

Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society



**Report to the
Community**

2021-22



Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society

"In our most vulnerable time in our private lives, [MHWSS staff] discretion and empathy helped me make the positive decisions I needed to make, and their support helped me achieve my goal."

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2021-22

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WHO WE ARE

The Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society is a non-profit organization. Our services are available at no cost and we serve Medicine Hat and surrounding area.

OUR VISION

All individuals live free from violence and abuse.

OUR MISSION

The Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society supports individuals impacted by family violence by providing them with safe shelter, education, advocacy and access to community resources. We are committed to social change by providing programs and services that promote treating all people with respect and dignity.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- We believe that violent and abusive behavior is a deliberate choice;
- We honor that victims always respond and resist to abuse and violence;
- We believe that people have the capacity to change;
- We are committed to providing a positive social response to every person;
- We believe in providing a socially responsible and financially accountable organization to the community;
- We value innovative practices and strong advocacy that offers a strong public voice;
- We believe that dedicated and compassionate staff can effect change.

PRESIDENT'S

Message

On behalf of the Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society's Board of Directors, it is an honour to share our annual Report to the Community as we reflect on this past year and look to the future.



Much of the Board's focus in this time frame has been the creation of a new strategic plan to guide us in the years ahead. We selected "A Flourishing Shelter Society" as the theme for this new plan, with an emphasis on four pillars: Culture, Facility, Funding, and Staff.

Family violence impacts everyone and anyone. It is imperative we build a **CULTURE** that is welcoming and inclusive to all. In recent years this has included expanding programming and services to be inclusive of all genders and we will continue to build upon this and other inclusive practices.

Our **FACILITIES** are home, even if just temporarily, for those staying in shelter. It's vital that these spaces be safe, functional, and accessible. This past summer our Musasa House Second Stage Shelter underwent renovations with this in mind, and we're currently looking at what renovations are needed at Phoenix Safe House Emergency Shelter.

Stable, predictable **FUNDING** is crucial to maintaining existing programming. We continue to look for ways to diversify our funding streams and build our Shelter Legacy Fund, especially as we look to meeting future needs within our community. As always, the generosity of our community is awe-inspiring, and a reflection of how deeply so many care about the work we do at MHWSS.

Our **STAFF** is the heart of this organization. Their kindness, knowledge and dedication are what clients remember long after their time with us has ended. As an organization that provides frontline crisis services, staff well-being must be a priority. Some ways we have done this include establishing a staff health spending account and employer funded RRSP plan – and we will continue to look for more ways to invest in our staff.

Our vision of all individuals living free from violence and abuse may seem impossible when faced with all the violence, anger, and pain in this world. But every day at MHWSS we see how change is possible. We witness the courage of those connecting with our supports and services to build safer and happier lives. Many are breaking cycles of violence that have existed for generations.

The board is honoured to be a part of their journey, and part of an organization like MHWSS that makes a safer, flourishing future possible.

Jennifer Kerslake

COMMUNITY Address



One of my favorite times of day at work is when I am sitting at my computer and can look out at our back yard here at Phoenix Safe House. Especially during the summer months, it's when the children are out there playing, or participating in the SAFE camp. I see kids just being kids, in a safe place. They are loud, laughing and filled with peace that they are, for the time being, in a safe place free from the violence they experience at home.

At the MHWSS, we work diligently to ensure we are not only providing a safe place to land in a world of violence and fear, but also an environment of refuge and peace.

We strive hard to make sure when families arrive at our doors they are welcomed and offered a clean and safe bedroom at our emergency shelter, or townhouse at our second stage shelter. That they have nourishing food and staff available 24/7 to

listen and support and offer direction or encouragement.

We are here not to judge, but to walk along with our clients on their journey of healing. At times this is hard, especially when a client decides to return to the abusive partner. At least we know we have planted a seed and now they know where to go the next time they need safety, and even better, have the resources and skills to know how to keep themselves safe.

This is my 16th year with MHWSS, and I am so very honored to be a part of this amazing organization. We have a wonderful team who are passionate and dedicated and want the best for our clients and are willing to advocate and support. But they are tired, so very tired. This work is wonderful and challenging but takes an emotional toll.

This report is dedicated to my staff, I see you and I know how hard you are all

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working to ensure our clients are treated with respect and dignity while receiving the supports and care they need.

This year launches our next three years of strategic planning, and I am so incredibly grateful and proud of our Board of Directors who chose to focus on culture, staff, facilities and funding as a focus for the next three years. Honoring the work our staff do every day, 24/7, 365 days a year is so incredibly important and validating.

