



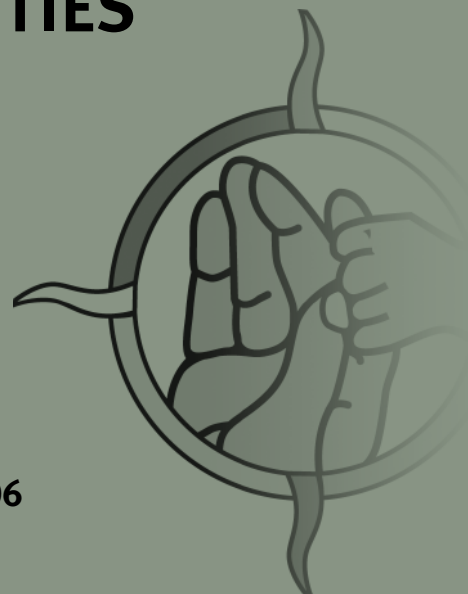
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Against Family Violence
(NACAFV)



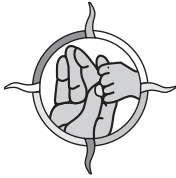
ENDING VIOLENCE

IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES:
BEST PRACTICES
IN ABORIGINAL SHELTERS
AND COMMUNITIES

JANUARY 2006



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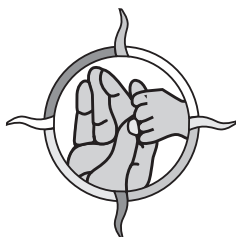
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Wishes to acknowledge

**Anita Olsen Harper
B.Ed., M.A.**

November 30, 2005

Financial assistance was provided by the Women's Program, Status of Women Canada. The opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the official policy of Status of Women Canada.



**National Aboriginal Circle
Against Family Violence
(NACAFV)**

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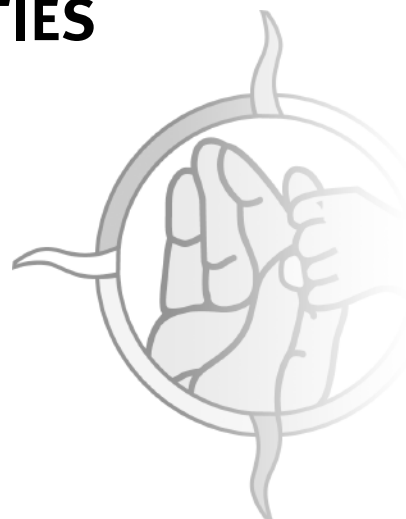




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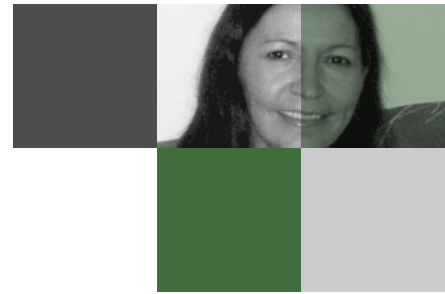
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PREFACE



The National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence (**NACAFV**) wishes to thank the Status of Women Canada (SWC) for its contribution to this project; without it, this project would not have transpired¹. Also, special thanks to all the shelter directors who helped **NACAFV**'s lead consultant, Anita Olsen Harper with the site consultations despite their extremely demanding schedules. A big thank-you also goes to **NACAFV**'s Board members, some of whom accompanied Ms. Olsen Harper on the site visits and also provided invaluable help and support.

This exercise was indeed rewarding (and sometimes emotionally charged) work, and much was learned about the daily operation of women's shelters that serve Aboriginal communities. These consultations brought forward an awareness of the vast amount of work that is still needed to help shelter directors accomplish their main goal of providing safety and protection to women and children fleeing family violence. Their dedication to serving women is indeed exemplary and continues to be an inspiration.

1 Note: however, that the opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the official policy of Status of Women Canada.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This project, entirely funded by Status of Women Canada (SWC), began with visits to shelters in the two Manitoba communities of Fisher River First Nation in Koostatak and Mathias Colomb First Nation (also known as Pukatawagan). Its purpose was to develop a study of best practices in dealing with family violence in Aboriginal communities derived from discussions of collaborative approaches that integrate the contributions of other internal agencies and organizations. This pilot phase resulted in a report by the same author, entitled “Ending Violence in Aboriginal Communities: Women and Community Agencies” (March 31, 2005), contracted by the National Aboriginal Circle Against Family Violence (**NACAFV**).

Upon completion of this exercise, ten other site visits were conducted. Before deciding on which shelters to visit, the **NACAFV** took into consideration the locations (urban, rural, remote and special-access communities) located both on- and off-reserve across Canada using Indian and Northern Affairs Canada’s 4 Geographic Zone classifications and clientele. This included choosing a non-Aboriginal organization (YWCA) with a high Aboriginal clientele. The definition of “Aboriginal” used is: Indian, Métis and Inuit, as recognized in the Canadian constitution (The Constitution Act, 1982).

Also, upon commencement of this study, we were informed that another national Aboriginal organization was doing a similar study in Inuit territories. As a result of this, these areas were not visited so as to avoid duplication of efforts. There were, however, a high number of Inuit clientele in the Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal.

The following 12 shelters were consulted. Of these, one shelter, Mathias Colomb First Nation’s Mamawehetowin Crisis Centre, was not visited; it was, however, represented by its Director at the session in Koostatak, Manitoba. Except for the Manitoba session in March 2005, all consultations were held during the months of August through November 2005:

- Akwesasne Family Violence Centre (Akwesasne, Ontario)
- Nuxalk Nation Transition House Society, Sxnlhh Tran (Bella Coola, British Columbia)
- Kitchenuhmaykoosib Equaygamik (Big Trout Lake, Ontario)
- Xolhemet Second Stage Housing Facility (Chilliwack, British Columbia)
- First Nation Healing Centre (Koostatak, Manitoba)
- Paspew House (Fort Chipewyan, Alberta)
- Mamawehetowin Crisis Centre (Mathias Colomb First Nation, Manitoba)
- Native Women’s Shelter of Montreal (Montreal, Quebec)
- Siksika First Nation (Siksika, Alberta)
- YWCA of Prince Albert (Prince Albert, Saskatchewan)
- Nukum Munik Women’s Shelter (Sheshatshui, Labrador and Newfoundland)
- We’koqma’q Family Healing Centre (Waycobah, Nova Scotia)



It is important to note that Siksika First Nation in eastern Alberta does not currently have a shelter. Although this community definitely needs a women's shelter (a full 90 percent of police reports concern domestic violence), despite several years of seeking funding, efforts have been unsuccessful.

A review of the 12 sites revealed a stark observation: strategies to address family violence in Aboriginal communities are very limited — they can hardly be considered in the infancy stage. One main reason is the lack of awareness of the effects of this situation. Another is the long-term, ongoing lack of resources. Another possible explanation is that domestic violence is accepted as normal in many places, further warranting the need for the raising of awareness of the long-term detrimental effects of this issue.

Furthermore, women's shelters are the only focal point for addressing the issue of family violence in the various communities examined; there appears to be little movement to garner other support to address the issue. The question certainly arises as to whether women's shelters should be considered to be the primary vehicles to combat family violence in Aboriginal communities. Shelters may wish to position themselves as only one of several key agencies spearheading efforts in this area within a community.

The finding that Aboriginal shelters are chronically underfunded is significant in that it indicates how few resources and time are available to devote to planning and developing broader community strategies to address family violence, let alone to advance a model that can be broadcast elsewhere in the country.

Because of grossly inadequate resources, training for staff is also minimal in all Aboriginal women's shelters; program standards, informal as they are, are therefore varied. Without exception, any funding increases that do exist do not even reflect the national increase in inflation. The seriousness of this problem is especially profound because the shelters rely mainly on one funding source; they rarely have support from additional agencies to which they can turn during lean times.

An ancillary goal of gathering information on best practices was to acquire an indication of the shelters' specific needs for training, capacity-building and other types of support **NACAFV** and its partners might provide. This information resulted in what can be used as an indicator for a future in-depth training needs assessment.

Another overall finding was that the success of any shelter is largely dependent on its executive director. Generally speaking, a strong shelter director propels a community towards more awareness of family violence and its effects, and this awareness can become the impetus for positive community action. This finding may be the foundation for developing a training curriculum that leads to more successful shelter directors.

However, this report concentrates specifically on best practices because of their potential usefulness to the Circle's members which also includes the shelters funded by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (currently 35 across Canada). Moreover, during the early 1990s, when shelters on reserves were being established, no monies were designated to train upcoming shelter managers and staff. Consequently, both managers and staff working in shelters since that time



could only operate using “trial and error” approaches to a large extent. The crisis mode of daily life in shelters also contributes to the lack of uniformity and to less-effective delivery of services in Aboriginal women’s shelters across the country.

Categories of best practices used in this report are as follows:

- Location
- Security and Safety
- Administrative (Staff, Shelter Policies, At Intake, Data Collection, Networking and Protocols)
- Funding
- Involving the Community
- Programming (Overall, Men’s, Children’s)
- Training / Capacity-building
- Follow-up
- When There Is No Shelter

Barriers and challenges to shelters’ success are also listed, along with general observations as to what works and what doesn’t.

Generally speaking, the best practices listed in this study were highly recommended by executive directors and staff with whom we spoke and should help to produce the results that shelter directors seek. They are sometimes the result of trial and error, sometimes a matter of common sense and sometimes the result of experience in the field. Because of the diverse cultural and regional influences in a country as large as Canada, not all best practices apply in all areas.







1. THE PROJECT



1.1 OVERVIEW

Overall, the project's goal was to provide a useful list of best practices by consulting with shelters across Canada. The majority of the 12 shelters chosen were in Aboriginal communities, while the remaining were in centres with a high number of Aboriginal clients.

To get a good cross-section of responses, **NACAFV** also considered the location of shelters to achieve a balance between: urban, rural, remote and special access (as defined by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's 4 Geographic Zone classifications for communities). Also considered was a mix of on- and off-reserve locations and a balance of Eastern Canada and Western Canada representation. The project also served to highlight the important role other community organizations play in supporting women's shelters and helping to address family violence.

