Shelter Project, to collectively develop strategies that will promote common understanding of and support for second-stage shelters in Alberta. The Second-stage Shelter project is intended to describe the work of the second-stage shelters such that their work can be understood and appropriately placed within the spectrum of domestic violence and housing services. Rowan House participates in this group even though it is not currently classified as having a second-stage shelter. This project would serve as a positive for any new second-stage shelters in the province. Second-stage housing is still a relatively short-term solution. It must be recognized that many families will require financial support to make the transition into permanent housing.

There are currently three second-stage shelters in the Calgary area, all three of which are located in the city of Calgary. Discovery House was opened in 1980 by community members who recognized that many women and children need long-term shelter to cope with the consequences of domestic violence. It has grown from its original capacity, from seven apartments to nineteen family units with 56 beds. Discovery House was the first in Canada to apply the housing first model to domestic abuse situations.
Sonshine opened in 1978 River Park Church to serve homeless individuals and families. In 1989 the decision was made to exclusively provide long-term residential support for women and children fleeing domestic abuse. By 2007 they expanded capacity to offer 24 shelter spaces. In 2008 they included an outreach component to help women transition back to the community. More recently Sonshine opened a children’s centre geared towards meeting the unique needs of children who have experienced domestic violence and other forms of emotional trauma.

The Brenda Strafford Society for the Prevention of Domestic Violence was established in 1996 when it became apparent there was a dire need in Calgary for longer-term accommodation for women leaving emergency shelters. They offer a second-stage shelter, providing individual, group and family counselling. It has 28 two-bedroom apartments and six single apartments. They also offer a program called Progressive Housing Program consisting of 51 two-bedroom units. It is intended to be more independent yet still provide adequate support. Families stay an average 24 months in this program. At which time they are supported to transition in to the community.

Second-stage housing does not receive core funding from the government for its programming, which makes it difficult to achieve sustainability. Many second-stage programs spend much time and energy on granting applications and fundraising. Most second-stage programs receive rent payments from their clients. In Calgary second-stage shelters charge residents the same rent as those who qualify for subsidized housing, which tends to be 30% of one’s gross income. The funding dilemma is that while they collect some rent money from tenants, these fees still do not cover the operational costs. While all of the emergency shelters receive funding there are currently only two shelters (one in Calgary, one in Edmonton) out of 13 shelters in Alberta that receive some funding from the government. With a recent change in provincial government, some funding has just been released to establish second-stage housing programs.

*Update on Second-Stage Funding*

On September 23, 2015 the Alberta government announced additional funds for women’s shelters. Included in this historic funding increase are targeted dollars for second-stage shelters, operational increases for emergency shelters, child trauma counselors, specialized housing and support services staff working in shelter and an increase in the fee for service agreement with on-reserve shelters (ACWS web site, media release). ACWS has been advocating for sustained core funding for second-stage women’s shelters for more than a quarter century. Prior to this funding announcement, only two (out of 13) second-stage shelters in Alberta received provincial government funding in the form of 30-year pilots to assess the efficacy of the second-stage model.
**Third-Stage Shelter**

There also exists a model referred to as third-stage shelter, which refers to another alternative available to women who have been abused, offering programs for housing and support. Third stage is generally available to women after they have completed a second-stage program but still need housing and some support in the community. This model is found both in BC and Edmonton, and the services differ somewhat between the provinces. Third-stage shelters in BC offer housing for abused women with unique needs. There are several third-stage shelters designated for women who have been abused and have significant mental health concerns, as well as shelters for women who have left abusive partners who are managing substance abuse issues (Tutty et al., 2008). Many of the shelters have limited lengths of stays, and others are permanent housing.

There is a third-stage shelter in Edmonton that is run by the Wings of Providence, a second-stage shelter, in partnership with two local non-profit housing societies, social assistance and Alberta Children’s services. They offer a housing placement after second-stage (Tutty et al., 2008). Women reside in units that are part of the regular social housing stock, hence there are no enhanced security measures. The outreach workers from the second-stage shelter provide support to the women participating in the third-stage program.

