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**Deputation on the need for 24-hour women's drop-ins in Toronto
Community Development and Recreation Committee
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Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak about the need for one to two 24-hour women's drop-ins in Toronto.

I worked in the sex trade for 15 years in Toronto. I did this work partly to finance a drug addiction, which was strongly related to early abuse in my life. I have worked hard to make a new life for myself and am now free of drugs. I have been disciplined in my recovery. But I would not be where I am today without help from the Toronto Community Addiction Team and the staff at Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre. These support people have helped me stop using drugs and get housed.

I wish I had met supportive people like them earlier on. When you work the streets in the sex trade, you feel really judged. It's hard to trust anyone. If I had been able to go to a women's drop-in early on, I might have learned how to build some trust with the staff there. This is what every working girl needs. She needs an all-women space to go in for one or two hours or more, at any time of the day or night. Many day-time drop-ins are made up of mostly male clients, and men can be vulgar and ignorant towards women. We don't want to spend more of our down time around men, when many of us have been assaulted by men. Also, shelters are too restrictive. Women can't come and go, and can't sleep there during the day.

Many of us have felt afraid working the streets at night. We have nowhere to go. And when we are assaulted on the job, we feel we can't report it to the Police for fear of being arrested. I was assaulted twice on the job, the first time at gunpoint. Women like me need someone to talk to who won't judge us, after such a horrible incident. How do you expect us to rebuild our lives if we don't have anyone to talk to? Working girls need staff who will try to understand, instead of all the people out in the world who judge us.

I am now involved in the community, and have applied to be a peer worker at St. Stephen's Community House. I am hopeful about my future. But I worry about the other women who are working the streets. Many of them have no money. They can't get enough on Ontario Works to live on. And if they are homeless, they only get \$250 a month from social services. This money can be used up in no time.

I really think there would be less violence against the girls if there was a place to go where they could be safe. Then they could start to get their self esteem back. And a women's drop-in would cost a lot less than having women go to a hospital or jail when something bad happens.

As a woman who uses a scooter to get around, I am concerned that not enough of our community spaces are accessible. I want the new women's drop-ins to be accessible for women who use scooters and wheelchairs. We have this right now with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Thank you for listening to the women in the community about this need. We are often forgotten, overlooked and silenced. It is good to know that we now have a voice at City Hall. We will keep insisting that you do the right thing for women.