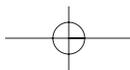
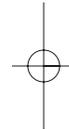
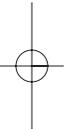
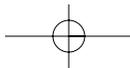
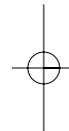
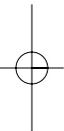


No Place to Go





No Place to Go:
Local Histories of the
Battered Women's Shelter Movement
Nancy Janovicek



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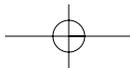
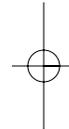
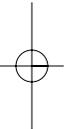
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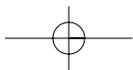
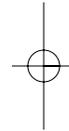
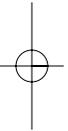
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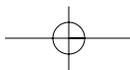
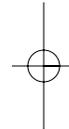
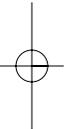
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No Place to Go





Introduction

“There was no place to go.” This was how many activists whom I interviewed summarized abused women’s isolation and social apathy about wife battering before the women’s movement made it a political issue. When feminists opened women’s centres in the 1970s, they were surprised by the number of women who wanted information about domestic violence. In discussions with these women, they learned that many of them stayed in violent relationships because they did not have the resources to leave. Economic dependence on the family and a lack of affordable, safe housing gave women few choices other than staying with their abusive spouses.

Racism, unfair child welfare practices, and discrimination against women in the Indian Act made it even more difficult for Aboriginal women to leave violent families. Confusing and inconsistent jurisdiction over services for Aboriginal people restricted women’s access to welfare. Even if they needed financial help, many women were reluctant to apply because they were afraid that social workers would take away their children. Many women fleeing violent families had to move to cities, and unscrupulous landlords often either took advantage of people who had recently moved from the reserve or would not rent homes to them. In addition to the racism that Aboriginal women faced in cities, leaving home had adverse ramifications for them. Under the Indian Act, women were involuntarily removed from the Indian registry when they left their communities or married outside of it. Fleeing from abusive relationships forced many Aboriginal women to choose between immediate safety and their own and their children’s entitlement to treaty rights and benefits.¹

No Place to Go is about women’s campaigns to organize transition houses and services for battered women in smaller cities and towns in the 1970s and 1980s. I focus on women’s groups in four communities: Thunder Bay and Kenora, Ontario; Nelson, British Columbia; and Moncton, New Brunswick. The services these groups organized were not the first in Canada.

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Indeed, transition houses were already established in major urban centres in Canada when women in these smaller communities began to organize. Some scholars have assumed that services in rural areas took longer to develop and were less radical than their urban counterparts because of the inherent conservatism in the country.² However, the reasons for the delayed organization in these communities are more complex than the assumption that feminist ideas began in urban centres and spread to small towns. First, feminists working in rural areas first had to change the entrenched view that family violence was primarily an urban phenomenon.³ Second, they had to compete with other community groups for the limited resources allocated to smaller municipalities. Often, feminists organizing in smaller towns made a strategic decision not to identify themselves publicly as feminists to gain community support for the transition house. This encouraged women who did not identify with the women's movement to join the group, and many of these women developed a feminist consciousness through their advocacy for abused women.

In the northwestern Ontario communities examined in this book, a significant portion of the women seeking services were Aboriginal, and many of them were from remote northern reserves. Aboriginal activists in communities across northwestern Ontario organized services that sought to rectify the legacy of the devaluation of indigenous culture, families, women, and children. As in other Canadian cities, specialized services to address family violence initially took the form of hostels that were designed to ensure that young Aboriginal women who had just moved from the reserve to the city did not become involved in harmful activities. These hostels belonged to a network of Aboriginal-run services that opposed the federal government's goal of assimilating Aboriginal peoples. Organizers of the hostels soon recognized that the majority of their clients had been abused by family members or had been victims of sexual assault, and they began to develop counselling programs for abused women that sought to develop pride in their Aboriginal ancestry as the first step toward healing.

The organizations examined in this book were part of the battered women's shelter movement, an international movement that responded to battered women's need for a safe place by organizing transition houses and safe homes.⁴ These services were more than emergency hostels because the organizers' objective was to help battered women to develop the self-confidence

they needed to live violence-free lives. Transition houses became the foundation of a political campaign to convince federal, provincial, and municipal governments that they had a responsibility to protect abused women.