This year we have a lot of exciting things to look forward to. We are constantly doing scans of our environment to ensure we are meeting clients' needs to the best of our ability.

In previous years, this has meant, expanding our capacity at the emergency shelter, adding on an onsite daycare, launching our Safe Families Intervention Team (SFIT) program with the Medicine Hat Police Service, partnering with Medicine Hat Community Housing Society to offer a Housing First program, and opening an offsite outreach building.

This past year we expanded into a partnership with Alberta Health Services to offer the Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART) program.

We also launched our text and web chat line this summer to increase the accessibility of our services in addition to our 24/7 help line. Initially our web chat and text line were available 7AM to 11PM daily, and this will soon expand to being available 24/7.

We are most thankful for our community and their incredible ongoing support. These have been a long 30 months of COVID, and we appreciate more than ever the generosity and kindness.

As you can imagine this has been an extra challenging time on the families we serve. A global pandemic and all the stressors that came with that exacerbated an already tense and difficult home situations.

We know our families are struggling and will continue to struggle for a long time to come and we want to ensure we are there for the long term with the programs and services they need to keep themselves safe.

So, thank you to all our funders, donors, volunteers, and staff. Without all of you, none of this would be possible, you are helping grow hope in our community!!

Natasha Carvalho MSc RSW
Executive Director

STATISTICS 2021-2022

Phoenix Safe House **200 Adults**
Emergency Shelter **80 Children**

24/7 Help Line **1,537**
@ Phoenix Safe House **Crisis Calls**

Musasa House **21 Adults**
Second Stage Shelter **32 Children**

Outreach Services **830 Adults**
Adult Support Groups - 41 group sessions held throughout the year, with a total of 28 participants **126 Children**

Housing First **70 Adults**
with Medicine Hat Community Housing **27 Children**



Christmas Hamper Program

137 Adults, 181 Children

S.A.F.E.

2021 Summer Adventure Fun & Education Program

16 Children



Treehouse Daycare

62 Children

"I wouldn't be where I am today, in my life and mind, without the support of your program"

ADULTS SERVED

1,121

CHILDREN SERVED

343

TOTAL SERVED

1,464

OUR STAFF

Phoenix Safe House Emergency Shelter

- Manager of Residential Programs and Services
- Residential Programs Administrator
- Community Support Coordinator
- 6 Crisis Intervention Workers (CIWs)
- 2 CIW Client Care Coordinator
- 2 Part Time Help Line Support Workers
- 5 Relief CIWs
- 2 Child Support Workers
- 2 Child Care Workers
- Household Support Worker

Musasa House Second Stage Shelter

- MH Client Care Coordinator
- 2 Child Support Workers

Outreach Services

- Outreach Supervisor
- 4 Outreach Workers

Administrative Team

- Executive Director
- Assistant Director
- Administrative Assistant
- Human Resources Administrator
- Community Education & Awareness Coordinator
- Volunteer & Donations Coordinator
- 1.5 Facility Maintenance Workers

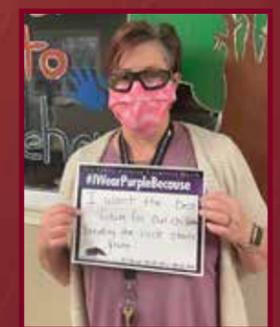
MHC Practicum Students

- Crisis & Musasa - 2 fall, 2 winter Social Work Program
- Child Support - 1/ year Child & Youth Care Program

SAFE Summer Students

- 2 during summer months

As of September 1, 2022



OUR Volunteers



1,385+ hours

of service provided by volunteers.

A change in how we record volunteer hours means this amount reflects volunteer hours from October 2021 to March 2022.

'A flourishing Shelter Society'



When our team set out to choose the theme of our new strategic plan, they selected "A Flourishing Shelter Society" as a fitting focus.

It's a theme that reflects our past successes, our strengths, and our goals for the future as we address emerging issues for our organization as we responded to the needs of our community.

MHWSS's previous strategic plan expired in 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic delaying the commencement of the new strategic planning process until September 2021.

Many of the lessons learned throughout the pandemic were incorporated into our new strategic plan, as we continued to adapt to the changing needs of our community and an increased demand for services and supports.

