

Waterloo Region Community Homelessness Working Group
Priorities and Strategic Directions
Community Homelessness Forum
September 12, 2001

(This document will form an appendix to the Waterloo Region Homelessness Plan.)

Community Priority: Meeting Immediate Needs

1. Provide more emergency shelter:
 - shelter for families/couples
 - shelter for youth.
 - shelter in Cambridge

2. Provide direct financial support to assist with housing/shelter costs:
 - Create a rent bank that could address needs such as first and last month's rent and utility hook-up costs for those who have the ability to pay monthly rent but have no savings to make the initial up front payments.
 - Create a fund to cover moving expenses.
 - Support the option that shelter allowances be directed to the landlord in those circumstances where the tenant is at risk of losing their housing due to frequent late payment of rent or rental arrears.
 - Extend the rent supplement program into non-profit and co-operative housing developments.
 - Increase shelter allowance - social assistance, Ontario Works and Ont. Disability Support Program
 - Barter options for rent payment.
 - Subsidies/grants for repairs existing housing
 - Help with heating costs/expenses (hook-ups)
 - Costs of moving to a shelter rather than a house

3. Provide 24-hour basic need services to homeless people:
 - Provide locations where homeless people can safely store their possessions, clean their clothing and shower.
 - Set up a 24-hour drop-in where support workers come to the clients.
 - Purchase and staff a mobile outreach van to provide food, emergency care, and safety, protection from the heat or cold and transportation to emergency services.
 - Set up an emergency hot line to identify where there are available empty beds any night of the week.
 - An (information/emergency) phone line that is open 24 hours, 7 days a week.

4. Provide integrated and co-ordinated supports:
 - Provide training to front line workers to make them aware of shelter services, supports and to prepare them for handling difficult situations arising from substance abuse or mental illness.
 - Provide support in places and ways that people can stay in their home communities and not become disconnected from their families and supports - distribution of services throughout the Region.
 - Provide places that help to understand the system.
 - Provide medical services in the same place where people are getting meals.
 - Speak directly to the homeless to determine their needs and involve them in solutions planning.

Additional Suggestions

- Free shelter
- Shelter 24 hr/day
- Elimination of 1st and last of month's rent or work something out (permanent)
- Language barriers should be a consideration in any immediate needs
- Eviction reduction program
- Housing Support Program
- Homeless people with pets face additional barriers
- "At risk" should be defined. Language focuses on those who are homeless. Not only those but also at risk.
- Partner shelter and support services
- Transitional/Long-term settings
- Accessibility
- Emergency attendant care

Community Priority: Creating a New Supply of Housing

1. Develop funding options for affordable housing development
 - Develop an investment pool for affordable lending for the development and construction of affordable housing.
 - Approach the United Way to consider housing and homelessness as a priority in their annual allocations exercise.
 - Create a housing foundation for charitable giving towards affordable housing
 - Seek major sponsors, benefactors to fund supports, shelters and services
 - Church groups consider putting money intended for capital expansion towards housing.
2. Create different types of units in appropriate locations.
 - One-bedroom units
 - More shared accommodation units
 - Across the Region
 - Different types (co-op, social housing, rent supplement/shelter allowances)
 - Units that are in safe areas and close to supports/amenities
 - Housing that is geared to single incomes
 - Create accessible single homes, some townhouses, some apartments – some of all types
 - Create units with certain features like controlled entrances and "hardwire" housing for visually impaired.
 - Develop non-traditional housing like equity coops, land banking, home ownership
 - Develop communal housing with shared expenses and peer support.
3. Advocate for housing and shelter policy changes:
 - Endorse the 1% solution proposed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities which proposes an increase of 1% over the current federal budget expenditures on housing.
 - Increase the current maximum shelter benefit allowable under Ontario Works and provide social assistance for housing at a rate equal to 85% of the median market rents represented in the local marketplace.
4. Build housing with supports:
 - To link people to services that can meet their needs.
 - To facilitate building ownership
 - To combat isolation
 - To build healthy communities
 - For people with special needs or "at risk" (disabled, seniors, addiction, new Canadians, etc)

5. Identify property that is available and suitable for housing development:
 - Request local area municipalities and the Region of Waterloo to develop a "housing first" policy for municipally owned surplus lands and properties acquired through tax sales, public works projects or redundant, obsolete buildings.
 - Local school boards, ministries, churches/faith groups identify unused land that can be used for housing.
 - Identify "brownfields" for clean up and redevelopment, public buildings and lands for development and renovation.

