



January 8, 2018

Deputation to Budget Committee 2018, Etobicoke Civic Centre

Good afternoon, my name is Leila Sarangi and I work at Women's Habitat of Etobicoke. We have a 25 bed emergency shelter for women and their dependents who are fleeing violence as well as a community outreach centre where we provide a range of services to about 900 diverse women and their dependents each year. The vast majority of these women are living in deep poverty and face significant barriers to achieving security and safety.

We are shocked, disappointed and frankly, very worried about the impacts of yet another austerity budget that will compound the marginalization people currently face based on their gender, indigenous identity, race, ability, age, sexual expression and orientation, citizenship and family status, among others.

Council has adopted a number of strategies and made promises that would make the city more inclusive. But these promises are empty when they are made without the commitment to fund and follow through on achieving their targets. And, it has severe impacts on women we serve.

The current crisis in our shelter system is not a surprise, but rather an expected manifestation of not funding and following through on plans including the creation of 1,000 new affordable rental housing units annually, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and also other plans that promote economic and social equity and income security including Transit affordability, creating new rec spaces, the funding of an Indigenous Affairs office, the Anti-Black Racism Strategy, and accessibility for people with disabilities to name a few. According to City staff, these unfunded strategies would cost \$42M out of an \$11B dollar budget.

The Equity Budgeting process that the City undertook for the past two budgets begins to point in the right direction. I participated on the External Review Committee this year and want to commend all the work that staff in the Poverty Reduction Office, SDFA and EDHR have done so far. But the process is still very far away from achieving the vision set out in the Intersectional Gender Equity Motions adopted first in June 2016 and then again in Feb 2017. These motions require the development of a framework, a set of indicators, consultations with women and women serving organizations, and a disaggregated data strategy that will enable the equity budgeting process to be evidence-based, consistent, and applied to Capital Budgets and Revenue tools, in addition to operating budgets. This kind of informed process and decision making would give guidance to staff and council as to where to allocate resources that would help to eliminate systemic barriers people in our communities are facing.

I want to stress that Intersectional Gender Budgeting is not about narrowing the scope or excluding people. It is about centring the experiences of those who are facing the greatest barriers and who are frequently left out.



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At our Outreach Centre, we have seen an increase in women walking in believing that we are a shelter where they can stay. (Our shelter is at a separate, undisclosed location). On Thursday, a woman and her 4 children were sent to us in a taxi by her church. The oldest of her children was 12 and the youngest was 2 months. They had been in the country for 2 nights and had nowhere to go. Our staff spent 3 hours trying to find her shelter. When our office was closing, we had to put them back in a cab to the church with a promise from Central Intake that they would call her when they find her beds. This woman is new to the country, has no status, no income, no housing and very limited English and her story is not uncommon. The recent investments into shelter spaces will not help her and respite centres are not appropriate. In fact, South Etobicoke doesn't even have a respite centre and the only Out of the Cold Program is for men, women are asked to leave.

This budget, which is dangerously balanced on draws from reserves, an inflated housing market, and an inflationary property tax increase, is not sustainable and does not address the root causes of systemic poverty and discrimination.

We want the City to choose a budget that leverages a range of revenue tools, invests significantly in areas of housing, transit, childcare, recreation, and poverty reduction and for these decisions to be made through a true intersectional gender budgeting process.

We look forward to our continued partnership with the city in this work.

Thank you.