



## ***Women Reducing Poverty Together - Maamawe – Les femmes combattant la pauvreté ensemble***

*Women Reducing Poverty Together brings together organizations working with a diversity of women. We draw upon the experiences and insights of women to work with local institutions to promote gender equality and eradicate poverty. The network is coordinated by City for All Women Initiative (CAWI). We say, Maamawe which means together in Anishinabe, the language of the Algonquin people.*

November 23, 2017

Dear Councillor and Mayor,

We write to ask that you make decisions in the 2018 City Budget process that will contribute to the reduction of poverty for women and their families in Ottawa. Even though gains have been made toward gender equality, women still struggle to have our work valued, receive equal pay for equal work and have family responsibilities shared.

These inequities contribute to women's experience of poverty. If we are Indigenous, immigrant, racialized, living with disabilities, fleeing violence or a single mother, our chances of being in poverty are even greater.

Through a series of kitchen table conversations, research into the causes of women's poverty and community discussions, we identified what is key for a reduction of women's poverty that falls within the jurisdiction of municipal government. Lack of affordable childcare and housing, along with the high cost of transit rose to the top of concerns. At the same time, we heard from many agencies serving women that they are finding it more difficult to address increasingly complex needs, which in turn, leads to deeper poverty.

We are very pleased with the provincial childcare allocation of \$13.6 million to support quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity in child care. We look forward to working with the City to ensure this is rolled out in a way that benefits women with a diversity of childcare needs.

**In the 2018 City Budget, we join with other community groups to ask Ottawa City Council:**

- 1. Create an EquiFare discount for people living on low incomes costing no more than \$1.75 (50% discount) and ensure Presto cards are distributed at no cost (versus the current \$6) to qualified EquiPass/EquiFare users.**

**Background:** Women living on low-income find the high cost for a single fare to be outside their budget and, as a result, find it more difficult to access services for themselves and their families, engage in the community, secure and hold employment. While the EquiPass is a valuable first step, many women are unable to afford a monthly pass. Lack of affordable transit is leading to isolation for many women. *"I just stay home,"* said one women. *"I walk, often after dark, even though I know it is not safe,"* said another.

2. **Restore \$4 million of City capital funding to the Action Ottawa housing budget consistent with the City's 10 year Housing and Homelessness Plan.**

**Background: Women cite the high cost of housing as the number one barrier for moving out of poverty. The current funding is not enough for building new affordable housing and creating more rent-geared-to-income housing. In 2016, there was an increase in the number of women and families accessing shelters in Ottawa, especially older women.**

**Shelters for women offer safe places but the demand is beyond their capacity. Women's homelessness is often invisible as they will couch surf instead of risk life on the streets. Women do not feel safe at mixed-gender shelters. Affordable housing is the answer.**

***"With a safe place to live, I could do so many things with my life." one woman said.***

3. **Invest an additional \$500,000 of base fund and a 2% cost of living adjustment to address complex needs and increasing demand for services.**

**Background: Agencies serving women in the city continue to face challenges because they cannot keep pace with the increasingly complex demands for social support.**

***"We have more women coming through our doors than ever before, we can't keep up," said one agency.***

We ask you to join us in our effort to reduce women's poverty in our City, by voting in favor of these Asks in the 2018 City Budget.

Best regards,

Immigrant Women Service Ottawa (IWSO), Executive Director, Mercy Lawlivi  
Tungasuvvingat Inuit, Executive Director, Jason LeBlanc  
Cornerstone Housing for Women, Executive Director, Sue Garvey  
KIGONI, Claudine Nsimure  
Harmony House, Program Manager, Lee Anne Lee  
The Well Women's Support Centre, Executive Director, Rachel Robinson  
Elizabeth Fry Society, Acting Director, Ann McSweeney  
Interval House of Ottawa, Executive Director, Kia Rainbow  
Gignul Non-Profit Housing Corporation, Executive Director, Marc Maracle  
Maison d'amitié, Executive Director, Francine Groulx  
Women's Initiative for Safe Environments (WISE), Policy & Administrative Coordinator, Valerie Collicott  
City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), Director, Suzanne Doerge

Advisory Committee of Women Reducing Poverty Together – Maamawe: Claudette Commanda, Mercy Lawlivi, Valerie Assoi, Delores Peltier-Corkey, Caroline Andrew, Fathiya Warsame, Suzanne Doerge