



Low Barrier Spaces for Women: A Critical Part of the Homelessness Solution

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Services

Women and Homelessness - A Crisis in Hamilton

2009 - increasing pressure on the four Violence Against Women Shelters
one shelter for women experiencing homelessness - 20 beds
community identifies gaps and a need to do more for homeless women

2019 - now have 43 beds for women experiencing homelessness
(men's system has 227 beds)





Willow's Place Fills A Gap

2011 - MSH commissioned Social Planning Research Council to look at women and homelessness in Hamilton



**NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN:
HOMELESS WOMEN
IN HAMILTON**
Summary Report - 19 May 2011



"Women's homelessness is not an extraordinary phenomenon but one closely interrelated with women's vulnerability in the labour market and at home."
Prof. Barbara Laidman, University of Guelph



Since the 1980s, homelessness in Canada (and other countries) has been on the rise. It is a complex and multifaceted issue, with many causes and consequences. The report aims to provide a better understanding of the situation of homeless women in Hamilton, Ontario, and to identify the needs and challenges they face. It also provides recommendations for how to address these issues.

SPRC Social Planning Research Council
Commissioned by: **MSH** (Municipal Social Housing) / **SPRC** (Social Planning Research Council)
Funded by: **MSH** (Municipal Social Housing) / **SPRC** (Social Planning Research Council)

- 2013 - WHPC was established (Women's Housing Planning Collaborative) - coordinate, advocate and facilitate a gender specific seamless system for women
- 2014 - Willow's opened it's doors as a low barrier day space for women identified clients - a hub where women could find community and connect with resources and begin to have housing conversations

- participants defined the space
- Willow's remained nameless until women had the opportunity to come to the space



A powerful metaphor; thrive and survive under the most difficult and challenging situations
Flexible; adaptable; strong



Gender and Homelessness

- Hidden Homelessness - Homelessness among women is the largest growing population in Canada
- A few factors that lead to women's homelessness;
 - Income
 - Shelter/Housing
 - Violence
 - LGBTQ2+ Community
 - Mental Health
 - Addiction

Average age of death for a woman in Canada is **81 yrs.**
But the average age of death for a homeless woman in Canada is **39 yrs.**



What makes Willow's Place different?

What we are...

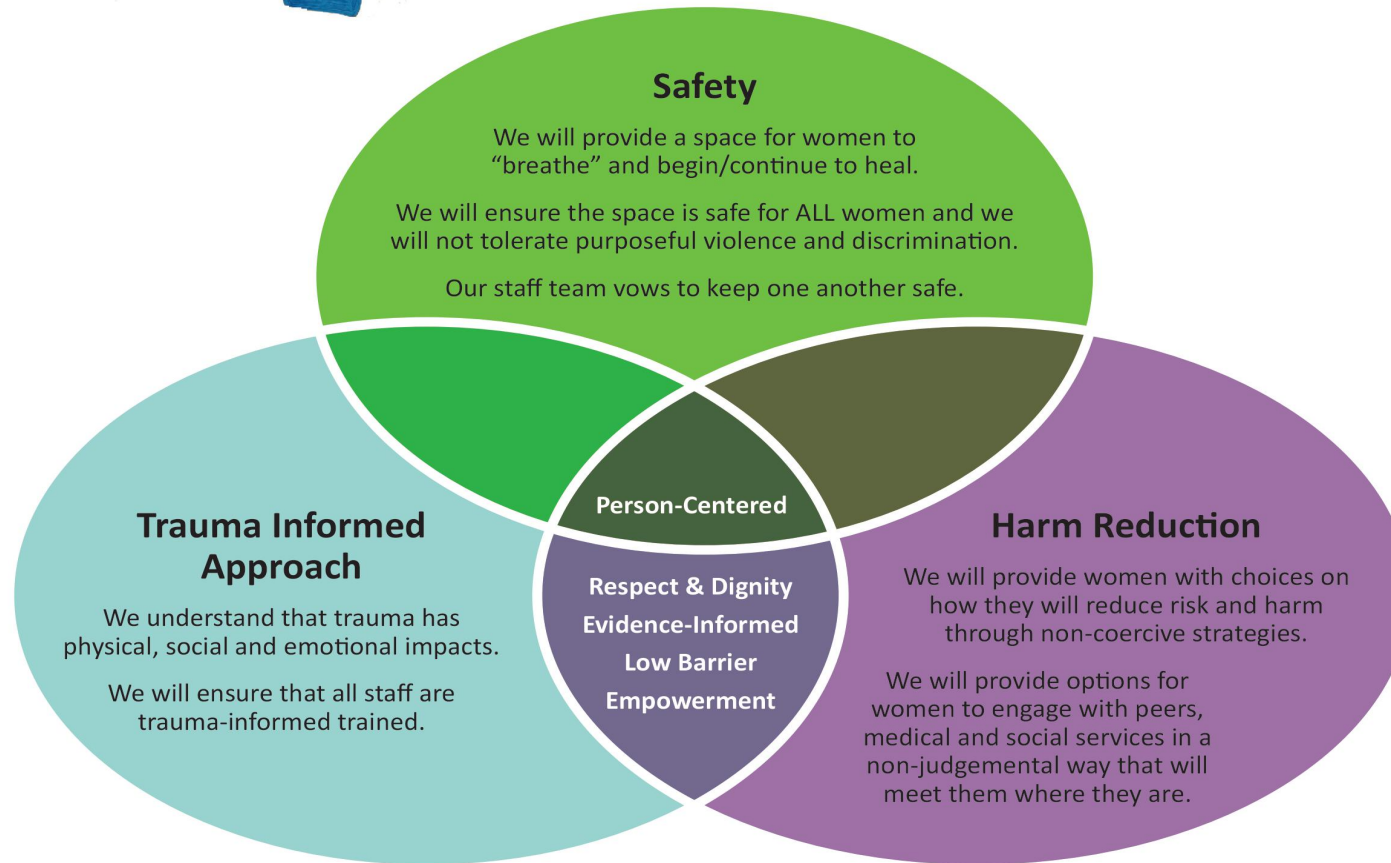
- a low barrier space
- a space where community partners can connect with their clients
- a space run from a harm reduction framework
- a program with a continuous quality improvement culture
- supports all women along the housing continuum

