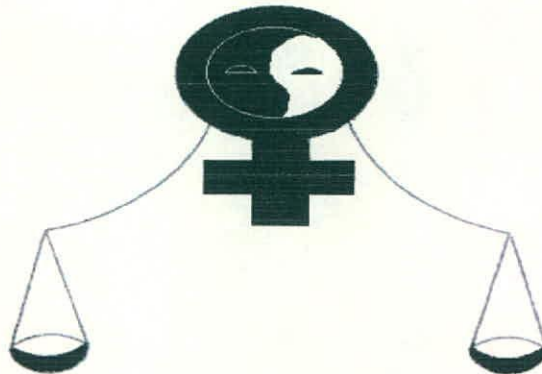


Pre Budget Consultation Submission
From Libra House
February 2015



LIBRA HOUSE INC

Submitted to:

Office of the Minister
Department of Finance
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Respectfully submitted by:

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Pre-Budget Consultations
Submission from Libra House

Libra House is an emergency safe house for women, with or without children, who are experiencing intimate partner violence. We are located in Happy Valley-Goose Bay and have been providing emergency shelter and services to families for the past 30 years.

Our Government has always supported the work we do and we trust that we will continue to work together to address issues of family violence in our Province. We hope we won't see any cuts to services to some of our most vulnerable population. Because of the front line work we do with women in crisis, we feel that it is imperative that government understand the impact on women when there are cuts to services or they are not adequately funded. It has particular implications for women living in rural and remote areas, aboriginal women and women living with disabilities. Women, children and families suffer direct consequences in terms of increased tension and violence during times of recession and, as we are learning, in times of growth and development. We are discovering that when there is increased Community development, options for women who are experiencing relationship violence are reduced. Affordable housing is non-existent and families are staying in our Shelter for up to 6 – 8 months before being able to find a place to move on to.

Presently there are 5 provincially funded shelters for women in Labrador. We are serving a vast population and geographical area, the funding we receive now is inadequate for us to meet the needs of women, children and families in this part of the Province. In many remote areas women have very limited resources when they are in crisis. Many women and children have to leave their home, their culture and their first language in order to seek refuge from abuse. The need for Transition Houses along with Women's Centers and Anti-Violence Coalitions – the organizations that stand united and work on issues of equality/equity and inclusion – cannot be overstated. Shelters, Women's Centers, the Rape Crisis Center and organizations such as the Transition House Association of NL and Violence Prevention Labrador, to name a few, are seriously under-funded and under staffed. There are limited resources for us to do the very important work of prevention, education, advocacy and service delivery when we are often coping with crisis. And, as we know, it is much more expensive to be reacting to crisis than it is to try to prevent it.

There are huge changes happening in our region that are concerning to those of us who work with women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Of particular concern for Libra House is the serious lack of affordable and safe housing and supports for women leaving abusive relationships. Women come to our shelter and find themselves in a situation where they cannot move on to a home where they will feel safe. Single women, youth and seniors are seriously limited in their options when it comes to housing. In fact, the only option for most is to live in a boarding home and even those are difficult to find space in. Many decide to return to abusive relationships or move in with family in homes that are seriously overcrowded already. It is the goal of Libra House to expand our services to include a Housing First Model of Supportive Housing for women who use our services.

Women who are challenged with severe addictions face even more limitations when reaching out for support and services. Our lack of a detox / rehab center in Labrador is unacceptable. Service providers are often left with no choice but to put women in lock-ups and hospital when they are under the influence because there is no appropriate place where they can get the help they require.

We have a Housing and Homelessness Coalition, with one staff person located in the Labrador Friendship Center and a Housing Development Coordinator for the Region. There is also a local Community Advisory Board on Homelessness that meets regularly with a focus on identifying and exploring solutions to housing and homelessness issues. An 'Action Team' on Homelessness has been organized with representatives from government departments, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, Nunatsiavut and various community service providers. This team is working to address all of the issues that relate to people who are homeless including finding adequate resources, emergency accommodations, services and supplies. Again, using a Housing First Model has proven to be a success in other communities and Goose Bay is building on those successes.

For more than 30 years Shelters in NL have been responding to the need for increased space and services. New shelters are being built and others renovated in order to be able to respond effectively to the issue of relationship violence. We also recognize that our role in our communities is about much more than responding to crisis. We play a valuable role in public awareness and education. We are not, however, funded to do prevention work. Much of the work we do around prevention and education happens as a result of fund-raising and volunteers. This results in a lack of consistency and accountability. The same applies to education and training for staff. We are faced with challenges to find trained staff to seek out employment in the field of anti-violence work because funding for human resources is not sufficient to staff the shelters at an acceptable level. Shelter workers are employed in a potentially volatile environment, and yet they are usually on shift by themselves. This must be viewed as a serious Health and Safety concern.

(We have been lobbying for a review of our staffing levels for the past 7 years and I am attaching copies of reports and documents that have been submitted to Government with the rationale for double staffing all Shelters in the Province.)

Ultimately women need to know that the services that we require, like adequate housing, policing, mental and physical health care, legal aid and shelters are going to be available and have the resources to deal with our concerns when we need them. We need to know that the government is prepared to have the safety nets in place that we require when we need them.

We would ask you to apply the gender inclusive lens throughout this process and be reminded of how your decisions will affect women and ultimately children and families. We need to know that you value and are willing to invest in the health, safety and security of the people of Labrador.