



**BC Housing**

**Research and Corporate Planning**

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# **Understanding Women's Safe Home Programs in BC**

Prepared by Research and Corporate Planning Department

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction

In 2009, the administration of the Women's Transition Housing and Supports Program (WTHSP) was transferred from the Ministry of Housing and Social Development to the British Columbia Housing Management Commission (BC Housing). The WTHSP includes transition houses, safe homes and second stage housing for women with or without children who have experienced violence and/or are at risk of violence.

Safe homes are typically located in small, remote communities and provide shorter-stay support and crisis intervention, where transition houses do not usually exist. The safe home may be an apartment or townhouse unit, private residential home, or hotel/motel room. There are 26 safe home programs in BC, which are funded through BC Housing. Approximately 375 women and children stayed in safe homes throughout BC in 2009/10. 2009/10 funding to safe homes was \$1.2 Million.

This report summarizes the findings of a study of the current state of services in the Women's Safe Home Program. The study was initiated by BC Housing's Women's Transition Housing and Supports Program and conducted by BC Housing's Research and Corporate Planning Department. The purpose of this study is to get a better understanding of the safe home programs and how they each operate. The study does not provide an analysis of the services needed or current best practices.

This study involved in-depth qualitative interviews with all 26 safe home programs coordinators by telephone. Interviewees were asked 35 open-ended and coded questions on the following topics:

- General successes/challenges/lessons learned
- Services and outreach activities offered to women through each program
- Program related questions
- Descriptions of safe home facilities
- After-hours coverage and services provided
- Staffing structures
- Partnerships

## Types of Facilities Offered

The safe home programs in BC use a range of facility types to shelter women and children. Women may be given a room in a hotel/motel or an apartment or townhouse that is either owned or rented by the program. They may also be placed in residential home with a family. In some cases, a woman may be transported to another community rather than staying at a local facility. The following table highlights some of the key characteristics of the various facility types and services, as well as some of the key strengths and challenges associated with each type:

Facility Type	% Programs Offering Facility Type	Access	Security	Strengths	Challenges
<b>Rooms in local hotels or motels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offered by 81% of programs</li> <li>- Rooms are booked as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accompanied by program coordinator, volunteers or police</li> <li>- Program coordinator or volunteers make arrangements, but women make their own way there</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women cannot reveal their location to anyone during and after their stay</li> <li>- Have confidentiality agreements with operators</li> <li>- Reservations are not made in woman's name</li> <li>- Operators monitor visitors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most have staff on-site 24 hours</li> <li>- Usually rooms available</li> <li>- Easy for women to find</li> <li>- Offers anonymity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rooms are impersonal</li> <li>- Women can be seen by someone they know</li> <li>- Not ideal for women with children</li> <li>- Limited emotional supports</li> <li>- Can be fully booked</li> <li>- Can be expensive</li> <li>- No cooking facilities</li> </ul>
<b>Rooms in residential homes, operated by families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offered by 46% of programs</li> <li>- 47 rooms available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accompanied by program coordinator, volunteers or police</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Operators receive advice on security features and risk-assessment</li> <li>- Operators have to have a criminal record check and some sign a confidentiality agreement</li> <li>- If woman's situation poses a risk to the family, she will be placed in another facility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides emotional supports</li> <li>- Provides home-like environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some women do not want to be a burden on the family</li> <li>- Some want to be on their own</li> <li>- Neighbours might see and recognize the woman</li> <li>- Operators can be unavailable</li> </ul>
<b>Rented/Owned Apartment or Townhouse Unit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offered by 35% of programs</li> <li>- 16 rooms available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accompanied by program coordinator or volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Units are not listed at the front door intercom</li> <li>- Some have security systems, as well as other security features</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offers more privacy</li> <li>- Provides home-like environment</li> <li>- Costs are fixed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Costs are fixed</li> <li>- Other tenants in the building might recognize the woman</li> <li>- There can be conflicts between tenants if the unit has space for more than one woman</li> </ul>
<b>Immediate transportation out of the community (to nearest transition house or to friends/family)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offered by 73% of programs, mostly only as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inter-city bus</li> <li>- Ferry</li> <li>- Coordinator or volunteer drives women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do not put bus tickets in woman's name</li> <li>- Travel with a buddy</li> <li>- Check in with another staff person before trip and when return</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some women feel safer or have better support networks available in other communities</li> <li>- Some communities have more resources to offer women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Infrequent transportation services</li> <li>- Cost of transportation</li> </ul>

## Service Provision

The safe home programs in BC provide more than shelter and a safe home. They also provide a broad range of services to women and children. The safe home program coordinators were asked to identify the support services and outreach activities they offer women. All programs offer emotional supports, referrals to counselling and other services, safety planning, and transportation.

The safe home programs reported that they often provide services to women in partnership with other organizations. The following table shows how the safe home programs work with some of the most common community partners:

Partners	Programs/Services/Activities
Aboriginal Band	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referrals</li> <li>- Raise awareness in community; ban abusers from community</li> </ul>
Church groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Program for skills exchange between younger and older women</li> <li>- Operate thrift stores (fundraising; women have access to free household items and clothes)</li> <li>- Provides safe home apartment for free</li> <li>- Ministers may refer to program</li> </ul>
Crown Counsel/Judges Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educate on domestic violence in Aboriginal community</li> </ul>
Hospital/ Local health services centre/ Ministry of Health/Regional Health Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referrals by emergency room nurses and other professionals</li> <li>- Provide emergency medications</li> <li>- Health services counsellor</li> <li>- Addictions and mental health services</li> </ul>
Ministry of Children and Family Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborate on programs with family services</li> <li>- Referrals</li> </ul>
Other Service Providers in the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular meetings to discuss issues</li> </ul>
Outreach programs funded through Public Safety and Solicitor General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referrals for services (both ways)</li> <li>- Advocacy on poverty issues</li> <li>- Communications</li> <li>- Provide access to knowledge and expertise on legal issues</li> <li>- Share resources</li> <li>- Community education and events</li> </ul>
RCMP / Police / Tribal Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referrals and support</li> <li>- Meet regularly</li> <li>- Educate on abuse and Aboriginal community</li> <li>- Collaborate on               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Take back the Night event (annually, September)</li> <li>o Victim Assistance Program</li> <li>o Workshops on healthy relationships</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentations to students on violence and abuse</li> </ul>
Transition House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide after-hours services e.g. handle crisis line</li> <li>- Provide shelter and supports for high risk women</li> </ul>

## Staffing

Most of the program coordinators indicated their paid staff work both daytime and after-hours. Half of the safe home programs have one person only who is paid to operate the program in their communities. There are no locations where the coordinator holds a full-time position paid through the safe home program. In 23 of the 26 safe home programs, the coordinator has another paid position with the organization or within the community. Twenty five of the 26 safe home programs have coordinators who are paid part-time wages. One safe home program employs their coordinator on a casual basis only. A total of six safe home programs employ casual workers.

While some programs do not rely on volunteers because the agencies feel that the work is too complex, intense, and potentially dangerous, 58% of the safe home programs do rely on volunteers to provide the following duties:

- Operate residential home facilities
- Provide after-hours coverage
- Drive and/or accompany women to appointments
- Help with the women's children
- Take women shopping or do the shopping
- Do the house cleaning or cooking
- Help to fill out papers
- Lead a weekly support group for women
- Help to fundraise and promote the safe home program

## General Successes and Challenges

The safe home program coordinators were asked to highlight some of the key successes and challenges of their programs.

Successes	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to help women locally</li> <li>- Ability to provide a continuum of care</li> <li>- Having the outreach and/or transition house services as part of the same agency which allows the safe home program to provide a one-stop-shop for shelter and services</li> <li>- Having strong relationship with other service providers in the community</li> <li>- Having additional staff/volunteers to help coordinator with after-hours coverage</li> <li>- Having a thorough in-take assessment</li> <li>- Program staff bring a wealth of experience and skills</li> <li>- Some agencies are able to provide training to their staff involved in the program, which they see as a strength</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Burnout for both staff and volunteers</li> <li>- Lack of housing options in the community</li> <li>- Transportation issues</li> <li>- Providing anonymity in a small community</li> <li>- Cell phone coverage is an issue for some communities</li> <li>- Lack of program funding</li> <li>- Lack of funding for training for both staff and volunteers</li> <li>- Lack of awareness and differing perceptions amongst individuals and communities about what is considered abuse</li> </ul>

## Introduction

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Safe homes are located in small, remote communities and provide shorter-stay support and crisis intervention, where transition houses do not usually exist. The safe home may be an apartment/townhouse unit, private residential home, or hotel/motel room. There are 26 safe home programs in BC, which are funded through BC Housing.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 375 women and children stayed in safe homes around BC in 2009/10.