**Housing First Model**

The Housing First Model is also sometimes referred to as rapid re-housing. Housing first was initially developed as a method to help reduce chronic homelessness. In recent years Housing First has emerged as a key response to homelessness in many parts of the world including the US, Europe and Canada. Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach to homelessness that involves moving people who experience homelessness into independent and permanent housing as quickly as possible, with no preconditions, and then providing them with additional services and supports as needed (Gaetz, Scott & Gulliver, 2013). Housing is not contingent upon ‘readiness’ or ‘compliance’. It is a rights based intervention rooted in the philosophy that all people deserve housing, and that adequate housing is a precondition for recovery (Gaetz et al., 2013). The approach works best when it helps people nurture supportive relationship and become meaningfully engaged in their communities. The core principals of Housing First include: immediate access to permanent housing with no housing readiness requirements; consumer choice and self-determination; recovery orientation; individualized and client driven supports; and social and community integration. Housing First can be looked at as an overall housing philosophy, or considered more specifically as a program. There is a substantial body of research that convincingly demonstrates Housing First’s general effectiveness, when compared to ‘treatment first’ approaches (Gaetz et al., 2013). Housing First can be adapted as specific programming for vulnerable subpopulations with different risk factors such as domestic violence. Discovery House Community
Housing program applies a Housing First model to women leaving violence.

The central premise is that everyone deserves a home and is house-able. There is much misconception that people experiencing homelessness cannot be housed. Educating the community about truths and myths of vulnerable populations is crucial in creating positive relationships with neighbours and communities. On January 23, 2008 the Government of Alberta announced the establishment of the Alberta Secretariat for Action on Homelessness, who were given the mandate to develop a 10 year provincial strategic plan to ending homelessness (AB Secretariat, 2008). The heart of the Plan for Alberta is based on a housing first philosophy (AB Secretariat, 2008).

*Staying at Home Models*

It is most often the victim who leaves the family home when domestic violence occurs. This is well encapsulated in the language we use when we talk about ‘women fleeing violence’ or ‘women escaping abuse’. Little has been written on the idea of a woman and her children remaining in their own homes when leaving a violent partner. The idea of women staying in their home is increasingly being considered as an important and viable option. There are now several models exploring the option for women to stay at home including the ‘Sanctuary Schemes’ in the United Kingdom, which began in 2002, that are now increasingly part of a multi-agency response to households at risk of domestic violence (Jones, Bretherton, Bowles & Croucher, 2010). ‘Safe at Home’ is the Tasmanian Government’s integrated criminal justice response to family violence (Tasmania Government, 2015). The ‘Staying Home Leaving Violence’ program in New South Wales, Australia provides funding for eighteen services across New South Wales (Bega Women’s Refuge Incorporated, 2007). Assisting women to remain safely in their homes is now the stated policy of the Australian Government, under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (Meyering & Edwards, 2012).

The staying at home models of housing for women leaving violence are firmly based on the principle of providing choices for women. Safety remains paramount for housing options. Safe at home models are premised on the fact that the perpetrator of the violence should be held accountable for their actions and removed from the family home, thereby not penalizing the women and children for the violence against them. These models aim to safeguard the autonomy and social support networks of victims, reduce the financial, social and health impacts of violence, and ensure that perpetrators experience consequences for their violent actions (WHGNE, 2011). These models have many advantages, from preventing homelessness and housing pressures, to provision of more choice and minimizing disruption for women and children (Meyering & Edwards, 2012). Similar to other services for domestic violence, service users will have varying levels of need for support and security.
Critical to the success of the staying at home models is the related integrated support and ongoing risk management. This may be in the form of support works, advocacy, added security systems to the home, and restraining orders for the perpetrators. A key aspect of this service model is working in close partnership with other organizations such as police and justice systems. These facts are reinforced in the evaluation of the Bega pilot in NSW that found that certain key factors are necessary for the success of the program (Bega Women’s Refuge 2007; Edwards 2014).