Best practices were identified through discussions of collaborative approaches within these communities. Shelter directors, staff and clients constituted the main body of interviewees; however, the contributions of community organizations were integrated as much as possible. The range of community organizations and workers (although not each of these were necessarily interviewed) included: hospitals, health centres, law enforcement personnel (police, prosecutor's offices, judges, legal services, probation / parole officers, victim witness departments), mental health / substance abuse workers, housing officers, employers (private sector), community governments (commonly called Band offices), social services, the faith community (churches), transportation providers, schools (also affiliated colleges and universities), counsellors (traditional and Western-based) and liaison with advocacy agencies in the larger Aboriginal community (eg., Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Native Women's Association of Canada, Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada, etc.)

An ancillary goal was to solicit responses from interviewees on shelters' training needs, capacity-building requirements and other supports the Circle and its partners might provide.

The project unfolded with a two-person **NACAFV** team, which met with shelter staff and some community members. Table 1 lists the shelters visited or represented, by location:

[Qy: special access (isolated, remote) above implies all remote or isolated areas are considered "special access" but these terms are used separately below?]



TABLE 1: LOCATION OF SHELTERS VISITED

Name of Shelter	Category	East-West
Akwesasne Family Violence Centre, Akwesasne, Ontario	urban, on-reserve	East
Nuxalk Nation Transition House Society, Snxlhh Tran, Bella Coola, British Columbia	remote, on-reserve	West
Kitchenuhmaykoosib Equaygamik, Big Trout Lake, Ontario	special access, isolated,	East
Xolhemet Second Stage Housing Facility, Chilliwack, British Columbia	on-reserve urban, on-reserve	West
First Nation Healing Centre, Koostatak, Manitoba	rural, on-reserve	West
Paspew House, Fort Chipewyan, Alberta	isolated, off-reserve	West
Mamawehetowin Crisis Centre, Mathias Colomb First Nation (also known as Pukatawagan), Manitoba	remote, special access,	West
Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, Montreal, Quebec	on-reserve urban, off-reserve	East
YWCA of Prince Albert, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan	non-Aboriginal; urban, off-reserve	West
Nukum Munik Women's Shelter, Sheshatshui, Labrador and Newfoundland	isolated, off-reserve	East
Siksika First Nation (no shelter), Siksika, Alberta	rural, on-reserve	West
We'koqma'q Family Healing Centre, Waycobah, Nova Scotia	rural, on-reserve	East

1.2 WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES?

There may not be a common understanding of the term best practices among anti-violence workers. While some regard best practices as a matter of common sense, this interpretation is subject to someone's personal perspective, philosophy or cultural norms. Considering the great variation in indigenous and Canadian norms, "common sense" is therefore, a definition that is subject to bias.

Several other definitions of best practices are listed below. They are derived from a range of different perspectives, including business, government, educational, international and encyclope-



dia definitions. From this list, shelter directors can derive meanings of the term “best practices” and apply them to their own shelter environments.

- A case study considered to be a good example of a business discipline. (*DM Review*, www.dmreview.com)
- The processes, practices or systems identified in public and private organizations that perform exceptionally well and are widely recognized as improving an organization’s performance and efficiency in specific areas. Successfully identifying and applying best practices can reduce business expenses and improve organizational efficiency (*U.S. Government Accountability Office*, www.gao.gov)
- Processes and activities that have been shown in practice to be the most effective. (IT, California State University, <http://it.csusb.edu/departments/data/glossary.html>)
- Best practices are the suggestions of care that experts have agreed upon in particular defined circumstances (Maine Quality Forum, Maine state government, www.mainequalityforum.gov)
- Methodologies that provide beneficial results. Some best practices are general in nature and can be applied to almost every industry; other best practices are industry-specific. (European Commission, <http://europa.eu.int/comm>)
- The term best practice generally refers to the best possible way of doing something; it is used in all types of fields. (*Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Best_practices)

1.3 FUNDAMENTAL PURPOSES OF A SHELTER*

The hardship faced by Aboriginal women who need emergency protection because of family violence may, on the surface, seem to be a personal matter that should not involve anyone outside the immediate family. However, during our consultations, many women clearly stated that violence will fester in the home, or will go underground, if it is not acknowledged and dealt with openly.

Shelter staff generally acknowledged that violence against Aboriginal women in Canada has a root cause in the historic relationship between non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people, specifically in the marginalization of Aboriginal people. Therefore, instead of being a strictly personal problem, violence toward Native women also has a societal dimension.

First Nation communities must recognize that family violence is an historic and communal problem, and that ignoring it will not help anyone, least of all the victims, which include the future generations, our children’s children. Chiefs and Councils that do not accredit shelters or support them in other ways help perpetuate the problem. Aboriginal society, especially male leadership, must commit to long-term undertakings to isolate and weed out factors that condone violence against women and children.

* Note: These few paragraphs are taken from the document, “Ending Violence in Aboriginal Communities: Women and Community Agencies,” which was also authored by Anita Olsen Harper (March 31, 2005) for NACAFV. This document explains in much greater detail than is found here the background, approach and methodology used in the pilot phase of this project and carried on throughout its duration.



Unfortunately, the need for women's shelters in Aboriginal communities seems firmly entrenched. Indeed, many shelter directors expressed their wish to increase services, programs and physical facilities because of a greater need. In this context, shelters serve to:

- provide for the physical and psychological safety of women and children who are fleeing domestic violence by providing the basic necessities (food, shelter and clothing) in a way that preserves dignity, without condescension;
- provide security by offering an environment that is physically safe (within as well as from outside the shelter);
- minimize clients' isolation and desolation through contact with others (staff and other clients in the shelter) and strive for a pleasant nurturing atmosphere;
- support clients' efforts to reconnect with support systems, such as family, friends, work contacts, etc., where appropriate and desired;
- assist clients to reduce victimization by helping them re-establish control over their own lives;
- help clients to formulate realistic plans and set attainable goals;
- provide as many services as possible for clients, including information on the dynamics of domestic violence, referring to other agencies where necessary and offering advocacy in all required areas, such as for legal, housing, parenting, relationship, social services, etc. issues; and
- support clients' children in as many ways as possible.

The empathetic and supportive services women's shelters provide to abused Aboriginal women and their families are undeniably essential for those who must leave their homes because of violence. Although some women leave temporarily while others never return, shelters play a vital role in helping women to become aware of choices about which they may otherwise not have known.

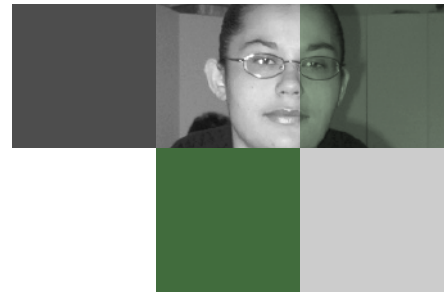
As in all organizations, shelters can improve their services and programs. Just as no organization is perfect, there is no perfect shelter. These best practices are meant to provide helpful "lessons learned" about shelter operations so that services and programs can grow and advance.

Note that some best practices are so general they could fit anywhere within the topics listed, while some could fit into more than one category. However, to avoid repetition, only one category was chosen. The only exceptions are when best practices are also seen as barriers and challenges.





2. SHELTER PROFILES: THE CONTEXT FOR BEST PRACTICES



The context from which best practices are derived is an important consideration because one shelter's best practice may not be considered even a good practice in another environment. Each shelter director is ideally positioned to evaluate which best practice is most suitable for her own circumstances and purposes.

Shelter directors must consider which best practices apply to their unique circumstances. This can be a productive exercise because it may reveal other angles of a problem or directions to take or, perhaps, reveal other ways of implementing similar processes, programs and services.

Each best practice must be a good fit within an individual shelter's routine; not all best practices can apply in all situations, or be treated as a panacea or cure-all.

The following tables listed below are profiles of communities with which the **NACAFV** visited. Tables 2 through 13 are listed in alphabetical order by community. The tables include an overall summary of the shelter. Mention must also be made that during this study that "Consent for Release of Information" forms were obtained.



TABLE 2:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
Akwesasne Family Violence Centre	Rita Swamp	Mohawk Council of Akwesasne P.O. Box 579 Cornwall, ON K6H 5T3 Tel: (613) 937-4322 Fax: (613) 937-4979 Crisis Line: (613) 937-4208 Toll-free Crisis Line: 1-800-480-4208	All Mohawk communities, including Cornwall Island, St. Regis, Snye and Cornwall Also, other First Nation communities, mostly in southeastern Ontario and southwestern Quebec	urban, on-reserve Akwesasne straddles five borders: Canada, U.S., Ontario, Quebec and New York state.
<p>Shelter Profile</p> <p>Akwesasne has a population of about 10,000. The shelter was opened in 1993; the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne committed to provide protection to battered women, while Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) (Project Haven) funded its building². There are ten full-time and five part-time workers with one part-time consultant. There is no Board of Directors, since the entire program is supervised by the Director and Assistant Director of Community and Social Services, who are accountable to the Council. The shelter has five bedrooms with four beds in each room. Second stage housing, with five apartments, is also located on the grounds. Operational funding comes from INAC (direct funding), the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy (funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ontario), and the Coordinated Community Response Team Initiative (funded by Partners Assault Response [PAR] and Partners Assault Response (funded by the Ministry of the Attorney General, Ontario). The shelter serves an average of 80 women annually.</p>				

² In 1988, as part of the Family Violence Initiative (FVI), the federal government launched Project Haven, an on-reserve program by CMHC to create shelters for women and children who are victims of violence. The operational budget was jointly administered by INAC and Health Canada with the help of a Native Advisory Committee. In mid-1997, CMHC and INAC announced plans to construct ten new family violence emergency shelters on-reserve; nine new shelters became operational within 1998–99, and the last shelter was completed in 2000.



