



# 2019 data release



Domestic violence is an  
**urgent and serious problem.**

# Every SIX DAYS

a woman in Canada is  
**killed** by a current or former intimate  
partner, and Alberta has one of the  
**highest rates of domestic  
violence in the country.**

We believe that when we share and develop knowledge to respond to domestic violence, we can achieve a world free from violence and abuse. Alberta's women's shelters came together to form the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) in 1983 because they knew that there is strength in numbers and in working together. Collective data informs our work, identifies trends and supports shelters to better serve the changing and increasingly complex needs of women, children and seniors who face domestic abuse in our province.

The 2019 data release includes aggregate statistics on services provided by shelters and stories that illustrate the positive impact of shelters on the lives of families as well as the context in which shelters are operating. We want to highlight the scale of Alberta's ongoing domestic violence epidemic while showing how shelters transform lives.

The 39 members of Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) collect data on every woman they serve so we can tell women's stories. Shelters also employ the Danger Assessment tool to determine a woman's risk of being killed by her intimate partner. The data is alarming. Today, nearly 2/3 of women entering shelter are at a severe or extreme risk of being killed. This is higher than at any other time in the past seven years.

The data paints a clear picture of domestic violence in Alberta. This is not one woman's problem, or just one family's. It is everyone's problem, and we can solve it together.

## **Building Shelter Capacity to Work with Indigenous Communities Project**

90% of survey respondents indicated that safety is the critical issue for Indigenous women entering shelters.

As part of this project, ACWS has:

- Conducted four community consultations
- Interviewed 23 women's shelters across Alberta to learn more about what they are doing to create welcoming and safe spaces for Indigenous women and children
- Created a Stepping into the Circle training manual for shelters with Lewis Cardinal and friends
- Worked with the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association to renew our Memorandum of understanding



# these are **our** **stories...**

Shelters across Alberta provide a range of services to women, children and seniors facing abuse. Shelters are the safest place for people facing abuse to go, to receive support as they navigate their way to a life free from abuse.

The 2019 data release includes aggregate statistics on services provided by shelters, the positive impact of shelters on the lives of families and anecdotal evidence to help understand the context shelters are operating in.



Abuse can take many forms but it is always about power and control.



## Collective voices, **collective action.**

Central Alberta Women's Outreach Society (known as The Outreach Centre) has provided services and programs in Central Alberta since 1984. Over the years, we have been expanding our services to victims of domestic violence, including the 2010 opening of Julietta's Place, a 10-unit second stage shelter for women and children fleeing domestic violence. This expansion is in line with our mission: working to end family violence and poverty by supporting people in their pursuit of a safer, healthier, more secure life.

When we think about our purpose, we often refer to the idea that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Our work sits in the intersection between what we care about most and where we can contribute most to helping others. We realized that becoming a full member of Alberta Council of Women's Shelters aligns our purpose with a stronger, collective voice.

Being part of a larger team provides our organization access to resources and training, the ability to adapt quicker to the changes in government policy and direction, and support to face complex challenges together. In return, we can share our data and experience to enrich the work of women's shelters across the province.

There is a saying on the wall of The Outreach Centre when you walk in the door: **if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.** We are so grateful to be going together with ACWS and are excited about the opportunities it will provide to serve victims of domestic violence and our community and to disrupt family violence in our province.

**If you want to go fast,  
go alone. If you want  
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My children get honours every year in school.

**Because they feel safe.**

I remember the day my children and I came to WINGS shelter. We felt confused, overwhelmed, scared, and wondered if we would ever find peace and stability. The feeling of helplessness and inferiority, fear of abandonment, the complex state of mind we were experiencing at that moment, made us feel hopeless.

Their father was confining us and preventing us from our basic rights like going to school, having fun, playing outside, having friends, having proper food. We don't have family in Canada. WINGS showed us the true example of protection. Our stay gave us the chance to gain back our dignity and humanity. I could never imagine how we would have survived without WINGS. Today, I have become a Canadian Citizen. I am studying education and will graduate as an elementary teacher in 2019. When I'm at school I can focus because I know my children are in good hands.

My children found their place in WINGS. They attend kids' groups and they benefit from all the events offered from camp, K days, parks and the zoo. They feel good about themselves, about their academics, and about their future, because they feel safe. Finally. They get honours every year in school. They met other children who shared the same experience. We have also been helped financially, with school supplies, hygiene supplies, gift cards, bus tickets, and proper food. Honestly, my children and I experienced all the fun for the first time in Wings Home Next Door. I will always remember the place where my children and I realized our rights.

