

Written by Cyndy D. Morin, founder of Resolve Legal Group. Cyndy is a family lawyer, mediator, arbitrator, litigator, member of the Reforming the Family Justice System initiative in Alberta, and survivor of family violence.

November is Family Violence Prevention Month in Alberta, and throughout the province different events are organized to raise awareness and educate communities about this largely hidden problem. Family violence cases are the most complex cases in family law and they require support beyond legal services to successfully assist families leaving abusive relationships. Abuse comes in many different forms, which means we cannot always see the bruises or scars that our friends and families in these situations endure. Family violence does not discriminate; families from all walks of life, of any socio-economic background, race, religion and gender can be affected by family violence.

When people think about family violence or abuse, they often associate it with physical violence. There are other types of less recognizable forms such as verbal, emotional, psychological, financial, and sexual to name a few. The most tragic form of abuse is when situations escalate to such a degree that it results in intimate partner homicide and/or infanticide. While abuse knows no gender, without a doubt women and children are affected more often and to a larger degree than men.

Unfortunately, the demand for shelters is increasing rather than decreasing. A singular study over a one-year period conducted by the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters indicate that from April 2015 - April 2016, 10,567 abused women, children, men* and seniors sought out the protection of emergency shelters in Alberta. There are 3 types of shelters available in Alberta: Emergency Shelters, Second Stage or Transition Shelters, and Senior Shelters. The statistic cited does not include the second stage, senior shelters or the additional community outreach programs accessed by victims. Even more staggering, however, is that during this same reporting period, a total of 16,359 people were turned away from shelters in Alberta due to a lack of capacity.

*Out of the 10,567 individuals who sought the assistance of an emergency shelter, only 1/10,567 was male.

**Statistics derived from the Police Service Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and Homicide Survey for Alberta (2008-2013), supplied by Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics.

Credits: Special thanks to Chance Watchel, Research Analyst with the Reforming the Family Justice System Initiative for providing me with the research and statistics for this article.

It is the philosophy of Resolve Legal Group that people should be able to access essential services in the communities in which they reside. Cochrane, Alberta has a population of over 25,000 people, but this does not include its vast catchment area. Cochrane is one of the fastest growing towns in Canada. Despite this, Cochrane unlike other towns of similar size in Southern Alberta, does not have its own shelter. Families impacted by family violence in Cochrane have had to access emergency shelters in Calgary because Cochrane has not historically had its own resources. Cochrane families in need have had to uproot from their community, from their local social supports, friends and schools and relocate to other areas to access services. When families outside of Calgary access services in the city, this creates a backlog on the capacity to accept families within the city.

Thanks to co-founders Patti Fisher and Margaret Van Tighem (both of whom are also survivors of Domestic Violence), Cochrane is well on its way to having its own local Women's Emergency Shelter, called Big Hill Haven. Big Hill Haven currently provides outreach services to the local community via space provided through the FCSS (Family and Community Support Services). Resolve Legal Group can refer Cochrane clients to this much needed community resource. Resolve Legal Group is also proud to support the efforts in the development of Big Hill Haven. We have made it our mission to help support the funding of this crucial project. For the month of November and until December 20th, 2018 in our Cochrane office, located at 116 Centre Ave, and in our downtown Calgary office located at 440, 318 11 Avenue, we will be selling purple wrist bands for \$5.00 each with 100% of the net proceeds going to Big Hill Haven.

All families deserve to feel safe, especially in their own homes. Reportedly, almost 90% of incidents of family violence between 2008-2013 in Alberta occurred in the home**. The good news is that together we can raise awareness and help raise funds for the build of Big Hill Haven shelter, which in turn will help us put an end to family violence.

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Resolve Legal Group is committed to making a difference: In addition to our purple wrist band campaign, 5% of all net profits derived from Resolve Legal Group's Cochrane Office are being donated to BIG HILL HAVEN, Cochrane's local Emergency Women's Shelter and Outreach Services. Help us support the local Cochrane Community while we support you through our exemplary legal services in the areas of Family Law, Wills and Estates, Real Estate, and Immigration at RESOLVE LEGAL GROUP – COCHRANE

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to support survivors through the process of leaving abusive relationships. To learn more how you can assist a family in need, or to find out about a variety of available resources for women, men, children or seniors please contact Resolve's Client Support Coordinator at 403-229-2365 for more information.

If you know someone who is in need of community outreach support, please contact Patti Fisher, Outreach Worker with Big Hill Haven at 403-796-6564 or email BigHillOutreach@shaw.ca <https://www.bighillhaven.ca>

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