TABLE 3:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
Nuxalk Nation Transition House Society, Snxlhh Tran	Emma Johnson	P.O. Box 919 Bella Coola, BC V0T 1C0 Tel: (250) 799-0070 Fax: (250) 799-0041	Bella Coola, Anahim Lake, Red Stone Reserve, Little Anahim Reserve, Waglisla (Bella Bella), Klemtu, Oweekeno	special access, on-reserve This First Nation represents almost 60 percent of the Bella Coola Valley's population
<p>Shelter Profile The Nuxalk Nation has a population of 2,175 (1996, Statistics Canada). The shelter was opened in 1998. The need for the shelter was realized after a young woman from the community was raped and brutally murdered near the shelter's location. CMHC (Project Haven) funded its building. There are three full-time and 11 part-time or casual workers. All members on the Board of Directors are volunteers and include an Elder. The shelter has four bedrooms, with a total occupancy of 15. There is a definite need for second stage housing. Operational funding from INAC goes directly to the Band. Vancouver Coastal Health (The Vancouver Coastal Health Program is a provincial program that provides a full range of health care services ranging from hospital treatment to community-based residential, home health, mental health and public health services). has contributed to the ground expenses of the shelter. One of the shelter's innovative programs includes helping clients become self-sustaining by planting, caring for and harvesting gardens. The shelter serves an average of six women a week (and their children, as applicable).</p>				

TABLE 4:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
Kitchenuhmaykoosib Equaygamik	Dorothy McKay	P.O. Box 919 Bella Coola, BC V0T 1C0 Tel: (250) 799-0070 Fax: (250) 799-0041	Big Trout Lake, Wawakapewin, Kasabonika, Bearskin Lake, Wunnamen Lake, Fort Severn, Pikangikum, Lac Seul, Cat Lake, Fort Frances and the Kenora area	on-reserve; remote; special-access (fly-in only in summer; the winter road is open for about six weeks from February to mid-March)
<p>Shelter Profile Kitchenuhmaykoosib (Big Trout Lake) has a population of about 1,200. The shelter was opened in 1995. The need for the shelter was realized in the 1970s, since women and children were leaving the community for safety reasons. CMHC (Project Haven) funded its building. There are three full-time house counsellors, one full-time security person, three part-time house counsellors, one part-time security person, one part-time administrator and the Director. There is no Board of Directors; the Director works directly with the Chief and Council. The shelter has six bedrooms, with a total occupancy of 12 (one bed is available for a physically challenged client). There is a definite need for second stage housing, because of the extreme shortage of housing on the reserve. Operational funding, which goes directly to the shelter, comes from INAC. There is no money in the budget for transferring clients to other shelters; when they have to go elsewhere, the receiving shelters have to absorb this cost. The shelter served 153 persons (women and women with children) in fiscal year April 2004 to March 2005.</p>				



TABLE 5:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
Xolhemet Second Stage Housing Facility	Susanne Point	P.O. Box 2025 Sardis Station Main Chilliwack, BC V2R 1A5 Tel: (604) 824-0939 Fax: (604) 824-0937	Serves all 26 bands of the Sto:lo Nation and Sto:lo Tribal Council communities, along with independent communities	urban, on-reserve The on-reserve second stage housing is called the Xolhemet Second Stage Housing Facility, while the off-reserve facility is called the Xolhemet Transition House
<p>Shelter Profile</p> <p>The Sto:lo communities number approximately 5,500 on-reserve and 6,000 off-reserve. Xolhemet Second Stage Housing Facility was opened in April 1996. The present Executive Director, a working committee and Board of Directors were involved in the founding; on-reserve capital funds (Next Step Project) funded its building. The second stage housing facility has five apartments. There are three full-time and two part-time employees. The Board of Directors is made up mostly of the founding members. The Xolhemet Transition House, located off reserve, has 18 beds and six rooms, with one full-time and four part-time employees. Operational funding comes from INAC (direct funding); other, smaller grants are obtained for specific items and/or services. The second stage housing facility is always full to capacity; the shelter served 264 women and children in the 2004–05 fiscal year.</p>				

TABLE 6:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
First Nation Healing Centre	Nancy Harasemiw (Program Administrator)	P.O. Box 365 Koostatak, MB ROC 1S0 Tel: (204) 645-2750 Fax: (204) 645-2546	Fisher River, Peguis and Kinonjeoshtegon First Nations	on-reserve This shelter is located about three hours' drive (280 km) north of Winnipeg
<p>Shelter Profile</p> <p>Fisher River First Nation has a population of about 1,640. After an initiative by Health Canada in 1988 to look at the high rates of Aboriginal family violence, the Chief and Council submitted a proposal to develop a CMHC (Project Haven) shelter in the community of Fisher River Cree Nation. In 1991, the building, now known as the First Nation Healing Centre, was completed. The shelter received its first clients in March 1992. There are nine full-time and two part-time workers. The Board of Directors consists of three members and two portfolio holders that sit on the local government; the shelter is co-managed with the Band. It has eight bedrooms with a total of 28 beds and three family rooms. Operational funding comes from INAC, which flows through the Band administration; other, smaller grants are obtained for specific items and/or services. The shelter serves an average of six families a month.</p>				



TABLE 7:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
Paspew House	Jean Lepine	P.O. Box 417 Fort Chipewyan, AB TOP 1B0 Tel: (780) 697-3329 Fax: (780) 697-3608	Mikisew Cree First Nation, Allison Bay Reserve, Athabasca Chipewyan Reserve and clients from the Northwest Territories	isolated, off-reserve, special access This community has municipal ties with Fort McMurray and two other First Nations (Athabasca Fort Chipewyan Dene First Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation) there is also a significant Métis population.
<p>Shelter Profile Fort Chipewyan has a population of about 1,100. The shelter was opened in 1999 based on community need. CMHC (Project Haven) funded its building. There are three full-time and two casual workers. There is a new Board of Directors that has replaced the advisory board, consisting of five members, two of whom are men. The shelter has four bedrooms with seven beds. Operational funding comes from INAC and is sent to the Mikisew Cree Band office. The shelter is in the process of becoming independent so it can fully manage its own finances. In one quarter (April–June 2005), the shelter served Métis, non-Aboriginal (Caucasian) and on-reserve and off-reserve Aboriginal women for a total of 379 women and 67 children. Not all of these were residents, however: the total includes those using the telephone crisis line and those who came in for counselling sessions.</p>				

TABLE 8:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
Native Women's Shelter of Montreal	Nakuset	P.O. Box 1183 Stn. "A" Montreal, QC H3C 2Y3 Tel: (514) 933-4688 Fax: (514) 933-5747 Toll-free: 1-866-403-4688	The Atlantic provinces, Montreal itself, the North and Far North (receives referrals from Cree and Inuit organizations)	urban, off-reserve The shelter's clientele includes a high number of Inuit women
<p>Shelter Profile Montreal, with a population of close to four million, is the one of the largest cities in Canada. The shelter opened in 1986. The Native Friendship Centre funded a needs assessment for a women's shelter to verify the need. As long as the shelter is located on the land it occupies at present, it pays \$1 a year for the land, but must pay the mortgage on the building. There are ten full-time and four part-time workers. Seven First Nations women sit on the Board of Directors; any changes are made at the Annual General Meeting. The shelter has 13 rooms with 16 beds. Operational funding comes from the Agence de développement de réseaux locaux de services de santé et des services sociaux de Montréal (direct funding) since the shelter is not affiliated with any single First Nation. In one three-month period in 2005, the shelter served 21 on-reserve, 44 off-reserve and 108 Inuit women, for a total of 173 women, and their children.</p>				



TABLE 9:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
YWCA of Prince Albert	Donna Brooks	1895 Central Avenue B West Prince Albert, SK S6V 4W8 Tel: (306) 763-8571 Fax: (306) 763-8165	All central and northern Saskatchewan, mainly	urban, off-reserve The very high number of Aboriginal clients in the YWCA women's shelter system is the reason that NACAFV visited at least one site for this project. All YWCAs across Canada provide service to a high number of Aboriginal women
<p>Shelter Profile Prince Albert has a population of about 45,000. This YWCA was incorporated in 1913 by a group of women who saw a need to provide shelter for women moving into town. The last 10 to 15 years saw a dramatic increase in Aboriginal women victims of violence. There are four full-time and eight part-time workers. Of 11 members on the Board of Directors, one is First Nation; all members are elected by the membership. Twelve rooms, with 24 beds, are funded by a grant from the Saskatchewan Department of Community Resources and Employment. Another seven rooms are funded by the region's First Nations Bands (when they do pay), Correctional Services of Canada and self-pay (women who come in and pay for their own stay – usually newcomers who are looking for an apartment or awaiting other housing arrangements). In 2004, 71 percent of clients were treaty Indians, 14 percent were Métis, 2 percent were non-Status Indians, 8 percent were Caucasian and 5 percent gave no indication – at least 87 percent of the clientele is Aboriginal.</p>				

TABLE 10:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
Mamawehet owin	Tina Colomb	P.O. Box 131 Pukatawagan, MB ROB 1G0 Tel: (204) 553-2198 Fax: (204) 553-2302	Mathias Colomb First Nation (also known as Pukatawagan), mainly	on-reserve, isolated; special access (fly-in only except by train and winter road) This shelter is located approximately 600 km north of Brandon
<p>Shelter Profile Mathias Colomb First Nation (also known as Pukatawagan) has a population of about 2,043. The shelter was founded in 1992 by the Chief and Council with CMHC (Project Haven) funding. There are two full-time, three casual and three stand-by workers. The Board of Directors are nominated by the community and then elected by the number of votes. When there is no Board (as happens), the Chief and Council becomes the voluntary Board. The shelter has three units with a maximum occupancy of five families. Operational funding comes from INAC and goes to the Band. The shelter serves an average of 134 women annually.</p>				



TABLE 11:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
Nukum Munik Women's Shelter	Frances Nui	P.O. Box 160 Sheshatshui NL AOP 1M0 Tel: (709) 497-8868 Fax: (709) 497-8827	Natuashish, Labrador Quebec and Inuit women from the coastal and northern area. Non-Aboriginal women go to the shelter in Goose Bay (32 km away)	off-reserve, remote The community is working towards reserve status, which it hopes to attain in a few years
<p>Shelter Profile Sheshatshui has a population of about 2,500. The shelter, which was built with CMHC (Project Haven) funds, was opened in 1998. There are six full-time and two part-time workers. There are six members of the Board of Directors; all are chosen on an ad hoc basis. The shelter has four bedrooms with seven beds. Operational funding comes from INAC, but it all goes to the Band administration. The shelter received donations from companies and stores for furniture when it first opened, and everything was second-hand. The Band did provide some new furniture when it was asked, well after the opening. The shelter serves from six to ten women and children in any two-week period.</p>				

