



From Knowledge to Action:

Lessons Learned in the Practical Application of Women-Centred Housing Design

BC Society of Transition Houses October 2024

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With Gratitude

With Gratitude we recognize that the BC Society of Transition Houses' office is located on unceded Coast Salish territory, shared by the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), xʷməθkwə́yəm (Musqueam) and sə́lilw̓ ətəʔ/ Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Thank you to the funders of this project, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) for generously supporting this project.

Introduction

Knowledge to Action is the recipient of the 2023 Gold Roof Award under the National Housing Strategy. This award recognizes the BCSTH project entitled: Practical Applications of a Women-Centred Approach to Housing Design. Following on the heels of the [Women-Centred Housing Design Toolkit \(WCD\)](#), Knowledge to Action aims to understand how women-centred housing design can be applied practically. To do so, BCSTH partnered with three case study sites across British Columbia that currently provide housing to women and children and additionally, are embarking on developing new builds or renovations to provide needed housing for women and children in their communities. Through collaboration with the case study sites, BCSTH sought to understand how women-centred design is being applied and the barriers that hold back implementing women-centred design. From these consultations, BCSTH has compiled themes that have emerged to share with the wider community to support and advocate for the implementation of women-centred design in builds that house women and children with experiences of violence. By acknowledging that the built environment affects one's mental wellness and healing process, it is essential to build housing that is violence and trauma-informed and considers the intersectionality of residents' needs.

The following report walks you through the case study consultation process and then leads into the case studies themselves which take a magnifying glass to the organization's specific learnings around practically applying women-centred housing design. Following this, a list of themes and recommendations are shared which were informed by the case study sites.

Thank you to the women with lived experience and the case study site staff teams and management for their collaboration with BCSTH. Their partnership has contributed to advancing women-centred housing design and has paved the way for a more streamlined process for future anti-violence organizations implementing women-centred housing design in their projects.

Case Study Sites

BCSTH partnered with three case study sites across BC, Tamitik Status of Women Association (Kitimat), Kelowna Women's Shelter (Kelowna) and Xpey' Selhni' Lelum Cedar Woman House (Nanaimo). These sites were selected as they are or were in the process of current renovations or new builds and are guided by women-centred housing design principles which inherently prioritizes housing design that is violence and trauma-informed.

Consultation Process

The consultations at the case study sites took place in person and included a site tour along with two separate facilitated conversations; one with the staff team and management and one with women currently living in the housing at the case study site. In total, 17 women with lived experience and 21 anti-violence members engaged in the consultations. A \$100 honorarium as well as food and beverages were provided to the women with lived experience in gratitude for their time and contributions. While the consultations ranged from casual conversations to facilitated sessions, the goal of the consultations was the same which was to understand how women-centred design is being applied practically in anti-violence organizations and the lessons learned that come with this complex and multifaceted process.

Case Study:

Tamitik Status of Women (TSW)



Organization Spotlight: Tमितik Status of Women (TSW)

Tमितik Status of Women (TSW), based in Kitimat, currently operates Dunmore Place, an eight-bed Transition House, along with six units of Second Stage housing. Additionally, TSW are nearing completion of a major capital project aimed at ensuring women fleeing violence have access to a continuum of housing options in one location. This mixed-model development will feature a four-story building with 12 units for Transition Housing, 12 units for Second Stage housing, and 20 units of rent geared to income Long-Term housing on the top two floors.

Adjacent to this development will be the ḡuláli Childcare Centre. This 24/7 childcare model is one of only five facilities in Canada, making it highly unique. TSW believes that having continuous childcare is vital, especially for single female-led households, to enable them to take full advantage of the economic opportunities currently and potentially available in Kitimat.

Working in Partnership with the Haisla Nation

Since 2018, TSW has developed a holistic partnership with the Haisla Nation. Their collaboration includes several key initiatives, such as co-developing immersive Indigenous programming, prioritizing Haisla staff representation, providing job training specifically for Haisla women, ensuring a bed is always available for a Haisla woman, and offering cultural support through a dedicated Haisla Support Worker and Cultural Support worker on their team. Moving forward, the programming at the ḡuláli Childcare Centre will also emphasize and celebrate Haisla culture.

Organization Snapshot

<p>Current Housing Type and Number of Beds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second Stage Housing, 6 units • Dunmore Place Transition House, 8-beds
<p>Future Program and Housing Type and Number of Beds</p>	<p>The mixed-model building features four floors, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First floor, Transition House with 12 beds and the capacity to add 6 additional unfunded beds • Second floor, 12 units of Second Stage Housing • Third and fourth floor, 20 units of Long-Term Affordable Housing • Adjacent to the housing is the ḡuláli Childcare Centre
<p>Programming Offered</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEACE Program • Dunmore Place Transition House • ḡuláli Childcare Centre • Homeless Prevention Program • Outreach and Supportive Counsellor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Community Response Network ◦ Interagency Case Assessment Team • Support Services UP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Angel Tree (Christmas gift service) ◦ Food Share ◦ Free Store ◦ Furniture Exchange ◦ Hygiene and Baby Needs (Anti-Poverty) • Women’s Second Stage Housing Program • Women’s Counseling (Stopping the Violence)
<p>Estimated Women and Children Served (April 1, 2023 to Mar 31, 2024)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition House: 45 Women and 12 Children • Second Stage: 6 Women
<p>Key Funders for New Build and Childcare Centre</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for mixed-model build – BC Housing, District of Kitimat, MCFD and Multiple other grantors • Operating funders – BCH fully funds residential building • ḡuláli Childcare Centre will run on parent fees as well as small operating funds from the Ministry of Education and Child Care

The Consultation Process

The in-person consultation sessions at Tamitik Status of Women included nine anti-violence members and four women with experiences of violence. Throughout the consultations, the participants shared their ideas and priorities for implementing practical applications of women-centred design principles based on their own experiences and intersectional needs.

Additionally, in these consultations women with lived experience also shared their thoughts on how they would like to engage in women-centred design collaborations in the future. Thank you to the anti-violence members and women with lived experience who shared their time, knowledge and expertise to create this case study.