Our staff has been key to navigating not just the pandemic, but our 40+ years of serving our community. Staff input was vital throughout the strategic planning process, and with them we explored the following themes:

- What do you value about the work you do and the role you play at MWHSS?
- If you could improve something about MHWSS's present services, what would it be?
- What do you think we could do that would have the biggest impact on our clients' lives?
- What is a small step we could take that would help us build a better culture for our employees?

From this feedback the strategic planning team established four focal areas: **Culture, Facility, Funding and Staff**, and developed "possibility statements" for each to guide our decisions and priorities in the years ahead.

Most importantly, our strategic plan is about our clients. Focusing on these four areas lays a foundation for helping them build lives free from violence, where they can pursue their goals in a state of dignity - and most of all, flourish.

Strategic Plan Highlights:

Culture

MHWSS is a flourishing organization because it supports and welcomes all populations to thrive in a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment to ensure all people live free from violence.

Facility

MHWSS creates a flourishing community by providing a safe and dynamic shelter that connects programs and services adapted to needs.

MHWSS's facility needs are comprised of both short-term initiatives for existing structures, and a long-term vision to build an expanded shelter environment.

Funding

MHWSS possesses stable resources to maintain programs and grow responsibly by diversifying funding streams.

Staff

MHWSS makes a commitment to invest in current and future staff to create an engaging and collaborative environment that ensures fair compensation, benefits, and supports overall well-being.

MHWSS employees are mission-driven, service-centred individuals who work with individuals in a high stage of distress and trauma. Maintaining a healthy workforce is a vital component of MHWSS's ability to achieve its mission.

"Human flourishing is best understood as a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good - happiness, mental and physical health, meaning/purpose, and close social relationships."

TEXT LINE & WEB CHAT

The Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society launched text line and web chat services this June.

By texting 587-850-5885 or visiting mhwss.ca daily between 7AM-11PM, community members can connect with a Crisis Intervention Worker for support, help, safety planning – and even arranging intake into shelter, just like they would be able to do through our 24/7 help line.

Why a Text Line & Web Chat?

- Now a preferred form of communication for many people;
- Increases accessibility for those with disabilities or language barriers;
- Provides more options for those without access to a phone, or whose abuser may be monitoring their communications.

Currently MHWSS is one of two shelters in Alberta who provide this service.

We will continue to gather data and feedback as we move forward, to adapt how the program runs to best respond to our community's need.

We want to especially send a thank you to all our dedicated staff who put in many hours to make the launch of these new services possible!



CONNECTIONS
MADE THROUGH
WEB CHAT OR
TEXT MESSAGE.

From June 1 to
September 1, 2022

2,316 MINUTES SPENT IN
CONVERSATION WITH
CHATTERS

REFERRALS MADE ... to a variety of local agencies, such as the Medicine Hat Police Service/RCMP, Addictions Support, Income Support, Legal Aid, and Mental Health Services.

One individual who reached out to us was a former client. They shared that having the text line available made them feel comfortable reconnecting for the support they still needed.



"I struggle with guilt and regret and self-blame, but since I have been in this program it has helped me so much. It is giving me strength, insight, and hope."



Top Left: MHWSS Outreach staff and Cst. Kinsi Steiger at our annual Memorial Walk for Family Violence Prevention Month. **Top Right:** Plains Midstream donated and built vegetable garden boxes for our Musasa House Clients. **Middle Left:** MHWSS Board members holding their #IWearPurpleBecause sign for FVPM. **Bottom Left:** The amazing number of pajamas donated through the annual "Bring a Child a Smile" campaign, run by Educational Support Workers with CUPE Local 829. **Bottom Right:** A beautiful day for golf at our 2021 Charity Golf Classic, sponsored by Scotiabank Group.

Website Redesign & Relaunch

Our newly redesigned website was launched in June alongside text line and web chat services. Visit mhwss.ca to see!

Domestic Abuse Response Team

Our Domestic Abuse Response Team (DART) program launched at the Medicine Hat Regional Hospital mid-November 2021, and has since expanded to include the hospitals in Oyen, Taber, Brooks, and Bassano.

Screening for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in a healthcare setting creates opportunities that patients may not otherwise have to safely talk about their experience of abuse, connect to referrals and supports, increase their safety and improve their health.

The DART program began in 2017 as a pilot project between the Red Deer Regional Hospital ER Department and the Red Deer Outreach Centre, and has since expanded to various locations across Alberta.

Through our partnership with Alberta Health Services, hospital staff screen patients for family violence. If abuse is identified and the patient gives permission, AHS staff will then contact the MHWSS DART responder, who is available 24/7.

