

Project Summary: Many Faces of Urban and Rural Displacement – Ontario Tenants Organize and Speak Up

The project will take place in 4 distinct communities across Ontario: Halton Region, Kingston and District, Oxford County and the Region of York. We will engage and work alongside tenants with lived experience of precarious housing, collecting the narratives of those who have been impacted in both urban and rural settings and mapping instances of eviction and displacement. Displacement is the term we use because it captures more than just the act of eviction. Displacement represents the loss of home, community, access to services/family and other natural networks when people are removed from where they have been living. The project was inspired by the groundbreaking work in displacement mapping and community organizing pioneered by the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region in conjunction with the University of Waterloo, both of whom will be consulting/partnering on this project.

One of the most consistent issues that staff with the Federation of Metro Tenants' Association, hear through the tenant hotline is displacement outside of the GTA. Yet, not as much work has been done to understand or combat displacement in urban areas outside the GTA or rural areas in Ontario. Our project is ideally positioned to address the gap in awareness and action while also growing tenant and local community capacity to continue necessary organizing work in each of the five areas.

Addressing the Gaps:

- **Gaps in Knowledge**
 - Gaps in tenant rights information and education
 - Gaps in the Availability of Stories/Data that reflects the extent/types of displacement
- **Gaps in Engagement**
 - The project will address the lack of tenant organizing and mutual support in the four local communities involved in this project.
- **Gaps in Lived Experience Leadership**

While our SPCs are connected to existing tenant groups or organizations serving tenant populations, there is a notable absence of tenant organizing activity in these communities. The project provides us the human resources necessary to: utilize existing connections, reach out to/engage tenants with lived experience and those interested in organizing, sharing their stories and/or being community connectors.

The Data:

Because displacement is largely invisible, acquiring this information/data will be critical to understanding the extent of the issue. By assembling, documenting, analyzing and sharing the lived experiences testimonies/narratives of poverty, racism, housing precarity, discrimination, gentrification and displacement, we will amplify the voices, knowledge and experiences of tenants from marginalized groups across Ontario, in order that their knowledge and experiences can play a central role in informing and shaping housing and rental housing policy and planning as well as the realization of human rights protections for tenants. It is imperative that those making decisions in the housing sector realize the extent of the problem of displacement outside of the bigger centres such as Toronto, the extent of the impact on individuals and families and the cost to communities.

Lived Experience Leadership:

Individuals with lived experience will be central to this work and as such, we will hire community connectors to access stories/narratives that expose the underbelly of the larger crisis of displacement occurring in communities across Ontario. Those most impacted, tenants and renters will have a role in asserting their rights and defining solutions and they will be the focus of the mobilization process, which begins with important conversations in their communities and then evolves to joint advocacy for legislative change. From an impact perspective, tenant engagement and voice in each area will inform and shape local organization and action plans and collectively will inform knowledge mobilization and advocacy for human rights protections for tenants at the provincial level.

Steps in Recruiting Lived Experience Leadership and Stories of Displacement:

- 1.) First investing in engagement, relationship and leadership development with community connectors and tenants with lived experience.
- 2.) Second, documenting lived experiences and treating individual stories not as isolated anecdotes, but as part of wider patterns and processes of displacement, both urban and rural.
- 3.) Third, addressing the gap in knowledge that currently exists of patterns of displacement across communities in Ontario by tapping into the in-depth knowledge that people with lived experiences of poverty and precarity possess about changes within their homes, streets, neighbourhoods, cities and rural areas, which is essential to planning more equitable communities.

Knowledge Mobilization

The information will be shared in the form of stories (publications) and disseminated through our various partner organization's knowledge mobilization (KMB) pipelines: The Centre for Equality Rights in Education (CERA), the Federation of Metro Tenants Association (FMTA), Social Development Centre Waterloo Region, the University of Waterloo and the University Research Network of Ontario. SPNO and the SPCs involved in this project also regularly use webinar platforms for events so this will be another avenue for information sharing through online events.

The Structure

While carrying out this project in-person would be ideal, we are completely prepared to conduct much, if not all, of it, on-line as necessary. The SPNO Executive including leads for the four SPCs involved in the project, will hire, supervise and support the central project coordinator. Each of the four local SPCs that reflect and are responsible to their local communities will be responsible for hiring their local engagement coordinators and mobilizing lived experience leaders to become the community connectors. The Central Project Coordinator will be responsible for providing training on research methodologies, outreach and interview methods, and will also conduct the mapping work.