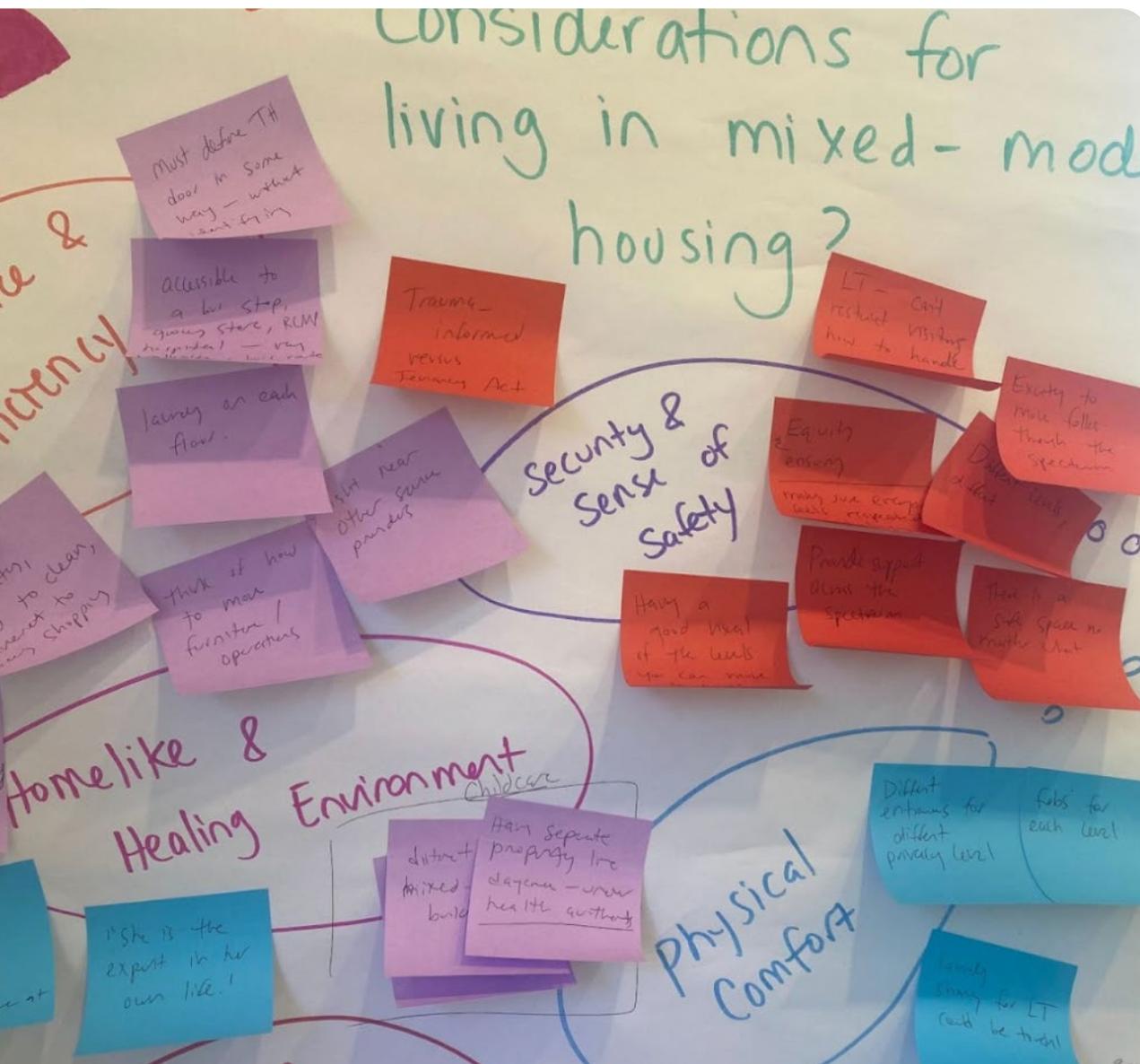


Image 1: Brainstorming ideas with TSW team on important considerations for mixed-model housing.

Practical Applications of Women-Centred Housing Design in Action

1. Mixed-Model Considerations from a Women-Centred Housing Lens

Tamitik Status of Women is in the final stages of a major mixed-model development that will significantly enhance its ability to support clients. This new project will create a continuum of housing options, providing security, a supportive community environment, and opportunities for education, training, and skills development for women and their children. The mixed-model build raises important considerations for designing and operating housing that is both intersectional and violence and trauma-informed, ensuring it meets the diverse needs of women across the housing continuum.



Identified Need:

- To ensure equity for all women is achieved while balancing different levels of programming and housing types which operate under different policies.
- To design the building from a women-centred lens and create a sense of safety for all women, in all levels of housing.
- To ensure that the building location is accessible and provides access to community supports and services.



Identified Solution:

- The new build implements two separate entrances, one for the Transition House and one for the Second Stage and Long-Term housing. Separate entrances create a sense of privacy and safety, aligning with trauma-informed practice.
- The elevator and stairwell both utilize a key and fob system to access either Second Stage or Long-Term housing.
- There are separate smoking areas for Second Stage/Long-Term housing residents and Transition House residents.
- Second Stage/Long-Term residents will have access to a large covered gazebo area with a seating area, wheelchair-accessible garden plots and two greenhouses. The master plan also includes adding a playground to this area.
- A large, bookable amenity room is available for family dinners and celebrations for all women in TSW housing.
- 40% of the housing units in the building are accessible and include in-suite laundry and dishwashers.
- The location of the mixed-model building is walkable to the hospital and grocery stores.



Image 2: Aerial image of TSW mixed-model building and ġuláli Childcare Centre.

Thoughts from Women with Lived Experience:



- Women shared that they are excited to be moving into Long-Term housing and specifically have TSW as their landlords as many had negative experiences with past landlords.
- Women shared that they are looking forward to having guests visit them in their Long-Term units and that it will make family visiting convenient.
- Women shared that they are looking forward to making their homes, “their own” by choosing furniture and decorating.
- Women shared that they are looking forward to the possibility of having a pet in Long-Term housing.
- Two amenities that the women spoke highly of were the beautiful views and the in-unit air conditioning.

Women-Centred Design in Action

The “Women-Centred Design in Action,” sections found throughout the case studies link the practical applications of women-centred design discussed above to the principles and strategies outlined in the [Women-Centred Housing Design Toolkit](#). These principles and their corresponding strategies meet the psychological, spiritual, and physical needs of women and children and reflect the two core foundations of women-centred housing design, violence and trauma-informed and intersectionality.



Principle:

Homelike & Healing Environment

- Personalization of space
- Material, Colour, Texture & Light



Principle:

Physical Comfort

- Climate control
- Lighting control



Principle:

Community Support & Social Life

- Diversity of On-Site Amenities
- Access to Community Centres & Supports
- Space Layout



Principle:

Security & Sense of Safety

- Building model
- Building location
- Limiting access
- Security systems and fixtures



Principle:

Convenience & Efficiency

- Accessibility/Proximity to Essential Services
- Flexibility, Adaptability, Accessibility

Best Practice Highlight: Navigating NIMBYism

TSW noted that they faced considerable NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) resistance before beginning construction. Now, as the project nears completion, TSW feels more connected and valued in their community than ever. They are building strong partnerships, including initiatives like educating the RCMP on trauma-informed practices. TSW attributes their success to developing a strong, early relationship with the municipality, actively seeking community engagement opportunities, and fostering relationships through outreach and events.

For more information on understanding NIMBYism, see the [“Developing Women-Centred Housing Toolkit”](#) by the BC Society of Transition Houses (2023).

“The most exciting thing for me about moving into Long-Term housing is that I will finally have a real ‘home, home.’”

- woman with lived experience of violence

2. Case Study Highlight: The ḡuláli Childcare Centre

The ḡuláli Childcare Centre was born out of a need to provide childcare around the clock to support shift-working women with employers such as Rio Tinto, LNG Canada, Northern Health, District of Kitimat and the RCMP. TSW has partnered with the Haisla Nation to immerse the daycare in Indigenous programming and will include Haisla art, traditional foods and Elders on-site to foster a connection with the children through storytelling and traditional learning. Tamitik Status of Women hopes that this daycare will emerge as a symbol of reconciliation and will foster a more inclusive and compassionate community.

Implementing a 24/7 childcare centre is a large undertaking and a unique model in Canada. Throughout this process, TSW has had many lessons learned.



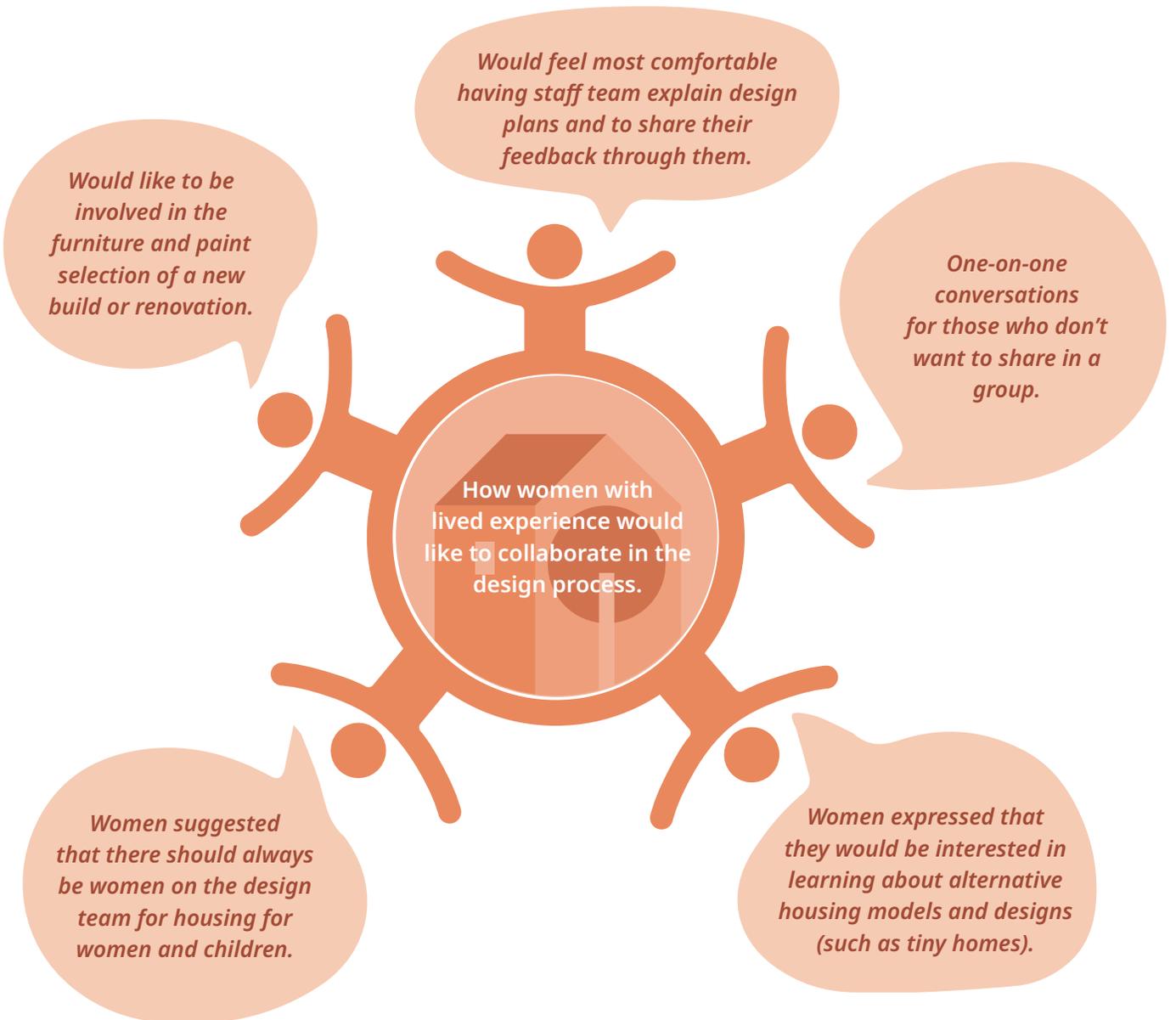
Image 3: Inside the ḡuláli Childcare Centre which uses natural materials and textures and large windows to create a bright, welcoming space.