The success of the staying at home model has been demonstrated in the UK through the Sanctuary Schemes. A 2010 report found that among Sanctuary Schemes in the UK, in the vast majority of cases there were no breaches, and the security measures deterred or prevented perpetrators from gaining entry into the property (Jones et al., 2010). A qualitative study exploring the experiences of women in New South Wales’ Staying Home Leaving Violence program provided evidence of a stability of housing which is unusual for women leaving domestic violence. All seventeen women in the study were living in stable accommodation at the time of the interviews, and eleven women had been supported to remain in their own home (Edwards, 2011).

While the staying safe at home models are clearly having success in terms of preventing violence-related homelessness for women the models do not suit all women, and do not purport to do so. Moreover, they are an important part of a continuum of services for women. McFerran (2007), in her overview of integrated models that deal with violence and subsequent homelessness, notes that staying safe at home models must be delivered as part of an integrated regional domestic violence strategy (as quoted in Meyering & Edwards, 2012). Staying at home is clearly an option that women should be offered, and an important reorientation of past ways of assisting some women affected by domestic violence.

Personal help buttons, or duress pendants, have been used as a tool for women to access emergency help without having to reach a phone. One such successful program has been the ‘BSafe’ project used in the Hume Region of Victoria, Australia. The project is an initiative between Women’s Health Goulburn North East, the Victoria Police, the Australian Government and Vital Call (medical alert services). It is a personal alarm and risk management option for women leaving family violence. The women are provided with a pendant and a mobile unit, and activation of either device sends an alarm to a response centre that immediately alerts the police while continuing to monitor and record the call and what is happening in the home. Such recordings can later be used as evidence for court proceedings (WHGNE, 2010). The objectives of the program are two fold. Firstly to reduce homicides, assaults, sexualized assault and recidivism relating to family violence by providing an additional level of support and service to victims of family violence so they can safely stay in their own homes and communities; and secondly, to strengthen the relationship between the police, family violence, and health and community sectors and the community (WHGNE, 2011). The BSafe project is clear that it could not operate outside an integrated approach to family violence where
community services, specialist family violence and sexualized assault services and police are working together to support the safety needs of women and children escaping violence. The bulk of the literature indicate that such staying at home models must only be an option for women assessed at low risk. Bsafe has been successful in providing a service for high-risk women and children escaping family violence or sexualized assault who want to remain in their home. Bsafe is a tangible risk management option. The BSafe evaluations demonstrate clearly that women and their children experienced an increased feeling of safety and have been provided with an additional level of support that has enabled them to remain in their own homes and communities. It also increases the likelihood of detection and prosecution of perpetrators. Evaluations show that 68% of women were able to stay in their own home, while a further 20% relocated to a new home but remained in their own community (Meyering & Edwards, 2011).

Additional Models and Considerations

There are also many innovative policy and program practices associated with the different housing models that can help to provide protection and support for domestic violence victims.

Some American second-stage shelters for example have implemented programs in which they set aside a certain portion of the resident’s rent during their stay. These monies are returned to the women when she leaves to help her establish permanent housing and can help her cover the costs of moving, or to help pay for their security deposit on a new place. This deduction is implemented when women are earning enough that their 30% portion of rent would be above the rates set by social assistance (Tutty et al., 2008). These savings accounts can provide the opportunity for women to move towards more financial independence and does not penalize them for increasing their income.

In some rural and northern communities that do not have shelters, community members may open their homes to women leaving a violent partner. Often referred to as ‘safe homes’ these homes offer a temporary refuge intended to provide women the opportunity to make the necessary travel arrangements to the nearest shelter where travel is often lengthy (Tutty et al., 2008). Since these homes are essentially family homes, there tends to be no added security measures. In some provinces or territories, the host families are trained to help victims of domestic violence and they have access to a coordinator who does outreach work.

