

PREAMBLE

We believe in a world free from violence and abuse.

Respect for the inherent worth of all human beings is a fundamental moral principle of Alberta Women's Shelters. Respect and caring for others and for ourselves is necessary to achieve a world free from violence and abuse. The elimination of violence and abuse is necessary for the preservation of humankind.

Violence, widespread in the world today, is the abuse and misuse of power in order to control others for personal or political gain. Violence within families is also universal across all nations, cultures, ethnic and faith groups, and regardless of sexual orientation, ability, education, and economic or social status.

Family Violence: is the intent, attempt, or act of a person within a relationship (where the relationship is characterized by intimacy, dependency, or trust) to harm another through abuse such as physical, psychological, sexual, economic and/or emotional mal-treatment of the other and/or their children. The goal is to establish and maintain power and control through this pattern of coercive tactics.

— Child Welfare Protocol.

As the public became more aware of the extent of violence and abuse within families, shelters were seen as essential for the safety and protection of women and children. In Canada in 1973, the first shelters for women fleeing abuse opened in Toronto, Vancouver, Saskatoon and Calgary. The early Women's Shelters evolved from grassroots collectives grounded in a feminist understanding of family violence as an abuse of power, to multi-faceted organizations grounded in a broader ecological framework. Family violence, and particularly violence against women, occurs in Canadian society where social structures and policies do not respect the dignity and equality of all people and where all members of society do not have the right to have their basic needs met. Today, in addition to direct counselling services for victims and perpetrators, shelters advocate on behalf of individual women and their families as well as advocate for changes in society that would mitigate against family violence. These changes are based on a moral framework that respects the dignity and worth of all human beings.

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters is committed to providing safe, competent and ethical care for women, children and seniors who access shelters in Alberta. Best practice requires an integrated community-based response to bring together law enforcement, criminal justice, health, education and community agencies in providing direct services. Cultural sensitivity is essential in addressing the needs of women and families from a rich and diverse variety of cultural beliefs. Services must be totally committed to the needs of those who have been abused, the majority of whom are women, children and seniors. When a credible assessment of dangerousness indicates that the lives of a woman and her children are in imminent danger, and an integrated community response is not immediately available, every effort will be made to preserve life and to obtain a safe solution within the law as early as possible.

Women's Shelters are grounded in the belief that all human beings are of value in themselves and should never be used or abused to achieve other objectives. Community agencies must deal with the complexity of human relationships and the implementation of social policies. This dynamic contributes to ethical dilemmas on a daily basis for those who provide shelter services. Conflicting interests of different parties and adversarial relationships contribute to dilemmas on what are the right, proper, caring, and ethical ways to address specific situations. For these reasons an explicit statement of ethical principles is valuable in guiding relationships among all parties. This Ethical/Moral Framework is intended to guide shelters¹ in their everyday conduct, thinking and planning, when acting in direct service, teaching, research, consultation, administration, management, governance and collaboration roles. The Framework complements other professional codes of ethics, such as, the Social Work Code of Ethics and the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists. It may also assist staff who do not belong to a professional association with a code of ethics. The Framework provides aspirational guidelines in reaching for the best ethical practice rather than defining specific rules of conduct.

The Framework is also intended to serve as a reference document for relationships with the larger community in the work of coordinating the development of protocols, standards and guidelines for family violence practice and research. The relationships that support effective collaborative work must explicitly embody values of mutual respect, honesty, openness, accountability, and commitment to the service of others, individually and collectively. The ideals of freeing individuals and society of violence must never be compromised by agency or self interest.

I. RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF PERSONS

The Principle of Respect for the Dignity of Persons requires that shelters in all their activities demonstrate their belief that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person, and that women, men and

¹ The term "shelters" includes emergency, second stage and seniors shelters, their staff, volunteers, and boards

children are respected and valued for themselves rather than as a means to other ends. Regardless of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, health, ability or social class, people have the right to be free from abuse within their own families. Family violence over time can be prevented by promoting healthy family functioning based on the equality of women and men. Abuse of power in order to maintain control of another person demonstrates a lack of respect and caring for such a person. Because abuse is learned behaviour everyone is vulnerable to being abused and to being abusive. Abuse is not the result of the abused person's faults or inadequacies. Those seeking help from women's shelters are vulnerable, often with feelings of low self-esteem, powerlessness, and fear for their safety. Safety must be the first priority in respecting those seeking help. Not only do they consent to receiving services, but they are provided with assistance in making free informed choices about their lives. The counsellor does not know what decisions are clearly in the client's best interests and -therefore supports the client to make her own best choices. Maintaining confidentiality of personal information is one of the foundations of respect for the dignity of persons, and precludes sharing personal information without her consent with a partner, doctor or other people who may assert their right to know, unless otherwise required by law, or to protect persons from serious imminent harm.

II. RESPONSIBLE CARING

The Principle of Responsible Caring requires that shelters demonstrate in all their activities a concern for the welfare of all persons whom they serve in a professional capacity. In order to be competent in providing service, or in conducting research, they need to understand the uses of power in fostering oppression, discrimination and violence. They also need to recognize the diversity of women's experience and how it influences each woman's perspective and identity. Another aspect of responsible caring is ensuring that the aftereffects of violence against women are not pathologized, but rather are viewed as understandable responses to traumatic experiences. Competence requires reflection and self-awareness of one's own biases and emotional reactions in working with vulnerable and often traumatized persons. Maintaining competence may require self-care, the support of colleagues, a balance between professional and personal life, and keeping current on new developments in the field. Competence requires the ability to collaborate with other community services in providing an adequate network of supports.

III. INTEGRITY IN RELATIONSHIPS

The Principle of Integrity in Relationships requires shelters to be honest, open, objective and accurate in all their professional activities, which means that they avoid dishonesty, deception, bias, inaccuracy and conflict of interest. They maintain professional boundaries that separate their working relationships with clients from personal and business relationships that would create a conflict of interest; and where that is not possible they manage the dual relationships completely for the best interests of the clients. If Shelter Workers hold strong personal beliefs that might interfere with their impartiality in counselling, they are obligated to make these known, seek supervision, or reconsider their choice of employment. Sexual or other intimate relationships between Shelter workers and clients are clearly prohibited, as well as intimate relationships with other persons closely associated with the clients that would constitute a conflict of interest.

IV. RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY

The Principle of Responsibility to Society requires shelters to demonstrate concern for the welfare of society generally, and in this context for the welfare of women and families in society. Because it is unjust for segments of society to be devalued or abused, professionals have an ethical responsibility to use their knowledge and power to contribute to change. Shelters may play a leadership role in advocating for social change. There are multiple avenues for social advocacy from which staff may choose those that are the most appropriate and beneficial uses of their time and talents. Family violence is not just a private matter, but rather a public issue that has impact on all members of society. Therefore, the responsibility for addressing family violence must be shared by individuals and their families, by the community, and by all levels of government, including the judiciary. Citizens need access to information about family violence and a range of service options to address their needs. Family violence programs are needed to improve the safety of those who have been abused, their families and the community. It is important to work to change the conditions in society that contribute to violence and abuse as well as to care for those individuals who have suffered abuse. Injustice exists in society and those who do not see and act for change perpetuate the status quo.