



WE NEED TO DO THIS: A HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S SHELTER MOVEMENT IN ALBERTA AND THE ALBERTA COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS

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A woman sleeps on a cushion on the floor in Edmonton in the 1970s.

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Calgary, fired up for change

ANITA

Anita's escape from her marriage began at her daughter's preschool. There had been another argument with her husband, this time in the car as they drove to pick up their child. Anita was crying when she walked into the Calgary church where the preschool was housed, and she asked to see the pastor. She told him her story.

They prayed for a few minutes and the pastor told Anita that a church member worked at a women's shelter in the city. He would arrange for the woman to meet Anita the next time she dropped off her daughter.

Anita, who grew up in Malaysia, remembers replying, "What is a shelter? I don't want to go there."

Anita had met her Canadian husband, "Brian,"¹ through a friend and their relationship blossomed online before they were able to meet in person. She came from a conservative Christian family; her parents had always told her to avoid men who smoked, drank, or partied too much. Her husband-to-be did none of those things, and she imagined they would start their new lives together on the other side of the world. She was thirty-two when they married.

Anita arrived in Canada in August 2005. She knew no one, other than her husband, and it was soon apparent he wanted to keep it that way. He answered the phone if it rang and answered the door if someone knocked. Anita was isolated and living with an increasingly abusive man who hit her for things like losing a pen or not eating all of the groceries he bought. When she got pregnant, Brian told her to abort the child or he would have her deported. Anita refused.

1 Brian is not Anita's husband's real name.

By 2006, with a small baby in the house and another on the way, the family moved to Calgary, where Brian was preparing to take a pilot training program. They bounced between houses and apartments because Brian repeatedly got into fights with neighbours and landlords. Inside their home, the beatings and the violence were getting worse. One day, Brian pressed a knife into Anita's back when she tried to escape the house to call for help. At night, Anita slept with her children on either side of her, while her husband stayed in a different room. She grasped a knife in one hand and a cell phone in the other. She kept the phone under her pillow and trained her hand to memorize the motions needed to dial 911.

"Sometimes I'd think, 'This is the night I'll be fighting for my life.' I had one of those Nokia phones, with the numbers that you press. I remembered where to press my fingers for 911. . . . '911. 911. 911.' The number was ringing in my head all the time."

At the church-based preschool, the pastor followed through on his promise and brought a caseworker to the church the following week. Anita again asked, "What is a shelter?" The caseworker described it to her as a safe place for women and children to stay until they find a place to live. They met again in the following weeks, devising a plan for Anita to leave. At the time, her husband was being held in a psychiatric hospital for an assessment following another fight with a neighbour and a subsequent court appearance during which he swore and insulted the judge. Anita knew she had just a few weeks before he'd be released, so she had to make a move before that happened.

The caseworker called the YWCA Sheriff King Home in Calgary to tell them about Anita. Then she gave Anita a day and time to leave. It didn't go as smoothly as everyone had hoped. Calgary was a city of sprawling suburbs. It's possible to spend your whole life in your own quadrant, driving between strip malls for daily errands, never entering the downtown core. Anita barely knew how to find the grocery store in her own neighbourhood, let alone a building in an unfamiliar part of town. "She gave me the address but I didn't know where to go. I was driving around and around and I couldn't find the place. I called them and they didn't understand me and I didn't understand them. I almost went back to my house. It took me almost two hours to find the place, with my GPS and my broken English," Anita remembers.

The first days were difficult and disorienting. Sheriff King Home was so different from what she was expecting, she almost thought she had been taken to jail. Part of the problem, she says now, was that she truly had no idea

what a shelter was, even after it was described to her. She didn't like the shared living spaces—she says she has an obsession with cleanliness—and felt she couldn't trust how it had been cleaned. But when her husband showed up at Sheriff King Home and told staff he wanted to see his wife, she knew there was no going back. “If I go home, he will kill me,” she remembers thinking. The staff told him to leave before they called the police.

A week later, a space opened at Discovery House, a second-stage shelter in Calgary where women can stay for longer terms to get on their feet and figure out things like work, legal issues, and their own mental well-being. There, Anita and her now two children had their own small apartment, with a kitchen and bedroom. She finally started to feel comfortable about leaving her home, although her husband was still always present in her thoughts. She looked up the address for every police station in Calgary so that if she saw him on the street, she would know where to go. She still slept with a knife in one hand and a cell phone in the other.

