

Proposal submitted by



**THE BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL
WOMEN OF BRAMPTON**

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Member of:

The Ontario Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Ontario)
The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW Canada)
The International Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW International)

March 2021



INTRODUCTION

The Business and Professional Women of Brampton (BPW Brampton) is a non-partisan, non-profit, and non-sectarian organization comprised of women across Brampton, dedicated to the advocacy of the social, political, and economic equity of all women. For almost 75 years, we have represented the local chapter of an international federation of clubs with a shared vision of equality as a basic human right.

While Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the work we do, BPW Brampton persevered through many obstacles and re-imagined how to continue meeting the demands of the community we represent. Our focus remains in alignment with our provincial, federal, and international chapters (BPW Ontario, BPW Canada, and BPW International, respectively) and our collective understanding that Covid-19 has had a profound impact on women and issues that affect us, including domestic violence, health, and poverty and financial autonomy. BPW is dedicated to the recognition of and support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the work we do.

Since 2019 BPW Brampton's Resolution Committee has focused on improving the lives of women in our community who are experiencing domestic or intimate partner violence. In our general membership of 40 women, this is an issue that hits close to home. We are women who love someone living in a dangerous situation, remember a colleague who feared going home after work, or are ourselves women who have lived in a violence against women shelter when they had nowhere else to go. We are women who have lost someone unnecessarily due to domestic violence.

It is with this experience we have compiled the attached resolution in support of the expansion of options for women experiencing domestic violence to live safely in their communities. BPW Brampton believes that women should not have to compromise their sense of community, financial stability, and their children's mental health to seek safety in a shelter simply because it is her only option.

Business and Professional Women of Brampton appreciates your review of the attached resolution and letters of support from fellow local organizations who believe in a

community where women can live free of violence. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss the resolution and ways in which we can work collaboratively to improve the lives of the women living and working in Brampton.

Respectfully submitted,

Alexandra Hopkins, MSW RSW
BPW Brampton Vice President, Resolutions Chair

Lynne Taylor
BPW Brampton President

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BPW Brampton Past President

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Business and Professional Women of Brampton

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BPW Brampton

Expansion of funding directed to increase options for women who are victims of violence to live safely in their community

Background

Emergency response systems have existed in Peel for those who are at high risk of violence for many years. In 2016, with the support of a grant through the Region of Peel, Victim Services of Peel was able to update this system from a home alarm system to a mobile GPS-enabled emergency alert device. This new system was titled 'Project Guardian' and continues to be a pilot project in Peel Region. Project Guardian functions to improve the safety of those at risk of violence from assaults, human trafficking, hate crimes, and domestic violence. The project also consists of extensive safety planning, maintaining contact with a crisis counsellor, and supports individuals living in Brampton or Mississauga who meet eligibility criteria including having reported the violence or threat of violence to the police, do not reside with the accused, and seek out and utilize other safety measures (e.g., peace bonds, restraining orders, or no contact orders). At the time of this resolution, ten (10) GPS-enabled emergency alert devices exist for Brampton/Mississauga, a population of over one million people, all of which are currently allocated to individuals; a waitlist exists (Victims Services of Peel, 2020). The emergency alert devices are provided to individual victims of violence who wish to remain living safely in their own residence, after the perpetrator has left or been removed. The GPS-enabled device has an emergency call feature linking the individual and important details of their risk directly to the police and once pressed, allows for an immediate response by police, should the perpetrator breach the safety order, threaten, and/or harm the victim(s).

The Minister for Women and Gender Equality stated COVID-19 is empowering domestic violence abusers with some regions reporting 20-30% increase in violence rates since the onset of Covid-19 intervention (Patel, R., 2020). Thousands of women, girls, transwomen, and non-binary people now face a heightened risk of violence at home with COVID-19 isolation measures. In a recent survey, one in 10 women reported being very or extremely concerned about the possibility of violence in the home (Gunraj, A. & Howard, J., 2020). Further, more individuals accused of domestic and gender-based violence have not been held in custody so as to prevent overcrowding at the police station or within holding cells in response to Covid-19; there is a higher opportunity for recidivism and revictimization of the victim if they remain in the home.

Women who experience domestic violence are frequently referred to a women's shelter. Of those who seek emergency shelter, 60% are women. Of those women, 40% attend shelters with their children. In Ontario, 42% of shelters were at capacity, and shelter being at capacity was the reason women were turned away in 82% of situations (Moreau, 2019). According to a 2017/2018 Statistics Canada report, on a snapshot day, more than 3, 500 women sought shelter; of those who cited abuse as their reason for seeking shelter, 80% reported their alleged abuser as an intimate partner (current or former) (Moreau, 2019; Sinha, 2013).

Due to the overcrowding of shelters and their reduced capacity in response to Covid-19 safety measures, women and children often have to go to shelters outside of their home regions, often meaning they have to leave their employment due to transportation issues and their children are made to change schools, all of which can compound their traumatic experience. The use of GPS-enabled emergency devices alleviates the need for women and their children to rely on shelters as their primary or sole option, by being able to remain safely in their own

home (with the aid of significant safety planning), and retain a sense of normalcy and financial stability for themselves and their children.

