

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE  
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES  
10<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY, 4<sup>TH</sup> SESSION**

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*Elizabeth Thomas*

Elizabeth Thomas,  
Chair,  
S.A.F.A. Board of Directors

February 18, 1985

## BRIEF FROM THE SOCIETY AGAINST FAMILY ABUSE, NWT

Honourable Richard Nerysoo, Ministers, Honourable Members; you are aware as is the Society Against Family Abuse that violence in the family is a serious problem. Your concern is evidenced by the establishment of the NWT Task Force on Spousal Assault.

As a result of the concerns of groups such as the Women's Support Group, the Transition House Committee and others, our organization was incorporated in the NWT last year with some very specific objectives.in mind.

1. to work toward the establishment of transition and safe houses in the NWT;
2. to assist communities in the identification of their needs and to assist in the development and provision of programs and provision of programs and information to meet those needs; and
3. to work with whatever body you decide to establish as a result of the report and recommendations from the Task Force on Spousal Assault.

During February 1984, one year ago this month, nine women and seven children fleeing from violent situations sought emergency counselling and shelter in Yellowknife. Four of these women were from Yellowknife, the other five were from four other communities across the Northwest Territories. All of these women bore visible injuries - bruises, black eyes, knuckle marks, hair pulled out - and perhaps more important, were all emotionally distraught and desperate for a safe shelter.

These women and children were seen by volunteer counsellors of the "Transition House Committee" and the Women's Support Group and were referred to such helping agencies such as Family Counselling, Mental Health, Social Services and Legal Aid. A common need of these women and children was appropriate shelter, support program and long term available housing.

We wish we could tell you that conditions have improved, that the number of women fleeing from family violence has declined and that the appropriate shelter alternatives have increased but that does not appear to be the case.

Just as last February was worse than the one before, there is every reason to expect that this February 1985 will be the worst yet with regard at least to the housing available to these families.

### Background

For a number of years limited emergency shelter has been provided by the Young Women's Christian Association in Yellowknife. Communities such as Cambridge Bay and Fort Smith are examples of small communities who are also providing, with little or no government assistance at this time emergency shelter or a temporary safe refuge. The Salvation Army has assisted in emergency space in Yellowknife and in addition, here in Yellowknife as in other communities, concerned citizens continue to open their homes to shelter women and children seeking safety from violence. This support is very minimal and does not begin to meet the real long term needs of either the victims or the abusers. Volunteer crisis intervenors are available in Yellowknife to provide basic counselling to victims however professional services are overloaded and victims needs cannot be adequately met.

Example of the kinds of situations that are happening are as follow:

1. A woman and her daughter moved to Yellowknife in June 1984 to escape a violent home in another community. They lived in a tent for the summer. When the weather turned cold, the woman worked at three part-time jobs to pay for her daughter to stay 24 hours in a local childcare centres. The woman slept where ever she could, and eventually her health began to deteriorate. She never did find housing. She moved south in November.
2. A Yellowknife woman continues to live with her husband in a violent situation. She has no children and therefore, does qualify for low-cost housing. Her name is on every waiting list in the city. She cannot find accommodation in a private home because of the fear that her husband may harass her and anyone she lives with. Her current apartment is leased by her husband's employer but the contents are hers. If she is unable to find alternative accommodation she will be forced to leave Yellowknife.
3. Another young woman with four children shares a trailer and a violent home with her common-law spouse. She has a grade 8 education and no family except her widowed mother. The woman is on all waiting lists for low-cost housing and apartments. Because she has nowhere to go, she continues to live in an abusive situation while she waits for a vacancy.

4. One Yellowknife woman in an abusive situation contacted a counsellor to see whether her name could be moved up on apartment lists. Her common-law spouse was abusing alcohol and the woman considered her situation to be desperate. The counsellor and the woman contacted facility maintainers throughout the city. After two months one landlord offered the woman an apartment as he considered her case to be an "emergency". The woman is now attempting to help her spouse deal with his problems.

This latter situation illustrates that the problems of family violence can be alleviated if some form of support system is available in communities. These case studies do not illustrate the situations being dealt with in the communities outside Yellowknife. Women from other communities have been referred to Yellowknife for assistance, but clearly this is not the answer. Without long term housing and available support services in Yellowknife or the individual community, victims have had no choice but to return to their home community and to the situation which they were seeking shelter from.

### Conclusion

Various organizations and concerned northerners have not been able to access emergency housing or alternate housing for the victims of family violence largely because of the chronic housing shortage. As outlined in the case studies there is little hope for families seeking shelter unless there is an improvement in the housing situation in the N.W.T. The Society Against Family Abuse (S.A.F.A.) and it's members and friends in the N.W.T. communities are asking for your attention to the recommendations we offer.