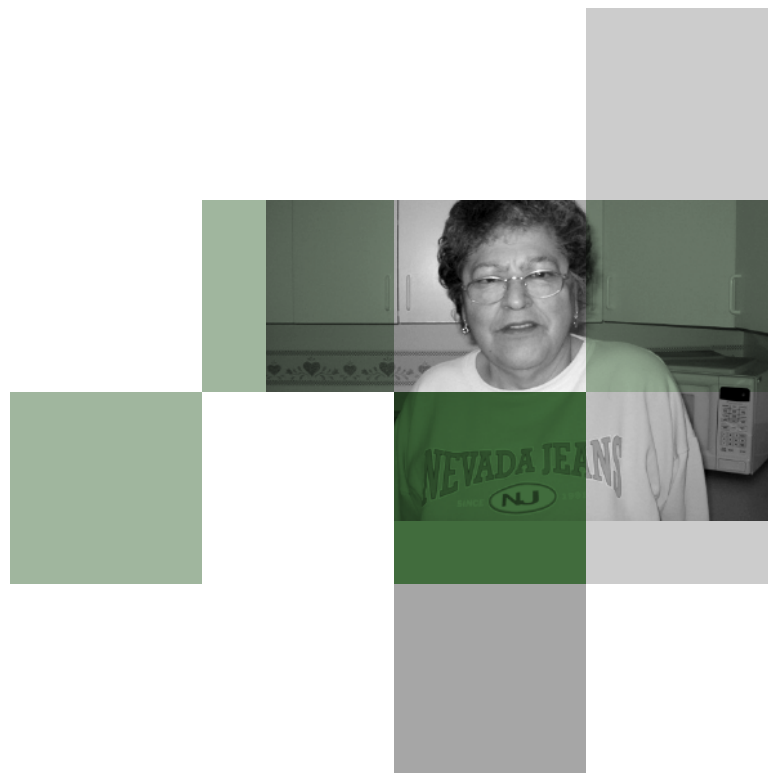
TABLE 12:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
Siksika First Nation	Darrell Royal, Family Wellness Coordinator	Siksika Healing Centre Box 1130 Siksika, AB T0H 3W0 Tel: (403) 734 - 3816 Fax: (403) 734 - 3971	Not applicable	on-reserve, west This large reserve, which has the second-largest land base of all reserves in Canada, does not have a shelter
<p>Shelter Profile The Siksika First Nation is located an hour's drive east of Calgary, close to Highway #1. Its population (both on- and off-reserve) is close to 6,000. Past efforts to get a women's shelter on reserve did not come to fruition, nor did more recent efforts, although the present family wellness coordinator states there is a definite need for a shelter. Instead, he runs nine family wellness programs, including: teen wellness; an annual youth cultural exchange camp; a strengthening couples workshop; domestic violence (for both men and women); youth awareness week; an annual family violence workshop; traditional / cultural healing; anger management and coping skills; and community violence intervention / prevention. Women who need safety and protection contact a 24-hour crisis team, and then are sent to the Strathmore Community Crisis Society, which is about half an hour's drive away.</p>				



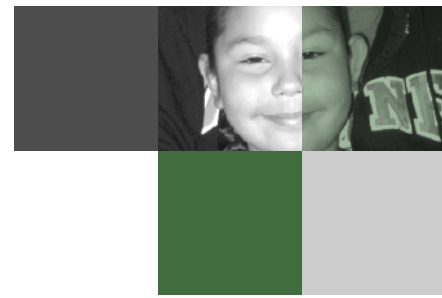
TABLE 13:

Name of Shelter	Shelter Director	Location and Contact information	Catchment Area	Category
We'koqma'q Family Healing Centre	Jean Maclean	P.O. Box 149 Whycocomagh, NS BOE 3M0 Tel: (902) 756 - 3440 Fax: (902) 756 - 3441	All the 13 First Nations in Nova Scotia	on-reserve, rural This reserve is about 120 km east of Sydney on Cape Breton Island
<p>Shelter Profile</p> <p>We'koqma'q First Nation has a population of 800 or 900. The shelter was started in 1992. The Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia and CMHC (Project Haven) came together to fund the Women's Shelter Program. There are nine full-time (no part-time) workers. The Board of Directors is made up of the elected Chiefs of the 13 First Nations in Nova Scotia and a representative from the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association; the Grand Chief is an Honourary member of the Board. The shelter has four family units with 14 beds and three cribs. Operational funding comes from INAC and goes directly to the Mi'kmaw Family and Children Services of Nova Scotia (the Bands do not have anything to do with the monies, nor any control over it). The shelter, on a yearly average, services 40 clients (in-house and outreach) but, because there has been no outreach worker for almost a year, the number has recently gone down.</p>				





3. BEST PRACTICES



3.1 LOCATION

- Geographic knowledge of the shelter's catchment area is essential. Because clients must be transported to the shelter as quickly as possible, routes and means of transportation must be clear to all staff.
- Shelters in aesthetically pleasing locations are most therapeutic, conducive to healing both minds and bodies.
- Pleasant surroundings outside the shelter (as well as inside) help to relieve trauma, anxiety and fear.
- Most shelters are located, not in downtown or heavy-traffic areas, but in more outlying areas, for reasons of anonymity and the need to be as inconspicuous as possible.
- Second stage housing may be located in more urban settings so residents (who, as a group, tend to be more independent) can have more ready access to employment and other opportunities.

3.2 PHYSICAL SAFETY

- The physical structure and size of shelters and second stage housing must be adequate for the designated number of clients and meet their space requirements.
- The physical structure must be strong (not falling apart) to provide a safe and appropriate environment for clients.
- To enhance safety and avoid clutter and inconvenience, shelters need space for donations and storage.
- Shelters must be physically accessible by disabled clients.
- The shelter needs to be "child-proof" (gates at the top and bottom of staircases; doors that are split so children cannot enter staff areas — the bottom half of the door may be closed, but the top half open). Child-proofing may also include child-safe switches, fire-proof wires, connecting doors between children and mothers' bedrooms (where these are separate), skid-free floor mats in bathrooms, safety latches that lock every time a cabinet door is closed (mostly for storing items under the sink), properly discarding anything that could be potentially harmful, and being aware of common everyday items that can cause harm or even death to children who handle or eat them.
- Vehicles used for transportation must have safe and age-appropriate car seats for children, in accordance with national or provincial regulations. Ensure children are always buckled in securely according to the particular make and model of the car seat.
- Shelters must meet all required fire codes and conduct regular maintenance exercises on smoke, fire and heat detectors, fire extinguishers and all types of alarms. Correspondingly,



fire drills should be a regular part of shelter life, with fire escape routes posted in all appropriate areas.

- To increase self-sustenance and constant safety, install a back-up generator for power outages, especially for shelters in areas that regularly experience electrical disruptions.
- Front-line workers must be able to assess the safety (or crisis level) of the situation when a client comes in, and to ensure that the first priority of safety for the client, her family and all staff is being met.
- When planning transportation for clients, consider the safety of the volunteer / staff person who is actually providing the service. For example, when a driver is picking up a client from her home, ensure that there is no danger from the abuser.
- If a client has a vehicle, shelter staff should ensure that it is parked in a hidden place so that there is no chance of the perpetrator seeing it and discovering her whereabouts.
- In some case, shelters may have to segregate certain clients and take them to other shelters for their own safety.

3.3 SECURITY

- Most shelters have some sort of fencing to provide physical security and safety around their parameters. Some have electronic gates, telecom systems, window/door alarms and security cameras for added security.
- Because perpetrators, especially in small communities, eventually realize a shelter's location, high fences and electronic security systems serve to protect clients and shelter staff.
- As a shelter, strive for a low profile. It protects the shelter from serving as a target for perpetrators seeking revenge, and protects clients who may be witnesses in an upcoming trial or other legal process.
- All children's play areas should be secured by fencing and kept under constant vigilance by either the mother or staff, particularly outside the shelter.
- It is essential to perform regular upkeep on all security-related equipment to maintain maximum functioning.
- Coded security locks on each room's door may be preferable to other locks because they are easy to change whenever a client leaves.

3.4 ADMINISTRATION

3.4.1 STAFF

- Shelter directors are vital to the successful delivery of services and programs offered within their shelters; they must be uniquely suited to their jobs. Some essential characteristics are:
 - creativity in procuring funding and fund-raising;
 - well-versed in “thinking outside the box”;
 - willing and able to raise the profile of the shelter within the community;
 - assertive and aggressive when necessary;
 - not easily intimidated;
 - able to deal effectively with constant stress;
 - a committed team builder;
 - have strong communication skills;
 - adventurous, but sensible — not afraid of trying innovative solutions;
 - know how “the system” works — how provincial, territorial, federal and municipal service agencies work, especially for shelters for Aboriginal women, and how they differ from those for non-Aboriginal people;
 - able to accomplish many tasks — supervising staff, marketing services, overseeing administration, able and willing to work at all levels of employment within the shelter, etc.;
 - empathetic and understanding of victims of family violence;
 - understanding of historical changes that ushered in the status quo of Aboriginal family violence;
 - able to understand the various cultural stories of their clients (clients from diverse indigenous cultures often express life realities with their own stories);
 - be a leader — provide structure and establish shelter policy; and
 - able to represent the programs and perspective of the shelter to outside agencies, organizations and the general public.
- Take special efforts to hire a qualified, knowledgeable (particularly about the shelter’s operation) and competent administrative assistant.
- Ensure that staff members understand their responsibilities of assessing the situation at the time of initial contact with a client and have the skills to determine the appropriate actions to be taken.
- Staff ought to approach the initial contact with the client with caution. Do not overwhelm her with unnecessary or inappropriate information at this time, while recognizing her need for immediate help. Later on, staff may present the options that are available to her.
- Some shelters under Band management are required to submit to mandatory random drug testing* for all staff and clients.
- Confidentiality is a very important part of shelter life; ensure that staff and volunteers are trained in how to maintain confidentiality at all stages of providing services and programs.

