



Statement: Downtown Protest's Impact on Cornerstone's Emergency Women's Shelter

February 2, 2022 - Ottawa, ON - These last six days have been extremely stressful for people experiencing homelessness and frontline staff working to support them in the downtown core.

Cornerstone's emergency shelter just returned to its downtown location a few weeks ago and is still getting situated and now, we're having to manage through this protest that is creating more barriers and retraumatizing women in the city. The residents and staff in Ottawa's women's shelter are exhausted. This protest is having consequences on the rights and wellness of the city's most vulnerable people.

Women and staff are scared to go outside of the shelter, especially women of color, being able to go outside is the only reprieve many women experiencing homelessness have and they cannot even do that. The incessant honking and noise from the trucks have caused significant anxiety and distress for staff and shelter residents. Women have admitted themselves into hospital due to the increased trauma from the noise and fear. All Shelters are having to figure out alternative plans for client transportation to any other program or hospitals in the city.

This past weekend Cornerstones operations moved to a crisis response far beyond the impacts of the Pandemic. Senior Managers working the frontlines to ensure staff and women are safe traveling to and from our shelter and residences. Supporting staff and shelter residents while they shake with fear waiting for a bus that never arrives.

Despite all this, we are living amongst the uncertainty of not knowing when this will end. After the past two years of battling through this unprecedented global pandemic, the toxic opioid epidemic, everyone is completely exhausted and cannot take one more day of this protest's added stresses.

The cost of this protest to our city for 3 days would fund our women's emergency shelter for more than an entire year, and yet this protest has cost us financial hardship. Frontline staff and healthcare workers have come to work every day for nearly two years, managing through this pandemic to provide safe, supportive services and communities to people in Ottawa who have no place to call home, and now they're having heightened fear and anxiety around coming into work over these past few days in the midst of a global pandemic. Our shelter system cannot take one more day of the consistent noise and fear.

Housing and Healthcare support is desperately needed, and this protest is only going to further our housing and homelessness crisis. We must get our city back.