At Discovery House, Anita made her first Canadian friends—women who had also left abusive marriages. One woman was originally from China, the other from Kyrgyzstan. There was some relief in knowing other women had experienced similar situations, and that she wasn't the only one. There was relief in knowing she had friends she could count on for help.

But Anita thinks that, even at that time, there wasn't enough support for immigrant women in the shelter system. Calgary was among the province's shelters that had begun developing programming, outreach, and publications in various languages to support women from the city's growing immigrant communities. It was a formidable effort, but, on the ground, Anita still felt like she didn't know how to access all the help she needed.

“I was coming from a different culture, and my expectations were different. I was hoping someone would say, ‘Let me hold your hand and we'll do this or we'll do that.’ But from the workers' perspective, they had to go by the book and the policies they have in place. I know they're trying to teach women to be independent, but if you're not born here and you don't know the system or the resources available, you still need people to tell you what to do and where to go. They should connect them right away with cultural brokers.”

Anita often took her children to the public library, where she'd pick up pamphlets for various programs around the city. She'd Google any program with the word “immigrant” in the title and soon found her way to ESL classes. She took an employment skills training class and then signed up with

a temp agency that helped her land her first job. She eventually moved out of Discovery House and into a townhouse owned by the Calgary Housing Company.

But she didn't leave the shelter system forever. Her husband stalked her. When things felt particularly dangerous, she would go back to one of the shelters in the city. If they were full, she'd drive to shelters as far away as Strathmore or even Brooks, an hour or two out of town. When her husband demanded visits with the children, she went back to the YWCA Sheriff King Home's Safe Visitation Centre, where staff were available to supervise court-ordered visits with non-custodial parents.

Almost a decade after her first night at Sheriff King Home, Anita now has a job at another shelter in Calgary. "Every time I see new clients moving in, I feel I have a connection with each of them. I'm not a social worker, but somehow I always have a connection with them, especially with immigrants. I always try to help them."

—Anita lives in the Calgary area with her two children. She asked that her last name not be used to protect her children's privacy and for her own safety.



When Anita arrived in Calgary in 2006, the city was booming. Real estate prices were soaring, construction cranes were a fixture in the downtown core, and people were moving there from across the country, drawn by jobs that were fueled by oil prices hurtling toward US\$100 per barrel. It was a quintessential boom period in a city that's long been defined by cycles of boom and bust. There's a certain confidence that comes from those heady times of economic expansion, and, partnered with a western frontier mythology, it makes for a city ethos of free thinking and risk-taking, even when the economy isn't in overdrive, and even outside the private sector. Women's shelters in Calgary have always embodied that boldness of spirit.

The Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter (CWES) opened in 1973, making it one of the first such facilities in the country. Its foundation story is rooted in the same feminist activism that propelled the opening of similar shelters across Canada. Joyce Smith, one of the pioneering founders of CWES, was a stay-at-home mom who went back to school at the age of thirty-six to study social work at the University of Calgary; there, she completed her practicum

at a fledgling shelter for transient people, called Oasis.² She was still at Oasis in 1973 when the shelter narrowed its focus to helping abused women, and soon after she was named director of CWES. Smith, who died in 2007, was described by her sister as a driven woman with a social conscience, who “didn’t lack for guts or courage.”³

CWES started out in a three-storey house in the city’s Beltline neighbourhood, on the edge of downtown. In the early years, women slept in donated bunk beds and were responsible for assisting with the cooking and cleaning of the facility. At the beginning, the shelter got a \$5 per diem from the province for each woman who stayed there, with additional funds coming from the charity United Fund. But public and government support for shelters was growing throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with more charities contributing to their operations and even individuals giving hundreds of dollars in cash donations. In a city as big as Calgary, other shelters opened, too. CWES was sharing the workload with Sheriff King Home, run by the YWCA, and Discovery House, one of the very few long-term stay shelters in the country at the time.

But it still took work to keep the eyes of the public, and potential donors, on the issue of domestic violence. When people in the movement look back at that time, they inevitably point to the influence of one woman who created the necessary momentum to make women’s shelters thrive: Carol Oliver. Oliver was a petite redhead with a passion for women’s issues and an ability to bring even those reluctant to discuss domestic violence into conversations about the need for services. She was also the central figure in pushing for a new, purpose-built building for CWES, a progressive idea for the sheltering world at the time; many shelters were still operating out of donated houses or haphazardly refurbished buildings.