* Note: Some do not see this as a best practice, but rather as just the opposite. It is therefore also listed under “Barriers and Challenges” (section 4).



- Shelters must be client-centered and work only with the agencies that directly involve the client; this also helps to maintain confidentiality.
- All staff must comprehend the meaning of a client-centered shelter, and know how to achieve and maintain this on an individual level, as well as on a team level.
- An alternative to firing staff persons who “don’t quite work out” is to help them to define boundaries as to what ought to be done and what should not be done while on the job. They need to know what not to do, as well as what they should do.
- The shelter needs a strong staff team so clients cannot take advantage of them and the shelter.
- Individual staff persons need to be aware of the “rescue syndrome”; they can help avoid this by reminding clients that they are strong and that, in most circumstances, can look after themselves.
- Staff must be allowed some flexibility when clients break house rules (enforcement of guidelines). While emphasizing client accountability, staff need to understand that all people make mistakes and that sometimes miscommunication is a reality of life.
- Staff must act as positive role models for clients. Shelters cannot be fully effective if staff lead chaotic and disorderly lives.

3.4.2 SHELTER POLICIES

- For on-reserve shelters that serve both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women, Aboriginal women must be given priority.
- Shelters must maintain a non-judgemental, non-demeaning, open-door policy so that women who come in feel encouraged about asking for help.
- In spite of how little money there may be for shelters, the aim must be to connect with the human side and to make the place as pleasant as possible for everyone. For example, weekly clients’ meetings can help the group divide up chores and provide a way for them to get to know each other.
- Provide small birthday surprises for clients and children, as much as possible.
- Provide language support by using the most common language of the clientele. Remember that not speaking a common language makes a client even more vulnerable and that, as empowerment of women is a common goal, efforts should be taken to establish good communication.
- English may be used as the common language, and all staff should have a good working use of it. However, at least one staff person should be able to speak the common language(s) of the large sub-groups within the overall clientele group.
- Each shelter needs a policy on the maximum length of time that women are allowed to stay.
- Some provinces have a “fleeing allowance” for clients; shelters need to know more details about these funds and how to access them.
- Clientele need to be constantly reminded about the confidentiality regulations within the shelter; post abbreviated regulations in each room or apartment and in all common areas.



- Shelters need to establish clear policies and practices for clients who have broken the rules. For example people who have given away the shelter’s location are coded on a “pink card” — this makes administration easier. A “yellow card” is used for those who need to be admitted with caution because they have severe drinking issues, have been guilty of theft, etc.
- To minimize costs, procure gifts in kind and use volunteers; ensure that both are effective in maintaining the continuity of shelter operations.
- Some shelters get extra help from volunteers to serve as coaches, team leaders, recreational leaders, etc.
- When appropriate, former (recovered) victims may volunteer as peer counsellors.
- For shelters that take both homeless and abused women, implement shift notes that have to be filled in twice a day. This keeps staff informed about clients’ state at all times.
- Some shelters do not operate with a Board of Directors but directly with the Chief and Council who act in that capacity.*
- For shelters in urban environments, finding service providers such as physicians, health educators, nurses, etc. within a medical and/or health facility can be a definite advantage since it allows clients to more easily access medical attention and care.
- Ensure that staff members have some knowledge of the regional and overall legal and/or justice system so clients have at least some help in this area. Remember that Canada’s systems may be as foreign to them as if they had come from another country. Be aware that clients may be unjustly treated by the justice system (e.g., many abused women, especially prostitutes, may be treated as the criminals rather than the victims). Many clients need help with paperwork and advice as to how the “the system” functions.
- Shelters need to address the question of what to do when fathers want access to their children who are in the shelter’s care. Some deal with this through a childcare worker who may work within the shelter or at Social Services to avoid compromising staff and other residents.
- Periodically, a needs assessment is done internally to help keep the shelter in good working order all the time and make sure required supplies are always in stock.
- Create an “inspiration wall,” where both staff and clients can post inspirational or motivational quotes. This promotes a sense of ownership for making the shelter a personal and pleasant place.
- In second stage housing, ensuring that no staff members work on weekends or at nights helps residents to integrate into the eventual reality of living outside the house.
- Lock up medications in special rooms or in special cabinets / cupboards ; when signing out, both the staff member and the client must make an entry into the “med book / log.” Do not dispense medications unless the pills are signed out; keep records up-to-date all the time and write everything down. Use surgical gloves.

* Note: Some may not see this as a best practice



3.4.3 INTAKE

- When a woman first comes into the shelter, help her and her children feel welcome. After intake, recruit other clients to make the newcomer comfortable and at ease. This helps women feel a sense of ownership of the shelter; it also develops leadership skills in those who have been there longer.
- At intake, explain to the client what she can expect, the shelter rules, etc.; have these in writing for her as she may be too traumatized to remember them.
- Shelter rules and regulations should be as simple as possible, designed to help make the shelter a positive and harmonious place in which to live. (Staff may want to call these “responsibilities” or “expectations” instead. The word “rules” may sound very scary, demanding and authoritarian.) These guidelines are also meant to provide some structure in clients’ lives.
- Shelter rules and regulations should reflect a balance between individual autonomy and living in a communal setting.
- Shelter rules and regulations should not be “set in stone”; staff must be open to suggestions and feedback from clients and make modifications as needed.
- Provide a list of belongings that clients should have, keeping in mind that many clients will have nothing except what they have with them at the time they come to the shelter.
- One shelter (located in an urban area) does not reveal its policy about three months’ maximum stay to its homeless clientele because many would take advantage by not working right away at finding suitable housing for themselves.
- A shelter must have a firm and clear policy on alcohol or illicit drug use among clients, while recognizing that some individuals may be untruthful about substance / alcohol abuse if they feel it means the shelter will not accept them. Staff may detect drugs and / or alcohol during intake conversations ; shelters should set procedures on how to deal with this issue.
- Each shelter needs a policy on whether or not to ask about alcohol / drug use, or whether drug testing should be mandatory. Sometimes this decision is not up to the shelter, but is made by the Band or the province. Since most shelters fall under at least one of these jurisdictions, they will have to abide by what is already in place.
- Shelters need a firm and clear policy about clients who are medically unstable or mentally ill. Whether or not the client is in impending danger ought to be the main consideration in determining whether the shelter is the appropriate agency for her or not, in which case the shelter ought to get other help for her.
- Discourage clients from keeping valuables in their rooms. If there is a theft, it should be the client’s problem ; this helps her take responsibility for herself and her belongings.
- Shelters may consider having clients sign a “suicide contract,” whereby a client agrees not to attempt suicide and states that, if she does, the shelter is not liable. This agreement helps deal with possible confrontations with the client herself, her family members and social service agency workers. Because of the sensitive nature of suicide and attempted suicide, the contract itself may need to be adapted until the shelter director is satisfied that it meets desired outcomes.



3.4.4 DATA COLLECTION

- Shelters should collect only the intake data necessary to serve clients, as well as data that has been identified by the program and/or funding agencies. (Funding sources or outside service contracts often require the gathering of specific data about the services being provided for statistical and other purposes.)
- Collection of information must be done as sensitively and appropriately as possible. Sometimes more immediate needs (such as medical help) have to be addressed before asking the client for required information.
- Data can tell a shelter about where clients are coming from and help define its catchment area. Data collection is also helpful for planning and recording purposes.

3.4.5 NETWORKING AND PROTOCOLS

- Establish protocols with other shelters in as many areas as possible. Shared protocols help when having to refer clients when space is not available; when “swapping” clients to ensure their safety; and for information sharing, combined training activities, etc.
- Partnering with other First Nation shelters is conducive to effectiveness, particularly for those within a common or overlapping catchment area.
- In one province (Alberta), as many as five Aboriginal shelter directors formed their own association to achieve more of an impact on the provincial shelter association, which, more often than not, had not been meeting their needs. They reacted proactively, not by “dropping out,” but by networking within.
- Establishing protocols with police is a valuable practice. Shelters can take a strong role in training local police on ways of dealing with Aboriginal victims of family violence. Communication between police and victims should take place with a shelter worker present or using female police officers, since clients are generally better able to communicate with them than with male officers.
- Good relationships with police can also result in police patrols in and around shelter areas, which can serve to deter vengeful perpetrators. This may also provide clients with an added sense of security.
- Ensure an ongoing relationship with health professionals and their organizations so that, for example, a nutritionist is able to come into the shelter on an as-needed basis.
- Initiate relationships with nearby restaurants or cafés. For example, one shelter has arranged for Starbucks to donate bakery products to them at the end of every night.
- For shelters that need to work with American clients (such as those located close to the Canada / U.S. border), establish ties with equivalent American programs so that normal difficulties with national jurisdictions are vastly reduced by having the background work completed beforehand.
- For on-reserve second stage housing, per diems from the province for non-Aboriginal clients can be funnelled through a Band entity (such as a tribal council).



3.5 FUNDING

- Good rapport with the Chief and Band council is invaluable. For example, the Band can help by providing per diem funding for Band clients through specific family support programs.
- Bring in additional money for the shelter by renting out the boardroom or any spare office space within the shelter facility.
- Work towards good financial practice; develop and maintain a good financial tracking system that meets the shelter's unique needs.
- Look for little pots of money (grants) for specific shelter needs, such as car seats for toddlers and young children, linens, etc., instead of large pots of money for the “big picture.”
- Staff can help out with proposal writing, particularly by doing background research. The more information that is known about the shelter's operation and the more precise the details that can be given, the stronger the proposals become.
- In second stage housing, ensure that all rental rates are the same, whether the women are working or on social assistance. This policy boosts the confidence of working women and increases their financial independence.
- In second stage housing, ensure that rental income can maintain the building by paying the costs for heat, lights, water, phone, etc.
- Most shelters cannot afford to pay overtime to staff, but “flex out” extra hours so staff can have days off instead. Ensure that all staff members are aware of this policy so they do not count on extra money coming in when they work longer hours.
- All budget projections should indicate the costs of ongoing client needs and reflect the costs of meeting past client needs as much as possible.

