

# Keep them safe Woman finds healing after fleeing domestic abuse

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BC Housing is partnering with SARA for Women to redevelop a site in Mission to accommodate up to 60 homes for women and children leaving violence. This project is currently in the design phase, with an expected construction start date of late 2024.

Puffer says the housing crisis is serious for everyone but it can be especially difficult for women and children fleeing domestic violence. She says there are challenges in Mission and the wider Fraser Valley with finding the proper space for housing.

“The goal would always be to have enough housing to house people. But is that realistic? Is there space for it? Is there money for it?” Puffer said.

SARA For Women also has a waitlist of 110 for Stop the Violence counselling and 38 for PEACE (Prevention Education Advocacy Counselling Empowerment), a program for children & youth experiencing violence. Puffer says there’s a need for more funding for counselling programs to meet the need.

“Those are the things that we’re really looking at in this coming year. How do we provide more counselling and more support, emotional support, for her now to take that next step? Housing I think is going to be a problem until probably until

interest rates come down and maybe beyond because we just don’t have the capacity, let alone the funding. But the reality is, even those that have housing we need to be able to support them to make healthy choices,” Puffer said.

In the past year, SARA also closed its warm zone program in Abbotsford due to a variety of factors including increased costs and loss of funding. The warm zone was a daily drop-in centre that “mostly dealt with women in addiction, women experiencing homelessness and women working in the sex trade.”

“It was a place for them to come shower, clean up, have an nap, maybe get some clean clothes, maybe get some food,” Puffer said.

SARA For Women is working to find a location that works in the Fraser Valley to possibly reopen in the future.

“Keeping women safe right now — I mean, you’ve seen all the things that are happening around the world. It’s it’s not a very safe time to be a woman and so trying to keep women safe is our number one priority and trying to find programs and ways to do that is important,” Puffer said.

Outside of the demand for housing, SARA For Women has a need for donations of formula and diapers.

Dillon White  
Mission Record

Asking for help didn’t come easily for Mary White.

However, while living through domestic abuse from her son, stepson and ex-daughter-in-law in 2016, she reached the limit where she needed help.

At the time, she was afraid and decided to call SARA For Women. Beds in the Abbotsford and Mission transition houses were full and she called three to four times before there was space to take her in.

“I could tell they were getting as concerned as I was as the abuse was getting heavier,” White said.

SARA For Women housing coordinator Sarah Hope says there are quite often delays to get into transition houses because domestic violence is so prominent and beds are always full. White moved to a transition house in Abbotsford for more than a month. She was going to move to the Mission transition house, but



Mary White (right) ended up at a SARA For Women transition house in Abbotsford in 2016 after fleeing domestic abuse. SARA housing coordinator Sarah Hope (left) says White’s strength is incredible. /Dillon White Photo

they found space for her at Christine Lamb Residence in Abbotsford.

“They put me here, which was really delightful. It was a gift for me,” White said.

If White hadn’t made the call, she expects the outcome

would have been tragic.

“I wouldn’t be alive. I’d be dead. I’d be prostituting, I’d be dead. Surprised I’m not there,” she said.

She says SARA helped to protect her from herself.

Christine Lamb Residence

provides an 18-month program for women, with most women coming from transition houses or abusive situations.

“Normally there’s a waitlist to get in here. So that’s why Mary spent a fair bit of time in the transition house because we really wanted to get her to this program,” Hope said.

White excelled in the program. When her stay was coming to an end after two years, SARA For Women offered her a caretaker position within the building so she wouldn’t have to leave.

White says spiritual healing helped her to survive what she went through — her history of abuse included.

“It was slow going. It wasn’t as topsy turvy mentally and emotionally, but it was more — sometimes [the effects] would peak and go down,” she said.

Sharing her experience is easier now that White is not reenacting past learned behaviours.

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