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Media Release

Women forced to choose between violence, poverty and homelessness

Calgary - Research completed between 2007 and 2008 by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters uncovered that a fear of poverty is a significant reason many women return to the same abusive relationships that brought them to a women's shelter in the first place.

As part of an exit survey of women who had stayed in an emergency shelter, women were asked whether they were returning to their abusive relationship and why. The research found that after their maximum stay of only 21 days at an emergency women's shelter, 57% of women who returned to the same relationship did so because of poverty related issues. The primary reasons cited were lack of affordable housing (42%) and lack of money (45%).

"The link between violence, poverty and homelessness is real and women need an option so they don't feel they must return to abusive relationships," said Carolyn Goard, Director of Member Programs & Services, Alberta Council of Women's Shelters.

Goard and Alberta Council for Women's Shelters member shelter representative, Michelle Murray (Discovery House), will be presenting "Violence, Poverty and Homelessness" as part of the Canadian Social Forum in Calgary on Wednesday, May 20th.

"Women need a Second Stage shelter option that provides safe accommodation with supportive programs for six months, or more," said Goard.

Goard and Murray explain that Second Stage shelters are most often small apartment buildings with extra security features to protect residents. They are also a safe learning environment where women learn how to make independent choices as opposed to being controlled by their abuser.

"Women who have been abused are traumatized, many have been isolated and lack basic skills needed to take care of themselves and their children. Because of this, women see their living options as violence, poverty or homelessness," said Goard.

"The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters has long held that the shortage of second stage housing is vast," said Jan Reimer, Provincial Coordinator for the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters.

"If we are to eliminate violence against women and their children, we need to address long-term housing and financial assistance," said Reimer.

Currently the Government of Alberta has no policy document or strategic plan in place to address the enormous demand for spaces in shelters.

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