



To: The Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Study: Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence in Canada

March 31, 2022

## Complexity of Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence and Its Structural Roots

Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence is a social problem with structural roots such as gender inequality, fear of retribution, accepting the emotional, psychological and physical abuse by the partner due to normalization of male superiority by our society. Furthermore, the financial dependence, the unemployment rates, the gender pay gap of 0.89<sup>i</sup> and financial insecurity are also structural barriers that underpin intimate partner and domestic violence experienced by women and girls.

Pathways to gain economic independence through advancing women's education is further complicated by issues such as lack of affordable housing, low childcare availability and affordability, and the need to access loans in order to pay for post-secondary education, which automatically leads to incurring debt.

Intimate Partner and Domestic Violence experienced by women and girls is attributed to a wide range of financial and social structural barriers, not limited to poverty. Efforts need to be coordinated to bridge gaps between siloed systems, and remove the multiple barriers that keep women and their children from staying, or returning to, dangerous situations.

### Homeward Bound:

Every night in Canada approximately 35,000 people are homeless. Over 9,555 Canadian women and 6,545 Canadian youth are homeless on any given night, many of whom are fleeing the brutality of domestic violence.<sup>ii</sup> It is well documented that housing instability contributes to family stress, multitude of health problems and is especially difficult for female-led single parent families. Poor housing quality and residential instability also negatively impact the lives of children and adolescents, harming early development—constraining emotional and behavioural functioning and lowering cognitive skills.

Financial and social support is needed for these women and families living in homelessness and in poverty. Programs and services are needed for the protection of women and girls who are living in unsafe environments; barriers for these vulnerable women and families to seek employment and safe housing, must be eliminated.

Launched by WoodGreen in 2004, [Homeward Bound](#) provides critical interventions for vulnerable women and families, offering a wrap-around multi-service support package which includes education, housing, childcare and access to employment.

Homeward Bound program leads unhoused women and their families, many of whom have experienced violence, out of homelessness, poverty and social assistance through a 4-phase approach that includes

skills training, formal education and internship placement, leading to full-time employment. Homeward Bound supports single mothers in obtaining employment with ‘family sustaining wages’ defined as income equal to, or higher than, \$35,000 per year.

Approximately 80 percent of Homeward Bound participants have experienced abuse. Nearly one in two participants enter the program while being housed in a shelter and 90 percent of these vulnerable clients are accessing social assistance at an average income of \$11,645 per year upon entry to the program. These clients need a pathway to a safe living environment with wrap-around social and financial supports and Homeward Bound provides it.

The majority of Homeward Bound graduates are empowered women earning family sustaining incomes. Securing employment and safe housing are primary outcome goals of Homeward Bound. Higher incomes obtained through employment are directly linked to the ability of single mothers to move out of poverty and unsafe living conditions.

Constellation Consulting Group ran a study of program with the objective of assessing the impact of Homeward Bound by examining changes in housing status, employment, and income source. [The report](#) found graduates five years after the program have had remarkable results, including 92% of participants who were living in a shelter when they began Homeward Bound, now live in market rental, subsidized housing, or own a home. Overall, 67% of survey respondents are now living in market rentals and 8% now own their own home.

The report also found:

- 80% of Homeward Bound graduates complete all of the milestones of the program, achieving a college degree and employment.
- 94% of the program graduates reported being stably housed.
- The employment rate amongst participants entering Homeward Bound was 6% compared with 87% up to five years after graduation.
- On average, full-time employed Homeward Bound graduates reported earning approximately \$43,000 per year; in occupations across fields like early childhood education, customer service, and office administration.

WoodGreen Community Services shares this model through affiliate partners as in the case of Peterborough, Halton Region, and Brantford. We have also worked with the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) to share learnings and adapt with indigenous cultural considerations.

We know it is a government priority to provide a wide range of services and supports to vulnerable populations and address long-standing systemic barriers for women. WoodGreen’s Homeward Bound provides women opportunity to find success in employment and independence. Coming from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, the women in Homeward Bound are united in hope for a better future – they work hard to pave their path to sustainable employment, leave social assistance permanently, obtain housing and a positive, violence-free future for themselves and their children.