By demonstrating the need for transition houses in their communities, anti-violence activists hoped to change social indifference toward abused women. Their immediate goal was to provide a safe place for abused women and their children, but feminists and Aboriginal women also developed theories of violence against women that reflected divergent cultural values and political histories. Feminists challenged the dominant social view that women provoked men's violence and that it was better for the family if abused women tried to make their marriages work. Because they offered safety from abusive husbands, transition houses were also a profound critique of the assumption that the family offered protection to women and children, its most vulnerable members. Aboriginal activists also developed theories of violence that conceptualized it as a social rather than an individual problem, but the programs that Aboriginal women developed sought to strengthen the family and provide services for all members of violent families, including the abusers. Feminists and Aboriginal activists had different goals, but women's needs, rather than government priorities, were the basis of their services. Even though the two groups shared the goal of ending domestic violence, the battered women's shelter movement did not integrate Aboriginal theorization of gendered violence into its strategies for change.

The battered women's shelter movement emerged from campaigns to change the laws and social practices that prevented women from controlling their own bodies. "The politics of the body" became a key theme of feminist organizing in the late 1960s, when women began to link women's equality with reproductive rights and safety from male violence.⁵ In consciousness-raising groups, women began to talk about their experiences of violence. The limited evidence we have about the discussions in consciousness-raising groups suggests that women spoke more frequently about rape than about domestic abuse. Rape was the first issue taken up by feminists demanding an end to male violence against women.⁶ Feminist analysis of rape underscored the centrality of male misogyny and violence to the maintenance of patriarchal power and the subordination of women. By the late 1970s, radical feminists organized political groups, such as Women against Violence against Women, that were based on an analysis of oppression that distinguished itself

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from liberal and socialist feminism by identifying sexism as the foundational form of oppression.⁷ Early feminist analysis of wife battering followed radical feminist assertions that male violence against women sustained patriarchal power.

The silence and shame associated with family violence most likely made women reluctant to discuss abuse in consciousness-raising groups and other public venues. However, this reluctance may also have been a response to some feminists' frustration with women who would not leave abusive relationships. In the heady days of the women's liberation movement, many feminists could not understand why women stayed with violent spouses. Joan Baril, one of the founders of the Thunder Bay Women's Liberation Group, recalled that her consciousness-raising group had little sympathy for a woman who often came to the meetings with a black eye but who would not leave her husband, because members did not yet understand the systemic barriers that prevented her from doing so.⁸ Some feminists were reluctant to accept that wife battering was a political issue because the helplessness of many abused women contradicted the feminist belief that women could live independently from men. Others thought that there was sufficient legislative protection for abused women. When Florence Bird chaired the Royal Commission on the Status of Women from 1967 to 1970, she did not want wife abuse discussed during the hearings because it was already covered under the criminal code.⁹ Frontline workers soon learned that the law offered little real protection for battered women, but they still had to justify the need for services to feminists who asked, "Why doesn't she just leave?"¹⁰ Lack of understanding of the complexity of woman abuse accounts for this unsympathetic attitude. In addition, there was some resistance within feminist groups to organizing services for abused women. This reluctance was linked to a broader discussion about whether feminists should use their limited resources to educate women with the goal of mobilizing them into action or to organize more costly services. I explore the various ways that feminist groups resolved this debate in some of the case studies that follow.

Safety and shelter were the basic needs of women trying to leave abusive partners. Before transition houses opened in their communities, many women's centre activists took women and their children home with them. In the early 1970s, the Vancouver Women's Centre converted the beds in its attic, which were initially intended for female travellers, into a refuge for abused

women and their children. Feminists soon realized that in addition to needing protection from immediate danger, abused women needed programs to help them prepare for an independent life. Thus, the first services for abused women were ad hoc until activists acquired sufficient funding to establish more formal services. The federal and provincial governments eventually ceded to pressure from women's groups to fund these services, but the financial situation of transition houses has always been precarious.