The new building, which opened in 1986, legitimized the services CWES was providing, says Susan Gardiner, who became the organization’s executive director in 1990. This wasn’t an operation that could be funded entirely through charitable donations, nor run through volunteer labour. The new building sent a message: “This was not just a project of rabid feminism. It was a societal issue,” she says. Gathering the money and the support for such

2 Goodhand, *Runaway Wives and Rogue Feminists*, 78.

3 Peter Green, “Joyce Smith,” *Calgary Herald*, January 20, 2008, B5.

a capital project was no small task, and Gardiner credits Oliver, who passed away in 2012, with making that happen.

Practically speaking, the new shelter gave residents more space to live and shelter workers more space to do their jobs. The upper level housed about a dozen residential rooms for women and their children. The main floor had counselling rooms, a dedicated office for intakes, a commercial kitchen, and a boardroom, while the basement would eventually be developed into a childcare space. Though the building would suffer major damage in a fire in 1996, for the first decade of its operation it would serve as a critical refuge for thousands of women and families and inspired passionate support from its community.

When Gardiner started at CWES, her job was to run with the possibilities the new space offered, from starting a licensed daycare for children who arrived with their mothers, to coordinating an outreach program for women who didn't want to stay at the shelter, to developing education programs for schools. There was an energy in the sector at the time, fueled, in part, by a public and governments that were finally alive to the harms caused by violence against women. In 1989, the year before Gardiner's tenure at CWES began, fourteen young women were murdered in their classroom in Montreal, slain solely because they were women working in male-dominated professions. The Montreal Massacre horrified the nation and brought gender-based violence suddenly into its consciousness.

In April 1990, Calgary Mayor Al Duerr launched a task force on community and family violence, an endeavour that landed on the front page of the *Calgary Herald* and prompted follow-up stories over the ten months it took to produce a final report. The task force had a broad mandate: to investigate violence "in families, streets and gangs, cultural and community violence, and violence against children and the elderly." Local politician Ron Ghitter, who was appointed to lead the project, stated that even without a budget to implement new programs, "this community will respond if there are problems out there."⁴ That brash confidence in his community's resilience was indicative of a mood in the city at the time. Calgary had hosted the Olympics just two years prior, a wild success by the standards of the city and the world. Volunteers and paid organizers had embraced the event, taking pride in being part of an emerging metropolis that could think differently

4 Roman Cooney, "Fight Begins on Violence," *Calgary Herald*, April 24, 1990, 1.

and get things done—especially compared to historic centres of power like Montreal, where the 1976 Summer Games had ended over budget and mired in corruption scandals.

This tremendous municipal momentum might well have been halted when Ralph Klein became premier in 1992. After his early career as a reporter—when he had formed connections with Indigenous communities in and around the city and cast a sympathetic eye toward the poverty that many experienced—Klein defined his first years in office with budget cuts and downright antagonism toward social service spending and so-called “special interest” groups. As much as Klein portrayed himself as a “man of the people” and embraced his status as a relative of the Siksika Nation, he actively cut programs that would have helped those most in need of social support. Health care in the province was decimated under his watch, with three downtown Calgary hospitals closed. Klein led efforts both big and small, substantial and petty: his office offered welfare recipients one-way bus tickets out of province in a bid to slash the social assistance budget, while school kids worried that their extracurricular basketball or soccer programs could get cut.

But somehow women’s shelters in Alberta were largely spared. Perhaps Klein was influenced by his wife Colleen’s passion for the cause. Colleen Klein had survived years of violence in her first marriage and left her husband after he pointed a loaded rifle at her chest, a story she shared with the Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters in the book *Standing Together: Women Speak Out About Violence and Abuse*.⁵ Colleen Klein would later become a board member for Awo Taan. Or perhaps Klein was impressed by the relatively “apolitical” branding that so many women’s shelters had adopted by avoiding direct links to the feminist movement. Political scientist Lois Harder has argued that creating this distance helped women’s shelters “avoid [the] deficit cutting that was visited upon ‘special interests’” in the 1990s.⁶ For whatever reason, women’s shelters were not the focus of Klein’s early budget cuts. It should also be noted that the funding for women’s shelters was so limited that cutting it wouldn’t have made much difference to Klein’s budget plans. Meanwhile, federal programs and grants in the 1990s were often sustaining the most innovative initiatives that were emerging at that time.