Peel Regional Police reported the highest number of calls they respond to are intimate or family violence related, and have been for the past several years (Peel Regional Police, 2018; Peel Regional Police, 2019; Peel Regional Police, 2020); Police saw an increase of over 850 domestic incidents in 2019, a year in which nearly half of the Region's homicides were domestic related (Peel Regional Police, 2020; Bond, M., & Amin, F., 2020)

Despite women utilizing all current available safety resources (e.g., restraining order, custody order, police), leaving an abusive relationship remains the most dangerous time; pending or actual separation was present in 67% of homicides investigated by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee between 2003-2018 (Office of the Chief Coroner, 2019). This report also identified additional high risks such as a current or past history of domestic violence by the perpetrator (71%), victims having an intuitive sense of fear (43%), prior threats to kill the victim (36%) and the perpetrator having failed to comply with authority (28%). Programs such as 'Project Guardian' aim to provide individuals safety through immediate, informed intervention to reduce risk of violence, including homicide, and help to increase autonomy, independence, and stability (Victim Services of Peel, 2020).

WHEREAS there has been an increased risk of domestic violence against women and children during COVID-19;

AND WHEREAS Peel Regional Police reported spending more hours on scenes of domestic incidents than any other type of incident; they spent 40, 000 hours more than the next highest type of incident in 2016/2017;

AND WHEREAS Peel Regional Police responded to over 18,000 family violence calls, including 10, 000 intimate partner calls, in 2019, a rate of approximately 50 per day;

AND WHEREAS the rate of police-reported incidents of domestic violence in Peel has increased over the past several years with an increase of 859 intimate and family violence incidents in 2018/2019, an increase higher than any other type of incident in Peel, however intimate partner violence victims represent only one third of all police-reported violent crime in Canada;

AND WHEREAS the rate of homicides in Peel increased 24% in 2019 and nearly half of all homicides in Peel Region were domestic related;

AND WHEREAS more than 60% of those who utilize emergency shelters in Canada are women and 80% of women seeking shelter as a result of abuse cited a former or current intimate partner as being their abuser;

AND WHEREAS on a snapshot day in Ontario, 42% of shelters were at capacity, and shelter being at capacity was the reason women were turned away in 82% of situations;

AND WHEREAS in 2009, 15% of female victims of spousal violence obtained a protection order (e.g., restraining order, no contact, peace bond), and 32% of these orders were breached; 65% of these breaches were reported to police;

AND WHEREAS the most dangerous time for a victim of intimate partner violence is during a pending or actual separation, and was a risk factor present in 67% of homicides investigated by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee between 2003-2017;

AND WHEREAS the City of Brampton continues to support Pilot Project Guardian and other support programs that similarly offer options to victims of domestic and gender-based violence to better meet the needs of the Brampton community;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Brampton City Council write a letter of support to endorse BPW Brampton's resolution for the Region of Peel and Province of Ontario.

Implementation:

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February 28, 2021

The Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon supports the BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL WOMEN OF BRAMPTON (BPW) proposal to expand the funding for Project Guardian which will increase options for women who are victims of violence to live safely in our community. We also see Brampton as a leader to promote provincial establishment of core funding to similar programs that work to improve women's safety and reduce the impact of gender-based violence.

Both BPW and Zonta International believe that gender-based violence, or violence against women and girls, is a severe violation of human rights. Violence not only negatively affects women; it also affects their families, communities and countries. The Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon envisions a world in which no woman lives in fear of violence and so for 47 years, we have contributed to help achieve a world free of violence against women and girls through service and advocacy.

We recognize the awareness that this project will bring to the issue of domestic and intimate-partner violence and commend BPW for their contribution to this pervasive and unrelenting scourge of human right.

Appendix B

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Inspiration. Empowerment. Action.

March 19, 2021

The City of Brampton
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RE: Project Guardian

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Roots Community Services Inc., a non-profit organization located in Brampton, Ontario, has been serving children, youth, women, seniors and families in the Region of Peel since 1985. Our mission is to provide culturally-relevant programs and services to inspire residents in the Region of Peel, primarily from the Black, African and Caribbean communities, to make positive changes in their lives and within their communities.

We are pleased to support The Business and Professional Women of Brampton (BPW) resolution for "Project Guardian", a life-alert system for women and girls who are at high risk of becoming victims of violence. This project is aimed at reducing the impact of gender-based violence and increasing the options for women and girls to live safely in their community.

We recognize the City of Brampton as a leader in promoting core funding to promote causes such as this and are appealing for the City to consider this project as one that could save many lives. BPW and Roots Community Services Inc. believe that gender-based violence, or violence against women and girls, has long-lasting and negative health, social and economic impacts, which the City cannot ignore.

We recognize the high level of awareness that this project will bring to the issue of domestic and intimate partner violence and Roots Community Services Inc. is pleased to offer a letter of support to The Business and Professional Women of Brampton.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Angela J Carter".

Angela J Carter
Executive
Director

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Appendix C

March 24, 2021

Hope 24/7, the designated Sexual Assault Centre for the Region of Peel, is pleased to submit a letter of support for the Business & Professional Women of Brampton (BPW) proposal to expand the funding for Project Guardian. We recognize that women and girls continue to be the target of violence because of their sex, and as such they represent a vulnerable group. Thus, we strongly support the expansion of choices for women that will increase their safety and reduce the impact of gender-based violence in our community.

Hope 24/7's vision is a thriving community free from relationship, sexual and gender-based violence and from systems of oppression that contribute to them. Our organization provides therapeutic services for people who have been impacted by relationship or sexual violence. Through psychotherapy, psychoeducational groups, outreach efforts and advocacy in support of marginalized groups, our goal is to stand with community partners like BPW for the sake of justice and human rights.

We believe that GPS-enabled emergency alert devices are a practical and important option for individuals at risk and the support of Project Guardian is significant in protecting victims from further violence.



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