### Recommendations

1. There is an immediate need to establish "safe" houses for victims of family abuse. SAFA feels that these centres should be located regionally including Yellowknife, in order to provide comprehensive services to victims of family abuse. It is intended that proposals will be made to the appropriate government agencies once the Task Force on Spousal Assault releases it's report and recommendations.
2. Priority access to existing low-rent housing should be given to victims of family abuse. An information/education program would help to build community support for this concept. Landlords have offered assistance in the past once they became aware of the problem.
3. As part of a long-term solution to the problem of family violence in the NWT, more affordable housing should be made available to all residents. Measures such as subsidies to builders and new home-buyers would take pressure off rental markets. Increased availability of land for housing projects would help to bring housing costs down. Any improvement in overcrowded and expensive living conditions may assist in decreasing family violence in the N.W.T.

The members and friends of the Society Against Family Abuse (SAFA) thank you for this opportunity to make this presentation and outline our specific concerns to you. We ask you to seriously consider the unmet needs and to support all efforts to eliminate and prevent family violence.

Thank you.

SOCIETY AGAINST FAMILY ABUSE (S.A.F.A.)  
c/o P.O. Box 2580 (Mental Health NWT)  
YELLOWKNIFE, NWT X1A 2P9

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SOCIETY AGAINST FAMILY ABUSE (S.A.F.A.)  
C/O P.O. Box 2580 (Mental Health NWT)  
Yellowknife, N.W.T., X1A 2P9

January 10, 1985.

OBJECTIVES

- A. Yellowknife based
- B. Territorially based

BASED ON THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF S.A.F.A. to support and protect families by decreasing and preventing family violence in order of priority and recognizing ONE major task at a time, SAFA's major goal and objective for 1985-86 is:

A. TO ENSURE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FACILITY SUITABLE AS A SAFE HOUSE IN YELLOWKNIFE, SO THAT A SAFE ENVIRONMENT, SHELTER AND/OR SUPPORT SERVICE CAN BE PROVIDED FOR WOMEN (with or without children), WHO MAY BE IN ABUSIVE SITUATIONS AND POSSIBLY IN TRANSITION FROM THEIR COMMUNITY AND/OR ABUSIVE SITUATION;

- BY:
- a) exhausting all housing possibilities in Yellowknife from all sources;
  - b) fund raising;
  - c) submitting proposals to funding sources for
    - i) facility costs
    - ii) staffing
    - iii) program expenses
  - d) lobbying all government funding sources, and
  - e) liaising and co-operating with the N.W.T. Task Force on Spousal Assault;



**NOTE**

The objectives of the transition house would include:

- 1) that each individual receives help in accordance with their individual needs;
- 2) that provision of a refuge including accommodation, food, clothing, and other necessities on an emergency basis is provided;
- 3) that crisis counselling and on-going counselling is available so that a woman may gain a perspective on her situation and consider alternatives and options;
- 4) that practical help and information is available from all sources so that the woman may make realistic plans about her future and;
- 5) that referrals to assist the woman in utilizing all existing services, are available.

**NOTE**

Once the facility is obtained, the infrastructure of management, administration, and staffing would be the next objective and would include requirements for an Administrator reporting to the Board of the organization operating the transition house(s), other staff such as fulltime crisis counselling and/or house-mother, job descriptions, salaries, terms and conditions of employment, etc., renovations if required, furnishings, insurance, security arrangements, on-going funding.

**B. ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF NWT FAMILIES IN ABUSIVE SITUATIONS IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITY;**

- BY:
- a) co-ordination/liaison with NWT Task Force Spousal Assault;
  - b) assisting and strengthening co-ordination of existing service agencies and communities;

- c) identifying, together with other individual communities, service agencies available, as well as any gaps in services and assisting and/or encouraging the expansion of existing services and/or development of new programs to fill those gaps, e.g. Programs for Batterers;
- d) advocating improvement to services where necessary and as identified by the community;
- e) acting as a resource group for counsellor training in co-operation with existing agencies and/or other organizations;
- f) providing information for community and/or professional groups, organizations, community groups and any agency on the problem of family violence and the needs of the individuals;
- g) liaising with similar groups across Canada and disseminating and promoting that information across the N.W.T.

NOTE: Each one of these items may require separate funding proposals, committee groups as well as focussed lobbying and become on-going objectives of SAFA.

Moved by Laurie Nowakowski and Seconded by Lynn Saunders that these objectives be accepted. Carried.