3.6 INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

- Because community and local support are essential to a shelter's success, unremitting efforts must be expended to establish and maintain this essential relationship.
- All programs for change absolutely require the community's buy-in or support, from grassroots or ordinary people to community leaders. Without this support, the risk of failure is high.
- Appoint a Liaison Officer who contacts all relevant agencies when clients come into a shelter. She can:
 - network with abusers, encourage treatment and follow up on their programming;
 - network with community workers in the areas of men's counselling, justice, police, child and family, healing and health promotion, home support workers, social services, etc.;
 - coordinate inter-agency case management meetings to better serve victims, and to better ensure that resources and services offer the maximum safety and protection to families at high risk;
 - be involved in exchanges of information between agencies on a need-to-know basis while respecting privacy laws.
- Work to change how the community thinks about violence or help build a framework among all appropriate agencies to guide, develop and implement policies to prevent family violence.



- Work to get the community to view family violence, as a community or societal issue, not just a women's issue. A community cannot fix a problem if it does not acknowledge or recognize that it exists.
- Shelter clients can be encouraged to attend social gatherings within the community in order to re-introduce the client to normal and healthy relationships.
- Community partners must understand confidentiality issues to help safeguard the shelter and its clients. They may need reminding as to the reasons for being given limited information or for restrictions on the support services they provide.
- Work towards being a model organization within the community. Realize the importance of responsible, disciplined, ethical staff and Board members; develop effective policies and adhere to them; develop good operating systems; and keep up good accounting practices.
- Educate doctors in nearby areas by preparing a simple package for them, with tear-away slips with the shelter's name, address and phone number that doctors can hand to clients whom they suspect or know are being battered.
- Shelter services must be made known to the community, far and wide. The Board can be of help to reach as many people as possible.
- Recognize the need for a coordinated approach to Aboriginal family violence services; reach out to as many organizations in the area to help integrate various services.
- Coordination of family violence services enhances the capacity of communities to deliver effective, culturally appropriate services, with long-term healing from the causes and effects of family violence as the main goal.
- For isolated shelters, networking is vital for access to current information; it can also be a much-needed source of support. Urban shelters should initiate meaningful communication with more isolated ones.
- All strategies designed for more than one region or area must be flexible, responsive and adaptable to meet the specific needs of each community and of each women's shelter, and allow for variations over time and in different locations.

3.7 PROGRAMMING

3.7.1 OVERALL

- Programming must be developed as needed by the counsellors who work with clients. Work must be "progressive" and adaptable to changing community and government policies.
- Always include cultural components in programming. Always provide programs, services and the shelter décor itself in as culturally appropriate ways as possible.
- Present Aboriginal culture in a favourable and pleasant way that also upholds, confirms and validates it.
- Aboriginal culture states that women are life-givers; the basis of cultural programming should reflect the theme "woman is life."



- Ensure clarity in programming by hiring shelter directors whose philosophy is consistent with Aboriginal cultural values. Different shelter directors may not agree with prevailing Aboriginal thought and values, and lean more towards Western-based / Christian values; while there may be nothing wrong with this, controversy can quickly arise from the community and clients themselves. Most First Nations and Métis want to reclaim their own cultural traditions and practices.
- Unless everyone is comfortable with the idea, do not adopt Western-based values and ceremonies or those from other First Nations' cultures.
- Group meetings and sessions must be conducted and led by Aboriginal facilitators as much as possible.
- All programs must convey hope to women and keep their hope alive. Clients must be encouraged to believe in themselves and be reminded that they are doing good things for themselves and their children.
- In second stage housing, ensure that there is a range of choice for compulsory "personal growth" programs for residents (e.g., life skills, self-discovery, Alcoholics Anonymous, effective parenting, healthy relationships, etc.) so they can gather together and keep in touch with each other. These programs can be of short duration (an hour each), but residents should have to attend at least two per week.
- Programs for second stage housing should be geared towards helping residents continue their healing journeys and teach them how to be proactive in discovering new ways of living.
- In second stage housing, residents must be discouraged from "sitting around" just surviving; they need to continue getting help as they learn how to move on in their lives.
- Do not mix programs between first and second stage housing because programs for the first stage are the foundation for programs for the second stage.
- All programs must make healing a positive and supportive progression.
- Avoid programs that "blame the victim," whether these are for men as perpetrators or for women as victims.
- Always ensure that clients' goals are achievable and practical, and according to the length of their stay in the shelter (if this is known); only short-term goals can work for a short-term stay.
- Client programs should include topics such as affirmations, benefits of fitness, budgeting, Co-Dependants Anonymous (CODA), depression, domestic violence, disciplining children, the effect of violence on children, anxiety disorder, stress, self-esteem for children, etc.
- Since most clients with drug, alcohol and other types of addictions require medical help, some shelters find that alternative counselling services, such as dance and/or art therapy, help victims considerably.
- Certified trained counsellors are needed for addicts who come into the shelter; meet this need as much as possible.
- Programming must address the needs expressed by the clients themselves; be sure to ask clients what they need.
- Where there is no specialized counselling, clients can be sent out to organizations that provide this service.
- Support mechanisms must include programs that teach an understanding of successful family dynamics.



3.7.2 MEN'S

- Trained women workers should be hired to conduct (or to help conduct) sessions and workshops for men. Women workers who help oversee group work are ideal for stepping in and identifying the undesirable attitudes that result in abusive behaviours.
- One shelter strongly recommends the Duluth model curriculum.³ (see Web site <http://www.duluth-model.org/>).
- Consider alternatives to incarceration or, in specific cases, a reduction in the length of the sentence for those who are convicted. Perpetrators, as well as victims, need advocacy and court services. Probation officers should take part in the process if they are already involved.
- When perpetrators reach the point in their lives that they are serious about stopping abusive behaviour, they cannot be allowed to “get away with things,” even verbally, when they are in treatment. They must receive support and be kept in the circle of learning, just the same. A well-trained counsellor can ensure these things.
- Facilitators that use cultural practices from other traditions must make participants aware that these may not be traditional for everyone in the group.
- Some First Nations and Indigenous groups place more value on keeping with one's own traditions than others do; for those who place a high value on keeping with one's own traditions, ensure that management and staff consistently respect their wishes.
- Women who abuse can be enrolled in the same program as victims (who are other women), so they can see the results of their actions first-hand from the other participants. This helps them to recognize their abusive behaviour and motivates them to find more appropriate ways of dealing with their emotions.
- In one First Nation, the Chief initiated a Mother's Day on which the men cooked and served the women. This conveyed a powerful example to the community of how men should treat their wives.

3 This curriculum deals with violence in the lives of women and children, particularly in light of this group's vulnerability to violence because of their unequal social, economic and political status in society, as well as the numerous inequalities women face — not only gender inequality, but also racism, classism, heterosexism and ageism. Work focuses on eliminating one form of violence that women experience — battering — and works collaboratively with other progressive agencies or organizations that seek to reduce societal violence as a whole. The curriculum recognizes the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination in all aspects of community life and acknowledges a commitment to develop Native and non-Native programming in all areas of anti-violence efforts, including the (re-)institution of egalitarian principles. The agency works in teams, makes consensual decisions as much as possible and recognizes diversity among all people. It strives to reference all major decisions back to the overall goal of improving the lives of battered women and their children.



3.7.3 CHILDREN'S

- Incorporate practices, programs and services that maintain and sustain children's safety, protection and sense of security.
- Wherever possible, provide the services of a full-time, licensed children's counsellor. As witnesses of violence, children need counselling to deal with the long-term effects; this can help break the intergenerational cycle of violence. Play and art therapy, and group activities such as "talking circles," are often helpful.
- Develop programs over the years; it is unrealistic to expect a program to be perfect the first few times it is implemented. Since Aboriginal children's needs differ from mainstream children's needs, keep an eye on how other Aboriginal children's programs are conducted.
- Good cultural teachings confirm children's identity (who they are to themselves); they can teach children how and why to make good choices, even at a young age.
- Parents need to be taught how to encourage their children to make good choices and how to keep confirming healthy choices after counselling sessions end. This is true even for parents who live according to Western-based practices.
- Start working with youth — give them recreational support and opportunities. They have to know that violence is not normal and not acceptable; question them and encourage all children to treat girls and women with respect.
- Children who witness violence need to have their standards (re-)set to replace the model they have witnessed with a more desirable one that says "abuse is wrong."

3.8 TRAINING / CAPACITY-BUILDING

- There is a need for information such as the development of a standard personnel policy that can be used as a template that can be shared with member shelters. This template can also include standard governance policies and procedures for example, Board of Director's policies and procedures. A number of shelters are in need of guidance in this area. A "re-inventing of the wheel" may not be required but can start with **NACAFV** sharing its policies and procedures.
- Look for training money from as many different sources as possible (e.g., the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, mainstream organizations, etc.); be creative in finding funds.
- Ensure that training money suits staff needs; for example, there is no point in obtaining money for computer training when this type of training is not required.
- Train staff in as many areas as possible so that, when the shelter is busy, each employee can act in different capacities as needed.
- It is essential to update training in certain areas; one-time sessions are not sufficient for subjects such as First Aid / CPR, conflict resolution, computer training, etc.
- To help rectify the problem of shelter employees who are not fully qualified for their jobs, a definite process (not a "trial and error" process) should be implemented to bring the employee up to the standards the job requires.
- If the shelter has space, such as a boardroom, use it as much as possible for training sessions to cut the costs of sending staff out for training.



