



RESOLVE Alberta Update – ShelterLink Project

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Families experiencing domestic violence in Calgary are frequently turned away from domestic violence shelters, due to lack of capacity. This can drastically increase the risk for victims who seek to leave an abusive partner. In fact, one of the contextual factors for this project is the case of a woman who called for shelter space in Calgary, was turned away, and was then tragically murdered by her partner. The purpose of this project is to eliminate the practice of ‘turning away’ shelter seekers, by expanding the use of the ShelterLink app as a means of building an integrated System of Care partnership among shelter and other emergency and non-emergency service providers in the Calgary area. This System of Care will act as a cohesive ecosystem of support for victims and their families fleeing domestic violence, trying to ensure that someone whose risk requires immediate safety is offered shelter, and if shelter is not immediately available then ensuring there are community-based services who can help to manage risk and support with safety and other essential needs.

Currently, the ShelterLink web-based app hosts thirteen women’s emergency, transitional, and second stage shelters (primarily located in Calgary and the surrounding area), wherein they each share their shelter bed availability among each other. In this project, we seek to improve the ShelterLink app in the following ways. Ongoing platform enhancements are being completed to streamline the use and accessibility of the app for all users. We are also piloting a new feature where Government of Alberta occupancy reporting can be completed right from the app. In the coming months, we will be developing a data repository, which will enable us to analyze service usage trends. Finally, we are starting to open external access to the app with Calgary Police Service, further establishing a collaborative partnership between emergency service providers and domestic violence shelters.

A Shared Intake & Referral Process has been developed collaboratively between YW Calgary and FearIsNotLove, wherein the YW Calgary Crisis Line is being forwarded to the FearIsNotLove Helpline. Upon contacting this Centralized Line, individuals complete a shared screening assessment that assesses an individual’s level of imminent risk and psychosocial needs. When it is determined that the individual’s needs would be best suited for services at YW Crisis Shelter, a consultation is completed between frontline staff at each shelter. Finally, a warm hand-off referral is completed so the individual is smoothly transferred from one program to another. By having both the YW Calgary Crisis Line and the FearIsNotLove Helpline supported by one centralized team at FearIsNotLove, the individual is assessed once and can access both shelters without calling each separately. This collaboration has been in effect since July 2023 with great success and is a pivotal example of integrated care between FearIsNotLove and YW Calgary.





Swift access to services is imperative for an individual who is at risk of imminent harm from domestic violence. Therefore, the ShelterLink app and the Centralized Line will act as a catalyst for an integrated, multi-disciplinary, rapid access System of Care. This System of Care will collaboratively respond to individual's needs, taking the onus off the individual to navigate siloed services during a time of crisis. This innovative approach to service delivery in the domestic violence sector ensures that those who are fleeing domestic violence are receiving timely, appropriate services to adequately address their needs. Whether it be through shelter or community services, no one is being left without support.

The System of Care Working Group is comprised of representatives from a variety of organizations who provide services which are critical to people escaping from or needing support with domestic violence. Support includes shelter, financial, substance use, mental health, and safety-related services. This Working Group is tasked to collaboratively build this system in which access to their programs are streamlined for victims calling into shelter crisis lines. Currently, the System of Care Working Group is meeting regularly to develop the Rapid Access Referral Model that will be implemented by their organizations.

The project owes much of its success to the collaborative and innovative work of **Kim Ruse, CEO of FearIsNotLove** and **Talia Bell, Chief Programs and People Officer of YW Calgary**. The success is also attributable to the commitment and leadership of both **Gillian Weaver-Dunlop, RESOLVE Alberta's Steering Committee Member, Chief Impact Officer of FearIsNotLove**, and **Randy Thornhill, Director of Organizational Impact at YW Calgary**, and the strong relationships developed between the frontline staff and leaders at both agencies.

As we move through this project, we've identified the need to solidify our collective understanding of imminent risk to harm within the context of domestic violence. Building capacity for service providers to ask the right questions in a timely way to get the best understanding of a person's imminent risk to experiencing harm. Therefore, we've partnered with RESOLVE Alberta and the Alliance Against Violence & Adversity (AVA), to complete a systematic review and provide recommendations to develop an imminent risk assessment tool.