Lessons Learned:

- The childcare centre and the mixed-model housing are on two separate properties with the childcare fence outlining the property line. This property division has proven to be very helpful as it has allowed the mixed-model housing and childcare centre to clearly navigate their respective licensing requirements.
- Navigating the childcare guidelines is new territory and a daunting task. It has been extremely beneficial to hire a team member who has a background in implementing childcare and working with the Ministry of Education and Childcare, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development.
- With regard to the built environment, in order to achieve a warm, welcoming and homelike environment TSW has utilized primarily natural wood tables, chairs and climbing structures (indoors and outdoors). Additionally, the walls are painted a light color and there is a lot of natural light fostering a comfortable and grounded environment.

When Asked

How women would like to collaborate in the design process of their housing in the future, this is what they shared...



**Based on conversations with women living in Transition Housing and Second Stage Housing.*

Wrapping Up:

Lessons Learned and Ideas for Future Collaborations between Anti-Violence Members, Architects and Builders

When the staff team were asked to share their lessons learned in practically implementing women-centred Housing Design as well as how best to collaborate effectively with architects and builders, this is what they shared...



Strong communication with the builder as well as the architect is key. For example, it is important to remember that communication around things such as delays needs to be as clear as possible as they not only affect the team but also the women who are expecting to move in at a certain date.

Consider your operations before the built environment. Especially with mixed-model housing, there are many considerations to work through.

Advocate for more office space to be included in your build to ensure your staff team have the amenities they need to work effectively.

Make sure to approve key materials, like fridges and doors, before the builder installs them. Stay consistently tuned in to ensure that the materials meet your needs throughout the build.

Make sure you have a clear process on communication channels and know who to talk to about what.

Work with your team to strike the right balance between large-scale, industrial housing and warm, welcoming housing that feels like home.

When building in rural locations, it is important to consider that it costs organizations more when it comes to maintenance and warranties among other things. Trades people are further away and it takes longer to book appointments or find someone who can do the work, etc.

During the development of a new build, it is important to ensure any new staff involved are properly onboarded so they are prepared with knowledge such as who holds contracts and who insurance is through so that they are not going at it blind.

Case Study:

Xpey' Selhni' Lelum Cedar Woman House



Organization Spotlight: Xpey' Selhni' Lelum Cedar Woman House

Cedar Woman House is a 24/7 staffed Transition House for women and their dependant children who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing violence. Cedar Woman House serves the immediate need for access to safe shelter and transition supports on a short-term or temporary basis. Cedar Woman House is designed around Indigenous values, cultural priorities and programming. All women and their dependent children in need of Transition Housing supports are welcome. The house is especially intended to support Indigenous women and children from the communities of Qualicum First Nation, Snaw-Naw-As First Nation, Snuneymuxw First Nation, Stz'uminus First Nation, Halalt First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Penelakut Tribes, Lake Cowichan First Nation, and Malahat First Nation.

In the future, Xpey' Selhni' Lelum Cedar Woman House and Snuneymuxw First Nation hope to develop a mixed-model Second Stage and Long-Term housing build. If this project were to go ahead, there would be a priority to design from a land-based and healing perspective that is trauma and violence-informed.

Organization Snapshot	
Current Housing Type and Number of Beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transition House, 10-bed contract with BC Housing (and no limit on children)
Future Housing Type and Number of Beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified need for Second stage (70%+) and Long-Term housing.
Programming Offered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting basic needs, shelter, food, clothing, etc. Safety planning, goal planning, advocacy, referrals and service linking. Monthly women's cultural wellness group, smudging and house cleansings with elders, weekly wellness walks. In-house counseling childcare (limited), budgeting, applying for housing, income assistance, and other relevant program-related paperwork. If a request for another type of support comes in, Cedar Woman House is always happy to consider how or if they can meet the need.
Estimated Women and Children Served (April 1, 2023 to Mar 31, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 32 women and 16 children. As of June 2024, Cedar Woman House has already surpassed 16 children in this fiscal year. Note, Cedar Woman House extends their stays and is averaging closer to 3 months vs 30 days.
Key Funders for Renovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's Shelters Canada COVID Funding for Basement Renovation

The Consultation Process

The in-person consultation sessions at Cedar Woman House included one anti-violence member and four women with experiences of violence. Throughout the consultation, the participants shared their ideas and priorities for implementing practical applications of women-centred design principles based on their own experiences and intersectional needs. Additionally, in these

consultations women with lived experience also shared their thoughts on how they would like to engage in women-centred housing design collaborations in the future. Thank you to the anti-violence member and women with lived experience who shared their time, knowledge and expertise to create this case study.

Practical Applications of Women-Centred Housing Design in Action

1. Prioritizing Healing and the Land: Future Goals of Developing Second Stage and Long-Term Housing

In the future, Xpey' Selhni' Lelum Cedar Woman House and Snuneymuxw First Nation hope to develop a new build that would include primarily Second Stage housing units in addition to Long-Term housing. If this build were to move ahead, a main priority would be to utilize the building site flora to foster healing to impact generations to come.

