

# Building *Better Futures*

A CAMPAIGN FOR



STEPPING STONES  
Crisis Society





# Did you know that every hour a woman in Alberta will undergo some form of violence from her intimate partner?

Alberta has one of the highest rates of domestic abuse in the country. And in rural areas like ours, the rate of intimate partner violence is nearly double what is reported in cities.

A number of factors add pressure to our community: long waiting lists for daycare, a lack of affordable housing, fewer high-paying jobs and the isolation of living outside a major centre.

During the pandemic, domestic abuse in the Lakeland region rose an alarming 50%, as women were forced to isolate with their abusers. Yet what's even more concerning: **instead of returning to pre-pandemic levels, now the violence is escalating further.**

Stepping Stones Crisis Society in Cold Lake is the only women's shelter within a 100-kilometer radius. In the last year, calls to our 24-hour helpline nearly doubled.

Our shelters served more than 300 women and children—yet we also had to **turn away an additional 332** because we were at maximum capacity in both our emergency and second-stage shelters.

*Too many women and children have nowhere to turn.*

\*Preventing Domestic Violence in Alberta: A Cost Savings Perspective  
[www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/l-wells-domestic-violence.pdf](http://www.policyschool.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/l-wells-domestic-violence.pdf)



Fizkes / Adobe Stock

Cover: Tatiana Syrikova from Pexels; Left: Liza Summer from Pexels

# Stepping Stones Crisis Society is working to address and prevent family violence— *but we need your help.*

To respond to current needs, Stepping Stones Crisis Society is **building a facility that will more than double the number of families we're able to help** each year. Further, it will more effectively help women and children transition to safe and independent living—by providing both emergency shelter and longer-term housing.

## Will you support this project, helping more women and children break free from violence?

The Building Better Futures campaign brings all of our services to one accessible location and provides significantly more safe housing:

### PHASE 1

A 50,000 ft<sup>2</sup> four-story building with 63 emergency shelter beds and 12 second stage housing apartments.

### PHASE 2

An affordable housing complex, with a goal of 34 units.

The City of Cold Lake has affirmed our vision by donating land in a desirable location that will serve families well: it's near schools, healthcare, businesses, and public transit.

We have also received federal and provincial government funding to help move the project forward. But to make this project a reality, **we are seeking to raise \$17.5 million.**

Domestic violence increases poverty, homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, and crime levels, as well as individuals' short- and long-term physical and mental health. The cycle then feeds itself since, "poverty, a low level of education, or poor housing situations can make families more vulnerable to family violence."\*

Your support of this campaign helps women and children break free from domestic violence—building stronger communities and a brighter future for Lakeland families.

*"Personally, I feel honoured to support this project. As a community businessperson, I recognize it is important—and as a woman, I know it is critical."*

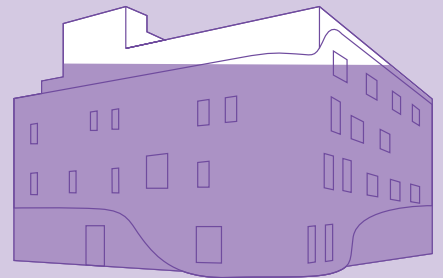
## PROJECT COST

**Total project cost: \$47 million**  
Currently funded: \$29.5 million  
Total fundraising goal: \$17.5 million

### PHASE 1: 80% funded

#### Total cost: \$37 million

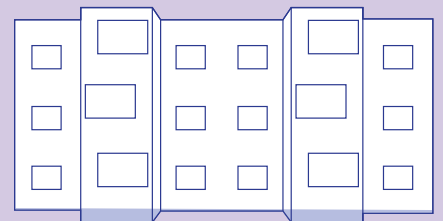
Emergency shelter and second stage housing



### PHASE 2: 0% funded

#### Total cost: \$10 million

Affordable housing complex



*"I am so grateful that we had this support during such a difficult time. I received help in every area while staying at Stepping Stones—mentally, emotionally and physically. Staying at Stepping Stones has changed my life."*

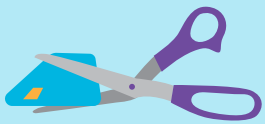
*"Thank you so much! I am stronger, healthier, and emotionally, I feel hopeful."*

\*[www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/health-social-impacts-family-violence.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/stop-family-violence/health-social-impacts-family-violence.html)

## UNIQUE BARRIERS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

As a direct result of the control dynamics related to their abuse, survivors often face specific obstacles to accessing affordable housing. These hurdles make it even more challenging for survivors to find safe housing for themselves and their children.

