

Desperate women vie for shelter

By Gillian Cosgrove
Toronto Star

It's a Monday night, shortly before midnight. My husband is drunk and violent. We've had a bitter argument. In a rage, he has thrown me out of the house with only a few dollars in my pocket.

I'm new to Toronto. Even if I had close friends here I would be too ashamed to turn to them.

I am alone. Frightened. Desperate.

Where do I run?

Posing as a woman in just such a plight, I decided to find out.

It's 12:01 a.m. when I phone the Metro Police emergency number and explain my distress. A policewoman happens to answer and asks where I am.

"In a phone booth at the corner of Broadview and Gerrard," she tells me not to worry and gives me the phone numbers of two hostels for women: Nellie's on Broadview Ave. and Street Haven on Pembroke St.

At Nellie's a woman with a soft, calm voice answers. She is sympathetic as I relate my story.

"Do you have any beds left tonight?" I ask.

"No, I'm sorry. They are all filled. But you are welcome to use the couch."

"I'll try to find a bed somewhere else first. But if I bomb out, I'll take up your offer of the couch."

She gives me directions of how to get to Nellie's — should I need them.

Next I try Street Haven. The woman who answers is curt.

"I'm sorry we were all filled up by 11:15 p.m.," she says.

"What am I to do? Where else can I go?"

She refers me to the Evangeline Residence or the Family Residence, both on Dundas St. W. She also suggests the Transitional Centre on Dufferin St.

The nighttime at the Evangeline Residence is busy.

At the Family Residence, I am told that they cater to families and couples but will take single women in a pinch. Someone checks the roster and says there are no more emergency beds for single women available.

Sounds puzzled

At the Transitional Centre, the man who answers sounds puzzled after I repeat my story and my urgent need for a bed.

"Are you a psychiatric patient?" he asks.

"No, but I was told I could get a bed for the night there."

"That's strange because we provide long-term housing for people coming out of psychiatric institutions. You have to have a psychiatrist's referral and, even then, we have a long waiting list."

At the Evangeline Residence my luck is no better. They have only six emergency beds and they were all filled early in the evening.

Desperation is beginning to creep into my voice. I moan: "Then where can I go? I can't walk the streets all night."

I am told to call Stop 86 on Madison Ave.

There a woman tells me I can have a bed for one night only. Finally I am at the end of my search for emergency shelter. With a gush of relief, I start to thank her.

She interrupts to ask one last question. "How old are you?"

"I'm 28."

"Oh, that's too bad. We can't accept women over 25."

She suggests I try another hostel such as Nellie's or Street Haven.

It is now 12:41 a.m. Forty minutes and six hostels later, I am the victim of a vicious circle. I still don't have a bed for the night. I'll have to settle for the couch at Nellie's.

Was my experience a typical one? Are Metro women — the penniless, the battered wives, the transients, the psychiatric outpatients or the women with just nowhere else to go — finding that more and more doors are being slammed in their faces?

It's hard to give a pat answer to that because no one can predict when or why there will be a sudden surge in the demand for emergency beds. Some joke that it follows the cycles of the full moon or the pattern of the welfare cheque payments.

'Hard to say'

"It is hard to say why one night you are full and the next night you have four empty beds," says Jill Elliott, house coordinator of Stop 86 at 86 Madison Ave.

The circumstances that send women to seek emergency shelter are as individual as the women involved.

"The last-straw situation can be triggered by anything or happen at any time," says Elliott.

Nancy Dodginton, a member of the collective that runs Nellie's Hostel at 275A Broadview Ave., says the occupancy rate varies from night to night.

"Sometimes we still have three beds open in the middle of the night," she says. "Other times we know by 7 or 8 o'clock that it is going to be a helluva night because the other hostels are already referring to us and even the Dundas St. Family Residence is full."

"When the situation gets that desperate, all the hostels pull out the roll-away bed or put up someone on the couch."

Hostel workers agreed that it is much more difficult finding a bed on the weekends. In the winter months, or if you have children in tow.

For example, the 22-bed Interval House, one of the three Metro hostels that caters exclu-

Metro hostels

Should you ever find yourself in the unhappy position of needing emergency shelter, here is a list of hostels in Metro:

□ Anduhyaun, 106 Spadina Rd., 920-1492. 14 beds. For young native women.

□ Stop 86, 86 Madison Ave., 922-3271. 25 beds. For young women, aged 16 to 25.

□ Nellie's, 275A Broadview Ave., 461-1084. 30 beds. For any woman in crisis.

□ Toronto Community Hostel, 191 Spadina Rd., 923-4431. 17 beds. For single women and couples.