- Hire from a pool of trainees, rather than training staff after hiring them. This helps cut the costs of training, since some staff members stay for only a short time.
- Use outside organizations' training offerings as much as possible; find out who provides training in specific areas (for instance, the Canadian Mental Health Association provides suicide prevention training, while other agencies offer return-to-work strategies).
- Some organizations have specific training for Aboriginal participants; if they do not, offer to help them prepare ahead of time for the unique needs of this particular group.
- Check to see if the organization has a “train-the-trainer” component, in which case it would be advantageous to have at least one staff person take the training so she can teach it to the rest of the staff. Ideally, this person would have strong teaching capabilities, but almost everyone can be trained to teach.
- Another advantage of having a “train-the-trainer” staff person is that she can train front-line workers (and perhaps other interested community members) at their own level and in ways that are adapted to an “in-house” situation.
- Allow employees time off so they can pursue proper educational accreditation; hold their jobs for them and fill the jobs on an interim basis.
- Further support staff by keeping in mind that they may be able to keep their jobs by taking courses on weekends, several days a week or in the evenings.
- Partner with the local community college to help staff receive the training they need.
- Partnering with educational / training institutions wherever possible will help the shelter fulfil its needs for employees with degrees, who will in turn increase the effectiveness of the shelter.
- Where possible, hold Co-Dependents Anonymous (CODA) workshops in the shelter;* have the sessions conducted by the shelter's alcohol and drug counsellor. CODA is a group of men and women who work towards developing healthy relationships; the only requirement for membership is a desire for healthy and loving relationships. CODA uses a “12 Step and 12 Traditions” approach to help deal with self-defeating lifestyles and realize new ways of living (see <http://www.codependents.org/>).
- Domestic violence and related topics in Aboriginal communities should be addressed by using educational approaches in as many areas as possible (health, school, sports, etc.), with as many age groups (children, youth, adults, Elders) as possible.
- Work towards eradicating the too-common view of violence being “normal”; examine different viewpoints and different visions to steer clients into healthy relationships.
- Regarding the new privacy law, staff and volunteers must be trained how to maintain confidentiality at all stages of providing services and conducting programs.

* Note: This will not work for all shelters, as a lot of room is needed and sessions must be held in areas away from the general client areas because of the presence of men.



3.9 FOLLOW-UP

- It is vital that clients receive a continuum of support after they leave the shelter. To keep healing, they need to continue to get support and / or help to find a support network or group.
- Shelters need an Outreach Worker to continue supporting clients when they leave the shelter.
- If there is no Outreach Worker in a shelter, inform the client while she is still in the shelter that she is welcome to come back to carry on with programs or to access other services. Ensure that the client receives information of upcoming “one-time” workshops and sessions.
- At a minimum, staff should have some casework training to help clients to determine next steps after leaving the shelter. Assistance should include safety planning (if she plans to return to an abusive environment), including a plan for transportation that includes gas money, bus tickets or having a reliable friend to count on if the need arises; and linking her to other community resources such as parenting and self-esteem classes, legal services, housing services, counselling and women’s groups.
- Client follow-up depends on each woman’s circumstances, personal goals and available options. Ensure that staff are non-judgemental and allow clients to take responsibility for making their own decisions.
- Shelter staff need to consider what the desired outcome or goal is for each client’s successful recovery, and construct a counselling and reintegration process (an individual plan) based on those desired goals.
- Successful follow-up means reintegrating a client into regular societal life, whatever the client perceives that to mean. Shelter workers need a clear idea of that perception to help clients achieve their goals. Counselling may be needed if expectations are obviously unrealistic, however.
- When a client seeks to re-establish family ties, vastly different relationships may result and they must be counseled to prepare for these changes. For example, a recovered alcoholic (client) must expect that her relationship with family members will change.
- Sometimes, clients will establish independent living arrangements away from their home reserves or hometowns; help clients establish new networks to help them cope successfully.
- Remember that former clients may continue to need moral support and counselling, and that the more follow-up, the less likely the client will be re-victimized. (This is one strong advantage of second stage housing — it gives clients time to find new, long-term ways of living.)
- Depending on the client, follow-up may include securing employment before leaving the shelter, particularly if going into second stage housing. Job placement personnel should be made available to clients for this purpose.
- It is (almost always) necessary for clients to find employment with a low level of stress. Some may prefer to work part-time to cope better with the stresses of employment while they work on establishing new lives.



3.10 WHEN THERE IS NO SHELTER*

- Ascertain the need for a shelter in the community; produce a formal needs assessment document.
- Establish good rapport with police, who can help find statistics and figures about the extent of family violence within a community, especially in the needs assessment phase.
- Then, be persistent in finding all required resources – financial and human. Keep prepared as the steps progress towards the reality of the shelter.
- Establish support from the Chief and Council and / or other community leaders to operate a family wellness or similar program, so that there is a legitimate base related to family violence from which to seek funds to build a shelter.
- Implement as many anti-violence programs as possible, for as many age groups as possible, including children (by offering “hands are not for hitting” and other “no bullying” themes as part of a Head Start program), youth (both young men and young women), women, men and Elders.
- Implement related programs that are needed by the community, such as those for sexual abuse, addictions to alcohol and / or drugs, parenting skills, anger management and healthy relationships, etc.
- Act as an outreach anti-violence educator as much as possible, in schools (both elementary and high-school), at special sessions and at conferences in the community, etc.
- If necessary, partner with non-Aboriginal social development agencies to bring programs into the community. Help the visiting agency meet the special cultural and other needs of the Aboriginal community.
- Train (or procure training for) social workers or other positions related to anti-violence activity within the community so those who complete training can remain at home.
- Establish a network with nearby shelters so that clients are able to access safety, services and programs when they have to leave home; keep in touch with clients and follow their progress. Be sure that transportation requirements will be met, perhaps through appropriate protocol arrangements.
- Cultivate good relationships with police, justice and social workers; they can help provide services that support women and their families, including not only their children, but also extended family members.
- Network with the provincial shelter association, especially with the Aboriginal members.

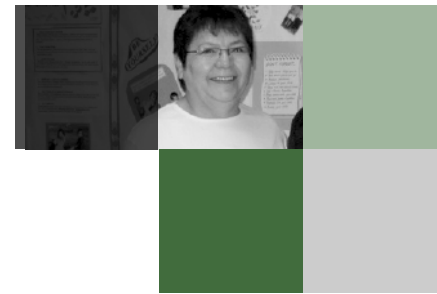
* This section is specific to the findings from Siksika First Nation in Alberta.







4. BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES



4.1 FUNDING

- The most common problem facing Aboriginal shelters is inadequate core funding.
- Closely related to the above is the lack of increase in core funding, even to match the national rate of inflation.
- Many shelters have not had an increase in their core budgets since their inception.
- Core funding comes from one main source — INAC. One-source funding limits an organization's independence, and growth is confined by the funder's willingness to provide more adequate finances.
- Funding from INAC depends on the specific location of a shelter (such as being located on reserve) and on the specific status of a specific client in an urban setting (for instance, funding only applies if a client has had to leave her reserve to enter a shelter, if she has already left the reserve and within a predetermined time period).
- It is difficult to find other sources of core funding for on-reserve shelters because reserves are under federal jurisdiction; therefore, provincial, regional and municipal governments conveniently view this situation as a way out of helping shelters.
- Some shelters encounter jurisdictional problems more than others do because their reserves overlap more than one boundary (international, federal, provincial, territorial and municipal).
- Most non-Aboriginal shelters have difficulty being reimbursed for Aboriginal clients because of jurisdictional problems (provincial / territorial, municipal, regional and federal).
- All shelters need a vehicle. There is precious little funding available for this purpose; upkeep of vehicles (gas, insurance, maintenance, etc.) is also costly.
- Some shelters do not operate with a Board of Directors but directly with the Chief and Council who act in that capacity.

4.2 LEGAL

- Slow police response time is unacceptable. Trouble can multiply in a short time.
- Shelter clients and / or program participants with criminal records have difficulty moving across borders when they need access to services (e.g., Akwesasne reserve straddles 5 borders and clients need to pass the Canada – US border to attend their programs).
- It is getting more difficult for clients to obtain legal advice, since legal aid is increasingly being restricted.



4.3 STAFF AND TRAINING

- High staff turnover is not conducive to shelters' effectiveness.
- Many shelters have had to cut costs by cutting staff positions.
- Many shelters have no benefit packages for staff and have to compensate wages / salary in lieu of benefits.
- Shelters in many areas need more staff with university degrees.
- There is a need for a specific course on domestic violence at the university (or university transfer) level because of the particular social dynamics involved; family violence should not just be lumped in with other social work courses.
- There is a need for pharmacology training so shelter staff can learn about medications their clients are taking. Such training must include how medications interact with others, side-effects, medical consequences and how to recognize when professional medical care is required.
- Some provincial shelter associations are not at all involved with Aboriginal shelters, citing jurisdictional reasons (INAC does not provide resources for Aboriginal clients in non-Aboriginal / urban shelters). Because most shelters do not have education / training budgets, they have no access to training offered by the association; neither can they afford to attend Annual General Meetings, nor do they have back-up staff even if they could afford to go.
- Constant attention has to be given to the cost of negotiating gifts in kind and training and supervising volunteers. It's easy to spend more time and money managing these gifts than is justified by the value of the savings offered.

4.4 CHILD AND FAMILY

- Social assistance rates for mothers with children in foster care are very low; it is extremely difficult for mothers to find adequate housing when trying to get their children back. In contrast, foster parents receive a lot of provincial money for these same children; this anomaly is very frustrating and discouraging for mothers who are trying to get their children back.
- Many shelters recognize the need to improve their childcare capabilities, but cannot because of lack of sufficient funding.
- Life skills programs for children and youth are badly needed within shelters.
- In many communities, there is an intergenerational acceptance of abuse of women.
- Many younger people see abuse against women as “normal” and a “part of life” because of constant exposure to this type of violence.

4.5 HOUSING

- There is not enough second stage housing available anywhere in Canada.
- Waiting lists for both first and second stage housing are much too long.
- Where there is second stage housing, operational funding is either extremely low or non-existent.
- In almost all reserves, available housing is scarce. This is one reason why some women return to abusive relationships.
- Difficulties often arise when women and children move in with parents, friends or other relatives. This solution causes overcrowding and more stress within households.
- The mix of homeless and battered clients in shelters is generally not good. This is because nearly all homeless women suffer from major addictions and / or serious mental illness. The dynamics of the two groups are too different for a healthy fit in terms of the services and programs that women's shelters are able to provide.
- The amount of paperwork and administrative effort is also excessively high for homeless residents. Many homeless clients have become adept at using the system for their own purposes, not to get help. Confidentiality concerning the location of the shelter often becomes an issue, too.
- Where there is both an Aboriginal and a non-Aboriginal shelter, the non-Aboriginal shelter sometimes off-loads clients they do not want by deliberately misrepresenting facts to the Aboriginal shelter; for example, staff might say someone's time is up when it really is not. This means the Aboriginal shelter (which is often over-burdened anyway) carries extra clientele which otherwise it would not have to.