The first Canadian transition houses opened in Toronto and Vancouver in 1972. Eight years later, when Linda MacLeod wrote *Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle*, the first report that attempted to document the incidence of woman abuse in Canada, there were sixty-three shelters for battered women.¹¹ There were more places to which battered women could go, but many women still lived in communities with limited services; in 1980, 45 percent of the Canadian population lived in places where abused women did not have access to an emergency shelter.¹² The 1980s witnessed a significant increase in the number of shelters for abused women and their children: by 1987 there were 264 transition houses in Canada.¹³ The majority of the transition houses discussed in this book opened during this latter period. Beendingen, a shelter for Aboriginal women and children, opened in Thunder Bay in 1978; Crossroads for Women/Carrefour pour femmes opened in Moncton in 1981; and Faye Peterson Transition House opened in Thunder Bay two years later. Kenora feminists did not open a transition house because the province opened a Family Resource Centre there in 1984. Activists in Nelson operated a safe home program from 1980 until 1995, when the Aimee Beaulieu Transition House took over providing shelter for abused women. Although these transition houses opened many years after those in large cities, most of the campaigns to establish these shelters began in the mid-1970s. It often took longer for women in smaller communities to obtain funding for transition houses than it did for women in major cities because they had to prove to parsimonious government officials that specialized services in small communities were necessary.

Convincing politicians and bureaucrats that it was the community's responsibility to help abused women, and that women's groups should provide these services, was every bit as challenging. Transition houses were different from government-run social services because they based their services on women's needs and refused to impose unrealistic expectations on women.

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The length of a women's stay in a shelter was often a key contention between grassroots activists and governments. Local welfare offices wanted to restrict the length of stay because they were concerned about the cost of providing per diems to shelters for indefinite periods of time. Shelter organizers usually ignored these rules and did not pressure women to leave the shelter until they were ready to do so. Some politicians were simply indifferent to the plight of battered women. The extent of this apathy became clear to the women's movement on 12 May 1982, when Member of Parliament Margaret Mitchell asked the House of Commons how it was going to respond to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare, and Social Affairs report on wife battering, which it had tabled the day before. Some of the members of Parliament laughed in response to her question.¹⁴

Isolation from the government and the women's movement influenced the strategies of the organizers of the transition houses examined here. These communities were not major economic or political centres. Although they provided social services for their regions, they remained distant from provincial and federal policy-makers and, in the cases of the British Columbia and Ontario communities examined in this book, from provincial legislatures. They were also far away from the urban centres that were the home of numerous diverse feminist organizations. In most of the communities studied in this book, women who held different political views worked together because there were not enough women involved in the local women's movement to form groups based on different feminist theories. Women did, however, organize separately along race lines. The board of Beendigen cooperated with women's groups in Thunder Bay but had a stronger affiliation with the Aboriginal services and political groups in the city. Women who organized feminist services in northwestern Ontario developed a strong regional network to cope with the derision they dealt with working in small northern towns. Women working in the Kootenays, British Columbia communicated with each other, but did not develop similar networks. The Moncton shelter grew out of the vibrant network of Acadian activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s that played an important role in initiating formal feminist organizing in New Brunswick.

Resistance to the politicization of wife abuse from government officials often made activists who opened transition houses targets for ridicule by people in their community, but activists had no choice but to engage with the

politicians, police, welfare officers, and municipal councillors who opposed their goals. To protect women, activists were obliged to enter into contracts with all levels of government. At the local level, advocates for battered women fought for women's right to social welfare benefits as citizens and opposed the assumption that women should be dependent upon their families. Initially, shelters relied on federal grants and per diem funding from municipal governments to cover day-to-day costs. Federal job creation programs and Status of Women grants helped women open shelters, but ultimately the federal government expected the provinces to take over the funding of these new services.

However, provincial governments were reluctant to provide permanent funding for new services, and activists negotiated between different federal and provincial agendas for women's equality. In 1983, Ottawa earmarked funds to develop transition houses by providing Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation loans, but guaranteed support from junior levels of government was a condition of the loans. Feminists lobbied provincial governments for stabilized funding, with varying degrees of success. The Ontario Association of Transition Houses negotiated a funding formula with the provincial government in 1983. In British Columbia, transition house activists could not convince the Social Credit government to pay for shelters because it had adopted a fiscal policy that reduced government spending and froze spending on all new social programs in 1982. New Brunswick's Conservative government also emphasized responsible spending, which again made it difficult for shelter organizers to secure provincial funding. Advocates for Aboriginal women faced another layer of bureaucracy because the federal government was responsible for services for Aboriginal people with status, and the provinces were supposed to provide social services to those without status.

