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Housing for Human Trafficking Survivors

Canada Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking focuses on four core areas, known as the 4-Pillars: the prevention of human trafficking, the protection of victims, the prosecution of offenders, and working in partnership with others in Canada and abroad. While these pillars undoubtedly have some impact on one-to-one and community work with survivors of human trafficking, they are not sufficient to guide workers walking alongside survivors. Human trafficking can be described as a form of chronic interpersonal trauma that strips away an individual's personhood. Thus, a focus on the personal identities and experiences of survivors must guide supports and interventions.

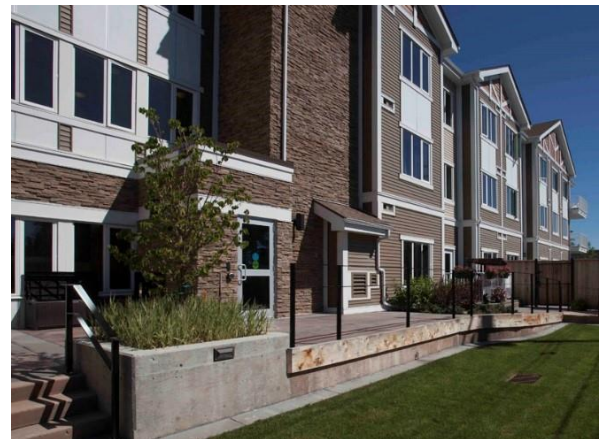
Nationwide there are very few services geared to support survivors of sex trafficking. In a Needs Assessment conducted by the Peel Institute on Violence Prevention, it was evident that securing safe and adequate housing was a first and fundamental step in the road to leave the sex trafficking trade and recover from trauma. Unfortunately, as of now, housing services for human trafficking victims remain scarce in Canada, and the available services are inadequate. Some of the major issues with current housing services are the 'male-centred' housing models, which enforce strict curfews, lack emotional support towards healing, and fail to provide adequate resources for women to get training and find employment. These flaws contribute to women back-pedaling into exploitation.

Honouring each woman's unique experience when supporting survivors to secure housing, the following principles could benefit the process:

Empowerment Practice: In Canada, only a few beds in women's shelters have been made available for survivors of sex trafficking. These women's shelters have been mainly created for survivors of Violence Against Women (VAW), mainly Domestic Violence (DV). Although survivors of sex trafficking are VAW victims, because of the complexity of their cases and particular vulnerability, special considerations are necessary when defining what constitutes adequate safe housing. Empowerment practice helps ensure that the survivor herself drives the process.

Harm Reduction as Opposed to Abolishment: Often, sex trafficking survivors have been subjected to the use of controlled substances. Harm reduction principles are thus synonymous with the reduction of drug-related harm. It is essential to recognize that to stop using controlled substances immediately in order to secure housing is not always the best approach for every victim. In addition, having abolishment as a pre-requisite to access secure housing will exclude some women that are not able to comply with this rule.

Intersectional Analysis: A lack of client service that is language, culture-specific and informed by gender and race. The intersectional analysis is the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape social inequalities. Applying the intersectionality lens help in making explicit the often implicit multiple and simultaneous matrices of power that influence people's experience. Intersectionality will ensure that the uniqueness of the woman and her needs are acknowledged, honoured and valued. It will also provide the context for housing services to be as unique as she needs them to be.



It is imperative to point out that while the needs of survivors are long-term and ongoing, the delivery models underlying most support services for sex trafficking survivors focus on short-term assistance. Canada's action plan has fallen short on Pillar #2: the protection of victims.

Housing Services in Canada

Adequate housing has been identified as the number one priority in providing services to survivors of human trafficking. Availability of appropriate shelter is a major factor in the recovery process. In 2018, there were 629 shelters in Canada for women who were victims of violence nationwide, with only three of them providing beds for trafficking survivors. Experts report that some shelters for victims of domestic violence will not accept trafficking survivors due to the complexity of their needs and out of fear of their traffickers.