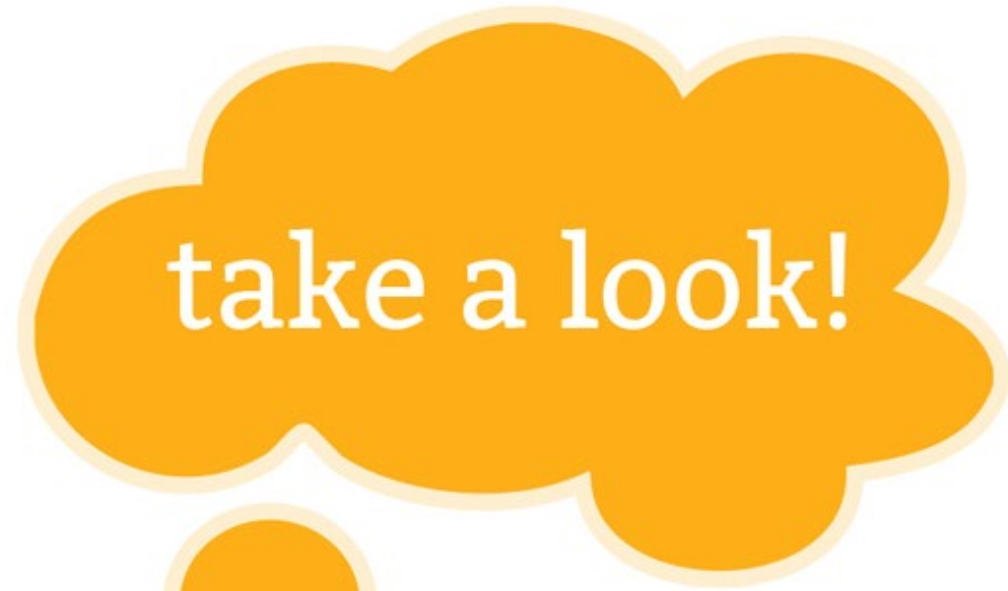
What we provide...

- a Zen room which provides a calm and quiet space for reflection and rest
- Community Room - a lounge/common space
- laundry access and shower
- a powerful team of unique and supportive staff, volunteers and students



Model of Care and Support





take a look!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PgbDNoC2-Go&feature=youtu.be>