Our DART responder may attend in person or by phone to provide support, safety planning, danger assessment, referrals, transportation, and immediate access to MHWSS services such as intake into our Phoenix Safe House Emergency Shelter.

On average, there have been one to two DART

calls per month. Since the screening process is a newer one, we believe numbers will increase as hospital staff become more accustomed to asking the screening questions.

There have been positive outcomes from the calls we have responded to. Three DART clients have become Outreach Clients, and we assisted two individuals in accessing emergency shelter here and in Brooks. As well, we've successfully connected with each client for follow-up care, even if they did not connect with Outreach supports.

In August our DART coordinator visited the ER department at Oyen's Big Country Hospital to discuss any questions they had. Discussions have also taken place with staff and support liaison workers from the Bow Island Health

Centre on how to best support the Low-Level German Community.

Hospital staff are increasingly connecting with us to ask questions about family violence and our services, and we're excited to see these positive connections grow with the communities we're supporting.

We've successfully connected with each client for follow-up care, even if they did not connect with Outreach supports.

Community Connection



Family Violence Prevention Month

- ✦ Purple ribbon put up throughout community by local schools, community members, and organizations.
- ✦ Annual Mayoral Declaration, Memorial Walk, and Pet Walk. ✦ #IWearPurpleBecause campaign on radio and social media.
- ✦ Displays at the Esplanade, Medicine Hat College, and Medicine Hat Public Library.
- ✦ Eight community webinars sharing information on family violence, MHWSS services, and building a safer, more inclusive community.



Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month

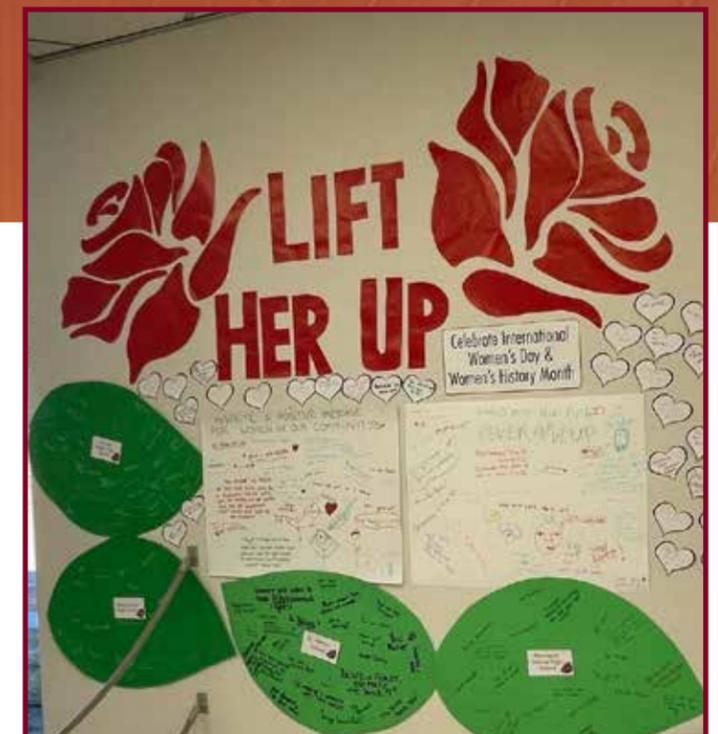
- ✦ Connected with 320+ local youth through presentations & lunchtime activities in February.



December 6th Vigil at Medicine Hat College to mark the National Day of Remembrance & Action on Violence Against Women.

International Women's Day

- ✦ Interactive display at the Medicine Hat Public Library where community members were encouraged to write words of celebration and encouragement for women in our community to mark International Women's Day & Women's History Month.
- ✦ MHWSS staff and clients contributed by adding hearts to the display with positive messages.
- ✦ Students and staff at Monsignor McCoy High School, Crescent Heights High School, Medicine Hat High School, and St. Mary's Middle School also participated by filling up green leaves with positive messages.



CLARE'S LAW & MHWSS

What is Clare's Law?

Clare's Law was first enacted in the UK in remembrance of Clare Wood, who was murdered by an ex-partner in 2009.

Wood's family believes that had she been aware of her ex-partner's longstanding criminal record including multiple acts of violence against women, she would have never entered into a relationship with him.

Clare's Law In Alberta:

The Disclosure to Protect Against Domestic Violence Act came into effect in Alberta in April 2021. It allows individuals who feel at risk for Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) to apply to see if their partner has a history of domestic violence, stalking/harassment, breaches of no contact orders and other relevant criminal acts.

