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MEDIA ADVISORY — FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Profile of violence against women in Ottawa

Today the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW) announces the release of *Hidden from Sight: A Look at the Prevalence of Violence Against Women in Ottawa (2007-2008)*. This compilation of statistics paints a picture of abuse and sexual violence within relationships and homes, and exposes women's inequality in Ottawa.

Women's shelters, sexual assault/rape crisis centres, counselling services, police and the hospital have always collected statistics on violence against women separately. *Hidden from Sight* brings this data together in a meaningful way for the first time. The report is a consolidation of diverse data collected from 16 local agencies in an effort to educate the public and service providers on the prevalence of woman abuse, sexual violence and homicide in our city.

"Having this compilation feels like putting together the pieces of a puzzle. Although our statistics reflect women who are accessing our services, what happens to those who are not? This report informs us on the figures, and ultimately the trends that other agencies are identifying. This is important information for enhancing a community response," asserts Richard Tomlinson, the Coordinator of the Ottawa Hospital: Sexual Assault & Partner Abuse Care Program.

One of our findings estimates that in a single year Ottawa's 7 women's shelters collectively receive over 18,600 phone calls for service. That means that on any given day in our city, over 50 calls are made by women in abusive relationships seeking help and safety from shelters. Moreover, many more women will call counselling agencies and other community services.

"The figures are staggering, especially when we consider that many women do not come forward for help. Therefore, they are not even counted in these statistics. As well, disturbing new trends are emerging, such as the numbers of men charged with forcible confinement of women partners," says Holly Johnson, Professor of Criminology at the University of Ottawa and advisor to the project.

In 2007-2008, a total of 606 sexual assault cases were reported to Ottawa police. In addition to that startling number, Statistics Canada reports that only 1 in every 10 sexual assaults is actually reported. Hence we can predict the number is closer to 6,000 sexual assaults perpetrated during the time period. Contrary to popular belief, sexual assaults and violence happen more often in the home by men known to women, making reporting to authorities difficult at times.

"Many people in Ottawa will find the rates of abuse and sexual assault in *Hidden from Sight* distressing. The reality of what women endure behind closed doors is just not widely known," points out Erin Williams, the Executive Director of OCTEVAW. "Our goal is to educate the general public.



The more people who know about the reality of violence perpetrated against women, the more people who become engaged on various levels to end it. Likewise, more public knowledge stimulates links between services which leads to more effective collaboration.”

Last fall, Community Foundation of Ottawa released Vital Signs 2008 which exposed the incredible amount of women and children who were turned away annually from shelters: “In 2007, a total of 613 women and 486 children fleeing domestic abuse situations were sheltered in residential care facilities in Ottawa. However, a total of 5,150 women had to be turned away due to full capacity at these shelters.” Our report builds on their focus of Safety and acts as an additional reference and resource tool for the community.

“OCTEVAW’s *Hidden from Sight* will be a vital tool in the effort to raise awareness of the prevalence of violence against women in Ottawa. It’s especially gratifying for the Community Foundation to see the way OCTEVAW has been able to use the public interest created by Ottawa’s Vital Signs to delve deeper into an issue that has been largely hidden from the broader community for too long,” states Barbara McInnes, the President and CEO of Community Foundation of Ottawa.

Our hope is that this report will serve as a data collection template in the coming years allowing us to track our collective progress on ending violence against women in our city. Moreover, it is a starting point for what we trust will be more in-depth research and dialogue leading to change and equality for women and children.

OCTEVAW is a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to ending violence against women and, through leadership, education, advocacy and political action, to promoting a coordinated response to women and their children who have experienced abuse.

The full report can be accessed online at the OCTEVAW website:
http://www.octevaw-cocvff.ca/files/Hidden_from_Sight.pdf.

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