□ Street Haven, 87 Pembroke St., 967-6060. 10 beds. For women with drug or alcohol problems or in trouble with the law.



Seeking refuge: Winnie Gordon, chaplain of the Evangeline Residence for Women on Dundas St., is forced to turn away a woman looking for a place to sleep. The shelter has only six emergency beds.

sively to women with children, last year had to turn away more than 90 per cent of the 728 requests for beds.

Carolyn Skelly, a staff member at Interval House, says the statistics indicate not so much that domestic violence is on the increase but that more women are coming out of the closet.

"More women are coming forward for help because I guess they realize they no longer have to suffer in silence," she says.

While Metro Social Services Commissioner Ray Tomlinson admits that the supply of emergency beds for women is inadequate, he points out that the over-all budget for hostels increases every year while other services are struggling under budgetary restraints.

The 1980 budget for men's and women's hostels is \$4.2 mil-

lion, a jump of \$800,000 over last year. About \$2.6 million goes towards Metro's Seaton House for men and the Family Residence. The rest is earmarked for the subsidization of 13 privately run hostels, 10 of which are for women.

Metro funds the hostels at a per-diem rate of \$16.25 per woman. The tab is actually split between Metro (20 per cent), the province (30 per cent) and the federal government (50 per cent).

The hard-pressed women's hostels say the real problem is that the number of beds has remained static since 1978. There are now 840 beds for men in Metro and only 170 for women. Since women in crisis are more likely to have children with them, the demand is much greater for a smaller number of beds.

The average occupancy in five women's hostels shot up to 92 per cent for the first four months of 1980 compared to 78 per cent for the same period in 1978, according to a spot survey by Metro social services counselor Irene Ilchysyn.

Pressure builds

The women who work in the hostels feel that the pressure for beds is continuing to build.

"We are filled to the rafters almost every night," says Captain Connie Green of the Salvation Army's Evangeline Residence, which reserves six of its 40 beds for emergencies. "We're turning away about a dozen a day."

"We refer all our leftovers to the Family Residence but often they're jammed as well. It is a really grim situation."

Street Haven has been run-

□ Evangeline Residence, 2808 Dundas St. West, 762-9636. Six emergency beds. For single women.

□ Woodlawn Residence, 80 Woodlawn Ave. E., 923-8454. Three emergency beds. For single women.

□ Interval House, 596 Huron St., 924-1491. 22 beds. For women with children.

□ Women in Transition, 143 Spadina Rd., 967-5227. 18 beds. For women with children.

□ Women's Habitat, 149 Stanley Ave., Etobicoke, 252-5820. 25 beds. For women with children.

□ Family Residence, 674 Dundas St. West, 363-5227. 85 beds. For families but may accept single women.

Family Classified

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Consumer Affairs

\$7 emeralds the dregs but they're genuine

They're genuine 1-carat emeralds, all right, but of a quality usually left behind with the dregs and tailings from the mine.

Some attempt has been made to cut and polish the stones, but not to North American gem standards. In fact, they are what professional dealers and jewellers call "native cut" — that is, cut and polished by natives at the mine site, using crude tools.

This is the expert assessment of two Toronto gemologists and an emerald dealer who examined four emeralds purchased by The Star for \$7 each (plus \$4 shipping, handling and insurance) through a mail order offer still making the rounds in Ontario.

The offer, made to sound like the deal of a lifetime, was brought to Consumer Alert's attention more than a month ago (see Consumer Alert column April 21).

At that time, the offer had an expiry date of midnight, May 30, and was outlined on the letterhead of North American Minerals Ltd., signed by president H. M. Fisk. Fisk now is making the same offer on the letterhead of HMF Minerals Ltd., of which he is also president. Now the cutoff date is June 30.

Thousands 'selected'

Letters are being mailed to thousands of people, whose names have somehow been "selected and computer-printed" on an emerald request form that allows them to order up to four emeralds, which Fisk promises will be accompanied by a "certificate of authenticity."

While no mention is made of the estimated actual retail value of the stones, it's implied they are worth a great deal more than the \$7 each Fisk is asking. His letter says, "To determine what such a stone might be worth, ask your jeweller if he can or will sell you a comparable 1-carat emerald for \$7."

Based on what Consumer Alert has learned since acquiring four of the emeralds, the reason a jeweller probably can't or won't meet such a challenge is that no one in the trade would likely have emeralds of the low quality Fisk is offering to the public.

One dealer we consulted said he wouldn't take them if they were offered free.

The four emeralds we obtained, packaged in twos in small plastic cases, were examined for us by Herb Forth, a Toronto jeweller and president of the Canadian Professional Jewellery Appraisal Association, and by John Taylor, an emerald specialist at Forth's gem lab on Yonge St. An emerald dealer visiting at the time also examined the stones but asked to remain anonymous.