## Purpose

In order to get a better understanding of the safe home programs and how they each operate, BC Housing's Women's Transition Housing and Supports Program asked the Research and Corporate Planning Department to interview safe home providers with the following objectives:

- Create an inventory to better understand what types of programs, services, and outreach activities are offered through BC's safe homes
- Better understand how the programs, services, and outreach activities are delivered

## Methodology

This study involved in-depth qualitative interviews with all 26 safe home programs. Interviews were conducted with the safe home program coordinators, but in some cases other colleagues from the agencies participated in the interviews, such as the supervisors of the program coordinators. The interviews were done over the phone and took approximately one hour to complete. Interviewees were asked 35 open-ended and coded questions on the following topics<sup>2</sup>:

- General successes/challenges/lessons learned
- Services and outreach activities offered to women through the safe home program
- Program related questions
- Descriptions of the safe home facilities
- After-hours coverage and services provided
- Staffing structures
- Partnerships

Coded questions were recorded in an Access database. The Access database will now serve as an internal inventory of the types of services and facilities offered through BC's safe home programs.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 1 for a list of safe home providers around the province.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 for the interview guide.

## Overview of Report

This report summarizes responses to a number of topics from interviews with the WTHSP safe home programs throughout BC:

- different facility types
- perceived strengths and challenges for each facility type
- how women access the programs
- safety and security procedures
- descriptions of services available to women and their children
- after-hours coverage
- descriptions of varying staffing and volunteer structures
- comments from safe home coordinators about length of stay in safe homes
- how safe home programs work with women with mental health and substance use issues
- contracting with women
- records and reporting
- successes and challenges
- community partnerships that are in place
- additional services providers would like to see available for women

The report concludes with a summary of some of the common successes, challenges, and lessons learned of the safe home programs as expressed by the program coordinators.

## Facilities

The safe home programs in BC use a range of facility types to shelter women. Women may be given a room in a hotel/motel or an apartment or townhouse that is either owned or rented by the program. Women may also be placed in residential home with a family. In some cases, a woman may be transported to another community rather than staying at a local facility. One safe home program has access to an apartment at a local church, in addition to the other facility types offered through the program.

Assessments and screening are usually done prior to taking a woman to the safe home. If more than one facility type is available in the community, the assessment is important for ensuring that women are placed appropriately. The safe home program coordinator or volunteers complete the assessments by either meeting the woman in their office or in a safe place, or by phone, and discuss her options. If after-hours, some women make their own way to the safe home facilities or are taken there by the police, and they connect with the safe home program coordinator the next morning during her regular work hours.

**Table 1: Safe Home Facilities in BC**

Facility Type	# Programs which Offer this Facility	% Programs which Offer this Facility	# of Rooms Available
Hotel/Motel	21	81%	as needed
Room in Residential Home	12	46%	47
Rented Apartment/Townhouse	6	23%	9
Owned Apartment/Townhouse	3	12%	7
Provide Transportation to Transition House in Another Community	19	73%	as needed
Other	1	4%	as needed

N=26



## *Rooms in Hotel/Motel*

Rooms in local hotels or motels are the most common type of safe home facility in BC, with over 80% of the programs using them. Hotel/motel rooms are booked as required by the coordinators for the women. In some instances, hotel/motel rooms are a back-up option if other facilities are full or the coordinator is not available to provide access to an apartment/townhouse or residential home.

### Access

Hotel/motel rooms are accessed in different ways by the women. In some cases, the safe home program coordinator or volunteer meets the woman in a safe location and accompanies her to the hotel/motel. In other cases, the police might accompany the woman to the hotel/motel. Some safe home program coordinators book the room for the woman, but she is expected to make her own way to the hotel and contact the coordinator in the morning during regular work hours. Women receive a key to the room and are typically free to come and go.

### Security

Ensuring that people do not know where the woman is staying is the main security strategy. Women are asked not to reveal their location to anyone during and after their stay in order to protect themselves and future women as well. The programs that rely on hotels/motels have agreements with operators around confidentiality. When making room reservations at the hotel/motel, they never give the woman's real name. They either use an alias or the safe home program coordinator's name. In one case, the coordinator does not allow the hotel staff to see the woman when she arrives, they use a back entrance. If the woman has a car, some hotels/motels provide a secluded parking space. If such an option is not available, the woman is asked to park the car elsewhere. Some programs make arrangements with the hotels/motels to have more secluded rooms so that the woman is not seen by other guests who may recognize her. Some programs try to arrange transportation for the woman to ensure that she is not seen as she is coming or going from the hotel/motel during her stay. One safe home puts women in a hotel/motel that is not in the community where the woman lives to help ensure that she is not recognized.

The safe home program coordinators reported that staff at the hotel/motel help by keeping an eye out while a woman is staying at their hotel/motel. Some programs do not allow the woman to have guests and the hotel/motel staff help to screen visitors. Some of the hotel/motels lock their doors at a certain time, which means that people can only get into the building if they have a key. Some programs also ask the hotel/motel staff to either screen in-coming calls to the woman or disconnect the phone in the room altogether, except for emergency calls.

The women are always given important contact information to keep in the room. Women are able to call the coordinator for emotional support, but they are told to call the police in a security related emergency. Many also try to use a hotel/motel that is near a police station or easily accessible to the police. Usually the police know that there is a woman at the hotel/motel.

## Strengths

- Many hotels/motels have staff on-site 24 hours, which provides security
- Many safe home programs have good relationships with hotel operators; some give good rates and they take their roles very seriously
- There are usually rooms available
- Usually hotels/motels are easy for women to find
- Hotels/motels are often close to services and amenities
- If hotel/motel has a restaurant, they can ensure that women have access to food without having to leave the building and risk security
- Hotel/motel offers anonymity (woman could be staying there for any reason) compared to a residential home (especially in small communities where they might know the family)
- Some women do not want to impose on a family and prefer to stay at a hotel/motel
- Some hotels accept pets
- Hotels/motels are accessible 24 hours/7 days a week

## Challenges

- Hotel/motel rooms are cold and impersonal; they are not homey like an apartment or residential home
- Women can be seen by someone they know at the hotel/motel or when coming and going
- Hotels/motels are not ideal locations for women with children
- There is no one to provide emotional supports at the hotel/motel
- If hotels/motels that are out of town or the core area, it can be difficult to access services/amenities
- Hotels/motels can be fully booked, especially during peak seasons in resort communities and in boom periods in resource communities
- Hotels/motels can be very expensive, especially during peak season
- Some hotels/motels rooms do not have phones, which makes it difficult to access services and supports
- If there is no restaurant, women have to go out to get food and they risk being seen
- It can be hard to hide the woman's vehicle at a hotel/motel

## **Residential Homes**

Almost half of the safe home programs offer women rooms in residential homes. These residential homes are operated by families. In many cases, the families are compensated for their time through a per diem, honorarium or stipend for nights when women stay with them. The families provide emotional supports and food. Some provide transportation to help women get to appointments. Most women do not receive a key to the homes. Some programs have several families who are willing to open their homes to women and some families make more than one room available. There are a total of 47 rooms available through residential homes for women around the province. Some of the residential homes are located close to the centre of town, and therefore, have services and other amenities nearby, while others are located in more secluded rural areas.

## Access

Usually paid staff or volunteers will take the woman to the residential home; however, in some cases, the police will take the woman. Some programs do not allow the women to come and go from the residential home, as neighbours may see them and identify the woman.

## Security

The first step in ensuring the safety of women staying residential homes is to have criminal record checks done on the operators, and provide proper education and training on risk assessment. The families also receive advice on appropriate security features for their home. Some programs require that there is always someone from the family at home with the woman. The police often know where the residential safe homes are located and give these locations higher priority if there is an emergency call placed from that location. Some operators require women to sign a confidentiality agreement stating that they are not to reveal that they operate a safe home. Women are asked not to reveal the location of the safe home or names of the operators. Women are given an emergency number for the person on-call from the safe home program and they are asked to park their car elsewhere so that it is not recognized outside the residential home. If during the assessment, the safe home program coordinator feels that placing the woman in a residential home would put the woman or the operator at risk, the woman is placed in a hotel/motel or taken to the nearest transition house.

## Strengths

- Families provide emotional supports for the women, are role models for healthy relationships, exhibit normal activities in day-to-day living, and assist with other needs, such as accessing food and getting to appointments
- Provides a cozy, home-like environment, with amenities such as TV, washer/dryer, etc.
- Provides a place for women to stay in the community after a traumatic event, where the women may already be familiar with the resources and services available to them
- Many safe home programs have a range of households that open their homes, which allows the coordinator to match the woman to a suitable family
- Helps to create awareness and acknowledgement of the issue of violence against women in the community
- Most safe home program coordinators feel that the residential homes do offer privacy and confidentiality, though some do worry about these issues when using this facility type

## Challenges

- Some women do not want to be a burden on the family; some women feel ashamed
- Some women prefer to be on their own, in a quiet and peaceful space, after a traumatic event, rather than in someone else's home
- They are unavailable for many reasons, for example families are away on vacation or have guests
- Some programs do not allow the women to go to work or the children to go to school while staying in the residential safe home
- Neighbours might see and recognize the woman who is staying with the family
- Not all homes are accessible to people with disabilities
- Cell phone service can be limited at some of the more secluded or remote residential homes in the rural areas

## **Rented or Owned Apartment**

Over one third of the safe home programs have a dedicated apartment or townhouse that they operate as the safe home. Most of these units are rented, but in a few cases, the safe home program owns the unit. Many of the units have more than one room so can accommodate more than one woman at a time. There were 16 rooms available to safe home women in the province in owned or rented units. Usually these facilities are unsupervised, but some safe home program coordinators said that they can be available to stay overnight at the unit if necessary. In most cases, the women can come and go as they need to, but some programs do not provide a key to the unit for the women, so they must arrange with the coordinator to come and go. In some cases, codes, which can easily be changed, are used on doors rather than keys. Personal care items and linens are usually provided. Most of the units are located close to the centre of town and near amenities, yet they are usually on fairly quiet streets for privacy.

