

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA CARLETON
 MUNICIPALITÉ RÉGIONALE D'OTTAWA CARLETON

REPORT
 RAPPORT

Our File/N/Réf.
 Your File/V/Réf.

DATE 15 Oct 1996

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator
 Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Commissioner
 Social Services Department

SUBJECT/OBJET **UPDATE REPORT - NELSON HOUSE**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That Community Services Committee recommend Council endorse the plan outlined in this report to protect the investment of the essential services provided by Nelson House to abused women and their children in an appropriate manner.

BACKGROUND

On September 24, 1996 the Board of Directors of Nelson House, a 15-bed shelter for abused women and their children, gave notice to the Social Services Department and the Ministry of Community Social Services of their intention to terminate their purchase of service agreement. On September 27 an interim injunction was granted to keep the shelter open. The ruling also replaced the management board of Nelson House with the board of Harmony House, a second-stage housing program for abused women and their children. The members of the Board of Directors of Nelson House resigned on October 2, 1996. On October 8 a new board of directors was elected for Nelson House.

The Community Services Committee discussed the situation of Nelson House at its meeting of October 3 and approved the following Motion:

That the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton continue to fund Nelson House on a day-to-day basis; that there be no new admissions; and that Social Services Department be directed, in consultation with the Province of Ontario to prepare, for the next meeting of the Community Services Committee, a plan to protect the investment of these essential services in an appropriate manner.

An Extract of the Draft Minutes of the 3 October meeting appears at Appendix 1
PLAN OF ACTION

The Social Services Department and the Ministry of Community and Social Services recommend that services provided at Nelson House be temporarily discontinued in light of the difficulties experienced during the past 2 years. The temporary closure will allow the opportunity to plan for the provision of stable and appropriate services. The funders propose the formation of a community advisory committee. The community advisory committee will assist in defining the essential services and the program design for abused women and children. The committee will also assist in developing criteria for a call for proposals to deliver services to abused women and their children. The terms of reference for the community advisory committee is appended. It is likely that the Nelson House program could be closed for up to 5 months. A service provision plan, described below, will ensure that services to abused women are available in the community during the closure of Nelson House.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

The funders anticipate the following sequence of events in planning for the provision of stable and appropriate services for abused women and their children:

- Advisory committee formed and convened by October 25th.
- Call for proposals issued by November 29nd.
- Proposals submitted by January 10.
- Successful proposal determined by January 31.
- Purchase of service agreement negotiated by February 28.

SERVICE PROVISION

The Social Services Department will continue to provide per diem funding on a day-to-day basis until the current residents of Nelson House have obtained appropriate shelter. In order to maintain the 15-bed capacity to accommodate abused women that was previously available, arrangements will be made with other residential services to provide those beds.

The bed-capacity of the remaining shelters for abused women currently accommodates 52 women and children. The potential exists to extend that number by 10 residents. It should be noted that the family shelters administered by the Social Services Department provide shelter for abused women and their children as part of its mandate. The Department will continue to do so and will ensure priority of admission so that women and children fleeing violent situations will always have an option.

*Approved by
Dick Stewart*

TERMS OF REFERENCE

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Purpose

To advise the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton and the Ministry of Community and Social Services in developing criteria for a call for proposals for services to abused women and their children.

Goals

- To assist in defining the essential services and program design for which a call for proposals will be issued.
- To assist in designing guidelines and criteria in the calling of proposals.
- To assist in developing the evaluation process for the proposals.

Membership

- Persons on the advisory committee cannot be affiliated with an organisation which will be submitting a proposal.
- Representation will be considered from the following:
 - Violence Against Women Network
 - Community Health and Social Service Centres
 - Community agencies providing services to women
 - Agencies that have specific expertise in successful agency management
 - Community representatives with an interest in services to abused women
- A total of 5 to 7 persons will be selected for the advisory committee.

APPENDIX 1

Extract of Draft Minute
Community Services Committee
03 October 1996

Nelson House

- Verbal Presentation by the Social Services Commissioner

In his preliminary comments, the Social Services Commissioner, Dick Stewart, indicated the department and the Area Office of the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) have been aware of the Nelson House situation for several weeks. Mr. Stewart added this is not simply a dispute between the Board of Directors and agency staff; it is clear there have been long-standing differences of opinion over the past few years and in spite of collective best efforts, the difficulties have not abated. In reply to questions from Committee Chair M. Meilleur, Mr. Stewart confirmed beds were available within the family violence network for each resident of Nelson House when it closed, and no resident had to return to abusive situations because of this event.

Councillor R. Cantin noted the presence of Mrs. Beryl Gaffney, former Nepean and Regional Councillor and currently Member of Parliament for Nepean.

