

Alberta
**Silent
Witness
PROJECT**
An initiative of
The Alberta Council
of Women's Shelters



THE ALBERTA COUNCIL OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters (ACWS) was formed in 1981 to provide a unified voice for the sheltering movement and to give shelters strength in numbers - it was felt that shelters would be more effective negotiating for funding and the recognition of shelter services together, rather than individually. Incorporated in 1983, the Council recently celebrated it's 20th anniversary.

At the time the Council was formed, shelters were in crisis. Funding was on a year-to-year basis with no guarantee of ongoing funding. In the beginning, the Council concentrated its effort in dealing with the funding problems of shelters. We have come a long way over the years, but establishing an adequate funding base for shelters is still on the top of our agenda. In addition, ACWS is active in educating service providers and the public on the needs of women and children served by women's shelters.

The vision statement of ACWS is:

We believe in a world free from violence and abuse.

The mission statement of ACWS is:

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters is a province-wide, voluntary organization supporting women's shelters and their partners through education, research and services for the benefit of abused women and their children.

We believe:

- In empowerment for women and equal worth of all persons.
- In strength of numbers together for a common mission.
- That the issues of violence and abuse are the responsibilities of the entire community including legal, social and political structures.

Thus, the areas of concern for ACWS are:

- Issues of family violence
- Breaking the cycle of inter-generational violence

The focus of ACWS is:

Abused women and their families

To work towards our vision, mission, and beliefs ACWS:

- serves as the collective unified voice of member organizations
- fosters networking and information sharing
- assists in acquiring adequate resources for member shelters and ACWS influences public policy and systems
- increases public awareness of issues related to family violence
- fosters professional development within Alberta's sheltering movement

Alberta
Silent
Witness
PROJECT
An initiative of
The Alberta Council
of Women's Shelters



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Silent Witness Project began as a US national initiative to honour women killed by their partners in acts of domestic violence. In 1990, an ad hoc group of women artists and writers, upset about the growing number of women in Minnesota being murdered by their partners, joined with women from other women's organizations to form The Arts Action Against Domestic Violence. They felt an urgency to do something to commemorate and honour the lives of 26 women who had died in 1990 as a result of domestic violence.

They decided to create 26 free standing, life sized red wooden figures, each one bearing the name of a woman who once lived and worked in the community and whose life ended violently at the hands of her partner. A 27th figure was added to represent women whose murders went uncounted or unsolved. These wooden figures are called Silent Witnesses.

The Silent Witness Exhibit was officially launched on February 18, 1991, when more than 500 women marched single file, carrying the Witnesses, from a church, across the street to the Minnesota State Capitol Building. To date all 50 states, and several countries are participating in the project.

In November 2000, The Charlotte County Family Violence Committee collaborated with the Maine Silent Witness Project in a community education initiative for Family Violence Prevention Month. The Witnesses were brought to Charlotte County from Portland, Maine, and exhibited throughout the Country, including Saint John and Moncton. This display was so successful that the Charlotte County Family Violence Committee decided to bring the Silent Witness Initiative to New Brunswick – the first in Canada.

ACWS is following in the footsteps of our friends to the east and will be presenting the first Silent Witness Initiative in the west during the Alberta Family Violence Prevention Month in November 2004.

Alberta
Silent
Witness
PROJECT
An initiative of
The Alberta Council
of Women's Shelters

THE SILENT WITNESSES PROJECT CRITERIA

The silhouettes in the exhibit represent women and victims of triangulation killed in Alberta in acts of family violence. The determination that particular homicides were acts of family violence was based on thorough research in relation to the criteria below.

Criteria used are:

Who? Women killed in Alberta by their partners, ex-partners or acquaintances in acts of family violence where the perpetrator was charged and convicted, or the women were killed in documented cases of domestic murder/suicide. Victims of triangulation will also be represented in this display (children, boyfriends, other family members).

Family Violence Definitions:

Family violence, sometimes called domestic violence, wife abuse or woman abuse, is the abuse and mistreatment of an individual in an intimate or family relationship. The abuser is typically the partner or ex-partner, or an acquaintance that was trying to have a relationship. The abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, cultural, spiritual or financial in nature. It happens everywhere and to people from all backgrounds. In its most extreme form, family violence can result in severe injury and even homicide. Most of the victims are women.

Partners include a husband, ex-husband, common-law partner or boyfriend, ex-common-law partner, ex-boyfriend, or same sex partner.

Acquaintances might include co-workers, friends, or neighbours in circumstances where there has been an attempt to forcibly create an intimate relationship with the victim. This may involve stalking behaviour. The key is that the person who commits the murder is not a stranger to the women and has attempted to exert control over her.

Victims of triangulation are third party homicide victims whose deaths have been caused indirectly by a domestic dispute.



SILENT WITNESS PARTNERS

The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters would like to thank the following for their assistance with this project:

Kim Lafreniere
Detective, Edmonton Police Services
Spousal Violence Intervention Unit



Bob Pagee
Sergeant, Edmonton Police Services
Victim Services Unit

Monty Sparrow
Staff Sergeant, Calgary Police Service



Dr. Leslie Tutty
Ashley Barlow



Prairieaction Foundation



Brent Connelly
Store Manager, Rona



VOLUNTEERS

Elmer Warwa
C.K. Equities LTD.,

Robin Greenwood
Detective, Calgary Police Department

Cheryl Gillan, Edmonton Crown Prosecutors Office

Northgate Lions Senior Citizen Association



Members of the association volunteered over 500 hours of their time to produce the silhouettes. ACWS would like to acknowledge the following volunteers:

Richard Daley, Ed Flathers, John Tucker, Ed Robege, Al Oakley, Mike Palichuk, Bill Klushin, Shirley Curle, Doreen Kristensen, Bill Baron, Clary Willis, Ercilia Comartin, Jay Metheral, Glen Talbot, Jackie Black, Albert Reule, Ed Schaaf, Nadia Schaaf

For more information contact: Patricia Poohachoff, ACWS, 780-456-7000