



One of the successful components of the Women's Housing Planning Collaborative was the creation of a social media campaign called "How's the Weather?" The campaign uses Twitter™ (@howstheweather_), Facebook™ and a website to raise awareness of women facing homelessness in Hamilton and what we can do collectively to make change happen in women's lives. Visit howstheweather.ca for more information.

The **Women's Housing Planning Collaborative** (WHPC) exists to develop, coordinate, advocate for and facilitate a gender specific, comprehensive and seamless system of services to meet the needs of women experiencing homelessness. It is supported by the S.O.S. Advisory Committee.

Women's Housing Planning Collaborative Members

Good Shepherd Women's Services
 Native Women's Centre/Honouring the Circle
 Mission Services
 Phoenix Place
 Womankind Addiction Services – St. Joseph's
 Healthcare Hamilton
 YWCA Hamilton

Ex-Officio Members

City of Hamilton Housing Services Division
 Ministry of Children and Youth &
 Ministry of Community and Social Services Ontario
 Service Canada Homelessness Partnering Strategy
 Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton

"I came from Nigeria and became homeless in Hamilton. We don't have a word for this in my home country."

S.O.S. Participant



Contributors to howstheweather.ca



Supporting Our Sisters is funded by:



SUPPORTING OUR SISTERS

WOMEN'S HOUSING PLANNING COLLABORATIVE

In May 2010, the report "Not to be forgotten: homeless women in Hamilton" was produced by the Social Planning and Research Council, commissioned by Mission Services of Hamilton. The report indicated that women's homelessness in Hamilton was at a crisis level and a coordinated system of support was needed to immediately address the issue. The report then spurred a larger conversation and action for gender specific responses to single women facing homelessness in the city.

In 2011, the Women's Housing Planning Collaborative (WHPC) received funding from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy for Project S.O.S. (Supporting Our Sisters).

Supporting Our Sisters is a wrap around program for women experiencing homelessness in Hamilton. It is based on a housing first approach that also includes supporting women in attaining transitional housing. S.O.S. focuses on gendered responses to women's homelessness and the multi-dimensional challenges women face in accessing appropriate responses and supports.

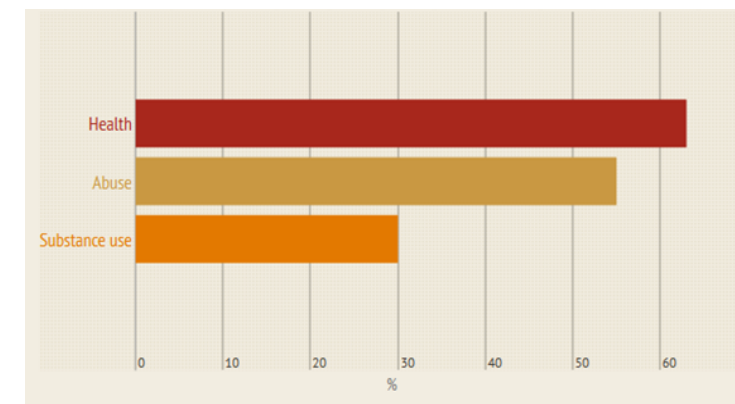
Transitional housing is an important part of the S.O.S. program. It offers many women a place to be safe, secure and gives them the opportunity to develop relationships with other women and build a sense of community. This engagement broadens support networks, improves self esteem, and can contribute to better health and housing outcomes overall.

One of our early findings in the S.O.S. program has been that women in the program are often reunited with their children once housing issues have been settled.

Why Housing First for Women?

The objective of the Supporting Our Sisters project is to develop a comprehensive service system response for women at risk of and experiencing homelessness. The initiative was designed to build capacity within this community's assets by investing support services where they do not exist. The project brought together a complex cluster of services, developed a comprehensive gender specific service delivery

model, and introduced supports where they did not exist to provide a range of options and identified more housing with supports for marginalized women.



Self identified risk factor at intake to S.O.S. Program

The concept of **Housing First** focuses on establishing housing before addressing other issues like employment, addictions and mental health with the assumption that these issues are more easily resolved if housing is already in place. Housing first approaches have been gaining support in community-based research and practice over the last several years across Canada.

Practices have been successfully implemented in Hamilton to reduce homelessness among men with the Transitions to Home program. For youth, the Street Youth Planning Collaborative has a focus on early intervention and prevention. The Hamilton Executive Directors' Aboriginal Coalition works to ensure that homelessness responses have a strong cultural component. Now there is a response to the unique challenges women face with launch of the S.O.S. program.

"Homelessness is a temporary experience, not an identity or permanent trait."