In 2017, the federal government announced a new Initiative to provide \$8.4 million to at least three provinces to develop emergency housing to address the specific needs of trafficking survivors. This includes an initiative in Ontario by Covenant House to provide emergency and transitional housing, among other services. Peel Institute on Violence Prevention (PIVP) completed a Needs Assessment that includes an interview with sex trafficking survivors and their families – they had much to say about the lack of dedicated housing services for sex trafficking survivors in Peel Region:

“There needs to be a secure location that nobody knows about [...] no phone access; there is no nothing. The girls can be taken to that safe house. If they know that is there; then they will be more willing to come out. Until that is there, they will not come out.” - Survivor

Additionally, the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) published a report that directly names systemic discrimination, racism, and colonialism as the reasons why Indigenous women, youth, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ individuals often suffer from precarious housing and poor living conditions. This has been noted as a major factor contributing to an individual’s vulnerability for human trafficking. NWAC’s recommendations are rooted in a deliberate, cohesive, and cross-jurisdictional method of anti-trafficking. These recommendations call for increased funding allocated to culturally safe, community-based programs and homes addressing poverty, precarious housing, healthy relationships, and internet safety. They also urge greater multi-sectoral collaboration between national, provincial, territorial, and local jurisdictions, and service providers. Focusing on female survivors of sex trafficking, housing services need to be explicitly tailored to survivors’ situations, providing wrap-around, holistic, and culturally safe services. It is clear that anti-trafficking actors in civil society have created many different housing models, with a common theme of providing comprehensive services – from emergency and transitional housing services to empowering services, such as leadership or employability skills development programs – but not enough research has gone into evaluating the benefits of these models to actual survivors. Housing is one of the most crucial needs of trafficking survivors. It relates directly to protection services. Therefore, housing models need to be survivor-centred, trauma-informed, holistic, stable, and culturally sensitive, in order to be successful – and they need to be located throughout Canada to be truly accessible.

Innovating Solutions to Housing

Due to the importance of housing for trafficking survivors’ recovery process, there have been a few alternative solutions developed. In particular, Caravan Studios and Polaris partnered to create the Safe Shelter Collaborative, an innovative technological approach to locating an emergency shelter. Initially it was developed to address the current barriers to securing emergency shelter for survivors of all forms of human trafficking. It helps participating agencies identify emergency shelters in two ways: (a) locating potential beds that are currently available within their geographic network of participating organizations, and (b)



providing a means to directly solicit donations from their donors to help cover the cost of a hotel room for a survivor. A shareable intake assessment tool was also developed in conjunction with the Safe Shelter Collaborative – the Common Eligibility Assessment Tool (CEAT) – that helped decrease the number of times survivors had to repeat information about their circumstances. Another solution to look into starts with Better Shelter, a social business that aims to support displaced people by providing a safer and more dignified home through their flat-pack Refugee Housing Units (RHU) where five people can sleep comfortably inside the structure, which at 188 square feet is twice the size of a standard refugee tent. The home has solar-panel roofing, allowing inhabitants to generate their electricity, and its roof deflects solar energy to keep its interior cool during the day and warm at night. The RHU costs \$1,250, which is twice as much as a typical emergency tent, but it provides security, insulation, and durability, and lasts for at least three years. Similar solutions have been invented by many other organizations, such as My Tiny House Project LA, to help find solutions for the homeless by either building tiny homes that take up only a parking spot or other sustainable, ecological, easy-to-maintain systems. New Story, a design-build non-profit, built the first permitted, 3D-printed house made of concrete. The production version of its concrete printer will be able to build a single-story, 600- to 800-square-foot home in 24 hours, for less than \$4,000. The structure includes a living room, kitchen, bedroom, and wraparound porch. These solutions all offer great basis for adaptable solutions to the lack of emergency housing services for trafficking survivors, working together with architectural and technological schools and professionals, a temporary housing solution or an innovative technological solution could help solve Canada’s lack of emergency and immediate housing services for trafficking survivors.