This is particularly true for those most marginalized and with the least access to resources, including many ethnic or racial minorities, Indigenous people, immigrants, those who are geographically isolated, those living in poverty, and those with disabilities.



### Poor Credit & Ruined Rental Histories

Often caused by abusers running up credit card debt or lying about paying rent, utilities, child-care, and other bills. This affects a survivor's ability to pass a landlord's background check.



### Lack of Steady Employment

Caused when victims are forced to miss work as a result of violence, or when they are fired as a result of stalking and harassment that occurs at the workplace.



### Housing Discrimination

Most commonly occurs when landlords evict victims from housing due to repeated calls to the police, or property damage caused by the abuser.

## Your Impact

The Building Better Futures campaign assists women and children throughout their journeys, including through housing over time, vital wraparound services, and other referrals and supports needed. Bringing all of our services together under one roof extends the continuum of care we can provide for clients and removes transportation barriers.

### EMERGENCY SHELTER BEDS: from 27 to 63

Especially as we see violence escalating, we know that having emergency beds saves lives. They help families escape from immediate danger and offer a place to sleep without fear. This new accessible building will allow us to support those with mobility issues, including seniors. Many struggle with the number of stairs in our existing building.

### SECOND STAGE APARTMENTS: from 6 to 12

Once women are out of immediate danger, they can begin to heal and develop the skills they need to transition to independent living.

Our new facility will include three fully accessible units, and the ability to adapt apartment size for larger families or single people. These apartments are designed for stays of up to two years.

### AFFORDABLE HOUSING: a goal of 34 units

Long-term housing supports residents once they complete their second stage housing stay. These units offer places to live that are safe, affordable, and supportive, extending the continuum of care for women and their children.

As women find stable employment but face a high cost of living, acquiring housing that is both affordable and safe is vital. These housing units help to ensure that women never need to decide between homelessness and removal of their children—or returning to an abuser.



Gantas Vaiciulenas from Pexels

# The New Build

The new, net-zero ready facility uses **trauma-informed design principles**, creating safe and calm spaces and promoting openness, light, and comfort. Shared resident spaces will include a **childcare area, community kitchens, and pet housing**.

We will also continue to offer an **in-house school**, an important service that allows children to continue learning—even when they can't return to their school due to distance or for safety reasons.

**Spiritual and cultural supports** are also an important component of our current and future operations. Space in our new facility allows practices such as smudging and prayer to help individuals' journeys toward hope and healing.

The facility's secure courtyard will have ample **green space**—including a healing garden and a playground—to enhance the quality of life for residents of all ages.

**Community Support Spaces** will be available to people regardless of whether they are staying in the facility. Private meeting spaces, training rooms, and a resource library will support programming that builds life skills and supports mental wellness.

For over 40 years, we have been building a continuum of care in Cold Lake and the broader Lakeland Region to help address and prevent domestic abuse. We know that for long-term impact, we must not only help people in their moments of greatest need through the emergency shelter, but also provide supports once they are out of dangerous situations.

We are part of a network of community services and partnerships, including our Cold Lake Interagency Network, Bonnyville Interagency Network, and Elizabeth Metis Settlement Interagency Network.

Your support of this project will save lives and change the future for countless families and communities. **Will you help these women find hope and strength again?**



*"I very quickly became pregnant in our relationship, which still didn't stop him from abusing me in all aspects—emotional, verbal, and physical."*

*"I had a safe place to find security and regain stability. It provided a protective environment for my children and me, and I also received valuable counselling."*



All renderings: Reimagine Architects



# MJ's Story: A Journey of Hope and Survival

I was young when I got married. Like so many women, I was filled with excitement and dreams of building a beautiful life with the man I loved. But that dream quickly turned into a nightmare. Just a few months after the wedding, the abuse started. At first, it was subtle—angry words, controlling behavior—but it wasn't long before it became physical.

It started with alcohol. He drank often, and he drank heavily, which made him aggressive. Whenever he started drinking, I knew the violence would start. Talking to other men lead to accusations of cheating. Eventually, I had to ask permission to speak to other people entirely, especially men. I was not allowed access to our finances. I had no bank card and no access to statements. I had no idea what was in our bank account, and I would be given \$5 to spend as "allowance". He controlled everything.

I tried to convince myself it was just stress, that things would get better. But they didn't. By the time I discovered I was pregnant within the first year, the abuse had escalated beyond anything I could have imagined. Instead of being a time of joy, my pregnancy was one of the most terrifying times of my life. Every day, I feared for my safety and the safety of the child I carried.

