

ACWS POSITION ON JUST SALARIES FOR SHELTER WORKERS

April 2004

ACWS believes that all workers in this sector deserve to receive market value for their work and not be forced to subsidize essential services by working for low wages.

Many women work at a women's shelter because of a strong belief in the cause and a desire to make a difference in the lives of women and children. In spite of wages and benefits that are often not commensurate with their level of experience and education, do not keep up with cost of living increases, and do not reflect the intensity and stress of the job, they provide this essential service because of their commitment. Yet, this contributes to the continuation of a situation of injustice and disparity particularly when shelter worker salaries are compared with comparable jobs in the public sector.

Funding uncertainties and economic limitations are among the most prevalent issues facing women's shelters in the Province of Alberta.¹ With the exception of a few shelters, most feel the burden of limited resources and the ongoing need to fund raise. In relation to limited economic resources, the majority of shelters also feel that low wages and benefits are a significant issue facing their organization.² This limits the ability of shelters to recruit and retain qualified staff and to maintain an empowered and satisfied workforce.

Because ACWS believes that all workers in this sector deserve to be treated justly by receiving market value for the work they do, ACWS retained Banister Research & Consulting Inc., in 2000, to conduct a review and evaluation of the current wage structure for workers within women's shelters. The findings were presented to the Minister of Children's services to support a request to restructure the current funding model to increase funding to women's shelter services and programs.

Some of the findings from the report include:

- Funding uncertainties and limitations are the most prevalent issue facing women's shelters in the Province of Alberta
- Almost all shelters feel the burden of limited resources and the ongoing need to fund raise for program dollars.
- Funding constraints place stress on shelter management and staff and defray time and effort away from programs and services.
- The majority of shelters feel that low wages and benefits significantly limit their ability to recruit and retain qualified staff.
- Because of low wages and benefits, shelters are facing a disempowered workforce, high levels of burnout and turnover rates averaging 59% (during the 2 year period 2000 – 2002)
- Shelter staff want wage and benefit parity with comparable employees in the public and not-for-profit sector.
- An analysis of wages from comparable organizations found that staff from women's shelters make, on average, 20% less than comparable positions in the government and not-for-profit sector

¹ A Compensation Review and Evaluation, Final Report, September, 2002, Banister Research & Consulting Inc. page 45

² ibid pg. 45

- Wages at a third of Alberta’s women’s shelters have not kept pace with provincial cost of living increases.
- Additional, secure funding sources should increase the stability of staff at women’s shelters and ultimately improve the services provided to women and children in need.

The results of the review were presented to government in 2002 and shelters received funding for identical with market rates for their staff in 2003.

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Highlights of ACWS Activities on Shelter Salaries

Date	Activity
2003	Shelters receive funding for increase in shelter staff salaries.
2002	Banister Report submitted to Minister Evans
	Status of Women funds salary review

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