5 Colleen Klein, “I Never Look Back,” in *Standing Together: Women Speak Out About Violence and Abuse*, ed. Linda Goyette (Brindle & Glass Publishing, 2005), 13.

6 Harder, *State of Struggle*, 128.

It was in this political climate that leaders in Calgary's women's shelter movement challenged themselves to develop new programs and work with new partners. Mayor Duerr's task force on community and family violence propelled the launch of the Protocol Project, an endeavour to get all family-serving agencies in Calgary to screen clients for incidents of domestic violence and develop guidelines for action if clients disclosed witnessing or experiencing abuse. Gaye Warthe, then a young social worker, was named the Protocol Project's coordinator. Warthe worked with a range of the city's agencies, including Jewish, Catholic, immigrant, public health, and youth-serving agencies. Intake workers in health settings, for example, were trained to use a version of these lines in their greetings to clients:

We know that violence and the threat of violence in the home is a problem for many people and can directly affect their health. Abuse can take many forms: physical, emotional, sexual, financial, or neglect. We routinely ask all clients and patients about abuse or violence in their lives. Is this or has this been a problem for you, your family, or your children in any way?

Every agency would use similar wording, tailored to their work and clients. The idea was to normalize these discussions. Warthe was initially told that it would be a miracle to get even a handful of agencies to agree on a basic definition of domestic violence, let alone have them all sign on to screening protocols. But in the end, Warthe exceeded everyone's expectations and wrote protocols for sixty-four Calgary-based organizations. "It was like there wasn't anything that we couldn't do. We believed we needed to do something, and Calgary was fired up about doing something," says Warthe, who went on to become an Associate Dean in the Faculty of Health, Community and Education at Mount Royal University. "There were so many people who knew so much, but it seemed like there was still so much learning that we were doing."

That learning was happening on many fronts, from the opening of Awo Taan to a growing awareness of the needs of immigrant women. When the first women's shelter opened in 1973, Calgary was a Prairie city of about four hundred thousand people. In the decades that followed, families from India, China, the Philippines, and beyond started to settle there. The city sprawled and many newcomers could afford single-family homes with lawns that

separated them from their neighbours. It may have been the suburban dream, but it was also isolating, especially for immigrant women who are particularly vulnerable to isolation imposed by abusive partners and whose cultural communities might have few ties to social service agencies. Immigrant women often fell through the cracks in other ways, too, as shelters didn't have access to trained interpreters, leaving children to take on the role of translators for their mothers.

Many women had been sponsored to come to Canada by their partners, and the threat of deportation was, as in Anita's case, frequently used to intimidate and control them. Anita was furthermore not alone in her ignorance of the existence of shelters, or what they were even there to do. To immigrant women, "[i]t seems no different than the police or state intervention they were fleeing in their country. It's just an extension of the big stick to them," Carol Oliver told a reporter in 1990, after she had been named co-chair of the Calgary Coalition on Family Violence. She acknowledged that even the most well-intentioned organizations had blind spots and preconceived notions of who they were serving and how best to do it. "We are basically White middle-class agencies that deal best with White middle-class families. We have failed to take into account the needs of immigrant women and the needs of Native women," Oliver said.⁷

But women's shelters in Calgary were learning about the needs of the diverse women who used their services, and they had the resources to address some deficits. There was community support, access to government grants, and partnerships with other social service agencies in the city—advantages that were not always present in smaller communities. Within a few years, CWES started a partnership with the Calgary Immigrant Aid Society, which offered a language bank of interpreters who could be contacted by shelter workers. Staff like Baljinder Mann, a program director at CWES at the time, worked on outreach programs to the Punjabi community in Calgary, doing presentations at the two Sikh gurdwaras (temples) in the city. She even hosted a Punjabi-language program on Shaw Cable TV called "Let's Talk About It," which highlighted topics like child abuse, elder abuse, and intimate partner violence.

⁷ Barb Livingstone, "Battered Women's Shelter Urged for Immigrants," *Calgary Herald*, April 21, 1990, J3.

Mann, who is now a medical doctor practising in Calgary, remembers hearing from people who would record the program and share it with friends and relatives who lived in other cities, from Vancouver to Regina. “I met a doctor in the shelter who had been in a very abusive situation,” she remembers. “She was a doctor’s daughter, and a doctor herself, but her husband wouldn’t let her do anything. She heard about me from her sister in Vancouver who had seen a recording of the TV program that she had watched in a friend’s house.”