Municipalities were excluded from social welfare arrangements between federal and provincial governments, but local politics mattered in the development of alternative models of social services.¹⁵ Securing funds from senior levels of government depended on approval from municipal bureaucrats, who were generally unreceptive to criticism of their welfare practices. There were parallels among the communities examined in this book, but the relationships between feminists, anti-violence activists, and local social welfare bureaucrats were not uniform. Kenora feminists and local welfare bureaucrats developed an acrimonious relationship, and consequently the town prevented

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the local women's movement from managing a provincially funded shelter. However, women's success in Moncton depended on support from municipal bureaucrats who joined the lobby for increased provincial funding for the transition house. In Kenora and Thunder Bay, where Aboriginal women accessed services, organizers faced vehement resistance from municipal welfare officials, who refused to help these women because they thought that all Aboriginal people were under federal jurisdiction.

An examination of the battered women's shelter movement in smaller communities shows how the local manifestation of patriarchal relations, colonization, and hinterland economies limited women's influence in their communities and at the provincial level. Knowing these politics helps to explain the choices women made and what they could and could not change. This, in turn, accounts for the uneven development of the battered women's shelter movement in Canada. It adds complexities to existing analyses of how the state absorbed feminist agendas for change, a key theme in the literature about transition houses.¹⁶

Frontline workers instigated analyses of wife battering as a political issue. In the 1970s, feminists challenged gender-neutral analysis of family violence by arguing that wife battering was a manifestation of patriarchal relations. Discussions about wife battering were not new. Before the revival of the women's movement, psychologists and sociologists conceptualized abuse as a symptom of family dysfunction. The goal of their research was to identify the economic and social stresses that caused family violence so that the family units could be strengthened.¹⁷ Feminists disagreed with this analysis because it placed equal blame on the perpetrator and the victim of violence. More importantly, such clinical analysis of family violence did not consider how women experienced abuse, and thus it conflicted with the feminist conviction that women were the experts on their own lives.

The literature on violence against women has grown exponentially since feminists put the issue on the public agenda. We know more about the social and economic reasons women remain in violent relationships. Stories about wife abuse are now common in the media, though many accounts are not feminist.¹⁸ Collections of women's testimonials and films by the National Film Board of Canada document how women found the courage to leave violent relationships.¹⁹ Reports by grassroots organizations continue to deepen our knowledge about violence against women through participatory action research.²⁰

Historians have contributed to the movement to end violence against women by challenging the assumption that family violence is a new issue and by demonstrating how its visibility as a social issue, rather than its incidence, has varied over time. Linda Gordon's book *Heroes of Their Own Lives* has been one of the most influential histories of family violence. Her argument that "family violence is historically and politically constructed" has guided subsequent histories of violence against women.²¹ Gordon examines how power struggles within families are connected to changes in the social and economic situation of women and children. Her work has inspired historians to look for the historical and local circumstances that have shaped women's ability to resist gendered violence.²²

Current chronologies of the contemporary movement to end wife battering, however, remain generalized. Histories of the battered women's shelter movement often trace its origins to Erin Pizzey's refuge for battered wives in Chiswick, England, in 1971.²³ The Canadian literature sets Toronto's Interval House and Vancouver Transition House as the origins for all shelters. Historical examinations of the women's movement emphasize the importance of grassroots activism but are preoccupied by the development of a feminist consciousness and the growth of the national women's movement. This literature acknowledges the uniqueness of local feminist groups, but it emphasizes their similarities and casts them as foundational elements for the history of the women's movement.²⁴

Political scientists have examined the early years of contemporary feminist organizing to explain how working within federal and provincial bureaucracies compromised feminist agendas for change.²⁵ Gillian Walker's analysis of the relationship between the battered women's shelter movement and the state examines how government agencies absorbed campaigns against wife battering to suit their own priorities, while marginalizing feminist expertise and analysis of the issue.²⁶ Understanding the relationship between social movements and the state is crucial for planning strategies and tactics, yet as Cindy Katz argues, an exclusive focus on the macro-analysis means that "the bodies and spaces in which citizens lived their protests" are forgotten.²⁷ Asking how women have understood their role in local politics deepens our knowledge of the history of the women's movement.

No Place to Go shifts the focus away from metropolitan centres and instead examines how women in smaller cities and rural communities organized

women-centred services. Feminists were key players in creating services for battered women in smaller communities, but so were women and men who did not identify with the women's movement. Although they had limitations, safe home programs were important in rural areas that did not have the resources to open a transition house. This book contributes to the growing literature on the history of violence against women by examining how, in the 1970s and 1980s, anti-violence activists developed an explicitly political analysis of wife battering that made visible the connections between personal experiences of violence and the systemic barriers that made women vulnerable to abuse in their families.