The Ontario Government in 2019-2020 reported about one million Ontarians are receiving some form of monthly social assistance. According to the Ontario Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Service percentage of cases that exited Ontario Works (between October – December 2018) that returned within one year (by December 2019) was 33%<sup>iii</sup>. Homeward Bound has a much higher success rate. The majority of program clients are receiving social assistance upon entry to Homeward Bound and exit the program with full time career-oriented employment. The fact that after five years, 87% of Homeward Bound graduates are gainfully employed shows the long-term impact of the program. Homeward Bound breaks the cycle of poverty for single mothers and their children.

## Homeward Bound's Return on Investment is both Economic and Social:

Not only does this program provide vulnerable women and families a pathway out of homelessness and poverty to employment and stability, but the program also has social and economic return. A Social return on investment (SROI) analysis in 2017 by Constellation Consulting Group, determined that for every dollar invested in Homeward Bound, approximately six dollars are created in social and economic value.

All levels of government benefit due to substantial cost reallocation as a result of decreased use of government services by Homeward Bound participants. So far \$48 million has been saved through reduced social assistance and increased tax revenues from the program.

While the majority of this benefit is experienced by program graduates through housing stability, increased education, and better employment opportunities, what is equally important is the value experienced by the children of graduates, who will realize indirect benefits throughout their lifetimes, reducing the cycle of generational poverty.

## Recommendations:

WoodGreen's successful Homeward Bound program demonstrates that wrap-around support services make a difference for single mothers experiencing homelessness, the vast majority of who have experienced domestic abuse, providing proof that impact can be made in this space with combined efforts across ministries and even corporate Canada.

Homeward Bound Leads to Significant Societal Benefit including:

- Graduates earn an average starting salary of \$43,000, contributing to the economy and paying income taxes;
- Securing and maintaining employment, avoiding the need for social assistance and decreasing government spending;
- Increased housing stability, reducing health, social and justice costs connected to homelessness;
- Children of graduate's experience improved (or maintained) positive physical and mental health;
- Children of graduates improved or maintained academic performance, requiring fewer in-school resources.

WoodGreen Community Services supports policy, partnership and initiatives that will empower vulnerable women like the Homeward Bound model and address intimate partner and domestic violence in Canada.

Based on our extensive experience with traumatized women and children, we would like to put forward the following recommendations:

- Core and operating funding to support longer-term programs with wrap-around supports like Homeward Bound focused on addressing the systemic financial and social structural barriers experienced by women and girls fleeing domestic violence.
- Financial support for longer term affordable and independent housing opportunities available to women and girls fleeing domestic violence versus temporary solutions (often through the shelter system). Women require a safe space to recover, regain self-dignity and confidence. Unfortunately, current structure and mandate of the shelter system is a temporary solution, with concerns around safety, availability, and continued structure of dependency through sharing setup, curfews, etc.
- Procedural improvements in the Family Court system when going through divorce, child custody, access, child/spousal support with stress on proper resourcing of more effective legal representation to avoid re-traumatization and further abuse.
- As a preventative measure focus more on the perpetrators vs. those on the violence receiving end. Support more research, recommendations and evidence-based approaches regarding educational and intervention practices.

### About WoodGreen Community Services:

Founded in 1937, WoodGreen Community Services (WCS) began as an east end neighbourhood centre and is now one of Toronto's largest social service agencies, serving 37,000 people each year across 40 locations. We offer over 75 programs and services tackling the social determinants that affect the health and well-being of individuals in our community. WoodGreen provides innovative solutions to critical social needs.

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<sup>i</sup> Statistics Canada, 2022

<sup>ii</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Jesse Donaldson, Tim Richter, & Tanya Gulliver (2013). *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013*. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

<sup>iii</sup> Government of Ontario. Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. *Building a Strong Foundation for Success: Reducing Poverty in Ontario (2020-2025)*.