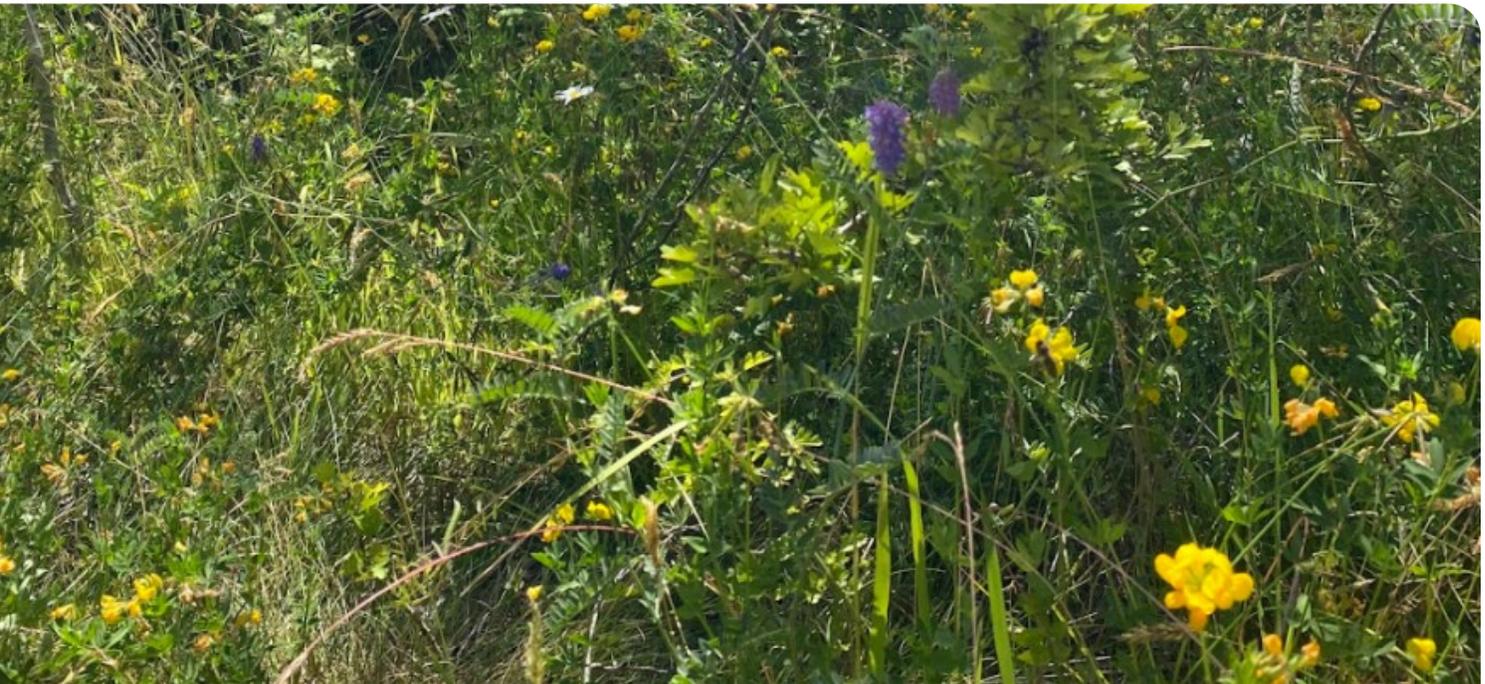


Image 4: An example of lush flora in Nanaimo that would be utilized to foster a healing environment.



Identified Future Need:

Working in partnership with the land and vegetation on a building site to keep Indigenous plants and trees with the ultimate goal of fostering a healing environment.

“In order to promote healing we need to work from a land based approach so that we stay connected to the land. We want to create the opportunity for women to be reconnected with nature, to get back to the “awe” of its beauty and the connection it provides. It’s our hope that in being reconnected with the land, women recognize the “awe” and beauty within themselves, promoting healing for future generations.”

- Anti-Violence Member



Identified Future Solutions:

- Working with a landscaper to identify native, significant trees and plants to ensure that they are preserved in the development process.
- Any trees that do need to come down would be repurposed as mulch on any walking paths, giving renewed purpose to them.
- Working with architects and landscapers to position a building to work complementarily with the land so that views from windows in housing units look out on a natural environment.
- Creating a large gathering space on a ground floor with a community kitchen to foster community and healing through cultural programming.

Thoughts from Women with Lived Experience:



Women shared that in any future housing, they would like to see cultural programming offered to support their healing journey.

Women-Centred Design in Action



Principle:

Homelike & Healing Environment

- Nature and Natural Elements
- Cultural Expression



Principle:

Community Support & Social Life

- Diversity of On-Site Amenities
- Residents Involvement
- Access to Community Centres & Supports

2. Downstairs Renovation: Creating a Warm, Welcoming Space

Cedar Woman House received Women's Shelters Canada COVID funding to do a small remodel of the downstairs space. This remodel opened up the space to allow for better social distancing, a second kitchen space as well as a secondary living room and exercise area.



Image 5: Prior to the renovation, the basement was an underutilized space.

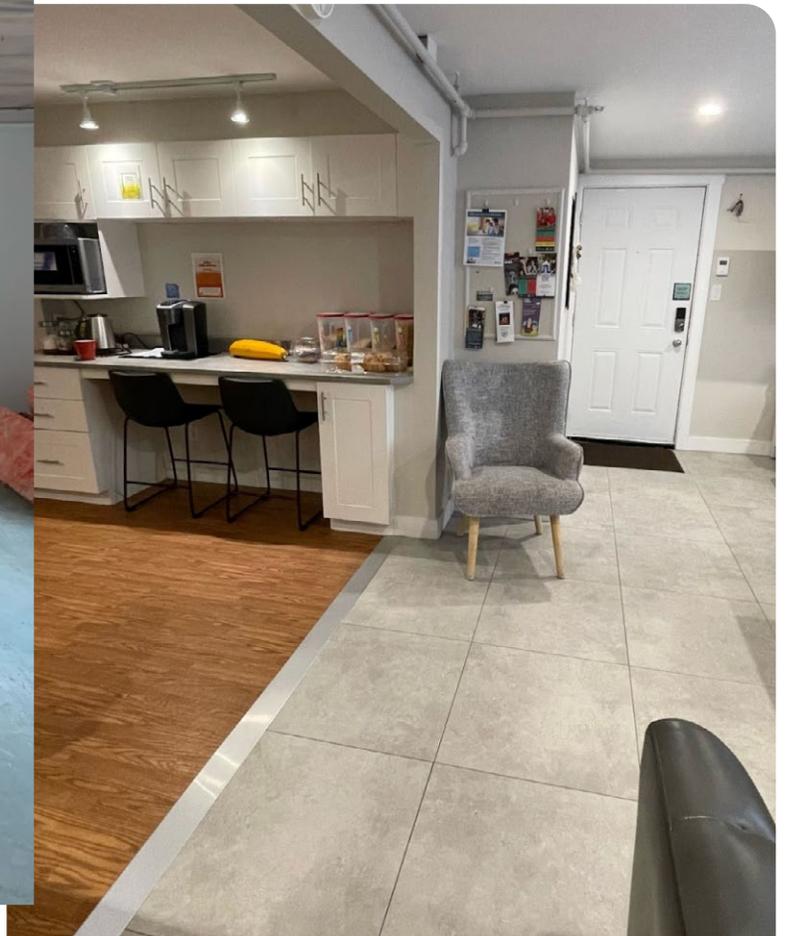


Image 6: Post renovation the space is warm and inviting with the flex breakfast bar/ workstation with snacks and coffee available as well as a living room and exercise area.



Identified Need:

- There was a need to provide more space for people to social distance while eating and spending time in the living room.
- For women without children in the home, there was an identified need to have a space to spend time in that was quieter and calmer.
- There was a need for a flex space that could both be a workstation as well as a breakfast bar.



Identified Solution:

- A wall was removed between the kitchen space and the living room space, opening up the space and making it feel more spacious.
- New kitchen cabinets and a flex breakfast bar/ workstation were installed.
- The living room was painted and a small workout space was created.

Thoughts from Women with Lived Experience:



- Women shared that it is nice to have a separate place to meet that is quieter and more private if the children are all upstairs.
- One woman commented, "my sons and I eat breakfast at the breakfast bar every morning!"
- One woman shared that she exercises with her children sometimes in the exercise area and that they like to spend time together that way.

Women-Centred Design in Action



Principle:

Physical Comfort

- Noise/Acoustic Control



Principle:

Community Support & Social Life

- Space Layout
- Safe Amenities



Principle:

Convenience & Efficiency

- Flexibility, Adaptability, Accessibility
- Access to Complementary Spaces
- High Quality Materials & Appliances

3. Lessons in Creating a Homelike & Healing Environment

At Cedar Woman House it is clear that there has been a lot of intention made to make the space feel homelike and healing. During the consultation, staff shared how they are working to foster this homelike and healing environment.