6. Create and use incentives for affordable housing development and renovation:
 - Waive building permit charges
 - Create new affordable rental units by piggy-backing the various incentives, grants and loans provided by all three levels of government.
 - Access Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP) funding to convert non-residential space into residential space and renovate existing shelters and boarding houses. Transform abandoned buildings into housing. or convert / renovate non-residential space (i.e. abandoned buildings, offices) into residential units using RRAP and other funding)
 - Create a special property tax category for affordable rental housing to reduce the operating costs and consequently the rent for developments defined as "affordable rental." A definition, measurement and legal agreement binding a landlord to affordable rents will be needed to operationalize a special assessment category.
 - Work with the Region and local municipalities to amend their development charges by-laws to reduce development charges for developments containing affordable rental units.
 - Challenge the administrations of the local municipalities building and engineering staff to facilitate and collaborate with non-profit agencies to overcome the construction and design complications posed by the various code requirements as they relate to renovation and conversion.
 - Adjust the targets in operating agreements to permit conversion of larger units to smaller units, create more accessible units and increase the ratio of rent-geared to-income tenancies while still retaining the principle of a mix of household incomes among the residents.

7. More research, planning, co-ordination:
 - Research and prepare a report which illustrates the continuum of shelter needs ranging from beds in shelters, temporary housing, transitional housing, supportive, supported and permanent housing to better understand the gaps in the housing supply system and the movement of individuals and families through the shelter system.
 - Research models from other communities which have been successful in creating new affordable housing units.
 - Co-ordinate information about services and funding from the Ministries of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Health and Community and Social Services, HRDC, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and the area municipalities through the Region of Waterloo.
 - Develop an information package on housing incentives, grants, funding resources and broadcast the information via a web site.
 - Develop an inventory of government owned land and buildings for affordable housing development or conversion.
 - Create an Affordable Housing Action Group to initiate and monitor the actions under the new supply theme
 - Increase the role of the Region as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager to co-ordinate homeless information services, administration of housing programs and funding.

8. Find creative options for building and renovations:
 - Co-ordinate through Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) the potential to match construction skills training with the rehabilitation of older housing stock for multiple

residential conversions.

- Get new builders to create at least one accessible unit in every new complex.
 - Approach home builders to see if they would donate a home each year or donate one of their workers to teach people to build homes.
 - Private sector needs to be involved (architects, contractors, etc) in building affordable housing.
 - Create a program like Habitat For Humanity to build multiple family dwellings.
 - Increase support for local Habitat for Humanity builds.
9. Involve those needing affordable housing in the planning and design of housing
- Speak directly with the homeless to determine their needs and involve them in solutions planning.
 - Have people with disabilities more involved in design processes.

Additional Suggestions:

- Senior level of government housing policy
- Housing as a “right” ensured by all

Community Priority: Supports for Special Needs; Prevention; Building Community Capacity

1. Develop informal and formal supports for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.
 - Develop circles of supports, buddy systems, and volunteer mediators who can provide assistance to both residents and landlords where tenancy is threatened.
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 - Need housing helpers: a team of people who we could call on who could act as interpreters, assist with access to transportation, and know peoples rights and how to access the system.
 - Use restorative justice approaches to family and youth issues.
 - Build on existing networks such as neighbourhood watch, schools, universities, churches, service clubs to help link those in need to existing services.
 - Use community centres as a one-stop shopping social services resource centre to link homeless to services.
 - Use community centres, schools, libraries as homework space and computer access for children living in crowded conditions.
 - Explore successful community mobilization strategies engaging volunteers such as life skills training, car pooling, child care, mother support, job search, community kitchens.
 - Explore the concept of interdenominational parish nursing.
 - Services that help develop better survival skills and ability to plan ahead and think creatively.
 - Promote a “continuum of supports” approach to reducing homelessness.
 - Keep families together through full continuum of supports including after-care and transition that accommodate children.
 - Form a task group of key people to develop a co-ordinated health care delivery system for homeless people at all levels along the health continuum.
 - Ensuring food security and safety
 - Provide low cost access or financial support to meet a range of needs:
 - Money for medical needs
 - Dental clinic
 - More from food bank
 - Legal assistance
 - Budget counselling
 - Entertainment
 - Activities for youth