Manitoba offers interim housing for women leaving violence, longer-term shelter space as an adjunct to the emergency shelter. It is meant to provide women with a place to stay while they are waiting for longer term housing (Tutty et al., 2008). The housing in this instance is provided by Manitoba housing under the control of the shelter.
The state of Victoria in Australia has been investing in the development of an integrated family violence system (IFVS) since 2005 (Victorian Government, 2012). As a result, Victoria now has an integrated approach that place women and children at the centre of the response. The Integrated Family Violence Network is a group of over a dozen organizations across the region aiming to reduce the incidence of family violence by working collaboratively across all service systems to provide a holistic integrated system, responsive to the needs of women and children. They have three standard models they use when exploring women and children’s safety: State Wide; Leave Local; or Stay at Home. All three options and their suitability are guided by a standardized approach to recognizing and assessing risk, the statewide risk assessment tool, The Family Violence Comprehensive Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework (CRAF) (Victorian Government, 2012).

For women who are at extreme risk and need immediate protection, shelter is coordinated via the statewide crisis system. Leave Local is for women who may be, for the short term or long term, unable to stay in their home – for example, the police are unable to locate the perpetrator or to serve him with an order - and are placed in refuge locally, or rehoused locally with additional security features in place. The third option is safe at home where the women decides she wants to stay at home, the perpetrator is excluded and there is increased safety measures at the home. The dispersed refuge model of housing is also employed, which is housing spread randomly throughout the community. Women are supported by a worker through a local agency. The dispersed housing is owned by the rural housing authority and they act as the landlord, and refuge manages the day to day operations as the refuge has the training to deal with the complex issues of domestic violence.

There are emerging technologies becoming available that may be helpful in monitoring perpetrators to increase women’s safety. Safetracks, a company based in Red Deer, Alberta has devices that have been used to monitor perpetrators. Domestic Violence Deterrence consists of an ankle worn single piece design incorporating GPS for location and cellular communication for reporting data to central computers. These units allow continuous tracking of the perpetrator throughout the community and may also employ a pager or cellular unit carried by the victim. Smartphone applications alert the victim when the perpetrator is in the vicinity. The United States is also using electronic monitoring of persons charged with or convicted of crimes related to domestic violence. There is unilateral and bilateral monitoring. The first is used to ensure that perpetrators are meeting their parole conditions and will signal when the perpetrator is not in their home. The latter can be used to alert the victim. The rationale behind this model is that by monitoring the offender’s location, the woman’s safety is enhanced (Tutty et al., 2008).

Central Alberta Women’s Emergency Shelter in Red Deer ran a three-year pilot project designed to enhance the supervision of select persons subject to court orders arising from Criminal Code convictions for serious domestic violence offences. The project
involved the use of ankle bracelets and GPS technology for electronic monitoring of offenders within the city of Red Deer.

There are also many variances in the approaches and uses of emergency shelters. For example in Australia these are called Refuges, and although they are still designed to be short term ‘crisis' housing options, the stay in refuges is typically three months rather than the usual 21 days in Alberta. Perhaps years ago it took a month to get women housed, but the reality is now that it can take years.

**Recommendations**

**Summary of recommendations:**

- **Expansion of Service Delivery**
  - Second-stage shelter
  - Wrap around services (ongoing support, advocacy, financial, children’s services etc)
  - Stay at home options
  - Community support options
  - Scattered Housing options

- **Existing services remain in tact**
  - Additional funding is necessary

- **Safety and Choice is paramount**
  - Increasing women’s autonomy
  - Guided by Danger assessment

- **Increased Collaboration**
  - Housing
  - Police
  - Community
  - Ongoing advocacy in Community

- **Policies**
  - Specific to needs of women leaving violence
  - Cross sector policies
  - Revision of existing policies
  - Rural considerations
**Expansion of Service Delivery**

It is recommended that Rowan House consider the expansion of service delivery that will provide a broader range of options for women leaving violence to decrease the likelihood that women may choose to either stay or return to an abusive partner. There is not one single approach that will fit the needs of all women leaving violence, particularly where housing is concerned. Therefore, the continued development of a range of services is recommended.

The need for more options for women leaving violence, in particular around transitional housing in the High River area, is undisputable. The shortage of affordable housing and the number of women experiencing violence alone speaks easily to this. What is less explicit is what these options should look like. There are many different considerations, and efforts must continue to develop additional housing options that respond to the reality of domestic violence. Housing options must make provisions for a diverse group of women with varying needs, different family compositions, cultural considerations, safety needs, and the ability to live in community while in crisis (Tutty et al., 2009). The reality is that women need an array of services to meet their needs.