Lee Farnworth, Councillor, City of Nepean

Ms. Farnworth, a Member of Nepean City Council, and a former member of the Board of Directors of Nelson House, stated her commitment to providing services for women and children fleeing family violence. She said she had been relieved to hear that Harmony House had taken over interim management but she expressed the view this was only a band-aid solution. She requested that the shelter be closed temporarily and that regional staff work with the Ministry to resolve problems at Nelson House to ensure the safety of women and children currently residing there and that of persons needing to use this facility in the future.

In reply to a question from Councillor D. Holmes, Ms. Farnworth said she felt the problems at Nelson House have deep roots and providing only surface governance (Harmony House interim management) is not the proper vehicle. She added Harmony House is designed to provide second-stage service and it does not have the same mandate as Nelson House.

Councillor A. Munter asked whether it would be possible to let residents who wish to remain at Nelson House do so, no take in any new residents and take the time required to resolve the situation. Ms. Farnworth replied this was almost the situation last Friday, when about half the residents had left the premises and interested parties were hoping for a cooling-down period. She expressed the belief the court injunction obtained by Nelson House residents pre-empted this taking place.

Ms. Farnworth indicated, in reply to a question from Councillor D. Pratt, her belief that the community will exists to reconstitute the Board and get back on the right track. She noted she has had calls from individuals volunteering to serve on a new Board, but she re-emphasized a new Board would only inherit the problems and would be taking on a considerable challenge: she reiterated the best approach would be to close the shelter temporarily.

Leighann Burns-Campagna, Harmony House

The speaker noted Harmony House became involved as a result of residents requesting a meeting to discuss the situation at Nelson House and asking for whatever help it could provide. She added it was clear residents did not want to leave the shelter and have it lost to other women that might come after them. Ms. Burns-Campagna noted her involvement has been to provide guidance to women living in the house and being accountable to those women. She expressed the hope the situation could be resolved by all parties working together.

Responding to questions from Councillor Holmes about the court injunction, Ms. Burns-Campagna said management control was given to Harmony House simply to ensure a structure is in place until issues are resolved. She went on to say there are plans to call a meeting of the Membership of Nelson House to install a new Board to resolve issues, simply because the beds must continue to exist. The speaker added it was her understanding a 14-days' notice is required to call a General Meeting and this is being worked on at the present time.

Pauline Van Lammers, Executive Director, Nepean Community Resource Centre

Ms. Van Lammers spoke as a representative of the following service providers: Interval House, Family Services Centre, Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services, Maison d'amitié and Goulbourn, Kanata, West-Carleton CRC; the Catholic Family Service are ready to assist.

Ms. Van Lammers raised the following points:

- from the time of the announcement on 24 September that Nelson House was closing, plans were in place to move women and children to safe places; other shelters cooperated, supportive visits were arranged, extra counselling was provided for women and children; the trauma of clients having to move from a safe and known environment was not underestimated by the agencies involved, and all parties had in mind that the beds should not be lost, that outreach and children's services are vital to the west end;
- there are concerns about the lack of process used to oust a duly-constituted Board and management and about the lack of consultation with service providers;
- efforts were made over the past years to put structures in place to make services at Nelson House responsive and accountable;
- there are serious concerns about the integrity and stability of services currently in place;
- a serious breach of trust occurred when the location of the house was made known to the media, when women in crisis were not protected in their conversations with the media and when it was stated there were no safe places for women to go when there were options;

Ms. Van Lammers said it is recommended no further placements be accepted at Nelson House until the situation has been clarified, that assurances be given funds will remain for the provision of those services, that there be a review by the funders of the circumstances leading to the decision to close the facility and that it be ascertained what is required for a stable set of services, and, that there be an open Call for Proposals to address the newly-identified service and organizational needs.

Patricia Pepper, Former Board Member, Nelson House

Ms. Pepper said she has been associated with Nelson House since 1989 when, along with Beryl Gaffney, then Nepean and Regional Councillor and currently Member of Parliament for Nepean, a steering committee was formed to look into services for women. The speaker spoke in support of the approach recommended by Councillor Farnworth and Ms. Van Lammers, namely temporarily closing the facility for a cooling-off period. Ms. Pepper said she believed the will does exist to reconstitute the service.

Moved by D. Holmes

That the Community Services Committee move In-Camera to discuss the situation at Nelson House, pursuant to Section 11(1) (e) (f) of By-law 112 of 1994 (as amended), Council Procedure.

CARRIED

Moved by A. Munter

That the Community Services Committee meeting resume in Open Session.

CARRIED

Moved by D. Holmes

That the RMOC continue to fund Nelson House on a day-to-day basis; that there be no new admissions; and that RMOC staff be directed, in consultation with the Province, to prepare, for the next meeting of the Community Services Committee, a plan to protect the investment of these essential services in an appropriate manner.

CARRIED