## Access

The safe home program coordinator usually provides initial access to the unit; however, after-hours, the volunteers may be the ones to let the woman into the unit. They provide a short orientation and explain the rules for staying in the unit. One coordinator said that if she is unavailable, the call goes through to the transition house and the transition house makes arrangements to send the woman to a hotel/motel until the coordinator is available to accompany the woman to the unit.

## Security

The safe home programs use a range of techniques to keep the location of their apartment/townhouse confidential. The units are not listed at the front door intercom or directory. One building even lists the safe home unit as a storage facility rather than as a tenanted unit. Another coordinator said that they change the location of their unit every few years to keep the location of the unit confidential. Some units have security systems, as well as other security features, such as peek holes in the door, locks on windows, blinds, security cameras, and exterior lighting. One safe home program ensures that the phone in the unit is a portable phone so that the woman can take it with her as she moves about the unit. Women are given the cell phone number for the person on-call on behalf of the program in case of an emergency. Police are usually aware of the safe home location and the address is given high priority in terms of response time, but a couple of programs keep the safe home location private from the police in case, for example, the police know the woman or her partner (which can be an issue in small towns). Whether or not the police know the location of the units, the units are mostly located near a police station. Women are asked not to park their cars in front of the building. Most programs do not allow visitors, but some only restrict male visitors. Some programs have a curfew for women.

## Strengths

- Apartment/townhouse offers more privacy for women than a hotel/motel room or residential home
- Apartment/townhouse offers a home-like environment, with cable and telephone and other amenities
- Safe home program coordinators find it easier to budget with an apartment/townhouse facility; they know what the fixed costs will be each month no matter how many women use the facility, unlike when accessing a hotel/motel or residential home
- Some safe home programs have very good relationships with landlords, some of whom give discounted rents or include utilities to save costs
- There is usually dedicated space for the children to play

## Challenges

- It can be costly to cover all the monthly expenses of renting and/or operating an apartment/townhouse compared to paying a family operating a safe home out of their residence
- The program has to cover the costs whether or not they have women using the apartment/townhouse
- Not all of the units are wheelchair accessible
- Other tenants in the building might recognize the woman
- It can be difficult to keep the location of the unit confidential
- The units are typically unsupervised; there is no one at the front desk as in a hotel and operators as in a residential home
- There can be conflicts between the tenants if the unit has space for more than one woman; communal living can be difficult, especially for women who are in crisis or have a mental health issue

## *Immediate Transportation to another Community*

Some safe home programs provide immediate transportation out of the community for women, rather than housing them in a safe home in the community. Almost three quarters of the safe home program coordinators said that they provide immediate transportation to another community as an option for women. Women may be transported out of the community at their own request (e.g. they might have a stronger social network in another community or they worry about their safety if they stay in a safe home locally). If the community does not have a facility, then they send women to the nearest transition house. Women may also be sent immediately to the transition house if after the intake interview/assessment, the coordinator determines that the woman has addiction or mental health issues that cannot be addressed in a safe home. As well, a woman may be transported out of town if the facility is a residential home and there are concerns about the risks the woman's situation might create for the family. Sometimes the local hotels/motels might be all booked, in which case the woman will be transported out of town.

### Access

Women are often transported out of town by bus. The safe home program typically pays for the transportation and/or helps to make the bus arrangements. Some of the communities served are on islands, so the safe home program usually has an arrangement with water taxi services or ferries to take women off the island. When transportation is not available, staff or volunteers may drive the women out of town.

### Security

Security for women taking a bus out of town can be a challenge. One safe home program coordinator said she puts the bus tickets in her name, rather than the woman's name. Another said that if a woman is feeling anxious about taking the bus, she will drive them herself, but usually paired with a buddy.

### Strengths

Interviewees did not explicitly mention any advantages to transporting women immediately out of town. Immediate transportation out of town may be ideal for some women, as they may feel safer or have better support networks available in other communities. Given that safe homes are typically in small communities, nearby larger communities may have more resources to offer women.

### Challenges

Many safe home programs operate in small or remote communities where transporting women to another community by bus can be a challenge because they do not have regular inter-city/town bus service. Finding the money to pay for the transportation out of the community can be a challenge. As well, it can be hard for the woman to leave the community if she has a job or if she has children who are in school.

## **Service Provision**

### *Types of Services Offered*

The safe home programs in BC provide more than shelter and a safe home. They also provide a broad range of services to the women. The safe home program coordinators were asked to identify the support services and outreach activities they offer women from a list of options. All programs offer emotional supports, referrals to counselling and other services, safety planning, and transportation.

**Table 2: Types of Support Services and Outreach Activities Offered to Women**

Type of Support Service and Outreach Activity	#	%
Emotional supports	26	100%
Referrals to counselling (e.g. mental health, addictions)	26	100%
Referrals to other services	26	100%
Safety planning	26	100%
Transportation to appointments in town and/or in nearby communities	26	100%
Assistance in accessing income assistance <sup>1</sup>	25	96%
Community education and awareness	25	96%
Food for meals	25	96%
Personal care services <sup>2</sup> (e.g. personal care items, clothing laundry)	25	96%
Assistance with accessing health care	24	92%
Accompaniment to the police to file reports	23	89%
Assistance in accessing/navigating legal aid	23	89%
Services for former women (those who have been housed and those who have not been housed)	23	89%
MCFD accompaniment and/or advocacy	22	85%
Accompaniment to court	21	81%
Assistance with locating market housing	19	73%
Assistance with completing subsidized housing applications	18	69%
Other	6	23%

<sup>1</sup>For some programs, this assistance is not limited to income assistance, but includes help with accessing CPP (Canada Pension Plan), OAS (Old Age Security), and disability benefits.

<sup>2</sup>In one program, the local Shoppers Drug Mart is very supportive. It donates a lot of items (and wide variety) and gives them to the program once a month. In another program, local thrift stores provide "tokens" which the women use to shop for free.

The safe home coordinators were asked to elaborate on the range of activities involved with providing certain support services in order to better understand them.

### Transportation

The safe home programs help the women with their transportation needs in diverse ways. Some rely heavily on volunteers who drive the women to and from the safe home, to appointments (medical, court, shopping, offices of other service providers e.g. income assistance, Service Canada), and to the local food bank. Two programs make use of the Seniors Volunteer Driver program. A couple of programs access the medical bus. The volunteers may or may not receive reimbursement for mileage. In other programs only the safe home program coordinator does the driving. One coordinator said, "She feels less and less comfortable having volunteers drive as the safety risks are becoming more serious". In some programs, transportation takes up a lot of resources (funding and time).

Almost none of the programs have access to public transportation. Quite a few programs rely on the privately operated Greyhound Bus system to transport the women to the nearby transition home or to another community. For those communities relying on car taxi, water taxi, or ferries, the safe home program coordinator has developed good relationships with those service providers.

## Community Education and Awareness

To raise awareness, many safe home program coordinators participate in events such as:

- International Women's Day (March 8<sup>th</sup>)
- Victims Awareness Week (April/May)
- Take Back the Night (September)
- Women's History Month (October)
- National Day of Remembrance and Action Against Women in Canada (December 6<sup>th</sup>)
- Clothesline project for women and children who have experienced violence. (They decorate t-shirts and hang them on clothes lines around the community.)

Some coordinators actively seek out opportunities to make presentations in schools and colleges, or speak to/at church groups, service groups, seniors centre, Royal Canadian Legion hall, drug and alcohol treatment workshops or meetings, Rotary Club, grandmothers group, drop in soup kitchens, alternate youth centres, youth events (e.g. girls' retreats). Several coordinators set up information tables or booths at local events such as craft fairs or women's shows, or in shopping malls. A few coordinators indicated they are too busy so they only give presentations when they are asked. A few coordinators indicated they do little or no community education or awareness as there are no resources or funding for it.

Either the safe home program coordinator or volunteers will distribute flyers, pamphlets or put up posters at schools, local offices or other places frequented by women or someone who might refer them to the program (women's washrooms, hotels, bars, restaurants, gas station, doctor's offices, tribal police, health service centres, hospitals). On one community cable channel, there is a public service announcement that runs 24 hours. Another coordinator uses the local newspaper to publish articles and run advertisements for program volunteers.

