



Celebrating 20 years...1983 - 2003

The ACWS logo symbolizes a dove for peace; clasped hands that represent our 'unified voice'; and finally, a heart, which enables us all to continue our common mission to break the cycle of violence & abuse.

ACWS HISTORY

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. The Council was formally incorporated in 1983, so we are now celebrating our 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, which in itself was totally inadequate. 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.

The work of the Council has included:

- ◆ Providing a vehicle for information exchange and networking between shelters
- ◆ Members of the Council negotiated with government to establish a policy for the women's shelters program defining the service of shelters and providing the basis for the funding of shelters
- ◆ The Council lobbied for assured, ongoing funding for existing shelters and was successful
- ◆ It has provided opportunities for Board and staff training
- ◆ Early on, the Council sponsored provincial conferences which involved all levels of volunteers and staff in shelters. The funding sources for these conferences became less available over the years, however, in 1997 the Council was able to secure funding for the Crisis Workers Conference and has continued this on an annual basis
- ◆ The Council provides the coordination for an annual IODE Child Support Workshops. These workshops provide the only opportunity shelter child support workers have to come together to address the unique challenges of providing services to shelter children. They have few, if any, counterparts in the community - the closest would be child welfare workers - to problem solve and consult with on program development.
- ◆ This year we hosted a week long Children Exposed to Family Violence Training Seminar for child welfare and shelter workers.

- ◆ ACWS worked with the Office for the Prevention of Family Violence (OPFV) to develop the original Women's Shelters Information System (WSIS) and are now developing our own information and research program with the Canadian Outcomes Institute.
- ◆ A translation project was carried out providing basic information on battering and the community services available for battered women. To date, tapes have been developed in Cantonese, French and Vietnamese.
- ◆ A generic contract was negotiated with Alberta Social Services for use by all shelters. This all changed through regionalization of Children's Services but through successful advocacy, we are almost at the point where provincially funded shelters are funded equitably.
- ◆ Members of the Council have represented ACWS on provincial and national discussions on family violence
- ◆ ACWS is currently the only community group on the Justice Minister's Advisory Committee on Policing Initiatives
- ◆ We have developed a detailed Compendium of Services outlining all the services, bed sizes etc. of each of our member shelters
- ◆ ACWS negotiated Program Standards for shelters which came into effect July 1st, 1993
- ◆ The Council continually brings forward the need to increase the Supports for Independence Program and implement policy changes so that women and children have the necessary resources to leave an abusive situation
- ◆ ACWS has written position papers on the following:
 - -The Regionalization of Children's Services
 - Mediation and Domestic Violence
 - Maintenance Enforcement Program
 - Gun Control
 - Custody and Access
 - Safe Visitation
 - Family Law Reform
 - The Divorce Act
 - Shelter Salaries
 - Batterer's Intervention Programs
 - Supports for Independence
 - Family Violence Commission
 - Protection for Persons in Care Act
 - Supports for Independence and the Cost of Living In Alberta: Regional Differences
 - Family Violence Commission
- ◆ ACWS has participated in several Statistics Canada Projects, including the Canadian Shelter Survey and Family Violence Resources on a national level
- ◆ ACWS has also pooled with nine shelters to provide an excellent Benefits Plan
- ◆ ACWS spearheaded the VIOLET Project, the first project of this type in North America, which allows abused women in Alberta (and across Canada) to access legal and family violence information on the Internet (<http://www.violetnet.org>). ACWS was successful in obtaining computer equipment for Alberta Shelters to make this objective a reality.

- ◆ ACWS participated in the “What Went Right” study with Dr. Leslie Tutty and developed Project '96 - “Wife Abuse: A Workplace Issue” to educate and facilitate workshops to corporations and businesses. It is a tool that shelters can use to fundraise for themselves while bringing awareness to the issue of family violence.
- ◆ ACWS participated in the Minster’s Shelter Review
- ◆ We develop resource material for shelters. Our latest resource is Blankets, Bibles and Beads, an Aboriginal Awareness Manual for shelter workers.

The Council and its individual members are committed to the rights and dignity and of women and children in our society. We continue to establish and reinforce the equal value to women, children and men and work towards a future that does not include violence in the home.

A debt of gratitude is owed to the ACWS Board members past and present. Over the past 20 years, these women and men have risen to the challenge of having women’s shelters recognized and valued by our society.

A large debt of gratitude is also owed to the board members of all our provincial shelters past and present because without the hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours given by these dedicated individuals, shelters could not maintain such high levels of service.

In conclusion, ACWS has seen a membership growth from 7 to 41 member shelters over the past 20 years. Our focus continues to be helping abused women and their families. As we enter the new millennium, ACWS will strive for the empowerment of women and the equal worth of all persons. ACWS, along with its membership which includes their staff and volunteers, gains strength by numbers in working together to break the cycle of intergenerational violence.

ACWS FACT SHEET

“We believe in a world free from violence and abuse”

ACWS BELIEVES

- in a world free from violence and abuse
- in empowerment for women and the equal worth of all persons
- in the strength of numbers working together for a common mission
- that the issues of violence and abuse are the responsibilities of the legal, community, social and political structures

AREAS OF CONCERN

- issues of family violence
- breaking the cycle of inter-generational violence

PURPOSE

- to support and strengthen the sheltering movement in Alberta and within the ACWS membership

GOALS

- to serve as the collective unified voice of member organizations
- to foster networking and information sharing
- to assist in acquiring adequate resources for member shelters and ACWS
- to influence public policy and systems
- to increase public awareness of issues related to family violence
- to foster professional development within Alberta's sheltering movement