



## SHELTERING HOPE:

Uniting Against Domestic  
Violence in Calgary

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April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023



**FearIsNotLove**



In the spirit of reconciliation, we honour and acknowledge Treaty 7 lands, which are the traditional territory of the Siksika, Kainai, Tsuu'tina, Piikani, the Stoney Nakoda Nation, and an important trading center for the Métis of Region 3 of the Métis Nation of Alberta. We recognize that we are Treaty people and have a responsibility to understand our history and the spirit and intent of Treaty 7 so that we can honour the past, be aware of the present, and build a just and caring future based on peace, friendship and understanding.



## SHELTERING HOPE:

Uniting against domestic violence in Calgary is a collaborative effort between Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society (Awo Taan), FearIsNotLove, and YW Calgary.

This report sheds light on the combined impact of these three organizations in addressing domestic violence and abuse in the Calgary area. Each of these organizations have committed to working together in innovative ways to reduce domestic violence in our community.

Domestic violence and abuse transcends gender, economic, and social boundaries. In times of stress and community crisis, it is common for instances of domestic violence to rise. After a pandemic, and now staggering rates of inflation and the affordability crisis in our city, domestic violence continues to increase.

**In the average month of 2022, the Calgary Police Service responded to more than 1,600 calls related to domestic violence<sup>1</sup>.**

*It is essential to acknowledge that many victims do not report their experiences to the police, leading to underreported figures<sup>2,3</sup>.*

Our three agencies provide hope and critical supports to those in need in the community, creating positive change and transforming lives. This report sheds light on the impacts we have achieved together, including heightened safety, reduced distress, increased knowledge, enhanced skills, bolstered self-esteem, and improved access to community resources for those experiencing domestic violence and abuse.

For individuals living in unhealthy and dangerous situations, these past several years have created additional barriers. Increased isolation and anxiety have not only led to higher rates of domestic violence, but also increased levels of danger, putting a strain on the well-being and health of victims.

The primary aim of emergency shelters and crisis helplines is to enhance the safety of victims of domestic abuse and their children, while promoting their social, emotional, and mental well-being.

<sup>1</sup> City of Calgary. (2022, November 03). Calgary police note downward trends in domestic violence for Family Violence Prevention Month. Retrieved from <https://newsroom.calgary.ca/calgary-police-note-downward-trends-in-domestic-violence-for-family-violence-prevention-month/>

<sup>2</sup> Alarming, only one in five (19%) victims of spousal violence self-report to the police. Statistics Canada. (2022, October 19). Victims of police-reported family and intimate partner violence in Canada, 2021.

Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221019/dq221019c-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup> In Canada, it is estimated that 44% of women, or 6.2 million women aged 15 and older, have experienced some form of abuse in their intimate relationships. Government of Canada. (2022). Fact sheet: Intimate partner violence. Women and Gender Equality Canada.

Retrieved from <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/gender-based-violence/intimate-partner-violence.html>

# CRISIS HELPLINE

Crisis Helplines are an essential service that provide crisis counselling, safety planning, information, and referrals for anyone needing support with domestic violence and abuse in the Calgary area. They are often a crucial point of contact for individuals, and the first step towards finding safety, healing, and a path towards a life free from violence. They provide individuals with access to the emergency shelters or other programs offered in the community that can help callers with longer-term support.

Collectively, the three organizations responded to **20,121 calls** over the last year.



The overarching themes that emerge from calls from all three organizations are: *“seeking safety, support, and empowerment in the face of domestic violence and abuse”*.

## Key elements of these overarching themes

These themes highlight the complex nature of requests and services provided during calls to the helplines.



### **SAFETY AND PROTECTION:**

Callers express a strong need for safety, often discussing concerns about their immediate well-being and of their family members, and potential threats from abusive partners. The callers are supported through safety planning. Other safety-related actions noted with callers include: suicide intervention, abuse intervention, and facilitating emergency services contact.



### **ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES:**

Callers sought access to counselling, emotional support, and shelter accommodations to escape abusive partners and find a supportive environment.



### EMPOWERMENT AND ADVOCACY:

Callers expressed a desire to take control of their lives, make informed decisions, and advocate for their own well-being, and frequently sought help for issues related to legal matters. **Approximately 30% of the calls were categorized as information requests.**



### COLLABORATION AND RESOURCE SHARING:

Callers were provided with referrals and information about various support organizations, shelters, legal services, and counseling resources. **Approximately 34% of calls provided referrals in various formats, including direct facilitation of referrals to shelters through the ShelterLink app.**



### CHALLENGES:

This theme which emerged from the call analysis highlights the complex legal and emotional challenges individuals face when attempting to leave or reconcile with abusive partners.