**Service Model**

The development of additional housing services should be provided in a holistic manner to meet both the housing and safety needs of domestic violence victims and their children. Service delivery needs to focus on assisting abused women to find safe, affordable long-term housing. Safety and protection measures should be considered in planning and designing shelter facilities and services provided as well as in policy-advocacy and community outreach efforts (Gierman et al., 2013). There is a need for transitional housing, which is critical to women’s ability to achieve economic independence after separation. Second-stage shelters are identified as an important aspect of the spectrum of housing options and target a group of women who will benefit most from a safe and supportive network. They provide women-only spaces essential to their safety and security as well as the supportive wrap around services they need, as well as an opportunity to develop a sense of community. The second-stage model should be considered as part of Rowan House’s expansion. The second-stage model has proven to be successful in Alberta and working in partnership with ACWS who supports second-stage provisions is recommended. Transitional housing is one of the most important tangible resources.

Additional program practices should be considered as wrap around services for women who need housing, and to enhance safety and services for an overall service program delivery that fits a variety of women’s needs. As well as a need for transitional housing, there is a need for choice, there is a need for strategies to help move women out of homelessness as quickly as possible, and there is need for support in community
housing. Services may include a choice of staying at home where it is safe and appropriate, consideration of extra safety measures for women who need it such as personal alarms or devices, or supporting the use of emergency protection orders to enhance the ability to stay at home safely where they choose. Consideration of financial programs to help assist women become financially independent once they leave the shelter or second-stage environment is also worth keeping in mind.

A model that encompasses a variety of housing options and housing stability including second-stage shelter for women that need the security, scattered community housing availability, community support and advocacy, and staying at home options would be ideal. Stable housing may be one of the most important tangible resources (Baker et al., 2010). All housing options must be considered through a lens of safety as priority and choice for women. High River is a logical location for second-stage shelter as its proximity to Rowan House will enhance service provision with the efficiency of time and support. Scattered housing should be considered beyond High River in outlying areas such as Okotoks and Black Diamond. Scattered housing in these outlying communities would provide options for women in these rural areas. For example, if a woman wanted to stay in their local community rather than moving to High River for second-stage housing, they would have this option. Alternatively, if a woman needed to leave High River for reasons of safety, they would still have a suitable rural options rather than being forced to move to the city. Scattered housing also provides the opportunity for women to live within the community if they do not need the added security of a second-stage shelter.

Existing Services / Funding

It is vital in the further development of Rowan House’s continuum of services that the existing services remain in tact. Although there is increased attention to the need for transitional and permanent housing, this does not abdicate the need for emergency shelters and the services they provide. Emergency shelters provide a safe place to stay as well as effective and supportive services for women in crisis. There will always be a need for emergency services. Expansion for Rowan House must be on the proviso that existing staffing, in-house and outreach services and the current budget stay intact.

Although the recent funding announcement by the provincial government is for existing second-stage shelter beds, there is certainly possibility that in the future this funding is expanded to new beds. Secure funding is critical to the sustainability of services.

Safety and Choice

Safety is paramount when considering housing for women leaving violence. Safety must be the first priority in looking at housing options for women. The numbers speak easily
to this need for safety, as does the fact that women leaving violence have unique safety needs. Service decisions are guided and choice is informed by the danger assessment. There is a need for choice, autonomy, and ensuring that women have control over their options. Programs need to increase women’s autonomy by emphasizing flexibility in services offered (Baker, 2010).

