



Women's+ Coalition

Providing Culturally Appropriate and Safe Space

What is the Challenge?

Through the housing lab, and hearing the voices of women+ with lived experiences of homelessness and violence, we found a large disconnect between the homelessness sector and the violence against women sector. Overall, there is a lack of holistic and integrated support. Despite many different organizations and governmental agencies identifying women+ at risk of violence as a group that needs support, we discovered that there was no one group to hold accountability, and no formalized communication or networks to connect the pieces. **The mission is to find and build an organization through empowering the Wisdom holders of the experience to better build and find solutions through their experiential lens.**

The Women's Coalition is a culturally supportive and safe place, working to empower and strengthen those experiencing homelessness and violence. We want to bring to light and link together the Wisdom holders to guide those currently experiencing homelessness and violence; to uplift and lead to solutions. Connecting those with Wisdom of the experiences to empower others to a safe place and tools for navigation.

Gaps in Current Systems

- Lack of interconnectivity
- Holistic Services
- Culturally Safe and Supportive Services
- Empowerment-led Services
- Services led by those with lived experience
- Resources

What is the prototype?

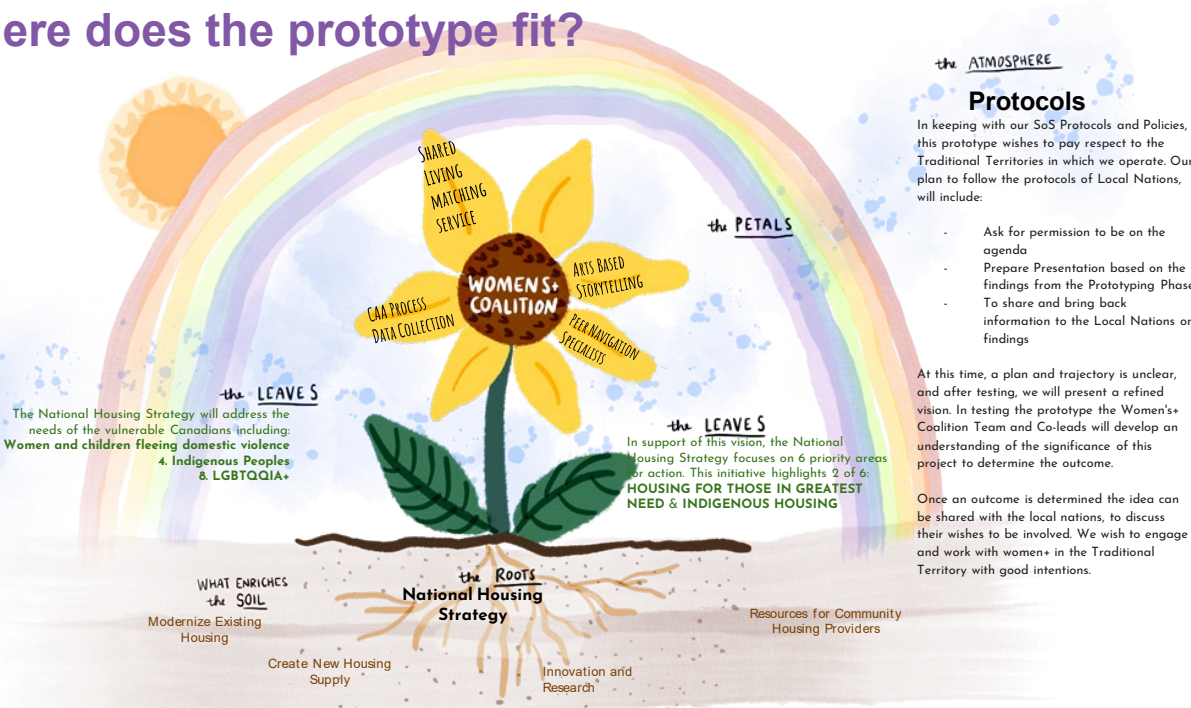
The womens+ coalition began as an idea to create a safe space in which to uplift women to use their voices to become active players in the decisions around housing supports and services that are made for them. Women+ will lead this discussion, by connecting in a safe place to share experiences, with those still living through violence and homelessness. A place to allow those with wisdom to share and support women+ through their own difficult experiences.

Our role is to facilitate making space for them. The space is intended to support engagement, and empower change. For the Wisdom holders to share with us the solutions and gaps within the system, to build partnerships and pathways to helping others still experiencing homelessness and violence. With more work to be done to further flesh out its definition, this prototype is currently an engagement framework with partnerships to bring wisdom holders (women+ with lived experiences of violence and or homelessness) together to provide peer support and consultation, and to iterate, inform and influence the services and policies, that directly affect them.

What needs to be grown? What is the innovation needed?



Where does the prototype fit?



the ATMOSPHERE

Protocols

In keeping with our SoS Protocols and Policies, this prototype wishes to pay respect to the Traditional Territories in which we operate. Our plan to follow the protocols of Local Nations, will include:

- Ask for permission to be on the agenda
- Prepare Presentation based on the findings from the Prototyping Phase
- To share and bring back information to the Local Nations on findings

At this time, a plan and trajectory is unclear, and after testing, we will present a refined vision. In testing the prototype the Women's+ Coalition Team and Co-leads will develop an understanding of the significance of this project to determine the outcome.

Once an outcome is determined the idea can be shared with the local nations, to discuss their wishes to be involved. We wish to engage and work with women+ in the Traditional Territory with good intentions.

How does it work?

Women+ experiencing violence and homelessness or at risk of homelessness are connected to the Women's+ Coalition through collaborative partnerships, word of mouth or internet search.

*Wisdom Holder: one with lived experience



For example, **Layla** hears about the Women's+ Coalition from a support worker.



She is welcomed to a supportive space of resource by a peer, **Corrie**.



They gather and share through weekly Women's+ Coalition Women's+ Circles.



Layla receives One on One Peer guided support to navigate services



The Wisdom holders* lead the space, engage with local governments and bring solutions learnt through listening to influence region, provincial and federal government changes



Collective work and voices are heard by and influence different levels of government

Key Learnings, Challenges and Opportunities



COVID

- Prevented the team from gathering in person and having meaningful dialogue informed by women+ with lived experiences, which was an important aspect of this idea
- COVID also raised other issues beyond logistical roadblocks. How can we do work like this in times of crisis?

Importance of scoping & starting small



- When the team started, they wanted to help everyone and do everything, however, there are so many women out there who need help but they couldn't reach out to them all
- Decided to work with a smaller cohort of women to best understand their needs and voices and amplify them to scale up and provide support to a larger audience
- One example of this was the desire to create a culturally inclusive space for all cultures, not only indigenous culture - after debating on how they could understand all cultures, the team decided to make a commitment instead, to learn and support someone and learn from them how to best support them culturally



Ensuring commitment

- One learning that the team will continue to take forward is striving to ensure intergovernmental commitment...
- Need to have more than a prototype before presenting

Key Learnings, Challenges and Opportunities



Leverage existing projects

(Reflection on similar engagements)

- Spaken House (meaning: Flower House) opened in August 2020 and provides culturally supportive housing and services to 22 Indigenous women experiencing homelessness and/or fleeing violence. Spaken House offers a broad range of programming to the family members living there, including a work program, therapeutic gardening program, and regular access to land-based cultural events and activities. Spaken House has been operating at full capacity since it opened.