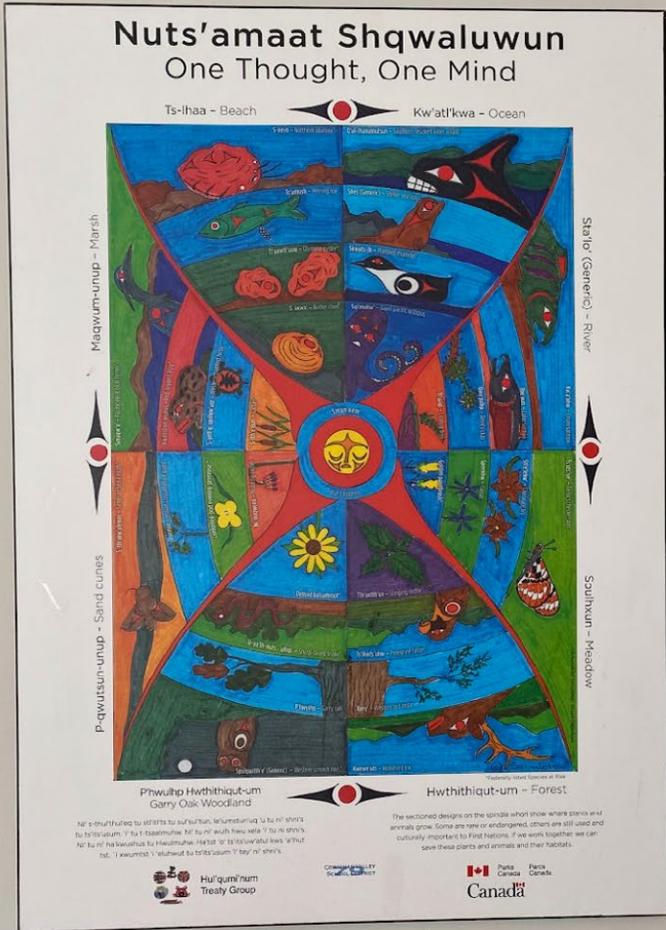


Image 7: Artwork on the wall creating a warm, homelike environment. Nuts'amaat Shqwaluwun (One thought, one mind).



Identified Need:

- There is a priority to centre Indigenous culture in the house through the built environment and also through programming. Ensuring that women feel they are in a healing environment is an ongoing reflexive practice.



Identified Solution:

- Artwork and signage can be found in Hul'q'umi'num', the language of the Snuneymuxw First Nation around the home including in the children's play area and to identify each bedroom in a unique way.
- A community garden is planted in the backyard which features plant medicines such as lemon balm and sage
- Seasonally, an Elder comes to Cedar Woman House to cleanse the house.
- Cedar Woman House hosts a culturally-based monthly women's wellness group.
- In-house counseling is available for the women.
- The wall paint colour is a warm tone rather than a cold institutional feel. It is important to note that at first the wall colour was painted a cold white and when a woman shared that it felt institutional, the staff at Cedar Woman House made it a priority to change the wall colour to a warmer tone.
- There are plants in the windows which provide a warm, homelike feel.

Thoughts from Women with Lived Experience:



- Women shared that they feel the house feels very peaceful. Highlights identified were: plants in the windows, warm lighting and welcoming artwork on the walls and doors.

Women-Centred Design in Action



Principle:

Homelike & Healing Environment

- Cultural Expression
- Material, Colour, Texture & Light
- Nature & Natural Elements



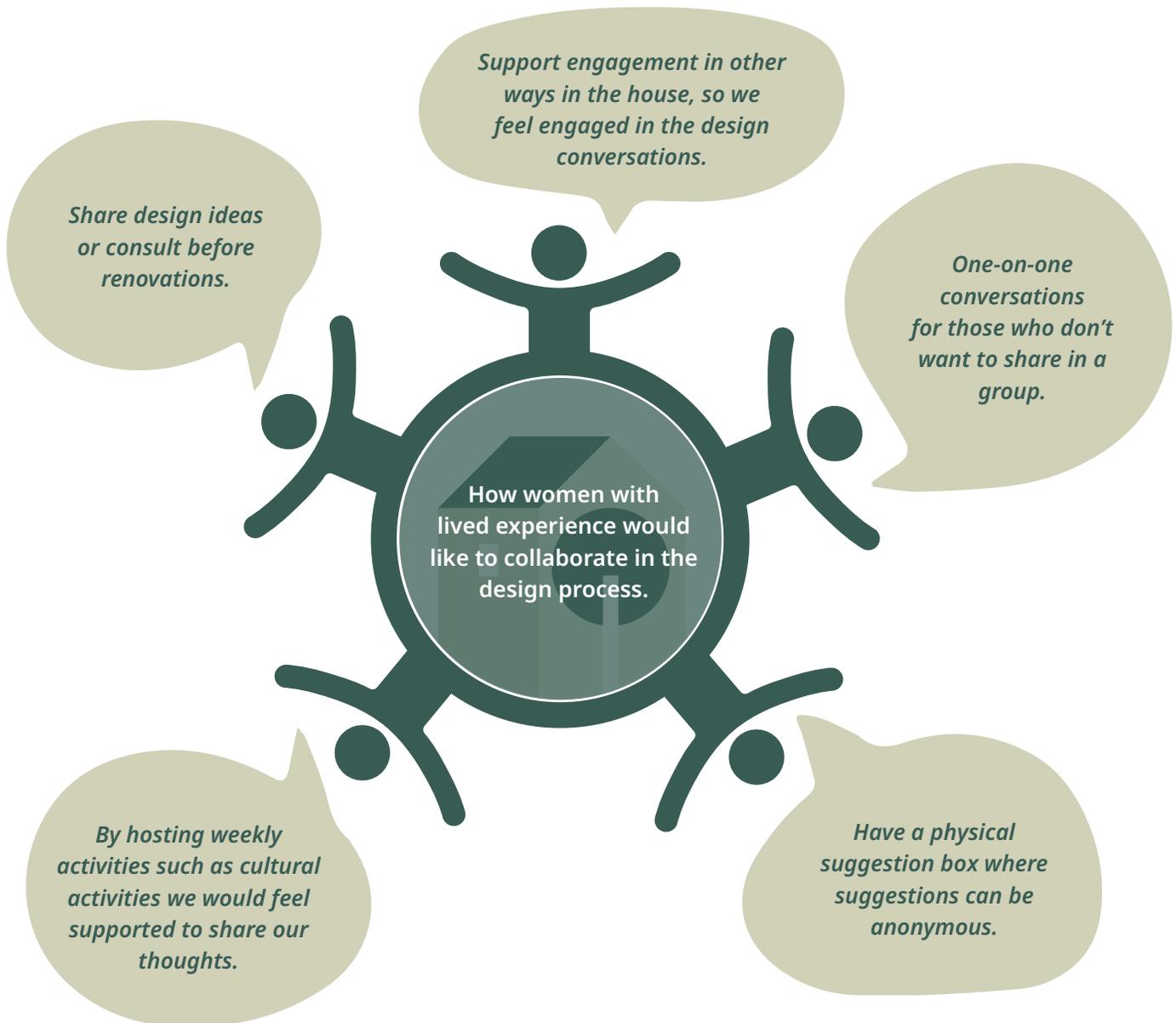
Principle:

Community Support & Social Life

- Residents' Involvement
- Diversity of On-Site Amenities

When Asked

How women would like to collaborate in the design process of their housing in the future, this is what they shared...



**Based on conversations with women living in Transition Housing.*

Wrapping Up:

A Story of Participant Involvement, Women-Centred Design and Making Memories

When you first walk up to Cedar Woman House, you notice a pond with lily pads and a small stream. The story behind this pond is one of how important and impactful resident engagement can be and the impact that the built environment can have on women and children. A woman came to stay at Cedar Woman House and asked if she could contribute to the house by re-building a pond that needed to be fixed as that was her passion. In fleeing violence she had to leave her pond and fish behind. When the pond was complete, three gold fish were introduced to the pond. Now, a frog has also decided to call this small pond home. During the engagement session with the women living at Cedar Woman House, the question, “What did you first notice here that made you feel welcome and at home?” was asked. One woman answered, “the pond.” Additionally, the children all love to come out and look for the frog and the fish that are residents of the Cedar Woman House pond. When asked about the pond, an anti-violence team member said, “My hope is that by having the pond, it gives children in the transition house a sense of joy and excitement. When they look back at this part of their life, I hope that they think of the lighter parts of it and remember the joy of simply feeding the goldfish while here...” It is clear that the pond contributes to residents feeling a homelike and healing environment and illustrates the potential of the built environment to positively impact one’s mental and physical well-being.