I would love to stay here forever because the staff in WINGS are our only family. WINGS needs to expand to respond to the needs of as many abused women as possible, and there are a lot, unfortunately.

## > Women face **tough choices.**

For women facing abuse in Grande Prairie the options can look bleak. The poor economy has had a significant impact on many people's lives. The affordable housing stock – already limited – is hard to access. This means that women facing abuse only have difficult choices: between homelessness or returning to their abuser. It also means that in Odyssey House women may be staying longer because they have limited options about where to go after they leave the shelter.

We have also invested a lot in public education in these past couple years. Having conversations with businesspeople in our community as well as with young people, their parents and teachers are all crucial to raise consciousness about the issue of domestic and sexual abuse. People are often surprised at how many services our shelter offers.

All of this new awareness feeds into an understanding of what is acceptable and, what is not, so we get even more calls from women seeking services, support and advice. I see this increased awareness as part of the success story: what was hidden for so long is now coming into the light and that is healthy for our society, for building equality and for ending domestic abuse.

Women facing abuse only have **difficult choices:** between **homelessness** or **returning to their abuser.**





## We hold her hand **every step along the way.**

Sonshine Centre has 24 apartments for women and their children. But after that we need somewhere safe for them to go. Ideally women will find an affordable home near childcare and other community supports. In Calgary we have housing options for women but we also have more social service agencies and people in need of services. We have been able to develop good relationships with affordable housing providers.

Our Intensive Case Management (Outreach) worker has also had a lot of successes in connecting with other organizations in the community. We have moving companies who volunteer their staff time to help transport goods for women. Our counsellors journey with women for six months after they leave the shelter so we know she is safe and making some progress in her healing journey.

We also refer her to other agencies and bodies. But a referral is part of the journey we go on with each woman: we hold her hand every step of the way. That means we support her with money to pay the rent or damage deposit, filling out forms, accessing income support, or applying to start school.

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providers.



## Doing something **small can have a big effect.**

I started playing with the Wildcats in 2015. Our team was invited to the ACWS Leading Change training in Calgary with the Stampeders. I didn't really know what to expect, but so many of my female friends had told me about things happening to them getting brushed over. I leapt at the opportunity.

One of the exercises I remember best was the 'Man Box'. We drew a box, and everyone wrote ideas about what a 'real man' should be: imagine a 1980s action hero. Outside the box we wrote what we would call someone who isn't man enough: mainly derogatory terms for women. It was eye opening.

The training helped us build better players, better people, and a team full of young men with strength of character and physical strength, too.

Later, in my first year in college, I heard a guy yelling at a girl he was with on Whyte Ave. Everyone was walking by, but I decided to try and give the girl a way out so I walked up to him and said, "you got the time, man?" In that split second, I saw relief on her face as she walked away. I realized that stepping up is something anyone can do. If everyone does a bit, we can bring change in the right direction.

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is something anyone can do.**







## Flexing Her Power Arm: Marina's story.

Marina is 70 years young and shares her apartment with the light of her life, her little dog Zach. Marina has a vibrant social network and has spent the past year evolving into the force of nature she is today - and - she has the tattoo to prove it.

In 2018 a social worker outside Edmonton contacted the Sage Seniors Safe House about an older woman named Marina who was experiencing domestic violence.

During her phone intake interview, we learned from Marina that she had suffered many types of abuse, for decades, at the hands of her spouse. At the time of the call the Safe House did not have an available space. Marina, with the support of her social worker and the Safe House, secured a place for her and Zach in Edmonton. Marina then began her journey to live free from abuse.


We worked with Marina to create a safety plan and access financial resources and health programs.

More than a year later Marina is almost unrecognizable as that small scared woman who we first got to know. Not only is she thriving, she is a source of great support to others experiencing abuse.

Recently, Marina came to the support group at the Safe House sporting a tattoo, something her spouse had previously forbidden. She got it on the arm that he had injured. For her the image represents strength, and she now calls this arm her "power arm".

We worked with Marina to **create a safety plan** and **access financial resources** and **health programs**.