**Increased Collaboration**

Increased collaboration between services is vital, particularly between domestic violence and housing systems. Best practices in family violence service provision affirm the critical importance of a coordinated community response in holding offenders accountable and providing holistic services for victims (ACWS n.d.). Despite the importance of second-stage shelter as a housing option with wrap around services, ultimately moving out into the community into safe, affordable, permanent housing is the goal of most abused women. Therefore, continued collaboration and advocacy for increased availability of public housing is essential, as is an integrated approach across the community to develop consistent policies that respect all agencies. Work with the community to develop a common philosophical framework about abuse and the complicated dynamics of family violence is essential (ACWS n.d.), as is housing systems working more proactively to better serve the needs and safety of domestic violence victims. Women’s shelters and housing commonly deal with the same women (although they may not disclose to housing). While these organizations have different mandates, funders, and philosophical foundations, improved collaboration between women’s shelters and the housing sector can only enhance women’s journeys to becoming appropriately housed (Tutty et al., 2014).

Enhanced consultation between the police and community can help to support women who stay at home or in their own community. The provisions to give women possession of the family home are powerful, and if the abuser is not at risk of breaching the order, this approach can be effective. Advocacy for housing subsidies that are not dependent on the act of moving would serve to increase housing options, including staying at home.

**Policies**

Policy recommendations that specifically address the needs of victims of domestic violence need to be fully implemented and enforced. This includes both awareness of existing resources, as well as consistent implementation throughout the community.

Assessing existing agency policy for implicit biases for women accessing services is important. Rowan House should consider creating cross sector policies for women and housing with other agencies in the community. Examining unintended policies that may
disadvantage or endanger victims is also important, as is creating policies that address barriers and improve housing related outcomes for women. Rural considerations should be made. As there tends to be less access to a multitude of services in rural areas services should consider supporting other women in need when the availability permits. Assistance with transportation may be critical as public transportation is limited in rural areas, and women may not have a vehicle of their own. Consider policies around length of stay. Research from the United States and internationally clarify that both emergency and second-stage shelter stays are generally longer than Alberta. The downside is, especially in urban shelters, that allowing current residents to stay longer would prevent women ready to enter the shelter from being able to do so. However, the appropriateness of this could be considered, as could a longer stay second-stage shelter program, for example up to two years. Continued advocacy to change policies that create barriers for women is essential.

Conclusions

The complexities of the issues for women abused by intimate partners who become homeless are overwhelming, and the current institutional response is simply inadequate (Tutty et al., 2014). A focus on women’s autonomy and agency in service delivery options and provision of flexible and long-term services that are tailored to women’s needs are vital. A holistic and integrated approach is required to meet both housing and safety needs of women and children leaving violence. Ongoing development of a range of services, policy revisions, and collaboration, are all required to achieve safety and stability.

There is a complex interplay of issues that may affect a woman’s risk of housing instability after she has left a violent partner. On looking at housing options for women there are many things to consider, including safety, maximum length of stay, and support. It is imperative to look closely at all the options and examine why they are not suitable options. On leaving emergency shelters women are often faced with inadequate housing and financial support that leaves them with a choice of being homeless or returning to the abusive partner. And the lack of housing resources in their community as impacting their ability to leave or stay safe from their abusive partner (Clough et al., 2013). Women feel that housing resources are directly linked to their safety (Dichter and Rhodes, 2011 as quoted in Cough et al., 2013). As described aptly by one participant in a study by Clough et al. (2013), the ability to have housing is key to achieving safety and stability for domestic violence survivors and their children.

There is no one solution to domestic violence related homelessness nor is the solution easy to realize. What is clear is that women need an array of services to meet their needs. A range of prevention and intervention initiatives are needed as part of an integrated approach to addressing domestic violence and its related homelessness. The type of assistance and support needed varies based on the personal circumstances,
which may be influenced by health, social and cultural background, financial resources, family resources, abuse etc. Two types of assistance are clearly critical: provision of safe, secure and affordable housing; and provision of a continuum of individualized and open ended wrap around supports including outreach services, housing and financial assistance, spiritual and emotional support for as long s they need it. All women and their stories are unique, and all circumstances are unique and require different approaches and different service options, provisions, and considerations. Safety is a factor in every housing decision. Consistent in the literature, is the concern that women are returning to their abusive partners because no affordable long term housing is available (Tutty et al., 2008).