### SUPPORTING OTHERS:

Some callers inquire on behalf of friends or family members who were experiencing domestic violence, drawing attention to the broader impact of domestic violence on informal supporters.



## EMERGENCY SHELTER

The domestic violence emergency shelters operated by our three organizations play a vital role in addressing the urgent and immediate needs of individuals who are unsafe in their own homes due to domestic violence and abuse within Calgary and area.

The emergency shelters offer a range of essential services that encompass:

- safety planning
- counselling
- access to resources and basic needs
- provision of a secure temporary residence

In the past year, our three organizations collectively provided shelter to over 1,100 individuals.



“I’m so grateful for how safe I felt with my baby. We were warm and protected. Thank you. We felt happy being in the shelter.”



As many of the women and children flee quickly and often come with nothing but the clothes on their back, they receive essential support, including clothing, basic necessities, food, bus tickets, and temporary housing. To facilitate their transition after leaving an emergency shelter, residents receive referrals and have access to community resources.

Common services accessed by residents include:

- referrals to community services
- safety planning, and
- information

Additional vital services include:

- financial support
- case planning, and
- housing support

Without access to follow-up resources such as income and social support, women often face additional challenges to establishing a stable life within the community after leaving a shelter.

**Many families (29%) rely on Child Tax Credit, followed by Income Supports (18%), and Employment (11%) as their primary income source.**

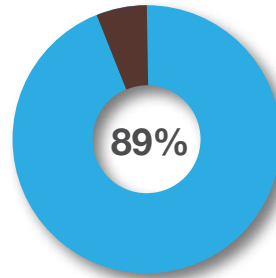
Community support and safety planning are crucial for those who have fled abusive partners, as research shows that abusers are more likely to harm individuals leaving the relationship.

**Notably, over 50% of families successfully secured stable housing after their shelter stay.**

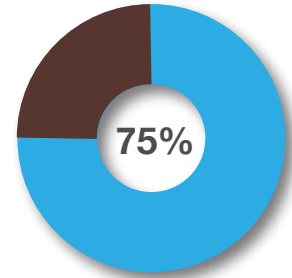
Highlights of residents' experiences following their shelter stay:

Emergency shelters remain a critical, essential service for women and children who are fleeing domestic violence and abuse. It is clear that the clients who stay in the shelter are very much in need of safe housing and support. Each shelter uses a Danger Assessment tool to determine a woman's risk of being killed by her intimate partner. Based on the data collected, it is reasonable to say that shelters save the lives of women and children living in dangerous situations.

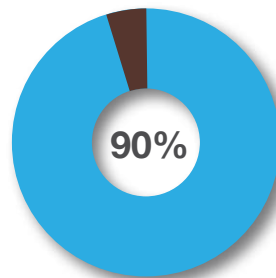
At the time of leaving a shelter, residents report a common theme of safety:



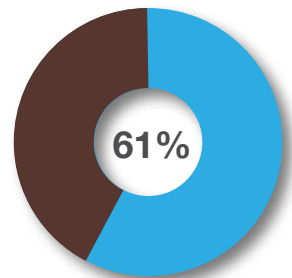
were feeling hopeful about the future (YW and FearIsNotLove)



felt safe in their relationships (YW)

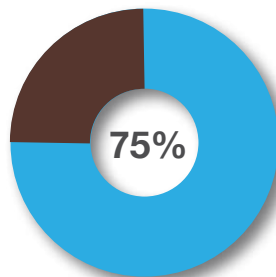


found safety planning and safety resources helpful (FearIsNotLove)

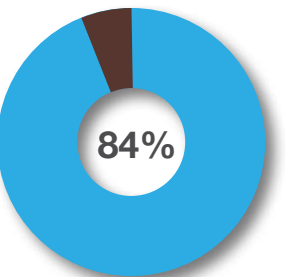


improved their awareness of dangers to themselves and their children (Awo Taan)

As well, a common theme of the awareness/importance of support systems and community resources is reported:




had people they could rely on when facing problems (YW)



gained a better understanding of available services (Awo Taan and FearIsNotLove)

The majority of clients (66%) were at extreme risk of homicide as measured by the Danger Assessments done by FearIsNotLove.