Feminists argued that wife battering was an extreme manifestation of unequal patriarchal relations in the family. From the beginning of the battered women's shelter movement, activists fought against more influential community organizations to ensure that women's experiences of violence were not subsumed in the larger framework of family violence. Feminists believed that "family violence" was an inaccurate analytical framework because it was a de-gendered term that hid the fact that men were far more likely than women to be the abusers in violent families. They also resisted the family violence framework because it had the potential to put children's needs before women's needs. One example of this is a 1979 report published by the United Way, which described kicking or punching a pregnant woman as instances of "intrauterine abuse" of the child.²⁸ As more people began to accept that violence against women in the family was unacceptable, feminists became increasingly vigilant in defending a violence-against-women framework that demonstrated how wife battering maintained male dominance.²⁹

This theorization of wife battering made it possible to talk about it as a political issue, but, ultimately, the framework was exclusive. The feminist investment in the violence-against-women framework entrenched a common experience for abused women that was based on white women's experiences and assumed that woman abuse happened only in heterosexual relationships. Those who attempted to widen the analysis of abuse, by examining how race, class, citizenship status, and sexual identity shaped women's experiences of violence in intimate relationships, felt unwelcome in the battered women's shelter movement.³⁰

Aboriginal women were among those who struggled to convince feminists that the violence-against-women framework was inadequate because it

prioritized the needs of white women. They argued that the theorization of violence must address the impact of the legacy of federal Indian policy, which was designed to assimilate indigenous peoples, on Aboriginal women who left violent homes. White feminists dismiss Aboriginal women's criticisms of feminist agendas less frequently now than in the 1970s and early 1980s because Aboriginal women have been insistent that white women listen to them.³¹ Yet as Lee Maracle argues, the mainstream women's movement included Aboriginal women on its own terms by expecting them to sensitize white women on issues of racism and to teach them about First Nations cultures. Maracle explains that inviting Aboriginal women to speak only on these issues has homogenized the diverse experiences of Aboriginal women and denied them the opportunity to speak with authority on women in general.³² In her study of anti-racist debates in feminist organizations, Sarita Srivastava explains that analysis of the women's movement that assumes that the issues championed by white women are the central concerns of the women's movement "recentres an implicit whiteness as constitutive of the ideal feminism."³³ Historical analysis of the women's movement cannot subsume the analysis of Aboriginal women's organizing into the established narrative of the second wave of feminism, which credits white women for initiating the revival of feminist organizing in the 1960s.³⁴

Benita Roth presents a useful model for understanding the history of the current women's movement. In *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*, she conceptualizes the contemporary American women's movement as "a group of feminisms, movements made by activist women that were largely organizationally distinct from one another, and from the beginning largely organized along racial/ethnic lines."³⁵ These different movements were part of a broader social movement that made connections among them. Rather than looking for origin stories, Roth insists that we need to pay attention to how race, ethnicity, and class affected women's access to resources because inequalities among women meant that women's feminist consciousness emerged in different social and economic contexts. *No Place to Go* demonstrates that regional disparities also shaped these social relations and, consequently, informed feminist strategies and goals.³⁶

In the battered women's shelter movement, those who posited patriarchal relations as the primary reason for spousal assault have found it difficult

to accept Aboriginal activists' contention that family violence in their communities was grounded in the history of colonial relations. Assimilation has been the guiding principle of the governance of Aboriginal people since contact between Europeans and indigenous peoples. Federal policy has sought to terminate traditional Aboriginal forms of government, and decreasing women's economic and political roles has been a central feature of programs designed to achieve this goal.

Federal Indian policy also targeted the family, which was the foundation of Aboriginal government, economy, and society. Removing children from their families and communities was deemed to be the easiest way to assimilate Aboriginal peoples, first through the residential school system and later through child welfare programs that placed children in non-Aboriginal families. Provincial governments extended child welfare to Aboriginal communities in the 1960s after the federal government began to close residential schools and introduce cost-sharing agreements with provincial governments to provide services to Aboriginal people who lived on-reserve. Social workers believed that the best way to protect Aboriginal children from poverty, poor health, and poor housing conditions in reserve communities was to remove them from their families and place them in white homes. Aboriginal activists have called this the "sixties scoop." It is not known how many children were placed in non-Aboriginal homes in the 1960s, but between 1971 and 1981, 75 percent of the children who were apprehended were placed in non-Aboriginal homes, often outside of Canada.³⁷ Many of these children suffered in these homes, and Patricia Monture-Angus argues that this practice was itself a form of family violence.³⁸ Thus, fear of losing their children informed many women's decision to leave violent relationships, particularly those who needed social assistance.

