**Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter: Shelter Showcase**

The Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter’s mission is to support individuals and families in their efforts to live free from family violence and abuse. We offer a range of intervention and prevention programming through our shelter and community-based services to women, children, youth and men living with family violence and abuse. Family violence includes many different forms of abuse, mistreatment or neglect, and has a widespread impact on our community. In a recent survey conducted by the Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter, 62% of respondents said they had experienced family violence firsthand or knew someone who had[[1]](#footnote-1).

Our programs and services are based in best or promising practices and undergo program evaluation, with a focus on continuous quality improvement. Below are descriptions of several of our programs, offered in-house (shelter) and in the community. Please also visit our website [www.calgarywomensshelter.com](http://www.calgarywomensshelter.com) for more information about these and other programs we offer.

* Our 24-Hour Family Violence and Abuse Helpline is a dedicated family violence helpline staffed by trained counsellors. Through the Helpline, callers can access information about family violence, emotional support and counselling, referrals to all our programs as well as community resources, and risk assessment and safety planning. The Helpline is also our portal for admission to our emergency shelter. All calls to the Helpline are anonymous and confidential. In 2011, we received over 10,000 calls from victims of family violence, community members, and service providers.
* We operate a 50-bed emergency shelter for abused women with or without children. At the shelter, women receive emotional support and one-on-one counselling, individualized risk assessment and safety planning, referrals and connection to community resources, advocacy on client’s behalf, and provision of basic needs while in shelter. Other complimentary in-house shelter programs include a weekly drop-in counselling group, child care, children’s counselling, and in-house health clinic. Research has shown that abused women need immediate access to safe shelter, financial assistance, support, advocacy, counselling, and referrals to a variety of community resources, including second stage housing, so that they can achieve abuse-free lives for themselves and their children.While in 2011, the program provided shelter to 337 women and 382 children and youth, many more were turned away due to lack of space at the shelter - 1,246 women and 671 children could not be accommodated at the shelter and were referred to other services.
* Within the Calgary community, we offer a range of services offering individual and group support to children, youth, women, men, and seniors. These include:
  + Community Counselling program – Short-term counselling programs for women who are unable to come into shelter (due to no available space), or who prefer to access counselling while in the community. This program provides crisis support, information, safety planning, advocacy, and access to community resources.
  + Outreach program – Long-term counselling, up to one year, supporting women as they transition into independence in the community. Counsellors support women through individual counselling, connection to community resources/organizations, safety planning, and family violence information.
  + Court Support program – A specialized court support program that assists clients in navigating the legal and justice system in response to their immediate needs related to family violence and abuse. In issues of domestic violence, the legal and justice system becomes an avenue that many clients need to peruse to ensure the ongoing safety of their families. Many clients reported feeling re-victimized by the legal and justice system following instances of Domestic Violence. Providing the appropriate support to become familiar with the proceedings can assure the most efficient and effective ways of accessing the legal system.
  + Older Women Living Safely (OWLS) program – It is difficult to accurately assess the prevalence of older women abuse because older women may be reluctant to talk to interviewers about domestic abuse; physical abuse experienced earlier in their relationship(s) may not be captured by questions which ask only about recent incidents; and women’s coping strategies of denial, numbing and dissociation may prevent an accurate assessment of the violence. Older women may also be hesitant to share their histories of abuse because they grew up at a time when it was not considered acceptable to talk about domestic violence, or services were unavailable. The OWLS program runs weekly where older women (50+ years) can speak freely about their experience in a safe and supportive group environment, while learning about family violence and abuse, safety, interpersonal communication, and other related topics.
  + Children’s Outreach – Works with children and youth who have been exposed to family violence and abuse, either directly as a victim, or indirectly through witnessing abuse of their family members. This program meets with children and provides one-on-one counselling using a range of appropriate therapeutic techniques, such as play therapy or filial therapy. Mothers also receive parental support and referrals to community resources for their family.
  + Healthy Relationships is an early intervention program for teens at risk of being abusive or who have experienced abuse, and currently experiencing conflict in their dating, school and family situations. The program offers a client-centered group format, fostering healthy relationships by utilizing an approach that promotes dignity and respect, empowers teens to make positive, healthy choices, challenges attitudes and beliefs that may support interpersonal violence, and builds skills and self-esteem. Topics covered in the group range from stereotypes and gender to identifying and expressing feelings to use and abuse of power. Working closely with public and private school districts, the Healthy Relationships program operates out of 19 high schools and junior highs in Calgary and Area, and serves over 300 youth annually.
  + The Men’s Counselling Service mission is to support perpetrators’ agency in making non-abusive choices and creating safety in their relationships, and to support victims’ efforts to increase their safety and their agency in opposing abuse. Using a response-based approach in working with perpetrators that recognizes the deliberate nature of abuse, professionals develop therapeutic conversations that concentrating on the language of responses emphasize agency and responsibility thereby demonstrating how perpetrators’ behavior is actually a freely chosen response to the circumstances they face. Through group and/or individual counselling, men are supported to discuss their abusive actions and examine how they have taken responsibility, shifting from an externally-focused to internally-focused locus of control.

1. Calgary Women’s Emergency Shelter 2009 Community Needs Assessment (2010) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)