Perhaps the most non-traditional program that Calgary shelters decided to develop is one that still causes debate in the women’s shelter movement today: treatment for men. In the 1990s, most women’s shelters in the country didn’t permit men to enter, either as staff members or as guests. Some shelters did not permit men to sit on their boards of directors, a requirement still in place for some shelters today. In others, older male children were not allowed to reside. Across the country, the well-being and physical health of women has always been the central mission of women’s shelters, along with providing women with resources to support her next move in life.

But relationships are messy, and many women don’t simply remove an abusive husband or boyfriend from their lives, full stop, once they decide to leave the relationship. Gardiner remembers that when she started working at CWES, her office was located next to the phone bank, and she could often overhear the conversations of shelter clients.

“They’d be in our offices telling our staff that they had left them and were having no contact. And at the same time, they’re on the phone talking to their partners about immediate plans, or sometimes the future, sometimes fighting, sometimes trying to resolve things,” says Gardiner. “They’d feel they’d need to sneak out during the day and go visit their guy. Unless we offer some real help to women where that was indicated, we’re not doing them justice. They’re left managing the big issue on their own. We needed more recognition that that is part of the struggle, they don’t just leave in the middle of the night and never talk to the guy again. So, we felt a good way to support the woman would be to offer supports that were immediately available to their partners. And it was to get the men, believed to be in crisis, to take some responsibility for making changes.”

A men’s crisis intervention service started at CWES in 1991, and the YWCA Sheriff King Home started a group counselling program for men that same year. The CWES crisis service didn’t operate at the shelter but at an

off-site location where the spouses of women who had come to CWES could access counselling within forty-eight hours of a crisis incident. They would then be referred to other services, if needed. Iterations of these programs are still running at CWES and Sheriff King Home today. Toward the end of the decade, as Sheriff King Home planned for a major expansion of their building, the organization announced it would begin offering on-site group counselling for men and supervised visits for families in secure sections of the new facility, which would make it the first shelter in Canada to do so.

Irving Kurz, a retired RCMP officer who worked extensively on domestic violence cases and went on to manage an inter-agency domestic violence collaborative in Red Deer, recalls that at one point in the 1990s the Central Alberta Women's Emergency Shelter even funded a men's treatment program. It was a fifteen-month program called "Treatment Group for Men Who Batter."

"The philosophy in that treatment group was that you can batter with your hands, you can batter with your mouth, it's the same. The program had great results. We recognized that it was all fine and well to intervene, but what happens afterwards? How do we get women back on their feet? How do we get these guys to quit being abusive? It's not by sending them to jail, that doesn't do it in itself. It has to be through treatment, they have to unlearn this behaviour."

But proponents of the women's movement have long disagreed about what role—if any—men should have in the fight for women's rights. As Judy Rebick recounts in her 2005 book *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*, women like Lee Lakeman, who worked at Vancouver Rape Relief—one of the pioneering women's rights organizations in the country—recalled that some of the most bitter disputes within the organization in the 1970s were about men. Some women were "appalled" that Rape Relief was organizing a group of men to raise money for a new women's shelter. "There were women who were convinced there was no way to work with or speak with men where men would not win," Lakeman recounts in the book.⁸ Those disputes carried over into how the organization should deal with abusers. Should Rape Relief work with police, for example, to put abusers in jail? "In those days it was an either/or. Either you used the courts and fought for longer and harsher sentences, or you were against the courts. Eventually, the

8 Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses*, 74.

women's movement got very good at living with the contradictions. You had to deal with both. There were men that we didn't know what to do with but lock them up, and fast. And there were men who needed to be condemned by the community but didn't need to rot in jail. We wanted women to think through the consequences and not just think like victims. The more we experience ourselves as powerful, the more we can do that."

In the Alberta women's shelter movement, those who have advocated for treatment programs for men say there's an opportunity to reach out to the other half of a relationship, especially in a moment of crisis, to get an abuser to take responsibility for his actions and be accountable to the woman he's hurt, the first steps toward making changes in his life. They argue that without helping abusers to learn different behaviours, you're not addressing the root cause of the problem. Even if women do not go back, both partners likely will find new ones, after all, and the patterns are likely to continue. But the women's shelter movement was founded on a feminist analysis of violence in the home, an analysis that seeks to centre women and avoid returning the focus, as always, to men. It argues that violence disproportionately affects women, is rooted in misogyny and patriarchal power structures, violates the bodies of women, and for too long was ignored because society considered the home a "private" sphere where the rights of women were not in need of protection. Acknowledging and working with Indigenous analyses of domestic violence—which advocates treating the family unit as a whole—has not always been easy for others in the women's shelter movement, and for some, the shift toward offering services to men is uncomfortable, too. Some shelter workers fear the feminist analysis of domestic violence is already watered down when politicians refer to "family violence" instead of "violence against women," and they say that, too often, the argument that "men are abused too" becomes cover for not providing adequate services to women.