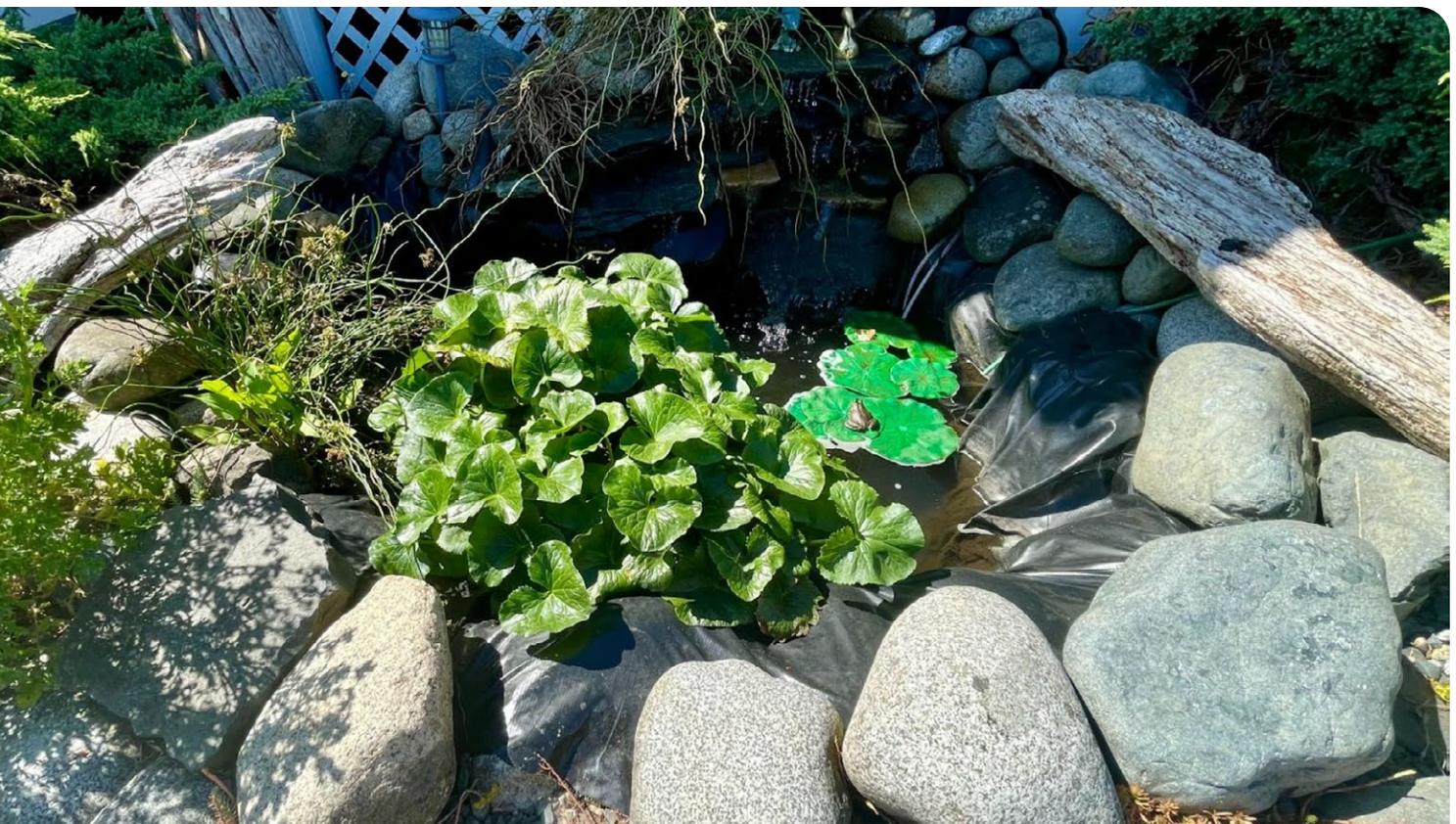


Image 8: The pond with the frog on the lily pad is a symbol for healing through co-creation.

Case Study:

Kelowna Women's Shelter (KWS)



Organization Spotlight: Kelowna Women’s Shelter (KWS)

The Kelowna Women’s Shelter Transition House in Kelowna provides eight bedrooms, a shared kitchen and living space, an indoor playroom and lounge area, a fully private and secluded outdoor green area, and a children’s playground all on-site. Additionally, Kelowna Women’s Shelter is proud to be one of the few shelters in the province able to offer the PEACE program on-site. The Kelowna Women’s Shelter also provides 32 units of Second Stage housing and wraparound support services for women and children along with a 10-bedroom Transition House in a mixed-model site in West Kelowna. Currently, the Kelowna Women’s Shelter has identified a need to provide more Second Stage housing units and is looking ahead to a future build.

Organization Snapshot	
Current Housing Type and Number of Beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kelowna Transition House, 8 rooms (and no limit on children) • West Kelowna Second Stage, 32 units (1-4 bedrooms) • West Kelowna Transition House, 10 rooms (and no limit on children)
Future Housing Type and Number of Beds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified need for Second Stage Units
Programming Offered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEACE Program • Second Stage Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Adult Case Management/ Programming ◦ Child & Youth Case Management/Programming ◦ Group Programming • Two Emergency Transition Housing • 24/7 Support Line • Community Outreach • Education and Prevention
Estimated Women and Children Served (April 1, 2023, to Mar 31, 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kelowna Transition House: 103 women and 72 children • West Kelowna Transition House : 4 women and 4 children • West Kelowna Second Stage: 24 women and 27 children <p>Note: West Kelowna mixed-model (TH & SS) TH opened on March/24 SS opened on November/23</p>
Key Funders for Renovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BC Housing

The Consultation Process

The in-person consultation sessions at the Kelowna Women’s Shelter included 11 anti-violence members and nine women with experiences of violence. Throughout the consultations, the participants shared their ideas and priorities for implementing practical applications of women-centred design principles based on their own experiences and intersectional

needs. Additionally, in these consultations women with lived experience also shared their thoughts on how they would like to engage in women-centred design collaborations in the future. Thank you to the anti-violence members and women with lived experience who shared their time, knowledge and expertise to create this case study.



Image 9: Consultation with women with lived experience at KWS exploring women-centred design.

Practical Applications of Women-Centred Housing Design in Action

1. Kelowna Transition House Service Delivery Area Renovation

KWS received funding from BC Housing to renovate the service delivery area in the Kelowna Transition House. The goal of this renovation is to apply a women-centred housing design lens to increase the sense of community support and social life in the house as well as to further foster a homelike and healing environment.



Identified Need:

- There is a need for more space that can be confidential yet spacious for doing intakes with women and children.
- Program team and management would like to have a more welcoming and open area as opposed to an enclosed office to ensure that women living in the housing feel welcome to come speak with them anytime and that the team are present elsewhere in the home.
- The team would like to utilize the space more efficiently so that it has a better flow.



Identified Solution:

- Remove one wall to open the office space up and move the current frontline support worker (FSW) office back into a confidential FSW working space only as needed, which will open up the welcome area.
- Open the front area and create a living room/ kitchen-like feel and move the FSW's into this area and out of an "office" space. This aligns to the KWS phrase, "Women do not live where we work, we work where they live."
- In the new working space, utilize a Dutch door to create a warm welcoming area while keeping children's safety in mind.
- Utilize the large back room better by creating a private confidential comfortable space next to the new FSW working space.
- Access more warm natural light by utilizing spaces with windows, while still providing a safe, private environment.

Thoughts from Women with Lived Experience:



Women shared that while the current office does feel welcoming due to the warm staff, they do feel there is a need for a larger confidential space to meet with staff and use the computer privately.