Rowan House is well positioned in the community and the province to take on the development of transitional housing and housing options. Building on current services around the broader continuum of housing will not only strengthen the existing staff and services, but will also provide the community with an essential service around housing for women leaving violence. As an integral part of the community, Rowan House comes with experience and best practice knowledge around domestic violence. Rowan House has many strong working partnerships with other key organizations in the area, including housing services, and financial assistance. Rowan House will engage and maintain these working relationships with key stakeholders as it moves forward with planning. Rowan House has an ongoing membership with the ACWS that provides support to shelters to look at promising practices for the needs of shelters. ACWS already supports several second-stage shelters across Alberta. Shelters should be operated by independent women’s organizations (Gierman et al., 2013). Informed by Rowan House as a women’s organization and experiences, this will create a service program approach that is empowering to, and authentic for women, reinforcing a gendered perspective to housing. Well established in its programs and services, Rowan House is committed to supporting women and children who have experienced family violence. Promising practices are already informed by Rowan House’s philosophies of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment. Recognizing the leadership that Rowan House has provided in the community is crucial to sustain its ongoing development and work to ensure a vision that every person is safe and secure and lives without abuse.
Appendix A – Rowan House Statistics

Number of women and children admitted to programs

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<tbody>
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<td>Outreach</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>129*</td>
<td>69*</td>
<td>58*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
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<td>151</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>48*</td>
<td>51*</td>
<td>50*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crisis Calls</td>
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<td>827</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of women and children turned away</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>469*</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outreach* Number included children, after 2010 only adults
Residential* Numbers collected differently, therefore may vary slightly for comparison
Crisis* Data not collected prior to 2012
Turn aways* 201 of these turn aways were due to floods
Turn aways** No data available

Of Note:
- In the old facility more women were being turned away than admitted into residential
- There has been a steady increase in number over the years
- The residential numbers have increase more than 4 times in six years, partly due to facility change
- In the Black Diamond facility prior to 2012, women were turned away due to lack of space, also due to safety reasons because of the nature of the non-secure facility

Length of stay in Residential

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Days</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 10</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>205</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>121</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 62</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>255</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 62</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td>692</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data not recorded prior to 2010

Of Note:
- 43% percent of women stay longer than 21 days
- 6% have stayed longer than 62 days
- 47% stay between 3 and 20 days
- The women who stayed more than 21 days has almost doubled in the past three years
Danger Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DA Scores</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interpretations of Scores:
Variable (less than 8): routine safety planning and monitoring.
Increased (8 to 13): Safety planning and increased monitoring are important. Watch for other signs of danger.
Severe (14 to 17): Victim should be advised that danger is severe. Safety planning should be assertive, consultation with others. Severe risk has been associated with increased risk of homicides of women.
Extreme (18 or more): Assertive actions to protect victim are necessary. Additional professional help is recommended.

* No data collected prior to 2012

Of Note:
- 74% of women admitted to Rowan House are in the Severe to Extreme range

Client Regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Region</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2009/10</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High River</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okotoks</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local area *</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>138</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other**</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>307</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Turner Valley, Black Diamond, Claresholm, Nanton, Vulcan and surrounding rural areas
** Have had women from other areas in Alberta, Edmonton and area, Lethbridge, Siksika Nation, Morley, as well as from out of province.