Four key themes emerged from follow up interviews with clients, 6 months or more after leaving the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter of FearsNotLove:

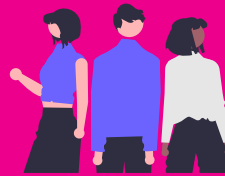


1

**EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING:**

The emotional support and counselling within the Shelter program were pivotal in reducing anxiety and enhancing autonomy, resource access, and overall well-being.

*"The constant availability, warmth, support, compassion and understanding, empathy and practical help have brought me to tears nearly daily. It has been like a hospital for emotional health."*



2

**PROVISION OF BASIC NEEDS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

The provision of basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, and access to community resources, was instrumental for women fleeing domestic violence.

*"(What was helpful was) the flexibility of the service, almost 24/7 available help. Employment help. Counselling help. I'm grateful for all the counsellor and all the team work they put together to help in every way and make sure I go back to my normal life safe and hopeful for the future and ability to continue to fulfill my goals."*





3

**THE  
COMMUNAL  
ASPECT  
LEADING TO  
REDUCED  
ISOLATION:**

The communal experience of the shelter, where women are no longer isolated and receive support from staff and fellow residents, is vital.

*“I have a few friends from the program, and we’ve reached out to one another and connected over Facebook.”*




4

**A SAFE HAVEN  
FOR DECISION-  
MAKING AND  
GOAL-SETTING:**

In providing a critical safe haven and refuge from the violence and abuse, this in turn enables women to set goals, and to make decisions for themselves and their children for their future.

*“I definitely have more confidence and control over my own life, I make all my own decisions and that’s helped me feel better about everything, less stressed, raising a child isn’t easy on your own but it’s a lot easier than dealing with someone who treats you badly”.*



These insights emphasize the holistic and transformative impact of shelter services on individuals seeking safety, support, and empowerment.

# COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVES

Equally Safe and ShelterLink are two initiatives that exemplify the power of partnerships between Calgary-based domestic violence organizations. Equally Safe unites them, along with Calgary Police Service (CPS) and other agencies, in a mission to address domestic violence and abuse collaboratively between law enforcement and social service agencies, offering support and referrals for both victims and perpetrators. ShelterLink takes a systems approach, leveraging technology to provide easier access to shelter beds for women and children fleeing domestic violence while also building a community-based rapid response system. These two initiatives are described in further detail here.

# EQUALLY SAFE

Equally Safe is a partnership that has been in place since 2017 when Calgary Police Service connected with YW Calgary to support the officers in the Domestic Conflict Response Team (DCRT). In January 2020, additional partners joined the effort. Awo Taan, Kerby Centre, FearIsNotLove, and Calgary Immigrant Women's Association were integrated into the newly named Equally Safe Coordinated Community Response initiative (Equally Safe).

The primary purpose of Equally Safe is to provide focused interventions and community referrals, for victims and perpetrators, to increase safety and reduce the harm that results from domestic violence and abuse. Clients of the program are individuals and families who have had interactions with Calgary Police Service because of domestic violence and abuse.

Through the Equally Safe partnership, members of the Equally Safe Team in each of the partnering agencies, along with CPS, provide support and services through two programs: Early Intervention Outreach Program (EIO) added in 2020, and DCRT. Case managers from each of the 5 agencies work to provide various forms of supports including referrals to community agencies, emotional support intended to empower both partners to effect change in their situation, and safety planning to reduce the recurrence of violence and abuse.



# SHELTERLINK

ShelterLink is a multi-strategy approach designed to help ensure that the needs of those experiencing domestic violence are appropriately met, safely in community or within an emergency shelter.



1

**The first strategy of ShelterLink is the ongoing development of a web-based app** that was designed to help the systems and shelter staff support women and children to access beds more easily. Through the app, participating shelters report their bed availability in real time. Shelter staff can see the bed spaces available in other shelters, so that women who are fleeing domestic violence do not need to make multiple calls when needing to access safe, emergency shelter. Currently, the ShelterLink app hosts thirteen women's emergency, transitional, and second stage shelters (primarily located in Calgary and surrounding area).

2

**The second strategy of the ShelterLink project focuses on the development of a Rapid Access, integrated, multi-disciplinary system-of-care** approach for families fleeing domestic violence, so their needs are better met, and they experience more seamless service delivery.