The Numbers - July-September, 2019

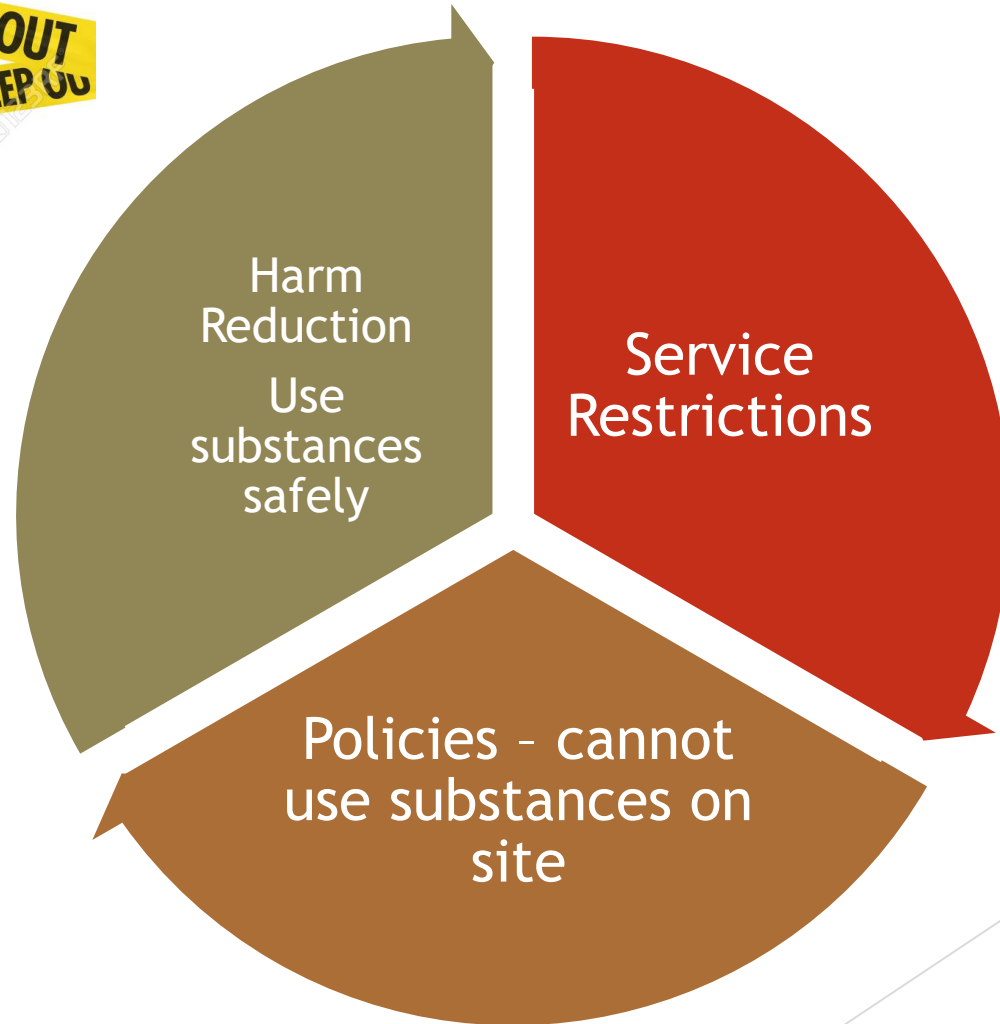
- Served an average of 33 “new” women per month
- Average visits per month 280 housed women; 407 homeless women - approx. 700+ visits per month
- Ratio of homeless women to precariously housed is changing - first half of year was 50/50 now it's 60/40
- Average of 275 mental health events each month; MH being our biggest challenge

Mental Health And Addictions Challenges

- Use in the space
 - Drug-induced Psychosis
 - Emergency Mental Health and Addiction Services
 - Capacity
- ✓ Average of 100 incidents of suspected psychosis in each month



Balancing Service with Safety in a Low Barrier-Setting



Building Community; Reducing Stigma

- safety plan together - reduces risk - (safe spaces/warm spaces/hidden spaces)
- Reduces social isolation - build relationships - check-ins - invite as groups
- Sharing - resources (clothes, toiletries,) and information about community events/meals etc.
- collectively protect the space - under-report for fear of closure of space - remind each other of guidelines - monitor the space - keep street conflict on the street - help to clean and decorate - quietly report to staff ongoing issues/danger to other women - also protect staff
- the existence of stigma - at all levels

Take Aways.....

- If you want to serve multiply-marginalized women, create a space that offers safety and trust
- Bring the services to them whenever possible including housing partners
- Never underestimate the power of women supporting other women
- Deliberate, meaningful and gradual engagement is key; patience is a must



Thank You



Sources:

Street Health Report, Research Bulletin #2 (2007)

Women and Homelessness in Canada, A Brief Review of the Literature, Duchesne, A. (2015)

Not to be Forgotten:

<http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Not-to-Be-Forgotten-Homeless-Women-in-Hamilton-Summary-Report-May-2011.pdf>

howstheweather.ca