# facing the facts of domestic violence in Alberta




**10,128**  
women, children and seniors sheltered in 2018/19\*.  
Demand for shelter services remains constant. \* Includes 45 men



Shelter outreach workers are operating at **caseload capacity**, which limits their ability to support all those who need them.

**7,474** people served through outreach programs in 2018/19.

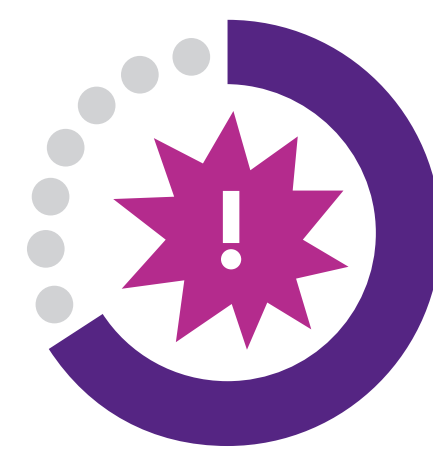


**23,247** women, children and seniors requesting admission were **turned away** due to a lack of capacity in 2018/19.

Increased public awareness, complexity of cases, lack of alternative housing options all contribute to a significant rise in requests for admission to shelter.

**65.9%** of women had a combined **severe and extreme danger level** in 2018/19.

Shelters work with women to conduct a **Danger Assessment (DA)** to establish the likelihood of her being murdered by her intimate partner. The levels of danger faced by women **remain alarmingly high**, in part because of the numbers of women reporting strangulation attempts and being threatened with a gun.