The overall aim of the project is to ensure that someone whose risk requires shelter is offered shelter, and those whose risk can be managed safely in the community are offered alternate and accessible community-based services.

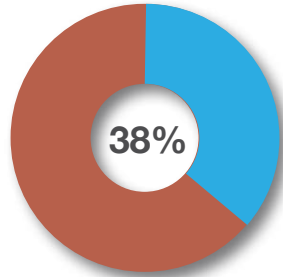
## INTEGRATED INTAKE & REFERRALS

To enhance the second ShelterLink strategy, FearIsNotLove and YW Calgary are currently piloting an Integrated Intake & Referral Process. Both the YW Crisis Line and the FearIsNotLove Connect Domestic Violence & Abuse Helpline are now accessible through one centralized team located at FearIsNotLove.

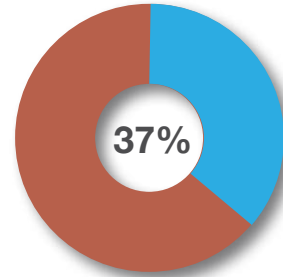
The staff at the Helpline provide warm transfers to shelter beds and outreach services in both agencies, when required. Thus, the individual seeking support is alleviated of the responsibility of calling multiple agencies to seek support.



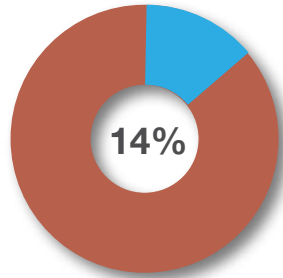
During the period from July to September 2023, this collaboration facilitated over 500 integrated calls originally intended for the YW Calgary Crisis Shelter, with the following results:



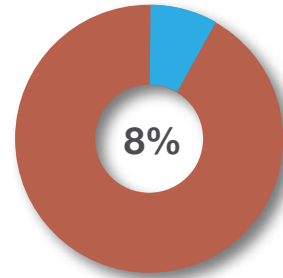
resulted in the provision of information on available community resources



led to referrals to other available emergency shelters



resulted in referrals to other services offered through YW Calgary or FearIsNotLove programs



resulted in direct admissions to the YW Calgary Crisis Shelter or FearIsNotLove (Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter)

As needs change, Awo Taan Healing Lodge, FearIsNotLove and YW Calgary continue to adapt and be responsive. We continue to find innovative ways to meet the growing needs of our community, to offer better support and effect change. We believe that positive outcomes lie with collaboration and coordinated efforts.

Much work remains to be done and new approaches developed to ensure that domestic violence is no longer present in our communities.

# ABOUT OUR ORGANIZATIONS

## AWO TAAN HEALING LODGE

**(formerly Awo Taan Native Women's Shelter Society)**



The Awo Taan Healing Lodge (formerly Awo Taan Native Women's Shelter Society) is a 32-bed, full-service emergency shelter that provides services to women and children from all cultures. Appropriately named "Awo Taan", which means "shield" in the Blackfoot language, the shelter is blanketed in a unique atmosphere where the traditional holistic and spiritual teachings of the Aboriginal people's Medicine Wheel are practiced. The agency is dedicated to supporting the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual healing and wellbeing of women during their time of crisis and beyond, and offers a full range of in-house crisis and outreach crisis, healing, and prevention programs. There is also a children's program to ensure each child's emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual healing and wellbeing are supported.

[awotaan.org](http://awotaan.org)

**FEARISNOTLOVE** **FearIsNotLove**  
**(new brand evolution and operator of the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter)**

FearIsNotLove supports individuals, families and communities to live free from domestic violence and abuse. The agency serves all people to live free from fear, neglect, violence, and abuse through a comprehensive range of innovative programs and services; from prevention and education, to counselling and emergency support. We believe that all of us are change-makers and can influence our environment so that children and adults can feel safe and be provided with opportunities to thrive. Everyone has the right to feel safe, respected, supported and loved.

[fearisnotlove.ca](http://fearisnotlove.ca)

## YW CALGARY



YW Calgary focuses on supporting women and their families to thrive, safely and equitably. With the support of our donors, government partners and other social agencies we provide an array of programs and services which focus on preventing incidents of domestic violence and trauma by building knowledge and skills to promote healthy relationships, mental wellness & financial resiliency, all while continuing to offer the critical supports women and their families need. We care about each other, our clients and our community and are driven by the lasting impact we have on women, their families and by extension, their community.

[ywcalgary.ca](http://ywcalgary.ca)





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