"In domestic violence, you can't be neutral. That doesn't mean you can't be empathetic and clear, but when you're serving one population, I think you're doing an injustice to start saying we can also serve the partner," says Heather King, who worked at Odyssey House in Grande Prairie in the early 1980s.

King remembers working with a young woman who insisted she wasn't in an abusive relationship because, the woman told her, she always fought back. "I asked her, 'Who called the police when you were fighting?' And it was the first time it occurred to her that she was scared of him. She figured

because she was fighting back, she wasn't afraid; that if she was fighting back, it was mutual violence. So I asked her, 'Who earns the money? How do you feel when you have to ask for money? How big is he? When you're fighting, do you think he's afraid you could hurt him?'

"I told her that fighting is not the answer and it's not okay, but battering is a different thing than fighting. It's why I still say 'battering'; it refers to a specific type of intimate partner violence and it's not lateral violence. There's a power imbalance and victims fear for their lives for good reason."

King argues that, while both parties in a relationship may need and deserve help, women's shelters need to focus on the victims of domestic violence, who require both immediate safety and longer-term support. She believes victims of domestic violence are put at greater risk of harm if counsellors and systems meant to protect women don't critically evaluate whether there is a real chance for change in the abuser. Trying to work with someone who can't change is at once a waste of resources and a danger to the partner, who might be given false hope that her partner's behaviour will improve because they're in counselling. "A portion of [abusers] think there's nothing wrong with them and are willing to get wiser and more manipulative in order to get out of facing any kind of consequences. So we're at a juncture where I think shelters need to be cautious that the victim and victim safety remain the priority."

Heather Morley started her career working at Discovery House in Calgary and later became vice president of programs and services at the YWCA. She also thinks of the women who fight back, and the way those actions can obscure the source of the violence and make the woman's danger more difficult for observers to perceive.

"I remember quite vividly early in my career, working with a woman who was charged [along with her husband] and she said to me, 'You know, Heather, I've been in this relationship for more than ten years. He hit me on probably the very first day. As time's gone by, for sure I've fought back, you bet I have. And when cops came and they arrested both of us because we're both standing there bloodied and bruised, he's still the one with the power, he's still the one who is the abuser in this relationship. So I said to the judge, Did you expect me not to fight back? Did you expect me to just stand there and take it?'" She adds: "Society is quick to jump to the idea that, 'men are abused too.' And yes, it does happen, but it's a very tricky place."

Despite the disagreements around men's programming, Calgary shelter workers were pioneering new ideas that were helping the shelter movement

evolve in ways their predecessors might never have thought possible. In 1997, women's shelter leaders helped the Calgary Police Service establish a domestic conflict unit for the force, matching a similar service that existed in Edmonton. Four years later, Calgary's Action Committee Against Violence helped to launch a specialized domestic violence court, a project that pushed the criminal justice system to think critically about how it handles these cases. In the late 1990s, leaders like Karen Blase from CWES were training a spotlight on the issue of domestic violence, both in the media and in the city's leadership circles. She offered commentary, context, and analysis on high-profile platforms, which helped to galvanize the Calgary community to fight against such abuse. By 2000, eight ACWS-affiliated shelters were operating in Calgary, including several second-stage shelters where women could stay for longer periods of time.

The talent and ambition found in Calgary existed in other shelters across the province, too. With smaller budgets and fewer connections, these shelters in the 1990s and early 2000s would sometimes follow the paths being forged in places like Calgary. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters was often a link that allowed the knowledge generated at shelters like CWES to be shared with shelters in smaller centres. ACWS held quarterly meetings, during which shelter leaders could share their learnings, leverage training opportunities, and generate new ideas. Shelters across the province were finding better ways to organize their workers, deliver programming, and—at the dawn of the Internet age—use data and technology to further the cause of helping women in need.