## Food for Meals

Some of the safe home programs provide food to women staying in the hotel/motel rooms; others can get meals at the restaurant in the hotel/motel. In the apartment/townhouse facility with a kitchen, the programs provide food for women in a variety of ways:

- Pre-paid voucher to local grocery store
- Coordinator or volunteer makes up shopping list with the woman and goes to buy groceries for her
- Coordinator stocks fridge with basic items before the woman arrives at safe home
- Help to access local food bank

For women staying in residential homes, food and meals are provided by the operator.

## Services for Former Clients

The safe home program coordinators assist their former clients in a number of ways. Some through outreach services, referrals to other services, as an information resource, or to access to other services ("we help them navigate the bureaucracy"). Some women may need ongoing support with the legal system. Others need help accessing food, clothing and household items even after they have set up their own home. Several indicated their former clients are comfortable coming back to speak to them. "We listen mostly", said one coordinator. Sometimes a former client comes to the coordinator to tell her she has decided she is leaving her spouse for good and asks, "What do I need to do?" One coordinator explained that former clients who see the violence in their communities approach her to ask what they can do for the younger women living in relationships with domestic violence. One program holds a weekly coffee talk session for former clients to meet or they bring in a guest speaker (e.g. self-defence demo, bullying).

## Other

There were two safe home programs which are able to provide less commonly needed services:

- One safe home program is able to provide a safe home which will take women who have pets.
- According to one coordinator, up to 20% of her older women clients have grade 2 to 6 education levels. They need upgrading and skills to give them financial literacy, for example on how to handle their banking. In order to live independently from their abusive spouse, they need this knowledge. The coordinator teaches them how to handle their financial transactions, takes them to the bank to set up an account, etc.

## **Most/Least Used Services**

The safe home program coordinators were asked, from their perspective, what are the most and least used services from among the range that they offer. The support services and outreach activities that are most accessed by women in safe home programs include:

- Emotional support
- Referrals to counselling
- Safety planning
- Transportation
- Assistance in accessing income assistance

The support services and outreach activities that are least accessed by women in safe home programs include:

- MCFD accompaniment and/or advocacy
- Accompaniment to the police to file reports
- Accompaniment to court

## **Services for Children**

Eleven of the 26 programs provided some level of service or activity specifically for women with children. However, the service may be as small as going to the children's school to pick up homework for them to do while staying at the safe home. In several programs where there are a lot of women with children, the safe home facility is chosen for its suitability (e.g. additional bedrooms). In one community, the coordinator always makes sure there is at least one residential safe home available which will accommodate a mother and her children. The same coordinator has access to car seats and play pens. Several coordinators mentioned they have a designated play area (may be a separate room) with toys, colouring books, videos, in the safe home. Several coordinators train the residential home operators on how to approach children who are housed with their mothers in their safe home. Part of the safety planning with women in one program involves teaching the children on how to recognize the warning signs and to call for help. Another program keeps emergency kits (e.g. hygiene related items such as toothbrush) on hand specifically for each child who accompanies their mother. At two of the programs, volunteers will provide child care and take the children to the park, for example, as long as it is safe.

For those programs that have women with children, the coordinators all said they refer the mothers to other programs and services that already exist in their communities such as Children Who Witness Abuse (CWWA) program, child and youth mental health worker, family support worker, and play therapy for children. In two communities the coordinators introduce women with children to programs where they could make connections with other mothers:

- Family Place (lunch served daily, activities, play space for kids)
- Strong Start (for mothers with children who are under 6 years of age)
- Women's Resource Centre – girls support group for 3 to 9 year olds (focus on healthy role modeling)



One safe home program coordinator said there are better outcomes for the woman when the children are included in the services where appropriate, rather than always addressing the mother's needs separately from the children's. One coordinator preferred that one agency provides many services and the staff share roles because the woman and her children benefit from a continuity of care.

Safe home programs that have no services specifically for children, stated that it is primarily because there is no need. Their women may be older with no dependent children, or women may have children who do not live with them.

In a few cases, the programs indicated they do not have the training or funding or their existing contracts do not allow them to work with mothers with children.

A few safe home program coordinators said they would like to offer or refer women with children to the following services which are not currently available in their communities:

- Program created for specifically for mother and child to work through together what has happened to them
- Counsellor for children who witness abuse
- Sexual assault intervention program
- Mental health counsellor

A few coordinators mentioned that staff need safety training to work with children within the safe home program. One coordinator explained the behaviours children bring to the safe home mirror how the father treats the mother. For example the child is very disrespectful to the mother. The coordinator would like to learn how to assist the mother to gain self-respect and empower her so when the child re-enters the room, the mother is not reduced to her previous state with little self-esteem.

## Partnerships in Service Provision

The safe home program coordinators were asked to describe the programs, services or outreach activities which they provide in partnership with other organizations on a regular basis.

**Table 3: Services Provided in Partnership**

Partners	Programs/Services/Activities
Aboriginal Band	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referrals to/from:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Social worker</li> <li>o Outreach worker</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Raise awareness in community; ban abusers from community</li> </ul>
Church groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Program for skills exchange between younger and older women</li> <li>- Operate thrift stores (fundraising; women have access to free household items and clothes)</li> <li>- Provides safe home apartment for free</li> <li>- Ministers may refer to program</li> </ul>
Crown Counsel/Judges Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educate on domestic violence in Aboriginal community</li> </ul>
Hospital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referrals by emergency room nurses and other professionals</li> <li>- Provide emergency medications</li> </ul>
Local health services centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides space for coordinator to meet with women</li> <li>- Health services counsellor</li> <li>- Addictions and mental health services</li> </ul>
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 16 days of activism against gender violence</li> </ul>
Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborate on programs with family services</li> <li>- Referrals</li> </ul>
Ministry of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Refer to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Mental health worker</li> <li>o Mobile counselling service</li> <li>o Drug and alcohol worker</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Other Service Providers in the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regular meetings to discuss issues</li> </ul>
Outreach programs funded through Public Safety and Solicitor General (PSSG)  (11 communities have separately funded outreach programs through PSSG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referrals for services (both ways)</li> <li>- Advocacy on poverty issues</li> <li>- Communications</li> <li>- Provide access to knowledge and expertise on legal issues (e.g. restraining orders)</li> <li>- Share resources</li> <li>- Community education and events</li> </ul>
RCMP / Police / Tribal Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referrals and support</li> <li>- Meet regularly</li> <li>- Educate on abuse and Aboriginal community</li> <li>- Collaborate on               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Take back the Night event (annually, September)</li> <li>o Victim Assistance Program</li> <li>o Workshops on healthy relationships (January)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Regional Health Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "SORT", social workers with Vancouver Island Health Authority work as a team called "Seniors Outside Resource Team" to address increasing incidence of dementia</li> </ul>
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Presentations to students on violence and abuse</li> </ul>

Partners	Programs/Services/Activities
Transition House	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide after-hours services e.g. handle crisis line</li> <li>- Provide shelter and supports for high risk women</li> </ul>
<p>Within same agency or with agency in community who has contract to deliver related services or programs (i.e. Women's Resource Centre, Transition House, Community Services Centre)</p> <p>Potential outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Referrals</li> <li>- Education</li> <li>- Community coordination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community education and awareness events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Provide space for events</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Children who Witness Abuse program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Building healthy relationships</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Reach out to women through a variety of programs with the message about domestic violence and how to access help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Mother Goose parenting program (2 to 3 times a year for young mothers with children under 6 years)</li> <li>o Infant Development program (assess new babies)</li> <li>o Prenatal classes</li> <li>o Infant massage classes</li> <li>o Sacred Wolf Friendship Centre (for mothers with children under 18 months)</li> <li>o Family Services program on advocacy and legal services (for young couples)</li> <li>o Pregnancy Outreach worker</li> <li>o Success by Six program (early childhood intervention)</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Stop the Violence against Women program (VAP) and counsellors</li> <li>- Employment Outreach program</li> <li>- Literacy advocate (helps fill out forms with women; holds workshops for women)</li> <li>- Visiting Lawyer (provide office space; coordinate meetings with safe home clients)</li> </ul>

### Transition House

Regarding their relationship to the nearest transition home(s), two thirds of the safe home program coordinators described it as being excellent to good. According to one coordinator, "Their staff is as committed as we are. They support us in the rural areas." For five programs, the same agency/organization operates the safe home and transition house programs. This provides several advantages including crossover of services. The remaining one third indicated the relationship could be better. Sometimes it is strained because of poor communications, staff turnover, lack of room, withholding of information, lots of procedures, or conflict from lack of resources. These may lead to misunderstandings and mistakes being made.

### After-hours Services

The coordinators, casual workers, or volunteers offer emotional support to the women during the after-hours at those sites that provide after-hours services. This may be in person, by telephone, or by referral to the transition house staff who are trained. Safety planning, transportation, and access to the safe home are other services which are often provided. A few programs will complete their in-take and assessment procedures. Some programs reported they offer all of the services listed in Table 2, except where the office is closed or the service is unavailable.

### *Additional Services Needed*

Most program coordinators indicated a need for additional services and activities in their communities. One coordinator commented, “We could double our outreach activities and still not keep up with the demand”.