Aboriginal women's theorization of violence in their communities was not simply an adaptation of feminist analysis of violence against women. *Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence*, the first published report that dealt exclusively with violence against Aboriginal women, did not appear until 1989, but Aboriginal women began to theorize the issue earlier than this.³⁹ When funding proposals and minutes of meetings are examined, it is clear that activists' analysis of family violence was based on indigenous values and was critical of government policies and social welfare practices that targeted Aboriginal families. The Native women's

movement argued that strategies to help abused women were not useful if they did not consider how this history of disempowerment shaped Aboriginal women's experiences of violence.

For these reasons, proposals for ending violence in Aboriginal communities have focused on healing the family, but they have also emphasized the urgent need for services that recognize the impact of colonization on Aboriginal women. In the 1970s, the Native women's movement began to develop programs that attempted to assuage women's isolation and loneliness when they left their home communities. Family violence disrupted many women's connections to their traditional territories, their languages, and their cultures because often the only option available for Aboriginal women in abusive relationships was to leave the reserve. In addition to dispossession from their traditional territories, Aboriginal women in cities had difficulty seeking social assistance because welfare administrators argued that status Indians were under federal jurisdiction. Provincial and municipal authorities were keener on maintaining this distinction after the release of the 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy, which they considered an attempt to off-load federal responsibilities onto junior levels of government. These policies created additional challenges for the organizers of Aboriginal-run services.

Given their differing theorization of gendered violence and the fear of creating divisions within Aboriginal communities, many Aboriginal women did not find the women's movement as meaningful as the Aboriginal movement for self-determination. Aboriginal women's activism often began in Native organizations and at friendship centres. Thunder Bay Anishinabequek and women who organized the first shelter in Kenora knew that abused women who came to town from the reserve would face racism and that programs had to acknowledge that race and gender-based discrimination were inseparable. The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) did not adopt feminist strategies for change because they failed to address the social and economic inequalities emanating from the colonial relations that instigated social problems in Aboriginal communities. This is not to say that there was no collaboration between the Aboriginal women and feminist groups. Even though Aboriginal and white women in northwestern Ontario established distinct organizations, they supported each other's projects. In Kenora, the movement against violence against women united women across their cultural and racial differences for a short time.

Incorporating the diverse experiences of women has been one of the most difficult issues in the women's movement. This has been especially challenging in the battered women's shelter movement because it has so much invested in the violence-against-women framework that focuses on individual change and posits patriarchy as the primary reason for violence against women. Using this framework, the movement has promoted solutions that centre the experience of white, heterosexual women. The emphasis on the criminalization of domestic violence has been far less effective for Aboriginal women, immigrant women, and women of colour, who rely on strong connections to their communities to counter racism and exclusion from Canadian society. Women from these social groups are often reluctant to involve the police because they do not want to draw negative attention to their communities or face censure from community leaders if they do. Moreover, men from these communities have been over-represented in the criminal justice system, and women do not trust police to treat their families with respect.⁴⁰ In most of the communities discussed in this book, activists were aware of the need for services for Aboriginal women. They were less concerned with developing programs for immigrant women and women of colour in the period under study because the number of women from these groups was small.

More recently, lesbians have spoken out about lesbian partner abuse. This has been one of the greatest challenges for the battered women's shelter movement because it has forced activists to acknowledge that women can be violent. As one activist explains, "it's been easier, and safer, for the battered women's movement to say that it's only men who are violent."⁴¹ Janice Ristock recalls that when she was first confronted with the issue in Toronto, she was worried that talking about lesbian abuse would result in more harm than help to lesbians and feminists.⁴² Lesbians played an important role in the movement to end violence against women, and Becki Ross has examined the debates between heterosexual and lesbian women in Toronto groups.⁴³ Lesbians were involved in feminist activism in the communities examined in this book. The literature on rural attitudes toward lesbians suggests that women in small towns did not welcome lesbians, but the relationship between lesbians and heterosexual women varied.⁴⁴ The Nelson and District Women's Centre promoted lesbian rights and held lesbian drop-ins. Yet the women whom I interviewed did not connect their sexual identity with their work to end violence against women. In Kenora, women did not promote