Dull and cloudy

The consensus among the three experts is that we got what we paid for — the stones are worth no more than \$7 each. Each weighed at least 1-carat, as promised, and they are genuine emeralds. However, they are so full of "inclusions" that they are opaque, only semi-transparent at best.

In other words, if you were to put enough of the stones on a window pane, you could block out the room. They would not let in the light. A good quality emerald, or other precious gem, shows its true colors by letting light pass through it.

The emeralds we got in the mail look something like jade. They are dull and cloudy. When placed under a Chelsea filter — devised to sort out genuine emeralds from fake — the best that could be seen was a vague pinky color.

Our advice to anyone who gets the Fisk offer in the mail: Throw it in the garbage. You'd be better off buying some inexpensive costume jewelry.

Women's refuge must go begging for funding

It's been a businesslike meeting so far, just like any of a dozen interviews in which I sit scribbling notes in a green steno pad, while an agency tells me about its funding crisis.

I'm always writing about funding crises.

Suddenly, Renee Edwards, the composed, attractive and lucid board member of Interval House, interrupts herself. She slams a fist down on her knee and yells.

"Oh I'm so bloody FED UP. Every year, beg, beg, beg and smile. It's TOO MUCH!"

We shout with laughter. We hoot, we swear, the whole staff of Interval House and I, the nonobjective reporter. It's a moment when if pure, distilled, frustrated rage could turn into gold, Interval House would be rolling in riches. But it can't, and it won't, because once again a woman's social service is up against the wall and governments, composed almost entirely of men in \$300 suits, are unmoved.

Oh, a top man might, if besought, move the cigar to the other corner of his mouth and ask for "a complete report."

A complete report which would take up more and more volunteer hours of a staff that is already overstretched... seven young women who work 20-hour overnight shifts and do without fringe benefits so that no one will lose her job.

Interval House is the oldest shelter for battered women on the continent.



MICHELE LANDSBERG

Its reputation is solid. Every Toronto service, from police to courts to Children's Aid, absolutely relies on it. There are more than 1,000 crisis calls a year, and the house is always bulging at the seams with its maximum number: 26 women and children, who stay for two or three weeks.

Half a million women, an official and conservative estimate, get battered every year in Canada. They are kicked, punched, slashed, banged against walls, thrown down stairs, their teeth and bones are splintered and sometimes they are killed. And some find the courage to grab the kids and a few of their things (green garbage bags are the favorite luggage) and get out.

The stress is incredible. The women flee from husbands who alternately cajole and terrorize them. They have to try to find jobs, a room, comfort the children. Flounder through a sea of red tape, get welfare or go to court for separation papers or restraining orders, and, meanwhile, fend off the hostile advances of their spurned men. That's why there

are bars on the windows at Interval House.

In all this, the Interval House staff works round the clock to help, listen, support, counsel and act. Yet Metro Social Services pays only about \$15 per day per woman — the barest minimum shelter allowance — because, due to provincial government inaction, the house is still classified as a low-subsidy "lodging house" instead of as a group home or counselling centre.

So now, despite the generosity of the United Appeal and the constant, loyal trickle of small donations from working women, and despite the exhausting yearly fund-raising work of the board and staff, the house is literally falling apart.

"If we don't get money for repairs somehow," Renee Edwards told me, "we'll have to fold. We can't keep going this way. We know we're tempting fate... the city might issue work orders — by going public, but what can we do?"

It's an old house on a leafy downtown street, and it's so worn that its bones are showing. The linoleum in the kitchen is worn through to the bare boards. A hole in the roof lets rain pour, not trickle, right through three rotting floors. The plumbing system is so decrepit that one bathroom has had to be locked up completely.

A guided tour takes me up and down incredibly dark, narrow stairs, through bedrooms where exhausted

children sprawl sleeping on beds surrounded by their pathetic bundles of luggage, last Christmas's battered toys on the floor beside them, snatched remnants of a crumpled family life. Like refugees.

Yes, this is a refugee camp. The women help with the cooking and cleaning and, cast adrift with strangers, sit late at night around the kitchen table to draw solace from each

other's stories. The backyard, hopelessly trampled by hordes of transient children, is a square of mud.

Restless toddlers, confused perhaps by their sudden move to a houseful of other women and children, crawl around the kitchen floor, waiting for lunch. The three high chairs lined up against the wall have lost their padding and the bare wood slats make a hard seat.



Troubled sleep: This little boy has a roof over his head for the night. But Interval House, a refuge for battered women and their children, is desperate for money as it copes with 1,000 calls a year.