The main barrier preventing the safe home programs from offering more services is lack of funding. Another barrier is the high cost of delivering some services. For example one program stated that the cost of having the cell phone for on-call uses up one sixth of her budget. To save money she asks the safe home staff to use their personal telephones and to block the calls by dialling #67. With long travel distances in some programs, coordinators do not offer certain services or outreach activities because there is no money in the budget to stay overnight.

Several safe home program coordinators said they have to prioritize their work. They handle the emergencies and crises and provide the safe home, but they scale back on other support services or outreach activities. For example a woman may benefit from receiving a service once a week, but the program budget only allows her to access that service once a month.

Several coordinators indicated they would like to provide support services through paid staff on a 24 hour basis, or at least have access to additional funds to pay for them on an as required basis. (Some programs which provide 24 hour support do so with volunteers.) Coordinators said there is a need for paid staff to provide services after-hours:

- If a woman comes into the safe home on a Friday night and is an older woman, being alone for two or even three days over a holiday weekend is a long period. Likely she has a fear of being alone.
- If emergency personnel pressure the coordinator to take woman to the safe home but it may not be appropriate to leave her alone. Instead the coordinator has to advocate for an overnight stay in hospital.

Coordinators would like to:

- Offer more outreach services such as advocacy, accompaniment to court
- Organize women’s support groups
- Provide more community education
- Access a community based victim services program
- Offer special workshops and presentations on topics such as:
  - o Healthy relationships
  - o What to do if your friends are being abused
  - o Parenting courses
  - o Life skills classes (budgeting, personal hygiene, meditation, relaxation and growing and preserving food)

One program would like to have a community garden and teach women to grow their own food in order to help low income single mothers feed their families. Another program would like a good food box program to help women eat healthier and make the groceries more affordable, but it is a lot of work to coordinate.

One or two safe home programs have particular needs such as helping the woman with her farm animals or pets (some women will not access the safe home program because they will not leave the animals for fear the abuser will abuse or neglect them).

## Successes

Safe home program coordinators offered the following examples of program successes in the delivery of services for women:

- Some safe home program coordinators feel that when the agency is a “one-stop-shop”, and holds contracts to deliver multiple programs and the same staff may have multiple roles or positions, there are many benefits to the women. For the safe home program it is easier to:
  - o Make referrals
  - o Foster networking
  - o Keep informed
  - o Share information
  - o Collaborate on programs
  - o Provide more resources
- Through strong partnerships, women are less likely to fall through gaps in services. The partnerships build trust; everyone has the woman’s best interests in mind. Their approach can be more holistic and address the woman’s many needs.
- In some Aboriginal communities, stronger partnerships are leading to better outcomes for women, such as helping women gain better access to the justice system. Attitudes are changing toward women and their children who experience abuse. Safe home coordinators are able to hold workshops. More court cases are being won against the abuser. Some Bands will ban offenders from its community. RCMP allows the safe home coordinator to attend the interview with the woman so the woman feels less intimidated.

## Challenges

Safe home program coordinators identified a number of challenges in the delivery of services for women:

- The safe home program addresses the immediate needs of the women. It does not get at the causes of the violent behaviours. One safe home coordinator said there are more images now in popular culture where young women are physical and violent. It is more accepted and even glamorized when she retaliates.
- Accessing services in another location is especially difficult if the travel time is extensive, for example income assistance office, legal aid office.
- Delivering on community education and awareness,
  - o Is hindered by denial that violence against women exists in their community. May go so far as to removing posters. Other services do not refer women.
  - o Is limited where there is a high proportion of vacation properties owned by people who do not contribute to the community
  - o Should be targeted e.g. to high school students about dating violence
- Lack of credibility in community especially when working with police or within legal court system
  - o Funding does not extend to employ social workers with degrees
  - o Lack of training for staff
- Presently referrals to the older women’s programs are not as efficient or effective as they could be
  - o When a woman meets with the safe home coordinator, she may not be able to explain herself very well
- Developing strong partnerships may not be easy if one or more groups or an individual is territorial
- It can be difficult to share client information across agencies due to confidentiality issues
- Some services are only available during regular work day hours, so the woman may have to go to hospital or emergency room (e.g. if the woman leaves her home without her medication, she will have to go to the hospital to get medication that is needed immediately)

## Lessons Learned

Safe home program coordinators identified a number of lessons learned in the delivery of services for women:

- There is a general theme among the programs as to the importance of partnerships and networks and the need to keep them strong
  - o One program has learned to collaborate closely with the police. A strong relationship with the RCMP helps them to support women and access the appropriate services in an emergency.
  - o One program puts a lot of energy into meetings about children and youth, as community collaboration is central to creating a web of support and services particularly for young women.
- There is a much better outcome for the woman if she is accompanied by a safe home worker who advocates for whatever service she needs regardless of whether or not it involves the police or another service provider
- Have volunteers go in pairs to support the woman and for their safety and security, and to help look after the children
- With older women:
  - o They need a private suite. Communal living, e.g. shared apartment or residential home, does not work
  - o Outreach services are more important so focus on those
  - o Proceed slowly, need to spend time to listen. If go too quickly, it falls apart. Have to accept that safe home coordinator may want to deliver six things, but it is okay if only one thing gets done

## Staffing

The safe home program coordinators were asked to describe how they staff and operate the program (paid staff, volunteers, after-hours coverage, safety and security), and the types of recruitment and retention issues they might experience.

### Staffing Structures

The safe home programs are staffed a variety of ways:

- Half of the safe home programs have one person who is paid to operate the program in their communities
- There are no programs where the coordinator holds a full-time position paid through the safe home program
- Twenty five of the 26 safe home programs have coordinators who are paid part-time wages
- One safe home program employs their coordinator on a casual basis only
- A total of six safe home programs employ casual workers

Most of the programs indicated their paid staff work both daytime and after-hours. In some cases the casual paid worker covers the after-hours, while the part-time staff person has a regular daytime shift. At some programs, they plan to work regularly scheduled hours during the day, but they have to be flexible in order to assist the women and not to exceed the hours covered by the contract. At two programs, the coordinators stated they only work daytime hours because it rarely occurs that they are called out after-hours.

**Table 4: Program Coordinator Takes on Other Work in Organization or Community**

Take on Other Jobs	#	%
Yes	23	88%
No	3	12%

N=26

In 23 of the 26 safe home programs, the coordinator has another paid position within the agency or within the community. Combining several part-time positions does not necessarily result in the equivalent of a full-time job (e.g. 35 hours of paid work per week). The following shows some of the additional roles safe home coordinators said they take on to increase their hours of paid work:

- Community outreach worker
- Counsellor for Stopping the Violence (STV) program
- Coordinator for Victim Services program
- Counsellor for Children who Witness Abuse (CWWA) program
- Coordinator of Meals on Wheels program
- Child and youth mental health worker
- Coordinator of school based violence program
- Lay counsellor for families and youth
- Counsellor for women's groups and individuals
- Family support worker
- Administrator for agency

### Recruitment and Retention Issues

According to the safe home program coordinators, over half of the programs do not experience difficulties with recruiting or retaining paid staff. Some coordinators have worked on the safe home program between 10 and 20 years. They experience high levels of job satisfaction. They work well as a team in their agency. They have strong support from their co-workers.

In those safe home programs which experience difficulties with recruiting or retaining paid staff, they indicated the lack of funding to pay better salaries and to attract the right person for the job are the top challenges. For some programs, it is difficult to combine the position with other paid work either within the agency or within the general community. People may not be interested in a job where they are on-call.

### Volunteers

**Table 5: Program that Rely on Volunteers**

Rely on Volunteers	#	%
Yes, rely on volunteers	15	58%
No, do not have volunteers	11	42%

N=26

Eleven of the 26 safe home programs do not rely on volunteers. These safe home program coordinators felt strongly that the work is too complex, intense, and potentially dangerous. The work is confidential and their communities are small. Some coordinators indicated that volunteers require a lot of time to manage and their program has evolved not to use them. One coordinator indicated they are not allowed to use volunteers, according to her agency's policy. There were two coordinators who said they will include volunteers in their program in the future, as the programs do not have sufficient funding to provide coverage and deliver all the services they wish to offer.

In the 15 safe home programs which rely on volunteers, they undertake a wide range of activities. If their program uses residential homes as the facility, they generally consider the host family to be volunteering their time. Even though the host family receives a per diem, it is a nominal amount and does not cover the real cost of food and shelter. In addition most residential home operators are available to provide support 24 hours a day to the woman for the period she stays with them.

Volunteers provide a variety of services such as:

- Drive/accompany the women to appointments
- Attend court with the women
- Help babysit the women's children
- Take the women shopping or do the shopping for them
- Do the house cleaning or cooking
- Help to fill out forms
- Lead a weekly support group for the women
- Assess the women's reading level
- Help to fundraise
- Promote the safe home program by putting up posters, distributing flyers, attending community events
- In two programs, volunteers work in pairs and stay with the woman 24 hours a day in the safe home. They are called "house mothers".