lesbian visibility in their group, in part because those who opposed their goals tried to undermine their work by calling them lesbians. Doreen Worden, a lesbian activist, explained that a small group of lesbians who organized autonomously did so because they did not feel welcome in women's groups; between 1980 and 1986 they published a newspaper called *Voices: A Survival Manual for Women*.⁴⁵ It was not until 1989 that the Kenora Rape Crisis Line sponsored a lesbian support phone line.⁴⁶ While lesbians were active in these communities, I found no evidence of discussions of abuse in lesbian relationships in the records.

Many argue that the goals and interests of middle-class women dominated the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, but this generalization does not capture the economic context of the small, resource-based towns examined in this book. Because of the tendency to focus on middle-class women's dominance in the women's movement, there is an assumption that middle-class women controlled the boards of shelters for battered women and that their privileged status fostered unequal relations between residents, staff, and board members in feminist organizations.⁴⁷ Many boards of transition houses comprised privileged women who often were not sympathetic to the economic situation of the staff in the shelter.⁴⁸ But this was not the case in all transition houses. Many of the activists whom I interviewed came from working-class backgrounds, were single mothers, or had themselves left violent families. Meg Luxton argues that the assertion that the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s was largely middle class "is part of a larger pattern in which both working-class women and their organizing efforts ... get written out of, or 'hidden from history.'"⁴⁹ Luxton focuses on union activism as the key site of working-class feminism. This book shows that working-class women also contributed to the development of feminist services.

Class differences between social workers and clients is an important theme in historical studies of government-run and community-based social service agencies, but without evidence I am reluctant to assume that all of the women who stayed in these transition houses were from working-class backgrounds. Crossroads/Carrefour was the only organization discussed in this book that kept statistics about the clients' and abusers' professions. However, the records do not provide sufficient data to draw conclusions about the class backgrounds of the clients because the majority of clients did not provide this information on intake sheets.⁵⁰

Because I have limited data about the women who stayed at these shelters, this book focuses more on women's political activities than on the experiences of the clients. One of the conditions placed on my access to the records of the organizations was that I would not look at documents about former clients, and there was no response to advertisements seeking women who used the shelters and safe home systems. Understanding the relationship between residents and staff and how women responded to feminist services will be a vital aspect of the history of the battered women's shelter movement, but, at this time, protecting the confidentiality of the women who stayed there is more important. Descriptions of the poor condition of the houses and the lack of space and privacy in the original shelters do shed light on what it was like to live there, but assessments of the effectiveness of the services are based on the perceptions of the organizers and staff.

Between 1998 and 2003, I read the privately held records of women's centres, transition houses, community services, and ONWA. The histories of the shelters are based primarily on these records. Some organizations had more complete and well-organized records than others. At Beendigen, when I expressed my surprise and dismay at how few documents the organizers had left, an employee reminded me that this kind of political organizing was new for many women. As was the case in most women's groups, keeping records was not a priority. In her overview of the history of the contemporary women's movement, Marjorie Griffin Cohen explains that "their immediate work was more absorbing than writing about it."⁵¹ Moreover, writing the documents was a political process. Feminists often made strategic decisions about whether to record the diversity of opinion within the group, to simplify the message in order to reach a wider audience, or to exclude explicitly feminist analysis in order to ensure support for their project.⁵² Thus, the complexities of the debates were rarely recorded in the documents. Local feminist newspapers (*The Northern Woman* and *Images*, published in Thunder Bay and Nelson respectively) and interviews with activists clarified some of the ambiguities in the organizational records.⁵³