A third party can apply on behalf of a person at risk, if they have consent. Police can disclose relevant criminal history to individuals at risk. The person whose information is being requested will not be notified.

How is MHWSS involved?

MHWSS can assist individuals who wish to submit an application.

We are a partnering agency with the Medicine Hat Police Service for the disclosure portion of the application, so applicants are provided immediate connection to supports as they decide how to move forward with the information available.

While the reach of Clare's Law is limited since many cases of Family Violence are never reported to police, some positive outcomes from Clare's Law we've witnessed include how it can provide an individual insight into their partner's history, help them assess their risk, and connects them with our supports and services.

"Making the first call was hard ... I'm so glad I did."

Beyond Medicine Hat:

In Alberta, 58% of women who completed a Danger Assessment with a shelter worker in 2020-21 were assessed to be in severe or extreme danger of being murdered by their intimate partner.

"Keira's Law" is currently awaiting second reading in the Canadian Senate, and if passed would require federally appointed judges to receive education on family violence. It's named after four-year-old Keira Kagan, who was murdered by her father while on a court-ordered visit in 2020, despite child welfare and a family court judge being informed he was showing behaviour consistent with a parent who would kill or harm a child.

The "More Than" National Awareness Campaign was launched this year by Women's Shelters Canada (WSC) to illustrate how organizations like MHWSS provide "more than" shelter.

The Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability recorded 173 women and girls murdered in Canada in 2021. This is a 26% increase from 2019. From available information, 35% were killed by a current/former intimate partner, 20% by family, 7% by an acquaintance, 5% by a stranger. In 34% of cases, the relationship to the victim was not disclosed by police/media.

SHELTER LEGACY Program

LET YOUR LEGACY LIVE ON

Join a remarkable group of individuals who have taken steps to ensure that programs and services are available for victims of family violence.

WHAT IS AN ENDOWMENT FUND?

An endowment fund is an income source where the principal is never spent. The interest from the Endowment Fund is the only portion of the fund spent to support the work of the Medicine Hat Women's Shelter Society.

ENDOWMENT OPTIONS

Bequests: Gifts or personal property, real estate or a specific sum of money.

Life Insurance: Through an existing policy or transfer ownership of existing policy.

Direct Gifts: Recognized with a Tax Receipt.

Retirement Funds: A charitable gift of all or any portion of funds remaining at death.

Gifts That Give Back: Gifts that provide a future gift for the society and a lifetime of income for the donor. This type of gift is irrevocable and provides immediate tax benefits for the donor, [ie. Remainder Trust.]

TALK TO US!

We can explain more fully each of these gift plans, and assist you in meeting your financial needs and philanthropic desires.

For more information about the Shelter Legacy Program, contact our executive director Natasha Carvalho — 403-527-8223 or natashac@mhwss.ca

"What you leave behind is not what is engraved in stone monuments, but what is woven into the lives of others."

-Pericles

LEGACY PROGRAM MEMBERS

Drew & Frances Barnes*
Gerry Carter*
Mike Salmon & Natasha Carvalho*
Cleanrite Services
Joyce Condon*
Don & Doris Dempster*
Nick & Voula Douvis
Dr. Trevor M. Brooks
Professional Corporation
Craig & Donna Elder*
Dianne & Cecil Finch*
Gerald & Elaine Freedman*
Muriel Glenn
Lyn Gordon* (in Memory of Toni Ward)
Carol & Joel Heese*

Kambi & Paul Heywood*
Hillcrest Church*
Bruce & Marlene Hubbard
Heather & Danny Koch*
Blake Pederson & Angela Kolody
Stan & Robin Krause
Randy & Linda Lehr*
Victor & Myra Link
PG Mastel
Miles & Noel Maughan*
Amanda & Grant McCrie*
Andy & Sherry McGrogan*
Gerald Borch & Hilary Munro*
Mike King & Rose O'Donnell King*

Bailey & Ryan O'Reilly
Darlene & Todd O'Reilly*
Catherine Ohama*
Sandy & Kevin Redden*
Mark Lewall & Karen Saffran
Marlene & Kevin Semrau
Dan Kammerer & Cheryl Shabatura*
Sons of Abraham
Congregation*
St. Paul Lutheran - Women's
Missionary League*
Ron & Sheila Verhegge
Deena & Mark West*
Jim & Anne White*
Tara Williams
Anonymous*

*Shelter Legacy Program Founding Members

MAJOR SUPPORTERS



@mhwomensshelter