At five safe home programs, the volunteers fill in for the paid staff when they need a break or go on vacation. In some communities, the volunteers carry the cell phone and provide all of the after-hours coverage. They are trained to take the calls and provide the full range of supports that the regular safe home program coordinator would provide. They may visit the woman, complete the in-take, and take her to the safe home.

The commitment of volunteers ranged from two hours to 12 hours a week on average. The number of volunteers involved with a program ranged from one to as many as 22. As one safe home program coordinator stated in the interview, "We couldn't run our program without them."

### Managing After-hours Coverage

**Table 6: Provide After-hours Coverage**

After-hours Coverage	#	%
Yes	23	88%
No	3	12%

N=26

Almost all of the programs operate 24 hours/7 days a week. The average number of referrals after 5pm to the safe home program ranged from none to 12 per month per program. For some programs, it is a rare occurrence; for others, almost all of their referrals come in after 5pm. Of the 23 programs which operate 24 hours/7 days a week:

- There are four programs with regular paid staff (either safe home coordinator, or other agency or casual staff who is trained to respond) who carry the cell phone and receive an hourly per diem. When the staff person receives a call-out, she is paid her regular hourly wage.
- There are 13 programs where the safe home coordinator carries the cell phone. She is *not* paid unless she receives a call-out.
- There is one program where staff does not carry a cell phone; RCMP has the home numbers for the staff.
- There are nine programs where volunteers play a key role with after-hours coverage. They carry a cell phone in order to give the safe home coordinator a break, to cover her time off or vacation periods. In some programs, the volunteers provide most of the after-hours coverage. They have a monthly roster and schedule.
- In a few programs, the safe home coordinator works closely with the local transition house and its staff. The transition house will handle the after-hours calls through the crisis line, screen and when needed make arrangements to help the woman get to a safe place for the night. The coordinator follows up with the woman the next day. At one program, the transition house in the catchment area receives all calls, screens and assesses the women. If the woman qualifies, the transition house refers her to the safe home coordinator.



With regards to the safe home program operating 24 hours/7 days a week, the following challenges were reported:

- Several coordinators mentioned that the WorkSafe BC sets out rules on working alone and personal safety, which has implications on insurance coverage and liability and can limit the services that can be offered after-hours.
- For some programs, the coordinator is always on-call or is on-call many hours and days which leads to burn out of staff. Some even feel guilty for enjoying activities in their personal lives instead of being available to a woman in crisis.
- Some coordinators have young families and they are not able to respond quickly. They rely on family and friends to look after their children while they respond to the situation.
- With limited hours in the contract to deliver the program, many coordinators end up volunteering their time in order to assist the woman. In programs where the same agency holds several contracts including the safe home program, they are able to be more flexible with the schedule and coverage.

According to safe home program coordinators, lessons learned by operating the safe home program 24 hours/7 days a week include:

- Through experience, safe home coordinators have learned that it is important not to panic.
  - o Sometimes the woman's immediate needs can be met by telephone rather than in person.
  - o It is okay to have the woman in crisis taken to a temporary safe place (i.e. shelter, transition house) or directly to the safe home (i.e. motel) for an overnight stay and then follow up with her the next day during regular hours.
- To help recruit and retain staff or volunteers, it is important to be flexible with the schedule and to accommodate the needs of the person, whether they are family or other paid work commitments.
- When casual paid workers are trained to respond to a woman in crisis, they must get enough hours in to use their knowledge and training.
- When transition house staff manage the crisis line, it is valuable to have a strong working relationship with them.

## *Safety and Security of Staff and Volunteers*

All safe home programs recognized that protecting the safety of staff and volunteers (where applicable) was very important, even though, some programs do not have formal written policies and procedures in place.

At those programs with formal policies and procedures in place, subject areas include:

- Working with RCMP and keeping them informed
- Working alone or in isolation
  - o Compliance with WorkSafe BC standards
  - o Some programs require their volunteers to work in pairs
  - o Some programs require their staff to call for back-up; to let someone else know of their schedule or movements; follow call-in and call-out procedures
  - o Staff and volunteers carry cell phone; one carries a satellite phone when going to areas out of cell phone range
- Ways to keep personnel safe
  - o They are secondary responders (they are not crisis responders)
  - o They meet in a public place (e.g. Tim Horton's) or at the agency's office
  - o They only go to a woman's home when accompanied by RCMP, or it has been cleared by RCMP to be safe e.g. abuser is in custody
  - o They do not accompany women to court
  - o They do not use last names of staff or volunteers
  - o They use personal panic buttons (wear around neck)
  - o There are alarms in the office
- Harassment
- Injury on duty
- Incident report and forms to be completed

Some programs indicated they have formal safety and risk assessment training for staff, volunteers or their residential home operators. One program indicated their training is based on what is available through the Victim Assistance Program (VAP).

## Client Records

### Storage

**Table 7: How Client Records are Stored in Safe Home Programs in BC**

Storage Type	#	%
Paper	17	65%
Electronic	3	12%
Both Paper and Electronic	5	19%
On-Site	21	81%
Off-Site	4	15%
No Files	1	4%

N=26

The safe home coordinators were asked how they store their client files. One program does not keep any client records, only a log of the information that is needed for reporting to BC Housing. Approximately two thirds of program coordinators said that they keep paper client files and 12% said they keep electronic files, while almost one fifth of coordinators said that they keep both paper and electronic client files.

In terms of where files are stored, 81% of the coordinators keep their client files stored on-site at their agency office. However, 15% of the program coordinators store their client files off-site, typically at their homes.

### Reporting

Over one third of the safe home program coordinators said that the quarterly reporting they are asked to do by BC Housing accurately reflects what they do. Among those who did not feel the reports accurately capture their work, one said that the reporting does not allow them to fully demonstrate what they do with a small budget. Another said that the reporting does not capture the value that the programs provide to the communities they serve. Some feel that the questions do not apply to what they do because either they do not house people in safe home facilities, or, they feel that the questions are more appropriate for a transition house model. One said that it can be difficult to track statistics, as women may access services from various parts of the same agency, such as an outreach worker or a transition house that is funded through the same agency. Some were concerned that they end up recording a lot of the information in the comments section, which is not tabulated. The coordinators had the following suggestions to improve reporting:

- Would like to be able to report additional activities, such as education workshops
- Would like to be able to record if a woman does not go to the safe home facility, but just calls to talk
- Would like to be able to show the amount of time and resources that go into working with certain women (some women may require minimal time and resources while others have higher needs)
- Some coordinators report having technical difficulties accessing the SNAP survey software
- There is no longer a place to record challenges around service delivery – only the challenges experienced by women
- Some find that it takes quite a while to enter the statistics; two coordinators suggested that having the ability to do the reporting monthly, while the information is still fresh, would save time
- There is no place to record the number of women with a mental health issue or dementia
- Would like to be able to capture the length of stay for women
- Would like to be able to capture information about the emotional supports they provide to women

## Women with Mental Health and Substance Use Issues

**Table 8: Increased Prevalence of Substance Use and Mental Health Issues for Women in Safe Homes in BC**

Increased Prevalence of SU/MH Issues	#	%
Yes	16	62%
No	9	35%
Don't Know	1	4%

N=26

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of women fleeing violence who also have substance use or mental health issues is increasing. Almost two thirds of the safe home program coordinators said that they have perceived an increase. Among those who said they have not seen an increase, it is important to note that some of them qualified their statement by adding that this has always been an issue – the prevalence is not necessarily increasing. Several program coordinators felt strongly that substance use and mental health issues are inherently linked to experiencing violence.

Almost of the coordinators who said that they have noticed an increased prevalence of substance use and mental health issues among women fleeing violence felt it poses additional challenges for their programs. Some coordinators said that communicating with women with substance use and mental health issues can be a challenge. They said that while some issues will make it easier to communicate with the women, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, other conditions make the woman less able to open up and speak honestly. One coordinator feels that women with substance use and mental health issues are more resistant to leaving an abusive partner. Another felt that when drugs or alcohol are involved, a violent incident is more likely to lead to both the woman and the man being charged with assault. There are concerns that women are self-medicating, especially to deal with the emotional affects of the abuse. Program coordinators also reported that issues are becoming more complex because of the new drugs that are now available. Some say there are also a lot of undiagnosed mental health issues and women who are not willing to take medications. One coordinator pointed out that when it comes time to help the woman find more permanent housing, it can be very difficult to find housing for women with substance use and mental health issues.

If during the assessment, evidence of substance use or mental health issues is revealed, the programs do not typically house the woman in a residential home, as they do not want to put operators or their families at risk. Operators are not trained to deal with these issues. Placing a woman with a substance use or mental health issue in an unsupervised apartment unit on their own or with another woman can also pose problems or lead to conflicts if more than one woman is staying in the unit. One coordinator said mothers with children are particularly nervous about sharing a unit with another woman who has substance use issues. In some cases, women will be sent to a hotel/motel, but some coordinators are hesitant to do that since they rely on the good will of the hotels/motels. They do not want any incidents that would jeopardize those relationships. When local safe home facilities are not an appropriate option for a woman, she is usually sent to the nearest transition home, where there are 24 hour staff and supports. As a last resort, some safe home coordinators ask the hospital or police to keep the woman overnight.