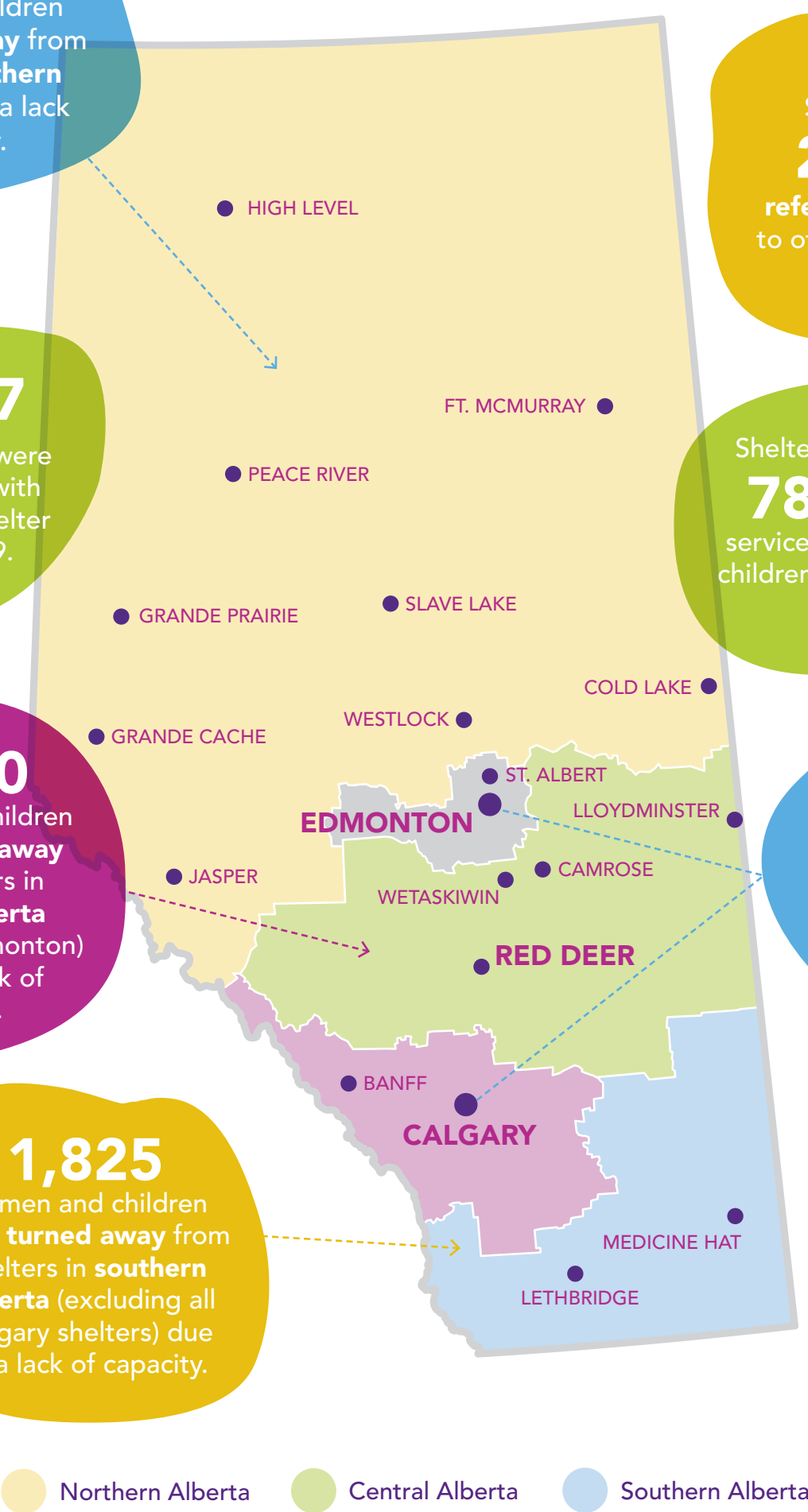


**2,346** women and children were **turned away** from shelters in **northern Alberta** due to a lack of capacity.

**4,377** safety plans were developed with women in shelter in 2018-19.

**5,680** women and children were **turned away** from shelters in **central Alberta** (excluding Edmonton) due to a lack of capacity.

**1,825** women and children were **turned away** from shelters in **southern Alberta** (excluding all Calgary shelters) due to a lack of capacity.



Shelters made **27,724** referral connections to other organizations in 2018/19.

Shelters provided **78,422** services to women, children and seniors.

In Edmonton and Calgary shelters **turned away** a total of **13,396** women and children.  
(Edmonton = 6,244; Calgary = 7,152)

**37%** of women in **second-stage shelters** were immigrants to Canada.



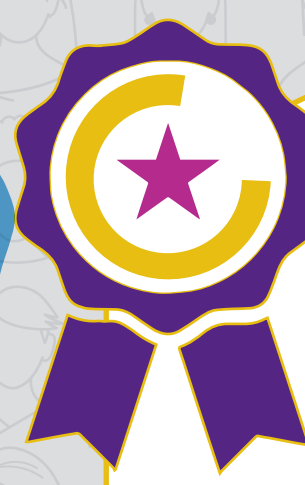
In the **past ten years** (2009-19) shelters have received **538,689** crisis calls. **Last year** shelters received **60,170** crisis calls.

If you need to speak with an ACWS member shelter near you, call toll-free at: **1-866-331-3933**.



**96%** of women and seniors **did not return to their abuser** after a stay in shelter.

Shelters are the **safest place for a woman facing abuse**. Shelter programs support women as they transition to safety and transform their lives.



**77%** of women **completed their program or met their goals** upon leaving second-stage shelters.

**Second-stage shelters provide longer-term accommodation** and the most effective route to ending abuse and supporting a healing journey. The **high percentage** of women who achieve their goals in second-stage shelters demonstrates this impact.



**68%** of men surveyed said they had taken some sort of **action to intervene** when they saw a woman facing some type of abuse.

## More than just a bed.

Shelters are so much more than a bed. ACWS members provide multiple services to women, children and seniors. They include: beds/accommodation, clothing, personal care products, food, support for obtaining income supports, employment, education, custody or legal advocacy, childcare, system navigation, pet services, health services, obtaining and providing housing, counselling, Intensive Case Management, lawyers, culturally specific programs, financial support, safety planning, transportation.

## About ACWS

Shelters serve women, children and seniors. We serve shelters. We are evidence-based, collaborative in our approach and mission-driven.

Every day, 39 ACWS members across the province do remarkable work to save lives, strengthen families and improve communities. We serve shelters across three main programme areas:

- **Corporate and Community Change** - our Leading Change Call to Action
- **Collective Data & Research** - including our Annual Data Release and our Inventory on Promising Practices
- **Frontline Education & Training initiatives**

## What can I do?

Alberta faces an ongoing crisis in domestic violence and abuse. We can all help to end it.

### You could:

- Volunteer in a shelter kitchen or child-care program
- Donate gift cards to shelters
- Make ACWS part of your planned giving
- Book an ACWS Leading Change training for your community or workplace



For more information, visit our website at [acws.ca](https://www.acws.ca)