

ALBERTA COUNCIL of WOMEN'S SHELTERS

ACWS' History Synopsis by Ardis Beaudry

Anniversaries are meant to be celebrated and that's what we are here to do - the telling of stories is part of that celebration. To understand the struggles, which are part of organizations, we have to look at the history.

The sheltering movement began in the 70's. The YWCA had served the needs of women in all walks of life but in the 60's, a new breed of women started to move out of the home and into the community. They were young and on the move across Canada. The first shelters were in Calgary and Edmonton and the statistics soon showed a number of women were battered by their live-in partners.

Shelters opened with a lot of faith, there was no money, no literature that addressed the cycle of violence and very inadequate buildings to serve women and children. Only a group of women committed to learning about the violence cycle, willing to change attitudes and to work for poor wages, no benefits and often poor working conditions.

By 1980 there were nine shelters in Alberta. Much time had been and continued to be spent with government trying to educate them on the violence cycle and the need for ongoing funding for shelters. During those years, the province was divided into regions. Each region dealt with difference managers and received different funds. It soon became obvious that a body to coordinate and speak as one for all the shelters was needed.

Phyllis Ellis, Director of the Women's Bureau and Ami Armit, Special Projects Advisor, arranged funding and space for a first meeting in Calgary. Members of the Boards of the nine Alberta shelters were at the first meeting held on, June 30th, 1981. The shelters included the Edmonton Women's Shelter, Calgary YWCA, Lethbridge YWCA, Fort McMurray, Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter, Medicine Hat, Grande Prairie and Discovery House.

In 1983 the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters incorporated as a society.

The period from 1981-1983 was a very active time for the Council. There were many meetings between shelter board representatives and government.

- 1982 80/20 funding model was approved and budgets were established - a big step forward. There were many meetings before a satisfactory agreement was made to set the essential programs, which were to be funded.
- 1983 The first Alberta Council of Women's Shelters newsletter was produced. Lenore Walker was keynote speaker for the first conference.
- 1984 Susan Painter and Debra Lewis came to Vermilion
- 1985 Ann Ganley was keynote speaker in Grande Prairie
- 1986/88 Many important policy statements were developed and implemented
- 1987 Alberta Council of Women's Shelters received funding from Secretary of State, which allowed the establishment of a Provincial office. Loretta Bertol was the first Provincial Coordinator
- 1988 Linda McLeod was the keynote speaker in Edmonton

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- 1986/91 Tapes on introduction to shelters and its services were prepared in French, Cantonese and Vietnamese and distributed to all shelters
- 1990 An evaluation and organizational review of Alberta Council of Women's Shelters was carried out

Program standards for shelters were developed. Over the years the Council has developed a high profile with government and the community. This has happened through the dedication and hard work of many people. Jean Langdon, as President since 1992, has given outstanding dedicated service. Arlene Chapman, Provincial Coordinator has done much to raise the public profile of the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters.

Most of all we must remember and congratulate the many women who have regained their self-esteem and their lives. Indeed, we have much to celebrate on this, our 15th Anniversary.