Women-Centred Design in Action



Principle:

- Increasing Community Support & Social Life
 - Improved space layout



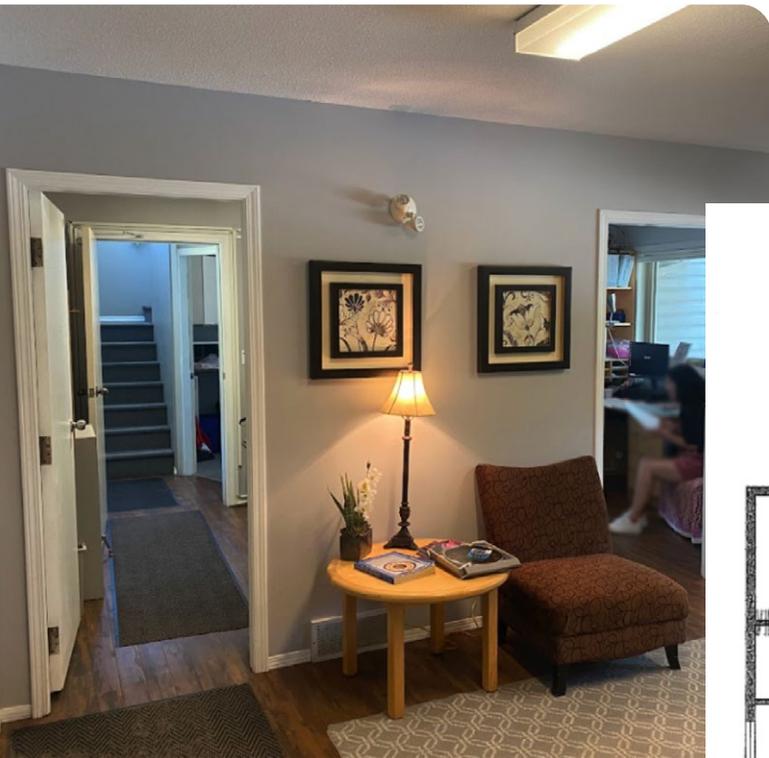
Principle:

- Increasing Convenience & Efficiency
 - Access to complementary spaces

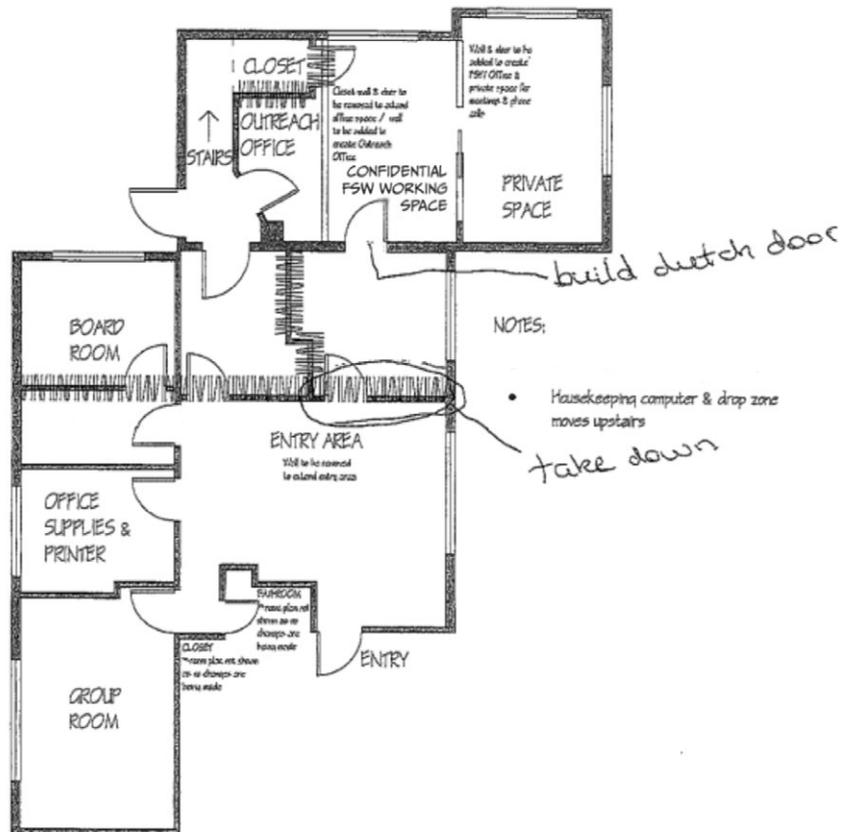


Principle:

- Fostering a Homelike & Healing Environment
 - Material, colour, texture & light
 - Personal space and privacy



The current layout



The proposed new layout

2. Using Current Challenges to Inform Future Second Stage Build

KWS is looking ahead to address the identified need for more Second Stage housing in the community. This build would be KWS' second build, their first being the mixed-model Transition House and Second Stage building in West Kelowna. KWS learned many lessons from the West Kelowna development process and through moving the building into a program space. With these lessons learned in mind, KWS is excited to implement these into planning a future Second Stage build. The opportunities for improvement in a future new build are outlined below:



Challenges in Current Second Stage/Transition House Site:

- The welcome reception area is currently an unstaffed desk at the entrance in a small lobby area that feels confining due to its size and multiple closed doors.
- The Wi-Fi and cell reception is weak in certain areas in the building.
- There is a lack of any type of amenity space in the West Kelowna location for Second Stage residents.
- Lack of outdoor space amenities such as a playground, dog run and gardens.



Women-Centred Design Approach to Future Second Stage Build:

- The entrance area should be a flow-through space that is much more open and welcoming.
- Dealing with barriers early and making this a priority with the building team to ensure better connectivity throughout the building.
- Creating a beautiful multi-functional amenity space that will include a children's area and flexible seating that can be used as workspaces.
- Include amenities such as a dog run, playground, and ideally a rooftop patio with wheelchair-accessible garden plots to increase access to outdoor spaces.

Thoughts from Women with Lived Experience:



- Women shared that more outdoor space amenities in their current housing are a big priority for them, specifically a playground.
- Additionally, the women identified a big need for an amenity space that could be used for hosting events or house meetings.



Image 10: Including amenities such as accessible community garden beds can foster a homelike and healing environment as well as build a sense of community and social life.

Women-Centred Design in Action



Principle:

Increasing community support and social life

- Diversity of on-site amenities
- Space layout



Principle:

Fostering a homelike & healing environment

- Nature & natural elements



Principle:

Increasing Convenience & Efficiency

- Access to complementary spaces
- Flexibility, adaptability, accessibility



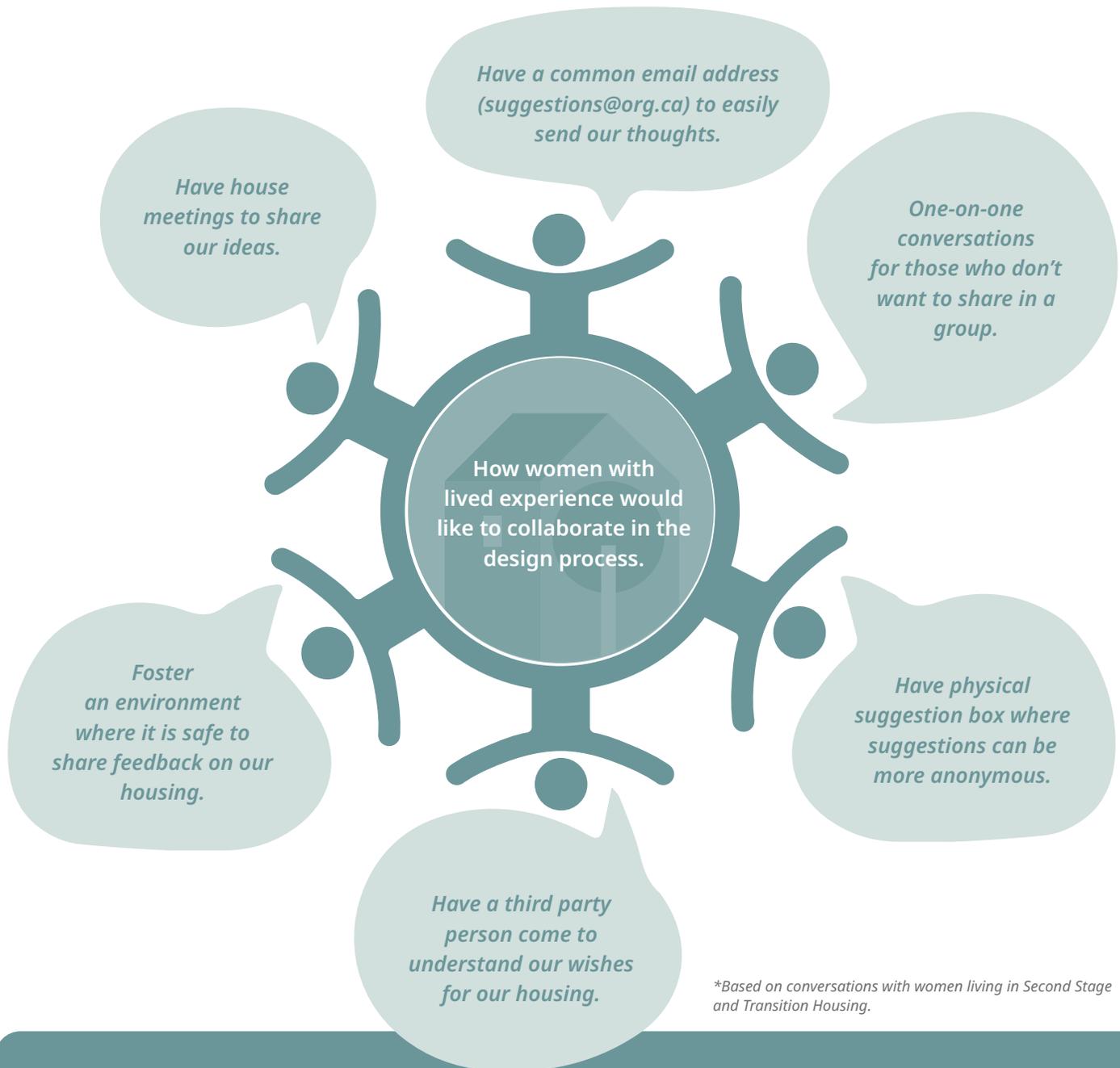
Principle:

