

Women's centres unsure of futures

By Kelly Shiers
Staff Reporter

Women's organizations vowed Saturday to make government accountable for the uncertain future of centres and transition houses that provide emergency services for women and children in Nova Scotia.

"We plan to be working across the province ... and we plan to let every politician know how we think and how we feel," said Stephanie Hunter, co-ordinator of Feminists for Just and Equitable Public Policy.

"They're going to have to reckon with the women in Nova Scotia."

The coalition of community-based women's groups, social activists and others held a a day-long meeting to discuss the crisis in women's services.

"The services we provide literally mean the difference between life and death in cases — that's not being overly dramatic — for women and children in this province," said Lucille Harper, director of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre.

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"Whether it's women who are living in violent situations, whether it's women who are dealing with extreme poverties that are pushing them toward serious consideration of suicide, the choices women have to make are extreme right now."

Ms. Harper said it was five months before government met with representatives of 12 transition houses, eight women's centres and programs for abusive men about funding.

This was after public pressure forced the Hamm government to put on hold a planned \$890,000 cut to their budgets — to \$3.8 million from \$4.6 million — last April.

There's been only one meeting since April, and that means the government is not moving quickly enough, Ms. Harper said.

"Nobody has been forced to close, but we're halfway through our fiscal year and we have no idea what's going to happen next fiscal year," she said.

If an election is called before funding is in place, all plans will be at a standstill, she said.

She said she believes the funding issue dropped out of the spotlight because people mistakenly believe the government promised not to make a cut.

"I think that people think the funding was restored, and it's not restored," said Ms. Harper, adding this year's levels will remain the same as last year's until the government makes a decision.

What it means is, we're not able to do long-term planning."

As well, the resources of those delivering front-line services are stretched, she said.

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