

Victims and Survivors of Crime Week 2021

Supporting Women and Children Escaping Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse

VICTORIA WOMEN'S
Transition
 *House*
SOCIETY

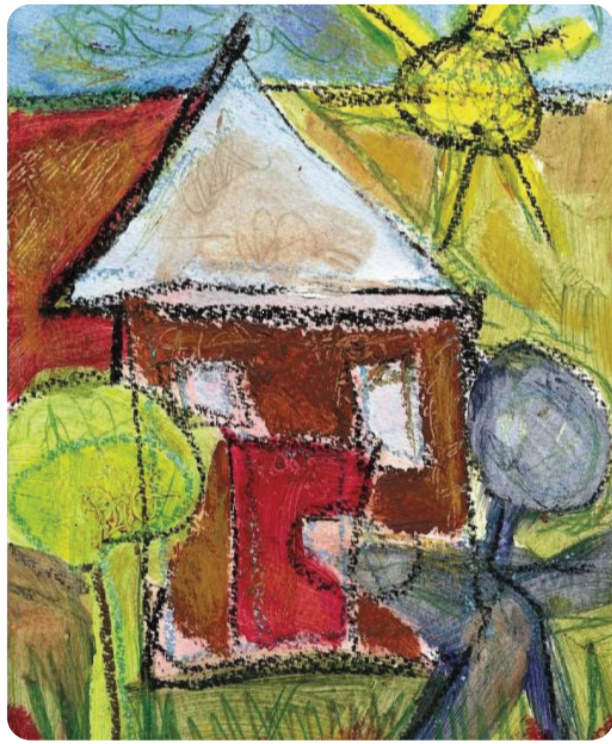
Our Mission

Victoria Women's Transition House Society (VWTH) collaborates, advocates and educates to address and prevent intimate partner violence and abuse of women and children through supportive shelter, housing, counselling and other community-based services.

Emergency Shelter

Last year, the Victoria Women's Transition House **Emergency Shelter** provided support and care to more than 260 women and children escaping abuse. In addition to safe and stable 30-day housing, individuals and families were provided with nourishing meals, basic care necessities, advocacy, legal and housing assistance, as well as trauma-informed counselling and community referrals. The **Children's Shelter Program** also offered crisis counselling, caregiver support and referrals.

Women escaping intimate partner violence and abuse can access our secure **Emergency Shelters** located in private locations. If you or someone you know is a victim of intimate partner violence and abuse, call our 24-hour **Crisis Line** at **250.385.6611**. Trained staff and volunteers can provide information, explain the available resources, give a referral and walk women through a safety plan.



Pictured: "A Safe Place. Painting by a child from our Shelter Art Break Program

How to Reach Us

Crisis and Information Line 250.385.6611

 250.592.2927

 info@vwth.bc.ca

 transitionhouse.net

Charitable No. 10817 3501 RR0001



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The Bystander Effect: What You Can Do When You Witness Abuse

It can be difficult to know how to respond in social settings when we hear or witness intimate partner violence (IPV), also known as domestic abuse. Sometimes, it can feel less awkward, easier or safer to do or say nothing or to ignore the situation entirely and assume someone else will help address the issue. But what happens when the bystander effect occurs and everyone assumes that someone else will help? The victim is left isolated, does not receive the check-in or support they may need and in some cases, is exposed to a more harmful or dangerous situation.

There are many things we can do when we hear or witness abusive attitudes, behaviours or acts:

- **Speak up** When we ignore abuse, which includes derogatory or belittling comments, we validate and enable abusive attitudes and behaviours. Simple statements such as "what did you mean by that comment?", "what you are saying/the way you are treating this person is not okay" or "what you are doing is abuse. Stop." can help to hold people accountable for their words and actions
- **Provide company** When you think a person is the target of an abuser, e.g., at a party or on public transit, staying with or near a person tells the abuser and victim that they are not alone and can help prevent a situation from escalating
- **Acknowledge** the reality of the victim. When you witness abuse, communicate with a nod that you heard or saw what happened. This can help to validate the person's experience. If you speak to the victim, express your concern in a way that is respectful and non-judgemental



- **Offer your support** Questions such as "are you okay?", "how can I support you?" or "would you like for me to stay with you?" show the person that you are there to support them
- **Encourage** the person to connect to community resources such as the Victoria Women's Transition House Crisis Line, 250.385.6611 for support. If comfortable, you can offer to be present when they call
- **Call 911**, if you think the person is in immediate danger

As bystanders, we have a choice to speak up and counter abusive attitudes, behaviour and acts. This will empower more people to take a more active stand and help to create safer social environments that support and give power to survivors and possible victims of abuse.

Client Story

Maria* with her four-year-old daughter, Sophia*, fled a physically, financially, and verbally abusive partner shortly after immigrating to Canada. Her partner physically assaulted Maria and police were involved but no charges were laid because she could not provide a statement due to a language barrier.

Maria and Sophia came to Victoria Women's Transition House's Emergency Shelter where counsellors advocated and arranged weekly translation services for Maria so that staff could support and connect her with legal representation and trauma counselling in her language.

When Maria first arrived, she had no community or support network as her ex-partner was extremely controlling. The VWTH Shelter Program provided Maria with a new cell phone and a free six-month plan offered by a telecommunications company. With the help of the counsellors, Maria set up a bank account and applied for income assistance, securing income for her and her daughter.

During her stay at the Shelter, Maria and Sophia made social and community connections, despite the language barrier. Watching Maria's daughter and the other children play highlighted how fundamental human connection is during periods of stress and transition, even if verbal communication is restricted.

Housing was one of the biggest obstacles for Maria. VWTH counsellors advocated for her during her housing search on all levels, and in the end, she secured private market housing and a modest



apartment. Maria also received a VWTH Homeless Prevention Program subsidy and a voucher to purchase needed household supplies and clothing at a local thrift store. When Maria left the Shelter, she had wrap-around supports in the community from VWTH and other organizations, fostering a safe environment for her and Sophia to start their new life.

Victoria Women's Transition House supports women of all ages, with and without children, fleeing intimate partner violence and abuse. In addition to our two Shelter locations, we offer a 24-hour Crisis and Information Line, housing support, counselling and programming for women and children who witness abuse, and an Older Women's Program offering counselling, expressive arts and health and wellness programs. Support navigating family law and the justice system are also available.

** Names have been changed for confidentiality*

Regional Domestic Violence Unit

The **Regional Domestic Violence Unit (RDVU)** addresses intimate partner violence cases where high-risk factors are present, or where there is an elevated level of risk to survivors and/or their children.

The RDVU is a collaborative team that includes police jurisdictions from Sooke to Sidney. The team is comprised of police investigators, VWTH victim support workers, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Community Corrections working to provide a full range of supports to clients. The RDVU monitors the highest-risk offenders and provides intensive support services tailored to each survivor's needs.

Within the Unit, the VWTH victim support workers' complex role includes creating safety plans, assisting clients to navigate the legal system with referrals to community services such as the VWTH Emergency

Shelter, the Spousal Assault Victim Support Program and the Family Law Advocacy Program, among others. The team offers ongoing support, from the first time a woman presses charges until after the offender is on probation and plays a critical role in helping survivors rebuild their lives after a traumatic experience.

Highly regarded in the community, the RDVU demonstrates the importance and effectiveness of organizations working together to increase education, information-sharing and partnerships that empower victims, encourage offender accountability and help create a society free from intimate partner violence.



24-Hour Crisis & Information Line: 250.385.6611