



Monthly Newsletter



Working locally (Calgary, Alberta) to stop the cycle of poverty for the children

January 2009, Edition 33

“The only thing that matters, at the end of a stay on earth, is how well did we love, what was the quality of our love?”

Richard Bach

Did you know? In September 2008 the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters (www.acws.ca) released stats:

- In the 3 minutes it takes to brew a Cup of Tea, 3 women in Canada will be assaulted by an intimate partner.
- Alberta leads the provinces in domestic assault, homicide-suicide, stalking and is third in domestic homicide.
- From 2000 – 2006 in Alberta, over 170 homicides were identified as domestic violence related. This represents about one third of all the homicides in the province.
- Over 12,000 women and children were resident in Alberta’s shelters.
- Over 14,000 women and children sought shelter and were unable to be accommodated.
- Shelters handled nearly 70,000 crisis calls.
- 88% of women resident in emergency shelters who have taken the Danger Assessment instrument, report being at further risk or serious risk of assault or homicide. This marks a 10% increase over the previous fiscal year.
- 70% of domestic violence victims are victimized at work.
- 68% of Alberta victims report being harassed at work; 50% interfered with at work; or 47% partner refused to let her work.
- Over 75% of perpetrators who have been charged used workplace resources.

The www.acws.ca website goes on to state: **The role of men in solving domestic violence:**

Men who hold positions of power in government non-profit organizations, business, and labor unions can do much to prevent men’s violence against women if they take two critical steps:

1. Recognize domestic and sexual violence prevention as a leadership issue for men, and
2. Start to think creatively about how they can push their institutions to address it.

[Men] need to be persuaded that prevention is a widely shared institutional goal, and that it is their responsibility to be as knowledgeable and proactive about these issues as possible.

Jackson Katz, *The Macho Paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help*, 268.

Home Safe Calgary

The Sky Works Charitable Foundation produced a documentary by Laura Sky called Home Safe Calgary. The documentary was released in October 2008 highlighting poverty and homelessness of families in Calgary (if you are interested in seeing it, let me know). In this documentary I saw children of domestic violence. It lead me to my conversation with Marla Ferg, Community Relations Manager at Discovery House. Here is their story.

Discovery House

After making my way to the shelter front door, being buzzed in by security waiting my way through a trap-door system and finally entering the security entryway for the Discovery House, I met Marla Ferg the new community relations manager.

After settling in, Marla explains to me that women coming here with their children have no hope, no self esteem and are living in fear. They live a life of great uncertainty and risk. She recalls one client saying to her, "When I came to discovery house I didn't know how to breathe, now I know I can breathe every day." That is the transformation that takes place here. These women used to be scared for their lives and for their children.

Discovery House has 19 individual suites. Only women with children are accepted at the shelter. With 19 suites, there is anywhere from 30-50 children housed here at a time. Other than the common areas (counseling offices; spiritual room; children's play therapy room; living room; outdoor courtyard play area) each family coming here has their own apartment with the same responsibilities to a landlord that they would have out in the community. Their suites are their own private areas and Discovery House respects that privacy the same as if they were tenants.

In order to meet the demand, Discovery House is striving to double their capacity in the next 5-7 years, with another house.

The average stay is 5-6 months, but some clients have been with them for 10 months. Every situation is unique and different. That's why Discovery House approaches each family with individualized wraparound service. Each client gets a residential counselor and an in home support worker. But the programming is very specific to what the family needs are. Sometimes, if a group of 5 women get together, or by recommendation of the counselors, look to do something together, then they will develop and deliver something specific to the small targeted group that are interested in the subject/activity. When the family leaves the shelter, Discovery House provides a follow up worker in the community for a year or more.

In the next year, Marla explains how they have a partnership with CUPS (Calgary Urban Projects Society) and the CUPS Rapid Exit Program (to house homeless people and families) to find housing specifically for women fleeing violence. This will require them to expand to provide more of the same services that they provide at Discovery House in the community instead. Marla explains that the majority of women fleeing domestic violence are homeless or considered homeless. They are hoping to have 50 families housed this way in the next year. They have much work ahead of them.

Marla is very passionate about social issues. It is shocking to know that Alberta leads the provinces in domestic assault. She grew up with a lot of awareness of social and community issues. In her new role she wants to support women and children fleeing violence and raise community awareness of the issue and get people involved. She likes to see that she is making an impact with the work she is doing. It's great to know that places like these exist to provide a SAFE place for mothers and children to get their lives back together.

Donations are always gratefully accepted.

To be added/removed from the distribution list or to provide comments, please respond to: Richelle@childrenwithoutpoverty.com.