Safe home program coordinators work closely with local mental health and medical professionals to ensure that women are receiving the additional supports they need. However, since many safe homes operate in small or remote areas, the communities do not always have substance use or mental health supports available, in which case the woman may have to be transferred to a larger community with more services.

## Contracts

**Table 9: Use of Contracts with Women in Safe Homes in BC**

Contracts with Women	#	%
Yes	21	81%
No	5	19%
Don't Know	0	0%

N=26

Program coordinators were asked if they have a formal contract that must be signed by women staying in the safe home facilities. Most (81%) of the programs do have a contract. Though the contracts range in terms of what and how much is covered, some of the items in the contracts include:

- Committing to keeping the location of the safe home and the names of the operators confidential
- Not using the telephone, as it may give away the location through call display
- Abstaining from drug and alcohol use while staying at the safe home
- Keeping the door locked at all times
- Not allowing visitors
- Guidelines around chores and house rules
- Guidelines related to children staying in the safe home
- Length of stay
- No contact with the abuser
- Liability waiver
- Permission to share client information with other services providers who may be approached on behalf of the woman
- Guidelines on medications

## Length of Stay

**Table 10: Average Length of Stay for Women in Safe Homes in BC**

Average Length of Stay	#	%
0 nights	1	4%
1-5 nights	18	70%
6 or more nights	7	27%

N=26

The safe home program coordinators were asked how long women stay at the safe home on average. This question was answered based on their perceptions of the average length of stay. Some gave a specific number of nights, while others gave a range. One program does not have a safe home facility in the community and immediately transports women out of town, so the average length of stay in the safe home is 0 nights. According to most Safe Home Program contracts, women can stay between 5 or 7 nights. Over two thirds of the coordinators said that the average length of stay in their safe homes is up to 5 nights. Over one quarter of the coordinators said that women stay longer. Some may stay up to a week, but others offer much longer stays of two weeks to 3 months if there is room. For those programs that allow women to stay longer, the programs tend to have their own apartment/townhouse and some start charging minimal rent after a certain period of time.

**Table 11: Should the Length of Stay be Extended for Women in Safe Homes in BC**

Extend Length of Stay	#	%
Yes	15	58%
No	8	31%
Don't Know	3	12%

N=26

Program coordinators were asked if they would like to see the length of stay extended from 5-7 nights to 10 nights. Over half said they would like to see the length of stay extended, while less than one third said no. Many of those who said they would like to see the length of stay extended said they would like to see it extended longer than 10 nights, even up to one month. Some said they would offer/consider flexibility around the length of stay based on the needs of the particular woman.

Some of the reasons safe home program coordinators would like to see an extended length of stay are:

- It can be difficult to find affordable longer-term housing in less than a week. Program coordinators pointed out that if women cannot find affordable housing before they have to leave the safe home, they may go back to the abusive relationship
  - o Women may be hard to house because they have poor credit ratings or rental histories, they do not have references, or they do not have their identification and other paper work in order to rent a unit
- Women need more time to settle and then make decisions around next steps
- Access to services are limited on weekends and holidays, so more time is needed to help connect women with the services and supports they need
- Not all the required services are available locally; it can take time to connect women with services that are out of town
- Some program coordinators feel that they are “frantic” trying to connect the women to the services and supports she needs; more time would allow them to do a more thorough job

Some of the reasons the safe home program coordinators do not want to see an extended length of stay are:

- Budget pressures when women stay longer
- Not enough space to accommodate new women coming to the safe home
- Longer stays could be very taxing on the families who operate residential safe homes
- Some feel that the extra three nights would not make a significant difference in what can get accomplished
- With programs that do not allow the woman to come and go as she pleases, an extended stay could be difficult for the woman, program coordinator, and volunteers. This is particularly challenging for women with jobs or with children in school, as they cannot miss work or they will lose their job
- For facilities that are unsupervised, it can be difficult to keep women with substance use or mental health issues housed for an extended period of time
- Some said if a longer stay is needed, they can transfer the woman to the nearest transition house where there is supervision

**Table 12: Should the Length of Stay be Extended for some Women in Safe Homes in BC**

Extend Length of Stay for Sub-Populations	#	%
Yes	11	42%
No	12	46%
Don't Know	3	12%

N=26

Less than half of the program coordinators felt that the length of stay should be extended specifically for certain sub-populations.

- Women with children
  - o Since many of the mothers with children are more likely to want to stay in the community so that the children can go to school, more time is needed to help find safe and affordable housing in the community. It can be difficult to find long-term affordable housing for families.
- Older women
  - o Older women need more time to settle in and transition into the next steps.
- Women with pets
  - o It can be hard to find long-term accommodations that will allow pets.
- Women with substance use and mental health issues
  - o Women with substance use or mental health issues might have a reputation of being difficult tenants in small towns. They may also need some time to detox before they can start making decisions.
- Women with disabilities
  - o It can be difficult to find an accessible long-term accommodation.
- Women wanting to leave town or access services out of town
  - o In some smaller communities, it can be difficult to arrange transportation out of town, so women may need some extra days until they can make arrangements to leave the community.

## General Successes, Challenges and Lessons Learned

### Successes

The safe home program coordinators were asked to highlight some of the key successes of their programs. Some themes emerged around the successes that were common to many of the safe home programs:

- Ability to help women locally, despite the fact that many of the safe home programs operate in fairly isolated communities with limited services
- Ability to provide a continuum of care
  - o The program can take care of women's basic needs – shelter, food, linens, transportation, referrals, etc.

- Having the outreach and/or transition house services as part of the same agency that provides the safe home program
  - o Allows the agency to respond quickly to the service needs of the women because the agency offers a “one-stop-shop”
  - o Allows for economies of scale
  - o Can leverage funding and staff between programs
  - o Provides flexibility in the types of services they can offer to women
  - o For those agencies who operate in multiple communities, having outreach workers in other communities makes it easier to provide services to women if they have to leave the community for safety reasons
- Having strong relationships with other service providers in the community
  - o Helps to create awareness about the program. Members of the community and staff at other service providers, especially the police, know when and how to refer women to the safe home program
  - o Can lead to more community awareness about the program. Community support is important, as they provide donations, such as furniture, to help women get set up as they move into more permanent housing or create fundraising opportunities for the safe home programs
- Having more than one person to staff the safe home program
- Having a team approach with support from the agency management, other agency staff, and volunteers
- Having a supportive board that allows for flexibility in the day-to-day operations
  - o Ensures there is always coverage, without burn out of the program coordinator
- Having a thorough in-take assessment
  - o Helps to screen women and ensure that they are referred to the appropriate facility type and services
  - o Helps to anticipate the woman’s needs that may arise
- Program staff bring a wealth of experience and skills
- Some agencies are able to provide training to their staff involved in the program

## Challenges

Clear themes also emerged around common challenges experienced among the safe home programs:

- Burnout for both staff and volunteers can be a challenge – especially given that the programs want to avoid staff turnover
  - o For programs with only one staff person and no volunteers, providing after-hours services can be very taxing on the program coordinator
- Lack of housing options in the community
  - o It is a challenge to find safe and affordable housing for women, especially given the limits around the allowable length of stay at the safe homes
  - o Program coordinators said that there is also a need for more second stage housing for women
- For women who just need an extended stay, even getting into a transition house can be a challenge
- Transportation issues
  - o Since the safe home programs mostly operate in small or remote communities, the services required by women are often located out of town – some communities do not have public transportation, regular inter-city bus service, or taxis, so it can be very difficult to make transportation arrangements to help the women get to their appointments
  - o When the program serves multiple communities over a large geographic area, it is not always possible for the program staff to go and meet the woman and accompany them to the safe home – in communities without local transit services, it can be very difficult for women to make their own way to the safe home if she does not have her own car
  - o Given that many of the programs serve large geographic areas, the transportation time for staff to meet up with the woman uses up a lot of the staff’s contract hours



- Providing anonymity in a small community
  - o Some potential safe home clients might be reluctant to contact the program because of the perception that everyone knows everyone in the community
  - o They are worried that their involvement with the program may not remain confidential
- Cell phone coverage is an issue for some communities
  - o Some programs cannot make use of volunteers who come forward to provide after-hours coverage because they do not have cell phone coverage at their homes
  - o Lack of cell phone coverage can put staff at risk if they go to meet the women
  - o Satellite phones which have better coverage, are extremely costly
- Lack of program funding
  - o Lack of resources to lengthen stays at the safe home
  - o Some program coordinators expressed concerns about their office space. Some have to work from home, while others feel that the agency space is inadequate, especially in terms of available space for confidential meetings with women
  - o Would like to see better wages for staff
  - o Would like funding to provide staff for after-hours coverage
- Lack of funding for training for both staff and volunteers
  - o Program coordinators pointed out women' needs are becoming more complex, so more training is needed
  - o Some program coordinators also expressed that they feel isolated and would like more training opportunities to learn from others
- Lack of awareness about what is considered abuse
- Through the screening process, the woman may not be the best fit to the program, but the safe home coordinator believes she needs a chance, it does not always work out