At 32 weeks pregnant, the violence reached its most horrifying point. In a fit of rage, my husband beat me so badly that he threw me down a hill into a gully and left me there to die. I can still remember the cold, the darkness, and the overwhelming feeling that my life was slipping away. I was

broken—physically, emotionally, and mentally. But somehow, someone found me. I was rushed to the hospital, barely holding on.

One week later, at 33 weeks pregnant, I gave birth to my beautiful miracle. They were premature and struggled from the moment they were born, but they were strong. This tiny body fought for life in the NICU, and I knew that

*Together, we can make a difference. Together, we can be the light in the darkness for women and children who desperately need it.*

if they could fight, so could I. Those days were the hardest of my life—watching my child struggle while I tried to heal from my trauma. But I also knew that I could never return to that abusive home. I had to protect my child, and I had to protect myself.

Three months after giving birth, I found the strength I needed to leave. It wasn't easy. In fact, it was the hardest decision I've ever made. But I knew that if I didn't leave, the violence would only continue, and my child and I would never be safe. I had no idea where to go or what to do, but I knew I had to escape.

It was then that I found an incredible organization that changed my life. They showed me my value as a person and as a mother. They taught me the skills I needed to be a single parent, and most importantly, they gave me the courage to leave my past behind. With their help, I moved across the country—far away from the violence—and started a new life for myself and my child. That was 25 years ago.

Looking back now, I realize how far I've come. My child, who was born too soon and fought so hard to survive, is now a strong, healthy adult—and expecting their own first child. I reflect on how different their life could have been had I stayed. I often think about the women and children who are still trapped in that cycle of abuse, who feel as though they have no way out.

Because of my story, I understand the life-changing value of the work that organizations like Stepping Stones Crisis Society do. I know firsthand how vital it is to have a place to turn to, a safe haven, and a community of support when everything else feels lost. It's not just about providing shelter—it's about restoring hope and giving women the tools to rebuild their lives.

Today, I'm proud to be an advocate for this cause. I know that we can't just stand by while others suffer in silence. We need to ensure that no woman ever feels trapped, that no child is ever left in danger. We must come together as a community to provide safety, support, and a path to healing for those who need it most.

Every day, women like me are faced with impossible decisions—stay in an abusive home or risk everything to escape. We can offer them the same hope and healing that saved my life 25 years ago. We must ensure they never face that choice alone. With your support, we can ensure that no woman is ever left behind!

# In the last year, calls to our 24-hour helpline nearly doubled

We anticipate providing more than 4,300 safe bed nights this year—a 48% increase over last year. Despite this increase, we simply could not meet the needs: we had to turn away nearly 400 people.

Your support helps to ensure that women and children fleeing violence first have a safe place to sleep—and then can find a new path forward, free from family violence.

This project makes financial sense, too. A conservative estimate placed the economic impact of spousal violence in Canada at \$7.4 billion.\* Addressing and preventing domestic violence offers cost savings in immediate healthcare, policing, and educational supports. It also provides long-term savings through improved health, education, employment, and wellbeing for whole communities.

**Join Stepping Stones Crisis Society in being part of a big picture solution.** Your support of this \$17.5 million campaign will help to address and prevent family violence in the Lakeland Region.

It's time to help families escape from violence and begin to heal. Let's give each woman and child the safety they deserve—and we'll see the effects in our communities for generations.

*Will you give today?*

\*An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada  
[https://justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/r12\\_7/r12\\_7.pdf](https://justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/r12_7/r12_7.pdf)



## OUR IMPACT IN 2023

4,262 BED NIGHTS



1,592 HELPLINE CALLS



238 STUDENT DAYS



121 PET NIGHTS



332 TURNAWAYS



*“He controlled every part of my life and went as far as banning me from leaving the house while he was at work.”*

*“My stay at Stepping Stones has given me some independence back, and increased my confidence.”*



STEPPING STONES  
**Crisis Society**

To invest in  
Building Better Futures,  
contact Melissa Francis,  
CEO of Stepping Stones  
Crisis Society, at  
780-201-4938 or  
ceo@steppingstonesociety.ca

**Thank you for your  
generous support.**

This campaign's goal is to  
raise \$17.5 million for Stepping  
Stones Crisis Society's new  
shelter, second stage housing,  
and affordable housing.  
Campaign costs are anticipated  
to be 10%.

*"Thank you for showing me love,  
for listening, for caring. You are  
one of the reasons that my  
daughter and I lead such a  
good life now. Thank you."*

