

inside
OCTOBER 2022



By her side
for 50 years

CANADA'S FIRST
CENTRE FOR
ABUSED WOMEN
AND CHILDREN



HER NEEDS. HER JOURNEY. HER SURVIVAL.

A Retrospect of Runaway Wives

It started with a note that Lynn Zimmer tacked on a dingy wall at The Women's Place, a run-down house on Toronto's Dupont Street.

She had signed up to volunteer there in the summer of 1972, thinking the women who stopped in would be like-minded young feminists. But to her surprise, several of the women who came to visit weren't looking to talk politics: they came seeking help after fleeing violence at home. With no income, they needed an address before they could apply for public assistance.

In the early 1970's, intimate partner violence didn't even have a name. Women who left abusive spouses were labeled "runaway wives" by the media. Too often, police would urge them to go back to their husbands.

Lynn decided there had to be a place created for women seeking safety, a warm place where they could find sanctuary after surviving violence. So she scrawled her note, asking anyone who was interested in forming a women's crisis shelter to come to a meeting.

Darlene Lawson, Billie Stone, Martha Ireland and Joice Guspie showed up. They too had realized that there were women in the community silently enduring physical abuse and indignities.

Around that table, a life-saving vision started to take shape.

The founders had no experience with finding space or raising funds, but they eventually secured a government grant and some United Way funding. They fixed up and furnished the house themselves – collecting discarded but functioning furniture from affluent neighbourhoods. When the house was ready, they each chipped in \$5 to stock the kitchen with healthy food.

And when they opened the doors on April 1st, 1973, the women came. Interval House provided a safe place to escape the violence they faced.

Since 1973, Interval House has been built around supporting women and ensuring a future full of hope. While the headlines might look different today, the issues remain the same – and that's why Interval House continues to strive for a future free from intimate partner violence. Your steadfast support shows you stand beside us and the women we empower. Thank you.

The Rent Subsidy Pilot Project:

Your support in action

Finding affordable, sustainable housing is one of the primary challenges facing women who flee intimate partner violence. And it's exactly the challenge the Rent Subsidy Pilot Project was created to address!

In our three-year pilot project, highly motivated, career-oriented clients selected from the BESS program were provided with a rental subsidy of up to \$1,000 per month for a year.

The project has been a resounding success! Every participant has improved her financial stability, found rewarding employment options, and is moving towards being able to afford private market rent.

It moved women who have experienced intimate partner violence away from homelessness after abuse and towards building resiliency.

Once again, your support helped Interval House channel passion and innovation to create brighter futures for women in our community.

And here's the most exciting update: beginning in October, the project is no longer in a pilot phase! Soon, the Rent Subsidy Program will begin offering one-year subsidies to 10 BESS clients each year for the next five years.

This is how your generosity removes barriers – and changes lives.

The Next Step

Why housing is critical to supporting survivors of intimate partner violence

Did you know? Violence against women is one of the main causes of homelessness and housing instability among women and children.

Women survivors of intimate partner violence face limited housing options compounded with various forms of discrimination, including:

- Lack of affordable housing options
- Discrimination from landlords based on having children, immigration status or racial bias
- Debt or a poor credit rating after leaving an abusive relationship

Women and their children often lose their family home when they escape abuse, which means the lack of access to safe and affordable housing is one of the leading barriers they face when rebuilding their lives.

When you support Interval House, you support the programs and services that help women overcome these barriers and access housing. You stand beside them as they find the comfort and safety of home.





Finding her strength, rebuilding her life:

Cara's Story

I woke up from a deep sleep, needing a moment to recognize where I was.

As things came into focus, I remembered: I was in my sister's apartment. I had fled my abusive partner the night before and my sister was letting me sleep on her floor. I had no place else to go.

A few years before, I'd had fallen in love with a man who promised me the world, while convincing me that a happy future with him meant leaving my job and isolating from most of my friends. By the time I was able to leave him, I had no income and nowhere to turn but my sister's already crowded apartment.

After a few months, my sister and I agreed it was time for me to go. *But where?* I felt so hopeless that I considered returning to the relationship.

That's when I learned about the BESS program at Interval House. At my first appointment, I tearfully told my counsellor, Fiona, how I had no idea how to find work and face the world again.

"Maybe it's not the right time to get back into work," Fiona said. "Everybody heals differently, and that's okay."

It felt like a weight had lifted off my shoulders. Finally, there was validation that I wasn't alone. My trauma was real, and my healing journey hadn't even begun.

The women in my BESS workshop were incredible. They had all gone through something similar and were at their own stages of healing. It was a special, hope-filled community that welcomed me without judgment.

I soon realized that BESS was exactly what I needed. From financial literacy and housing workshops to counselling and self-care activities, BESS had so much to offer me. For the first time in years, I made friends. I voiced my opinions. I rediscovered my own interests. *I rented a home of my own.*

I feel like I'm rebuilding myself. While I'm not the same person I was before, I learned skills through BESS that helped me find the confidence I'd lost surviving a violent relationship.

Today I can honour the person I was before as I look forward to everything that lies ahead of me. Your support makes it possible for me, and all women in the BESS community, to live with pride. Thank you for your kindness.



Adapting, Supporting, Innovating – every year since 1973

Re-Imagining our Children's Program

In our Children's Program, kids living in the shelter who have experienced intimate partner violence are given unstructured play time, while Child and Youth Counsellors observe to determine how they've been affected and how best to address their needs. Our approach is individualized — geared to the specific needs of each child.

After extensive research and evaluation, we've realized there isn't enough children's programming that specifically addresses intimate partner violence and includes both mothers and their children.

We're now in the early phases of developing shared programming that includes women and children coming together in their healing journey and reconnecting after leaving abuse behind. We're exploring counselling options such as family psycho-educational therapy, family group counselling sessions, youth mentorship and more. Look for more information on these innovative changes to our children's program in the future!

Expanding our Virtual Education Program

Since we opened our doors 50 years ago, we've always looked for new ways to serve women and children fleeing violence. The pandemic highlighted the importance of eliminating barriers based on physical ability and location, allowing more women to benefit from Interval House's programs and services virtually.

This year, we plan to bring our counselling services to an online platform to help women all over Ontario get the support they need to end the cycle of abuse. We then hope to expand the program across Canada, providing services to more women victims and survivors of intimate partner violence.

With your ongoing generosity, innovative ideas like these will reach more women who are escaping violence. Thank you for your support.



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If you'd like more information about how you can support the women and children of Interval House, visit our website www.intervalhouse.ca or call 416-924-1411 ext. 238