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## Demand for Ottawa's secure chat and text service for women living with violence doubles expectations in first month

**Thursday, May 21, 2020 (Ottawa)** — More than 300 people have reached out for support during the first month of operations for **Unsafer at Home Ottawa**, doubling the expected volume. This secure text and online chat service aims to give women living with domestic violence and abuse the support they need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The number of chats/texts to the line is much higher than expected," says Keri Lewis, Executive Director, Interval House of Ottawa. "I was particularly surprised by the dozens of folks who reached out to ask for advice on how to support a family member or friend they are concerned about and who they suspect are living with abuse."

The service was launched on April 14, 2020 by Crime Prevention Ottawa (CPO), the Ottawa Coalition to End Violence Against Women (OCTEVAW), Interval House of Ottawa, the Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre, and Victim Services of Ottawa, with communications support from the Ottawa Police Service.

Results for the first month include:

- 308 online and text chats
- 4,800 visits to the Unsafer at Home Ottawa website

Here's the breakdown of support offered in the chats:

- Safety planning: 32% (includes 2 individuals supported in leaving a violent situation)
- Other: 32% (for example, friends and family reaching out for support)
- Emotional support: 20%
- Practical support: 7%
- Support with basic needs: 5%
- Legal support: 3%
- Financial support: 1%

"We knew as frontline workers that there was an issue when the demand for our services was collectively lower when the pandemic first started," said Melissa Heimerl, Executive Director, Ottawa Victim Services. "The results we see from the first month of Unsafer at Home Ottawa demonstrate the need for survivors to have a secure, confidential means to still reach out for support while being in isolation."





Unsafer at Home Ottawa has generated extensive interest across Canada. OCTEVAW and CPO have hosted Zoom calls with more than 240 participants from communities across Canada.

Available 7 days a week from 8:30 am to midnight, Unsafer at Home Ottawa uses safe, encrypted technology to ensure that conversations are confidential and secure when someone reaches out for help. Trained counsellors provide advice, referrals and support in English and French.

**Unsafer at Home Ottawa - Text (613) 704-5535**  
**Chat online [unsaferathomeottawa.ca](https://www.unsaferathomeottawa.ca)**

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