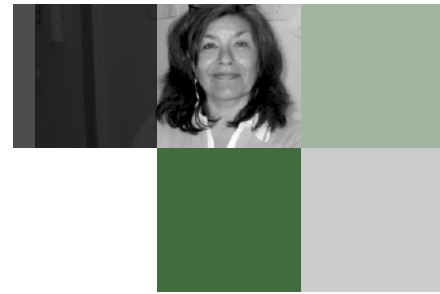
4.6 OTHER

- Many young women are starting to fight back and are becoming the abusers. Curriculum is needed for woman-specific perpetrator programs.
- The general lack of Aboriginal culturally appropriate programming is a concern.
- Some shelters under Band management are required to submit to mandatory random drug testing for all staff and clients.
- Shelters need to be able to share client information without the fear of violating privacy laws.
- The new privacy laws can inhibit healing, especially in sexual abuse cases, because offenders cannot be named and therefore cannot be confronted.
- Higher standards of living within Aboriginal communities are often accompanied by stronger drugs and more alcohol, so substance abuse problems become more rampant.
- Aboriginal women who have to go to a non-Aboriginal shelter should at least have one Aboriginal counsellor, even if they have to go elsewhere. It is essential that they maintain a connection with their own culture.
- When mothers and children go to off-reserve homes or shelters, it can be difficult for them to return to the reserve and reintegrate back into the community.



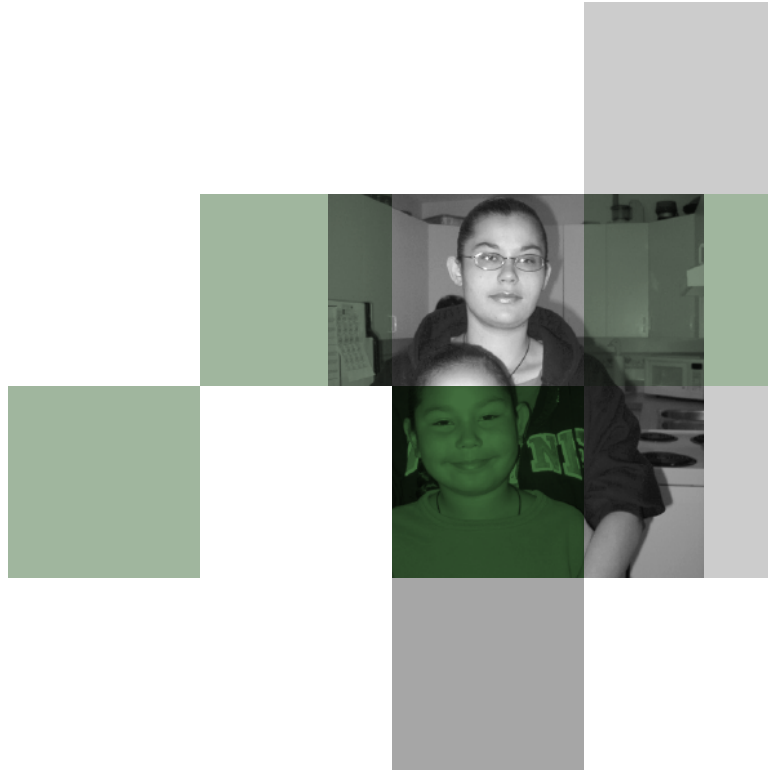


5. OBSERVATIONS



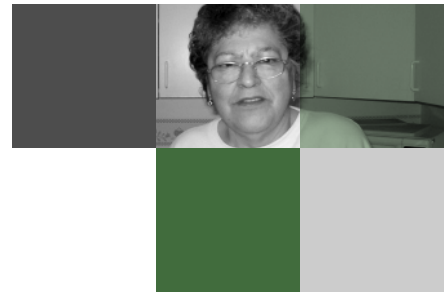
- Clients who stay one month do much better than those who stay one day.
- A woman in second stage housing is especially well-situated to start working on a foundation for the rest of her life. It gives her a unique chance to develop a healthy relationship with herself, which is the crux of all healthy relationships.
- Overcrowding, which is common in most reserves, causes extra stress in households and can be a cause of family violence.
- Because most reserves do not have shelters, women fleeing violence often escape to friends' and relatives' homes. This exacerbates the issue of overcrowding of housing on-reserve.
- Aboriginal clients are more comfortable in Aboriginal shelters; they tend to feel more valued and have less adjustments to make.
- Recommended for anyone working in shelters and for clients: Listening to the Thunder: Advocates Talk About the Battered Women's Movement, by Leslie Timmins (ed.), Vancouver, B.C.: Women's Research Centre, 1995. Twenty-two front-line workers and activists in the battered women's and children's movements address general issues surrounding abuse. Special issues include lesbian battering, tribal justice, ethnicity and why mediation can be dangerous in custody disputes. The "professionalization" of women's groups is also discussed.
- Many Aboriginal shelters generally suspect that they have to pay much lower wages than their provincial counterparts.
- It is impossible to pay shelter staff what they are really worth, since staff work so many extra hours and often perform duties that are not in their job descriptions.
- Clients generally find group sessions most valuable.
- Anxiety and depression are disempowering and may result from not having a voice, which is needed for emotional well-being. Battered women need to find their voices to help themselves become well, in a holistic sense.
- If clients do not feel safe and secure within a shelter, the shelter is not meeting its basic *raison d'être* (from the French, meaning "reason for being"; a basic, essential purpose).
- In at least one community, before the existence of shelters for battered women, women and children were leaving and sometimes not able to return safely to their own homes.
- Shelters that are autonomous are more efficient than those that are dependent on the Chief and Council or any other organization.
- Shelters that do not have good relationships with their Chiefs and Council experience difficulties.







6. CONCLUSION



A common but extremely significant challenge articulated by all shelters is the lack of sufficient increases in core funding (if and when there is core funding). All shelters report increased pressure on their programs, services and staff because of an increase in the number of women and children fleeing domestic violence. As a result, they are faced with the almost impossible choice of either cutting back on already threadbare services or turning away victims. More remote areas, with much higher costs of living, including exorbitant costs in freight and transportation, are especially vulnerable to the disastrous outcomes that financial insecurity, in the form of inadequate core funding, brings.

The best practices listed in this document are based on certain premises or self-evident declarations from the perspective of Aboriginal traditions. All points, which were derived from at least one shelter's input, reflect the following postulations:

- Family violence is a crime.
- It is possible to deal constructively with family violence.
- Family and community violence is not indigenous to Aboriginal lifestyles, nor is it limited to Aboriginal societies.
- Each woman and child has the right to live safely and free from violence and the fear of violence.
- A community must recognize, acknowledge and take ownership of internal domestic violence to implement effective intervention practices.
- Proactive planning must accompany communal recognition of the importance of protecting and supporting women and children in the face of family violence.
- Communal awareness of the destructive impact of violence and the importance of breaking the cycles leading to these outcomes must be heightened to begin eradicating family and community violence.
- Community leaders can help identify interpersonal violence within the larger context of community dynamics and help shelters strengthen women and families, including children.
- Communities and shelters must work towards understanding the multifaceted nature of family violence and adopt wholistic approaches so that issues are not addressed in isolation.
- Both communities and shelters must be familiar with conditions often associated with family violence. These include alcohol and other substance abuse, lack of good parental role models, drifting away from traditional practices, and the lack of housing, education, adequate nutrition and employment. (All of these, to some extent, stem from the intergenerational impact of residential schooling.)
- A shelter can only operate within its own mandate, that is, to provide safety to women and children who are victims of family violence. The entire community, however, can address



wider issues related to violence by providing the infrastructure and framework by setting short-, medium- and long-term goals that facilitate healing for whole families and communities.

- True to the tradition of collective values in all Aboriginal cultures, service delivery and parallel activities must be decided at the community level and be appropriate to cultural norms. These activities may include community awareness and education sessions; preventative activities, including family and youth well-being programs, support for victims and care-givers; and programs for offenders.
- All persons, men and women, must be held responsible for their own behaviour and actions; programs and services must be made available to those seeking help related to family violence.
- Women have always had formal and informal leadership roles in Aboriginal communities. Their decisions often emerge from groups (rather than as individuals). These are strong reasons why women must participate, meaningfully and significantly, in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of anti-violence programs.
- Integrating local culture, art, storytelling, dance and music into community-based activities is vital to preserve culture in the fight to assuage family violence, even if Western-based crisis and support interventions are part of a shelter's and community's strategy.
- In working to alleviate family and community violence, a wholistic concept of human development must always be considered. In a wholistic view, individuals cannot be healthy unless they grow physically, mentally / intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.



The best practices in this list are based on these foundational principles (although these principles are not comprehensive). The best practices are directed towards helping **NACAFV's** members (generally, INAC-funded shelters) improve their own operations and management, and are meant to help executive directors of shelters benefit from others' successes and experiences, because improvement not only comes from building on internal achievements but can also result from emulating others.

APPENDIX A: DATES OF CONSULTATIONS

THE DATES OF THE SHELTER VISITS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Date (2005)	Name of Shelter
March 29–31 (combined with Pukatawagan)	First Nation Healing Centre, Koostatak, Manitoba
March 29–31 (combined with Koostatak)	Mamawehetowin Crisis Centre, Mathias Colomb (also known as Pukatawagan), Manitoba
August 23–24	We'koqma'q Family Healing Centre, Waycobah, Nova Scotia
August 30	The Akwesasne Family Violence Centre, Akwesasne, Ontario
September 12–14	Nuxalk Nation Transition House Society, Snxlhh Tran, Bella Coola, British Columbia
September 14–16	Xolhemet Second Stage Housing Facility, Chilliwack, British Columbia
September 26–27	Paspew House, Fort Chipewyan, Alberta
September 29–30	YWCA of Prince Albert, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan
October 6	Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, Montreal, Quebec
October 13–14	Nukum Munik Women's Shelter, Sheshatshui, Labrador and Newfoundland
November 2–3	Kitchenuhmaykoosib Equaygamik, Big Trout Lake, Ontario
November 24–25	Siksika First Nation, Alberta (no shelter)