Of Note:
- 38% of women come from local area and surrounding local rural regions
- 45% of women come from Calgary
### Appendix B – Housing Type Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Type</th>
<th>High River and area</th>
<th>Calgary</th>
<th>Barriers for women</th>
<th>Benefits for women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non DV Specific</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emergency Shelters / Homeless Shelters</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>. A total of 6 facilities in the city of Calgary with a total of 1,391 spaces (mixed gender)</td>
<td>. Safety</td>
<td>. Minimal criteria to gain entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. YWCA operates Mary Dover House with 6 beds dedicated to single women</td>
<td>. Must vacate during the day</td>
<td>. No cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. YWCA operates a Winter Emergency Response (Nov-Apr) with 50 cots dedicated to single homeless women</td>
<td>. No guaranteed access daily</td>
<td>. Immediate safety off the streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. One family shelter with a total of 28 units, with additional overflow available</td>
<td>. Location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Kerby Rotary Shelter for seniors experience elder abuse men and women (6 beds)</td>
<td>. Shared sleeping facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Shared amenities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Do not address DV issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Mixed gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Minimal safety protocols</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Do not accept children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. No DV services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. YWCA Mary Dover (3 weeks stay)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short term Supportive Housing</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>. A total of 3 facilities in the city of Calgary with a total of 470 spaces</td>
<td>. Safety</td>
<td>. Minimal criteria to gain entry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. No DV services</td>
<td>. No cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Length of stay (short term)</td>
<td>. Immediate safety off the streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Mixed gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Long term Supportive Housing | N/A | . A total of 1 facility in the city of Calgary with a total of 70 spaces  
. YWCA Calgary provides 80 transitional beds for women | . Safety  
. No DV services | . Length of stay (long term)  
. YWCA transitional (2 year stay)  
. Although YWCA program is not DV specific, this support is available |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Affordable Housing | . The Town of High River (30 units)  
. Foothills Foundation (22 units affordable housing - 9 in Okotoks, 6 in Black Diamond, 7 in Turner Valley)  
. 21 units of social housing – rent geared to income – 19 in Okotoks, 1 in Turner Valley, 1 in Black Diamond | . The City of Calgary has an affordable housing program | . Safety  
. Availability  
. Location  
. No DV services  
. No connection to support  
. Isolation  
. Residency requirements  
. Discrimination  
. Income levels  
. Policies, criteria  
. Over / Under housing  
. Lack of trained staff on DV  
. Housing priority different  
. Income support do not qualify  
. Priority rarely given to DV | . Length of stay (long term)  
. Affordably criteria  
. Potential to stay in home community |
| Subsidy Programs | . Foothills Foundation provides subsidy for private rentals | . Subsidy programs available. | . Safety  
. No DV services  
. Private rental availability  
. Policies and criteria  
. Discrimination | . May be able to stay in current home  
. Choice of more rental options |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV Specific</th>
<th>DV Emergency Shelter</th>
<th>Second Stage Shelter</th>
<th>Housing First Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>. Rowan House (24 beds)</td>
<td>. Rowan House is currently leasing 4 units for transitional housing on a trial basis</td>
<td>. Discovery House (DV specific)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>. Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter (50 beds)</td>
<td>. Brenda Stratford Centre (34 units second-stage + 54 units in Progressive Housing)</td>
<td>. Discovery House (DV specific)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>. YWCA Sheriff King Home (42 beds)</td>
<td>. Sonshine Centre (24 units)</td>
<td>. Model may also depend on available housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>. Awotaan Healing Lodge (27 beds)</td>
<td>. Discover House (19 units)</td>
<td>. Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wheatland Shelter, Strathmore (25 beds)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>. Eagles Nest, Morley (23 beds)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Availability</td>
<td>. Social and Community integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Policies and criteria</td>
<td>. Immediate access to housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Length of Stay (short term)</td>
<td>. No housing readiness requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Exclusions</td>
<td>. Recovery oriented approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Permanent housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Secure facility</td>
<td>. Supports available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Safety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. DV specific support and services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Children specific programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Trauma informed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Trained staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Focus on empowerment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>. Mostly funded, women stay at no cost</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Community Housing Model | N/A | . Discovery House  
. Brenda Stratford | . Safety  
. Housing in desirable areas may not be affordable | . Social and Community integration  
. Choice to stay in community |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Stay at Home            | N/A | . Shelters may sometimes support women to stay in own home if it is safe and appropriate | . Not always safe for women to do so | . Provision of more choice  
. Prevention of homelessness and housing pressures  
. Minimizes disruption for women and children  
. Remain in own home and community  
. Holds perpetrators accountable  
. Minimizes victim blaming  
. Safeguards social support network for women  
. Strengthens relationship between DV and community sector such as police |
| Scattered Housing       | N/A | N/A                                                   | . Safety  
. Availability | . Community integration  
. Provision of more choice  
. Remain in own community |
References


Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (ACWS) (n.d.) Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters Aspirational Service Standards.