The first three chapters discuss communities in northwestern Ontario, where violence against women mobilized more women into political action than any other issue. Women's groups from across the region worked together to organize networks to get women to safety and to lobby for shelters in the north. Chapter 1 examines the founding of Beendigen, a shelter

organized by Thunder Bay Anishinabequek, a chapter of ONWA, and the development of an analysis of family violence that defined it as a consequence of colonialism. Chapter 2 discusses the two other shelters for battered women in Thunder Bay: Community Residences, a city-run service, and Faye Peterson Transition House, a feminist service for women from across the region. Organizing the transition house taught feminists that they were politically marginalized at both the municipal and provincial level. Drawing on regional solidarity among northwestern Ontario feminists, Faye Peterson Transition House organizers transformed their weak position in provincial politics into an effective political tool. Chapter 3 tells the story of the Kenora Women's Crisis Intervention Project, founded in 1976. The Kenora case study examines a brief cross-cultural collaboration between Aboriginal women and white women. Although the coalition was short-lived, non-Aboriginal activists continued to advocate for Aboriginal women during their campaign to open a transition house. The regional movement supported Kenora feminists, but they were unsuccessful because municipal bureaucrats opposed their alternate vision for service provision.

More often than not, transition houses faced the quandary of serving women in crisis when the organization itself was in crisis.⁵⁴ The next two chapters discuss internal issues in feminist groups. Chapter 4 examines how the debates about whether or not feminists should organize services influenced feminism at the Nelson and District Women's Centre. Because feminists decided not to organize a transition house without adequate government support, they were able to establish a co-operative relationship with the organizers of the safe home program, even though one of the goals of the program was to keep families together. The final chapter discusses Crossroads for Women/Carrefour pour femmes and examines how Moncton feminists negotiated the contradiction between working for women's equality and paying transition house workers low wages.

My ethical obligations to the organizations discussed in this book and to the individuals whom I interviewed put some restrictions on the analysis. Some themes that are central issues in the women's movement today – in particular, the issue of racism in the women's movement – do not receive as much attention as I had anticipated they would when I planned the research. These activists did not record discussions about racism within the organization in their minutes, and, in interviews, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

women were reluctant to talk about it. Women were certainly reticent to explore these issues with an outsider. But, in retrospect, I realize that Aboriginal women who spoke to me are still active in community organizing and have developed working relationships with non-Aboriginal community groups. Speaking on record about the racism that has shaped northwestern Ontario would jeopardize this network of local services.⁵⁵ Studying very recent history obliges one to consider the impact the research will have on activists' reputations and the future work of community organizations.

This book is the first Canadian study to examine the history of the battered women's shelter movement and the first history of contemporary feminist organizing that focuses exclusively on rural communities and small cities. Because it is based on specific case studies, it cannot capture all of the complexities in the organization of feminist services in the 1970s and 1980s, and the conclusion recommends areas for future research that would advance this historiography. Feminist analysis of the politics of the battered women's shelter movement informed my reading of the documents, but I do not examine the criminalization of wife abuse, current policy debates, or the state of transition houses today. The history of the battered women's shelter movement that focuses on local histories, however, can inform these debates because it explains how women grappled with these issues at the local level. Local histories demonstrate that strategies for change can work only if the people who are strategizing pay attention to local politics and circumstances.

What this book does do is examine the struggles, disappointments, and successes of women operating under specific social and economic conditions. At the time that the women in these communities were organizing services, many feminists were lamenting the loss of the radical analysis of the early years of the women's liberation movement, the institutionalization of feminist goals, divisions among feminists along race and class lines, and the lack of visibility of the movement itself. In Toronto, the International Women's Day Coalition was a response to the lack of visibility of the women's movement. Women from different groups and organizations marched in the streets in order to disprove media assertions that the women's movement was dead and to reassure activists that the movement was still vibrant.⁵⁶ Protest marches and public celebrations of the women's movement were important, but so was the tedious day-to-day work of social movements. After delivering a lecture in Vancouver, Angela Davis commented that "what demonstrations

demonstrate is the existence of a movement. What happens between demonstrations is a lot of not very exciting work.”⁵⁷

It was through mundane activities, such as fundraising, typing newsletters, reassessing the collective structure, operating a safe home, or renovating an old home into a shelter, that the women you will meet in this book learned they could create change. Some groups achieved their goals and others did not. Feminist philosopher Ruth Lister argues that political actions do not need to meet their projected aims to be successful because the act of coming together to express a political voice builds women’s self-esteem and their sense of themselves as political agents.⁵⁸ These women did not end violence against women, but they did help many women understand that the abuse was not their fault. Sometimes bureaucrats and politicians who had greater control over social policy took over their vision for change. Nevertheless, it is quite probable that some women are alive today because of activists’ dedication to the belief that one day they would end violence against women. For these reasons, I dedicate this book to the women who organized these transition houses and services for battered women and their children.