### **Lessons Learned/Advice**

The safe home program coordinators were asked to share lessons learned in order to provide advice on what has worked well in their programs for the benefit of others. Coordinators provided the following recommendations:

- The safe home program and outreach services should be offered through the same agency or even the same staff person as there is a natural overlap between the safe home and outreach programs
- Assess community needs before setting up new programs, both to assess where programs would be appropriate and to ensure that funding is adequate to meet the needs of each particular community. For example some communities need more emphasis on the outreach component, while others need more housing options for women.
  - o Ensure that the program is flexible to address different local needs
- Ensure that the program is woman-centered
- Take the time to network and make contacts in the community, both for creating awareness about the safe home program and to build contacts for when referring women to other services they need
- Have a thorough in-take assessment procedure, especially given there is an increasing number of women who are presenting with more complicated needs, such as substance use and mental health issues
- Taking on other positions within the agency can help to round out part-time or casual hours allotted for the safe home program. This can help to ensure a more liveable salary for program staff.
- Provide funding to support staff with the provision of after-hours coverage and services to avoid staff burnout
- In one community, the agency has been able to host two 3-day workshops in one year for 25 people from around the region on trauma. The focus is on level 2 training for counsellors who need to understand trauma and assess it effectively.

## Appendix 1. Safe Home Providers

Organization	Location
100 Mile House & District Women's Centre	100 Mile House
North Shore Crisis Services Society	Bowen Island
Castlegar & District Community Services Society	Castlegar
South Peace Community Resources Society	Chetwynd
Yellowhead Community Services Society	Clearwater
Kootenai Community Centre Society	Creston
Kootenai Community Centre Society	Creston
Elkford Women's Task Force Society	Fernie
Campbell River & North Island Transition Society	Gold River/Cortes Island
Golden Women's Centre Society	Golden
Family Resource Centre of Invermere	Invermere
North Kootenay Lake Community Services Society	Kaslo
South Okanagan Women in Need Society	Keremeos
Lillooet Friendship Centre Society	Lillooet
Mackenzie Counselling Services Society	Mackenzie
Robson Valley Home Support Society	McBride
Arrow and Slokan Lakes Community Services	Nakusp
South Okanagan Integrated Community Services Society	Osoyoos
District 69 Society of Organized Services	Parksville
Howe Sound Women's Centre Society	Pemberton/Whistler
South Okanagan Women in Need Society	Penticton
North Island Crisis & Counselling Centre Society	Port Hardy
Princeton Child Care Services	Princeton
Salmo Community Resource Society	Salmo
Northern Health Authority	Tumbler Ridge
Victoria Women's Transition House Society	Victoria

## Appendix 2. Interview Guide

### Successes

1. What would you say are the top strengths or successes of your program?

### Services and Outreach Activities

2. Do you offer any of the following types of support services and outreach activities to women through your program? (This will provide us with more detail than what is reported in the Safe Home Quarterly Data Collection Survey.)
  - Safety planning
  - Emotional supports
  - Transportation (If yes, please elaborate on the types of transportation services you provide.)
  - Referrals to counseling (e.g. mental health, addictions, etc.)
  - Referrals to other services
  - Assistance with completing subsidized housing applications
  - Assistance with locating market housing
  - Assistance in accessing/navigating legal aid
  - Accompaniment to court
  - Accompaniment to the police to file reports
  - Assistance in accessing income assistance
  - Assistance with accessing health care
  - MCFD accompaniment and/or advocacy
  - Food for meals
  - Personal care services (e.g. personal care items, clothing, laundry, etc.)
  - Community education and awareness (Please elaborate.)
  - Services for former women (those who have been housed and those who have not been housed) (If yes, please elaborate.)
  - Other (Please describe.)
3. Which services and outreach activities are most often accessed by your women?
4. Which services and outreach activities are least often accessed by your women?
5. Have there been any challenges or lessons learned in providing particular support services or activities we just discussed for women? If yes, please elaborate.
6. Do you provide any services or activities specifically for children?
  - a. If yes, what types of services or activities do you offer for children who accompany your adult women?
  - b. If yes, what have been some of the challenges or lessons learned of providing services for children?
  - c. If no, why do you not provide services or activities for children?
  - d. If no, would you like to offer services or activities for children?
7. Are there additional services or outreach activities that you would like to offer to women through your program?
  - a. If yes, please describe the additional services and activities?
  - b. If yes, why are you not currently offering these services or activities?

## Program

8. What is the average length of stay for a woman?
9. Most safe home programs contracts allow women to stay for 5 or 7 days. Do you think the maximum length of stay should be extended to 10 days?
10. Do you think that there should be differing lengths of stay for any particular sub-populations?
  - a. If yes, which sub-populations?
  - b. If yes, what should the average length of stay be for these sub-populations?
11. Which communities do you serve?
12. What does your program have in place to protect the safety of your women?
  - a. For women staying with a family in a residential home.
  - b. For women staying in a hotel or motel.
  - c. For women staying in the program's apartment/townhouse.
13. Do you have policies and procedures in place to protect the safety of staff and volunteers?
14. Does your program have a contract that must be signed by women staying in the safe house?
15. Has your program seen an increased prevalence of women with mental health and substance use issues?
  - a. If yes, does the increased prevalence of women with mental health and substance use issues pose any additional challenges? (If yes, explain)
  - b. If yes, how do you address these additional challenges?
16. How are your woman files stored?
  - Electronic files
  - Paper files
  - On site at agency
  - Off-site (please specify)
17. Do you feel that the quarterly reporting you are asked to do for BC Housing accurately reflects what you do?
  - a. If no, do you have any suggestions to improve the quarterly reporting process?

## Facilities

18. Do you offer the following types of facilities to women (please indicate the number of each type of facility available through your program for each type)?
  - A room in a hotel or motel
  - Residential homes (#\_\_\_\_\_)
  - Apartment/townhouse rented/leased by the safe home program (#\_\_\_\_\_)
  - Apartment/townhouse owned by the safe home program (#\_\_\_\_\_)
  - Provide transportation to another community with a transition house immediately or after one night in a motel
  - Other (please describe) (#\_\_\_\_\_)
19. Does your program offer wheelchair accessible facilities?
20. What would you say are the advantages to the types of facilities you provide through your safe home program?
21. What would you say are the disadvantages of the types of facilities you provide through your safe home program?
22. What is the process for women to get into:
  - a. A room in a hotel/motel.
  - b. Residential homes.
  - c. The apartment/townhouse.

## After-hours Services

23. Does your program operate 24 hours/7 days a week?
  - a. If yes, what kinds of services are offered after-hours?
  - b. If yes, how many referrals do you get on average after 5pm in a month?
  - c. If yes, how are after-hours calls handled (e.g. on duty staff or volunteer or pager system, etc)?
  - d. If yes, what are some of the challenges or lessons learned in operating 24 hours/7 days a week?
  - e. If no, why not?
  - f. If no, how are after-hours calls handled (e.g. is there a referral number left on the voice mail message)?

## Staffing Structure

24. How many paid staff members are involved with operating the safe home?
25. Do paid staff work:
  - Full-time
  - Part-time
  - Casual basis
26. Do paid staff work:
  - Daytime hours
  - After-hours (evenings and weekends)
  - Both
27. Do any of your paid staff take on multiple roles or positions within the organization/society?
  - a. If yes, what are some examples of the multiple roles one staff person might have?
28. Does your program experience any challenges when recruiting paid staff? If yes, please provide some examples.
29. Does your program experience any challenges with retaining paid staff? If yes, please provide some examples.
30. Does your program rely on volunteers?
  - a. If yes, what kinds of activities do your volunteers do?
  - b. If yes, what kind of time commitment do they have to make to the program?
  - c. If yes, how many volunteers help with the safe home program?

## Referrals and Partnerships

31. Do you provide any programs, services, or outreach activities in partnership with other organizations that provide violence against women services?
  - a. If yes, which organizations do you partner with on a regular basis?
  - b. If yes, which types of programs/services/activities do you provide in partnership with other violence against women organizations?
  - c. If yes, what have been some of the successes in partnering with other organizations?
  - d. If yes, what have been some of the challenges or lessons learned in partnering with other organizations?
  - e. If no, why does your program not partner with other organizations?
  - f. If no, would you like to partner with other organizations?
32. How would you describe the relationship between your safe home program and the nearest transition home (e.g. do you refer women to the nearest transition house, how do you arrange transportation costs for women traveling between your safe home and the transition house, etc.)?
33. Does your community have a separate outreach program funded through Public Safety and Solicitor General?

- a. If yes, in what ways do the two programs collaborate (e.g. communication, programs)?

### **General Challenges and Lessons Learned**

34. What are the top three challenges with your program?
35. Do you have any advice you would like to share with other safe home programs based on lessons learned in your program?