

Howe Sound Women's Centre Society

Purpose

The Howe Sound Women's Centre Society operates on the traditional, unceded territories of the Skwxwú7mesh, Lilwat7úl, and Lower Stl'atl'imx Nations. As an organization we respect the history of this land and its Nations, working towards true reconciliation and inclusivity in our shared communities.

In October 7, 1981, Howe Sound Women's Centre Society was formed as a grassroots organization dedicated to the prevention of violence against women and support for women, children and youth impacted by violence or abuse. We provide a transition house and safe home for women and children who are leaving abusive relationships or at risk of experiencing violence and otherwise unsafe living conditions, support, resources, referrals and advocacy. Comprised of 45 passionate employees and a dedicated volunteer base, we serve the needs of women and children in the Sea to Sky Corridor including Pemberton, Whistler, Squamish and the Nations of N'Quatqua, Samahquam, Lil'wat, Skatin, Xa'xtsa, and Squamish. The population in our service area is more than 36,000 dispersed over approximately 200 kilometres.

Howe Sound Women's Centre Society is the only service provider in the Sea to Sky Corridor that works from a feminist perspective, offering a unique set of helping services to women and their children.

Mission

Howe Sound Women's Centre Society promotes women's equality and the empowerment of women and their children. We work from a feminist* perspective. By responding to and working for change, we honour the diversity of women's lives and meet the evolving needs of women and children throughout the Sea to Sky Corridor.

**Women and men who believe in women's rights and equality throughout society.*

Vision

Howe Sound Women's Centre envisions a day when all women and their children are valued and lead healthy lives – supported, connected to the community and violence-free.

Programs:

Howe Sound Women's Centre provides emergency transition housing, crisis support, children and family counselling, youth education programs, sexual assault response and prevention, multicultural outreach, homeless prevention services, resources, referrals and advocacy throughout the Sea to Sky Corridor. Each year we support more than 8,000 client interactions through our programs and services in the region.

Growing Need:

As the communities of the Sea to Sky Corridor grow at a rapid rate, so too does the need for the critical work done by Howe Sound Women's Centre. Each year we are seeing increased demand for crisis support including our Transition House and Safe Home operating at capacity, the Whistler and Squamish Drop-In Centres seeing year over year increase in drop-in visits, and increased calls to the Society's 24-hour crisis line.

This past year, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Howe Sound Women's Centre, like our sister organizations throughout the province, have seen an unprecedented level of need for safe housing for survivors of intimate partner violence. In addition to the continued operation of our transition house in Squamish and Safe Home in Pemberton, both which have been operating at capacity, the society has been sheltering survivors in hotel accommodations in Squamish and occasionally, when available, in Whistler.

As the pandemic enters its second year, the impacts of a year of isolation, economic uncertainty, and anxiety continue to negatively impact the rates of gender-based violence throughout the region, the province, the country, and the world. We are witnessing a secondary pandemic of violence against women.

Whistler Safe Home:

Currently, with the exception of occasional and very temporary hotel accommodations, Whistler does not have emergency housing for survivors of gender-based violence. Survivors are required to uproot their lives to be housed in Squamish at Pearl's Place Transition House, or in Pemberton at Pearl's Safe Home. For many survivors in Whistler it is not feasible to leave their community, uprooting their children from school and friends, and the financial burden of either having to leave their job or commute through very limited transportation options. Most survivors in Whistler choose to not access emergency housing as a result, increasing their risk of ongoing violence.

The establishment of a Safe Home in Whistler, would allow Howe Sound Women's Centre staff to provide crisis support and emergency housing within the community, provide safety planning, and support a survivor in navigating their next steps, all while ensuring those who wish to stay in the community are able to do so. Survivors of violence need to have options to best meet their individual unique needs and a Whistler Safe Home provides for autonomy of choice.

A safe home provides survivors of gender-based violence with safe, secure, confidential accommodations for 10-14 days (and sometimes longer) while they process the trauma they have experienced and navigate next steps with the support of crisis support outreach workers. All the survivor's needs are cared for including providing food, transportation, and personal care needs. Crisis support staff check in daily and are also available 24 hours a day by text, phone or email. Support staff work with the survivors on safety planning and help navigate next steps in

the survivor's journey, which may include pursuing justice, finding permanent accommodations, referrals for counselling services, support in accessing medical care, and more.

In the past two years, Howe Sound Women's Centre has housed 7 women and 2 children from Whistler in housing outside of the community for a total of 181 bed nights. In addition, 25 women have turned down services due to the requirement that they leave the community to access emergency housing options in Squamish and Pemberton.

Howe Sound Women's Centre Emergency Housing Statistics:

FYE 2018/2019

Number of Women and Children served	83
Number of Bed Nights	1095

FYE 2019/2020

Number of Women and Children served	105
Number of Bed Nights	1329

FYE 2020/21

Number of Women and Children served	125*
Number of Bed Nights	1721*

*estimate for FYE March 31, 2021