- More income for adults; low wages aren't enough/increase minimum wage
 - Assistance in saving \$\$ to acquire own home
 - Creative supports for basic needs and self sufficiency:
 - We need more peer supports in finding places, surviving while one is looking, and in creating some income.
 - Pay low-income seniors who have skills (i.e. trade, cooking, sewing, budgeting) to teach younger low-income individuals
 - Use community economic development strategies to supplement the incomes of homeless people.
 - Provide business mentorship and education programs which build on the skills and talents of homeless people.
 - Address special dietary needs of homeless people,.
 - Use a barter system where people can trade their services and goods.
 - Improve public transportation (extended hours, 3 shifts; Sunday service; reduced bus fare; buses to go where people need to go to work).
2. Develop discharge protocols with institutional facilities to ensure individuals are not released into the community without support and shelter.
 3. Provide appropriate and co-ordinated supports for special needs:
 - Co-ordinate housing supports and health care services, including mental health and addictions supports.
 - Co-ordinate housing supports with employment and training supports.
 - Provide supports to seniors, disabled, first nations, new Canadians and refugees.
 - Make services and methods of interventions more culturally and linguistically sensitive.
 - Supports to families and parents. [*For a break for any family member*]
 - Support youth in a complex range of needs and challenges.
 4. Put eviction-prevention plan in place for people held in hospitals for extended periods of time so that when they are discharged they will have a home to go back to.
 5. Develop a team of housing advocates and develop interventions for people with disabilities, mental illness and/or addictions.

Additional Suggestions

- Develop discharge protocols with institutional facilities to ensure individuals are not released into the community without support and shelter.
- A place to discharge people to – with convalescence or whatever needs are. (All institutions i.e. Grand Valley Institute, Hospitals, etc)
- Empowerment and self-help principles should be the basis upon which we proceed.

Community Priority: Information, Education and Community Awareness

1. Advocate for all homeless populations, particularly the mentally ill, youth, women and children, and the relative homeless.
2. Develop an information campaign to raise public awareness around the scope of, cause and solutions to the homelessness crisis in Waterloo Region:
 - Take opportunities to dialogue with interest groups where the message about homelessness will have an interested audience, i.e. churches, libraries, service clubs, the labour council
 - Approach the Boards of Education to develop an awareness program on homelessness for use in the school system.
 - Set up a forum with Regional Councillors, MPs, and MPPs to present Call to Action on Homelessness in Waterloo Region and inform Mayors.
 - Develop an education campaign in rural communities.

- Sponsor a “service fair” where all agencies involved in assisting the homeless population could share information about their programs and services.
3. Use social marketing techniques to change attitudes toward people who are homeless.
 - Increase cross-cultural education to eliminate discrimination.
 - *[Make the public aware of the real costs of homelessness.]*
 4. Promote collaborative processes and broad-based partnerships among all stakeholders — i.e. private, non-profit and voluntary sectors, labour organizations and all levels of government.
 - Work collaboratively to develop and deliver services.
 - The community (and the average citizen) take roles rather than relying on the government.
 - Take preventative measures to keep the problem from occurring in the first place.
 5. Get the community involved in finding solutions:
 - Use an education and public awareness campaign.
 - Get media to help educate private and public sectors.
 - Implement the plan in ways that increase community awareness.
 - Fit awareness activities into the planning cycles of sponsors, corporations, businesses, etc. because they often have their plans in place a year in advance.
 - Focus on feasible and concrete actions.
 - Show the small steps and successes that are being done.
 - Inform interested parties about how they can contribute to the plan including small actions that can be taken.
 6. Develop a base of knowledge, expertise and data about homelessness and share it among all the concerned parties and the general public:
 - Gather information to better understand needs in geographic communities and special need populations.

Additional Suggestions

- Volunteer interaction with homeless / at-risk people
- Political actions/involvement of homeless /at-risk people