Increasing security & sense of safety

- Community building

When Asked

How women would like to collaborate in the design process of their housing in the future, this is what they shared...



I would love to have more conversations like this [WCD consultation], it feels good to talk about this stuff and share what we think.

- Woman with Lived Experience

Wrapping Up:

Lessons Learned and Ideas for Future Collaborations between Anti-Violence Members and Architects

When staff were asked to share their lessons learned in practically implementing women-centred design as well as how best to collaborate effectively with architects this is what they shared...



Design the space with inclusion as a priority. Ensure that the space feels safe for everyone who enters it.

Stay checked in! It supports you and the team to create a space that is truly for women and children.

Talk with other Executive Directors about their experiences collaborating with architects and building housing for women and children.

Ask lots of questions and remember that no question is a silly question. It supports a collaborative partnership with everyone at the table.

Review the two [BCSTH] toolkits (Women-Centred Housing Design and Developing Women-Centred Housing Toolkit) you'll have a better understanding of the process, and you won't feel as lost.

Share the Women-Centred Housing Design Toolkit with your architect.

Discuss opportunities during the development phase to identify strategies and/or funding to contract a project manager to manage the procurement and set up phase.

Architects have their expertise, and we need to bring ours.

Take a look at your harm reduction approach and implement that into your operations and how it will inform the housing design.

Prior to the design, think about what your goals are for your Second Stage program - what do you need in the built environment?



Looking Ahead: Sharing Themes that Emerged from Consultations

Below are overarching themes that emerged during the consultations with women with lived experience and anti-violence members.

Program Operations Should Inform Design

A common theme that emerged at all case study sites, was the emphasis on having a strong understanding of what your program operations will look like and how this needs to be reflected in the design of your renovation or build. In short, program operations should be fleshed out prior to any design plans and shared with the development team. An example of this in the case of a new build is that organizations should consider:

- What programs do we run and what space allotments do we need?
- How do we want these spaces to function and flow?
- How can we make these spaces feel safe and secure while also feeling warm, welcoming and not institutional?
- What staff team spaces do we need and how do we want these to interact with program space?
- How will this space be experienced by women with lived experiences of violence and would they like to collaborate in this process?
- What are our future program goals and operations and how can we create a space that will serve these future plans?

Women with Lived Experience are Interested in Co-Creating Their Housing¹¹

The Women-Centred Housing Design Toolkit (Akbarnejad, Godard, & FitzGerald, 2023) discusses that in order to meet the specific needs of women and children, housing providers should engage women in the process of co-creating or co-designing their home. As discussed in the BCSTH online course, *Foundations in Women-Centred Housing* (2023), the act of home-making should be a collaborative process between the housing provider, the residents, and the community. This theme emerged in conversations with women with lived experience in that they were interested in collaborating in the design ideas and operations of their current housing. To truly honor choice-based, trauma and violence-informed practice, residents should be included in making choices around their housing. To see specific ideas brainstormed by women with lived experience around how they would like to be involved in collaborating in co-creating their home, please see the individual organization case studies.

Architects Should be Educated on Women-Centred Design & Why it is Important from the Outset

As discussed throughout the case studies, for housing to meet the needs of women and children with lived experiences of violence it must be designed from the outset from a violence and trauma-informed lens. It is integral to the project's success to educate the architecture team on what women-centred housing design is and why it is important. While it is not clear what or if there is a process in place from funders, from case study consultations this education seems to often fall on the shoulders of the anti-violence organization to

inform and advocate for the importance of women-centred housing design. A suggested process for this education would be that all architects awarded a project take the BCSTH Foundations in Women-Centred Housing course, review the Women-Centred Housing Design Toolkit and the Housing Design Checklist to inform their work.



Image 11: In order to meet the specific needs of women and children, housing providers should engage women in the process of co-creating their home. (Akbarnejad, A., Godard, L., FitzGerald, A., 2023)

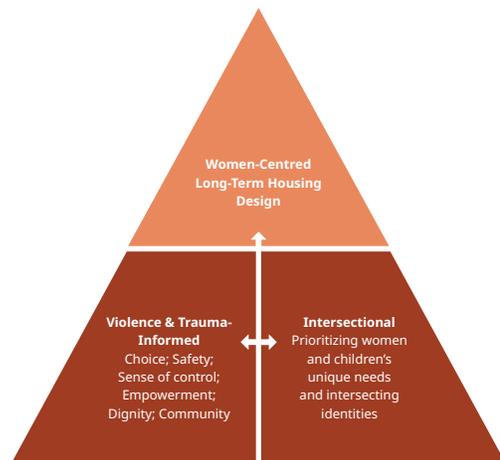


Image 12: Violence-informed, trauma-informed and intersectional design are the foundations upon which Women-Centred Housing Design stand. (Akbarnejad, A., Godard, L., FitzGerald, A., 2023)

Women with Lived Experience Feel Safer and a Stronger Sense of Community when Women-Centred Housing Design is Applied¹²

In the conversations with women with lived experience, we explored what features of their current housing fostered a sense of safety and community. Throughout these conversations, women shared that women-centred design principles in a practical application foster a greater sense of safety and a stronger sense of community compared to housing built without a trauma and violence-informed lens. This theme was consistent across all three case studies sites and should be strongly considered by funders and municipalities who are funding builds that house women and children with lived experiences of violence.

A Formalized Provincial Community of Practice (CoP) Could Support Anti-Violence Members Developing Housing Projects

In conversations with the case study members there was a shared sentiment that undertaking the development of a housing project is a large and daunting undertaking that many organizations are taking on for the first time. Currently, specifically in BC, anti-violence organizations who are developing housing are supporting other anti-violence organizations on a similar path in an informal capacity. However a formalized community of practice that links organizations to supports and organizations with experience may be a good way to bridge gaps in knowledge, share resources, problem solve and support advocacy efforts as a community.

The Big Picture & Final Thoughts

As noted in the Keys to Home: Gaps Analysis Report (2022), “It is not the role of anti-violence workers to find the solution to the housing crisis in BC.” With this said, with the provinces commitment over the next 10 years to the BC Housing’s Women’s Transition Housing Fund (WTHF) to build over 3000 units for women and children who have experienced or are at risk of violence, there is an exciting opportunity to change the housing landscape in British Columbia for women and children leaving violence. It is clear that anti-violence members are experts in working from a violence and trauma-informed lens and that women with lived experience are experts in their own lives and have expertise to share in co-creating their housing. Based on this knowledge, women-centred housing design offers a practical road map on how to honour the knowledge shared by both anti-violence members and women with lived experience. Thank you to the many anti-violence organizations that have taken on the incredibly large endeavor of developing housing that is trauma and violence informed, your work has made much needed space for many more women and children to find housing that is appropriate and safe.

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BC Society of Transition Houses