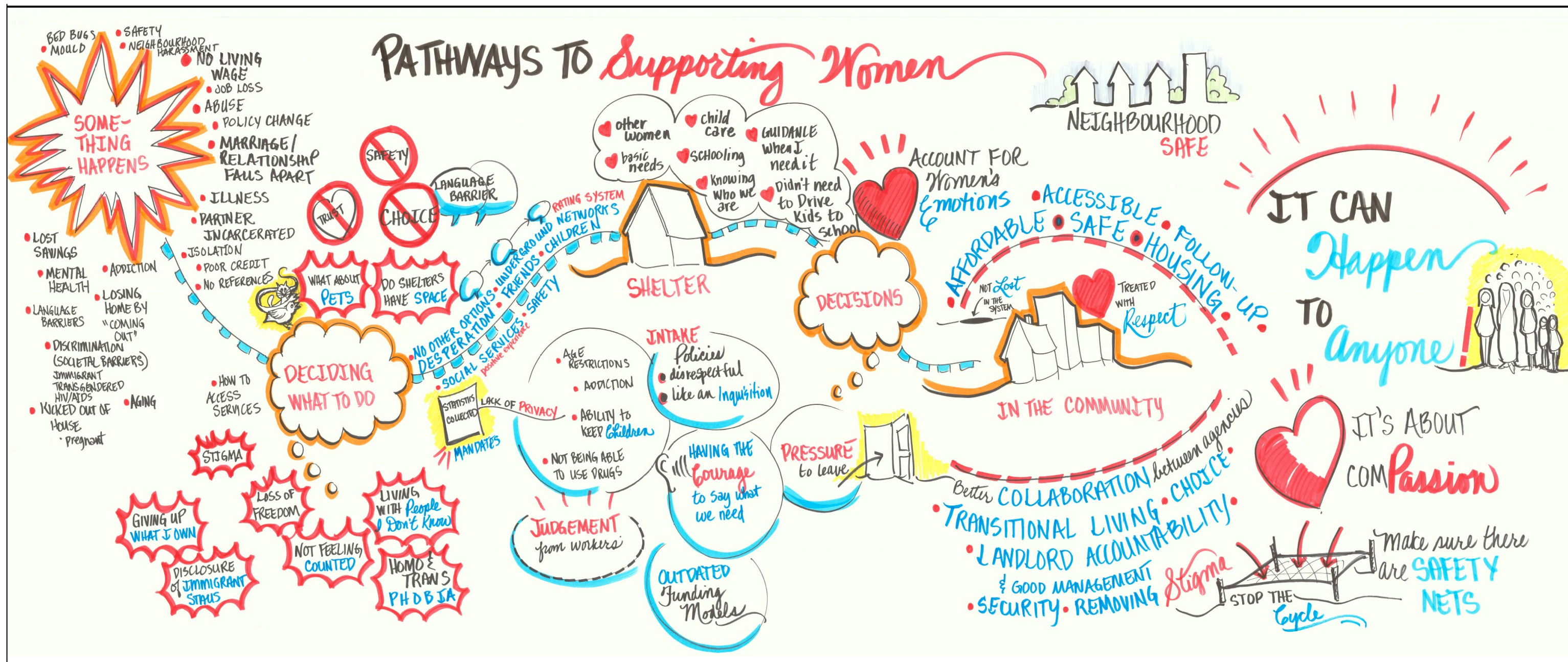
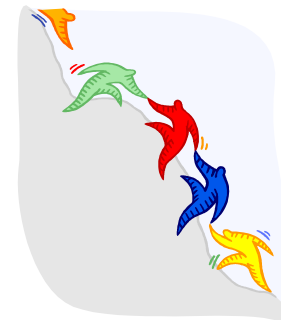
November 2013
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Project S.O.S. (Supporting Our Sisters)



Project S.O.S (Supporting Our Sisters) is supported by an advisory committee of women with lived experience of homelessness. Without their valuable input the program wouldn't be able to meet the unique needs of women. A gender lens is important when developing and delivering women centred supports. The image below was created by graphic facilitator Pam Hubbard with the input of women with lived experience of homelessness. The input happened at the *Why Gender?* conference held in conjunction with Hamilton's International Women's Day celebrations held in March 2013.

The graphic demonstrates that "something happens" that results in women in experiencing homelessness. The "Pathways to Supporting Women" can be very complex, and as the graphic shows, the lack of affordable housing is one of the main barriers to women having better health, social and economic outcomes. Women have told the community that homelessness can happen to anyone. With compassion, collaboration and respect the needs of women experiencing homelessness can better met.



Project S.O.S. results as of September 30, 2013

- ⇒ 254 women served and 88% remained housed while receiving S.O.S. supports
- ⇒ Data collection tool created, refined and staff trained
- ⇒ 12 WHPC Meetings & 6 Advisory Committee meetings have been held
- ⇒ Trauma Level One certification training for front line S.O.S. staff
- ⇒ S.O.S. Advisory Committee established and is informing the work of the project
- ⇒ Why Gender? Housing conference held

Original S.O.S. targets for March 31, 2014

- ⇒ Approximately 140 women will receive services to increase housing stability
- ⇒ Approximately 85 –105 women will retain housing after 3 month follow up
- ⇒ Data collection tools in place and formal project evaluation complete
- ⇒ Approximately 12 S.O.S. Advisory Committee meetings held
- ⇒ 12 Women's Housing Planning Collaborative meetings held
- ⇒ 5 joint training sessions for project staff

