

# Plan to End Chronic Homelessness in Waterloo Region: Prototyping Report - Phase 2

Social Development Center Waterloo Region  
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# 1. Introduction – Lived Experience and the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness

*“So it's a huge ...slap in the face too, because I was one of those people that shunned homelessness and now that the shoe is on the other foot, I'm like, wow, okay, this is a lot harder than I expected. And now I like to actually look at it in a different way. Because it was I who looked down on everybody before; now I'm more like a person who wants to fight towards helping homelessness.”*

A lot of people have been asking the question: “what does ending chronic homelessness look like?” This report is part of a wider project led by the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region, in partnership with the Region of Waterloo and the University of Waterloo. In it, we rephrase the question to ask: what does ending chronic homelessness look like *from the perspective of those who are experiencing homelessness?*

We answer this by centring lived experiences and lived expertise within all aspects of this project. This is done through respectful, real and detailed engagement with people that are experiencing homelessness. In this unique project, we had the opportunity to hear answers, experiences, perceptions and solutions from the community. These were obtained through meaningful conversations, fostered through relationships between a lived expert and community member. These community conversations were multi-faceted and came from many different perspectives; collectively, they offer unique insights as to the causes, experiences of, and solutions to the homelessness crisis that will not be found elsewhere.

We heard a variety of perspectives that reflect the diverse and complex situation. In the first instance, this helps us move beyond statistics and numbers to paint a vivid picture of what is happening on the ground. While the responses and ideas were diverse, there was one consistent narrative; *people need to regain control of their lives, regain freedom, choice and self-determination.*

One of the main focuses of this project was to develop ideas for prototypes to address a variety of inter-related challenges and opportunities. These prototypes reflect the learnings and knowledge from twenty-seven community conversations done by Lived Expertise Consultants, as well as engagements with community partners in various demographic and geographic areas across the Waterloo Region. Lived Expertise Consultants are individuals with lived experience of homelessness and housing

marginalization, advocacy experience, and connections to communities. The Social Development Centre works with a broad network of community partners including agencies like Sanguen Health Centre, Ray of Hope, Waterloo Region COmmunity Legal Services and Community Justice Initiatives as well as mutual aid and advocacy groups like WRYIMBY, the Unsheltered Campaign, Going Mobile, and Fightback KW.

The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness has been supported by the Social Development Center Waterloo Region, Waterloo Region Staff and faculty at the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University to ensure we center the unique and irreplaceable role of lived expertise throughout the entire process.

The collaboration between the community advocates, such as those with the Social Development Centre, staff at the Region of Waterloo and academic researchers has been established through this process. Central to this collaboration is also the Lived Expertise Consultants. This unique partnership represents a significant turning point in the way we collectively respond to major challenges in the future beyond the housing and homelessness crisis.

We began this current project informed by research and recommendations that have been developed and articulated in the last five years in our work with low-income or no-income populations experiencing precarious housing and homelessness. The aim was to move beyond talk and start prototyping ideas and projects developed from this collaboration from day one.

Using this mutually caring approach, the collaboration leads to “doing things” together, in contrast to the more dominant “planning tables” model, where players come together and work in a mostly reactive mode, within tight time constraints and resources.

Our work is guided by several key principles, which were shaped by ongoing reflection throughout the process. These are:

- Recognizing the unique value of lived expertise in all phases of the project
- Applying human rights approach that decriminalizes homelessness and poverty
- Relying on the capacity of the whole community and addressing socio-economic (class) divides
- Acknowledging diversity and different types of housing and communities where people have choice and control

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region has built a multifaceted team with both content and process knowledge about the **human rights approach to homelessness**.

We are a partner that has been building lasting relationships with the Region of Waterloo staff and Council, and we are dedicated to supporting the necessary change management, allowing, in the words of Otto Scharmer: “**the system to see and sense itself.**” Central to this is the understanding that we are all being a part of the system.

Our project relies on a consistent participation of Region of Waterloo staff throughout the process to build the foundation for **transformational practice working with lived expertise** in a more equitable way. This gives the possibility for a context “where the change moves at the speed of trust” (Michael Tubbs)

We began the process with recommendations that have been articulated in the last 5 years in our work with low-income or no-income populations experiencing precarious housing and homelessness, and **start prototyping projects from day one.**

**The findings from this process are owned by the communities and partners** who created it and will be integrated into the recommendations. At the same time, this Prototyping Project report is being shared in its authentic form and authentic language through the use of many direct quotations that came out of conversations with community members.

The envision that the collaboration between the community advocates and Region of Waterloo staff which has been established through this process, will be **a turning point in the way we collectively respond to major challenges in the future** beyond the housing and homelessness crisis.

## 2. Statements which have guided and informed this process

During initial meetings with the working group in mid 2023, we discussed a number of key issues, approaches, themes and goals that we were determined not to lose sight of:

1. Homelessness and the issues that we are here to address
2. That this crisis comes with significant loss
3. There is a lot of value to lived expertise (those living at the heart of this crisis)
4. That we are all choosing to be here because we want to see/do something different
5. Of each other, especially when external circumstances come up that make it challenging to see each other
6. The importance of being together, and remember our strengths
7. Finding the good in things and laughing where we can
8. Even if things get challenging and frustrating, there is value to this work and taking another step forward
9. We all come from different experiences and accept that we all see the world differently; the gift of difference and what can be learned from difference
10. Ensuring that this remains a safe space requires our ongoing attention. We are committed to having the necessary conversations that will bring us back together and help us to move through the obstacles.

### 3. Why are we stuck (and how to get unstuck)?

*“There are greater societal issues if we don’t get to the root causes of homelessness such as, consumerism, capitalism, people being a paycheck away from being homeless, institutionalization of care, and prison-like shelter systems.”*

#### **Why are we stuck?**

- Colonization and privatization of the Land
- Discriminatory beliefs and fear mongering about those who are labeled “outside of the normal,” those who are homeless, poor, and/or racialized
- One sided institutional risk management and liability frameworks
- Meritocracy, survival of the fittest and blaming the “victim” mentality
- Supposed scarcity of resources
- Disintegration of family and community
- Service systems unaware of the harm they perpetuate
- Decision-making removed from the realities of marginalized populations

#### **How to Get Unstuck**

We need to acknowledge and recognize the complete imbalance of power that exists. It is also important to disentangle private and public interests in decisions made behind closed doors. Stopping the loss of affordable housing (through renoviction, demolition, lack of rent control) or shelter beds is also essential, as these losses are far greater than what you can build in today's context.

Recognize the harm and the criminalization that the systems do. These include fencing off people at Roos Island and charging activists, which was an act of violence with multiple ripple effect in affected communities.

Do not distract people with conversations and plans. Do not apply double standards for those with power and those without; commit to action to undo the harm and take concrete steps to create solutions today.

Acknowledge the wisdom and the strategies of the people living in homelessness, the front line workers and the community members who know what needs to be done to end homelessness.

## 4. A Lens to Center Lived Experience.

***“We value what lived experience folks value.”***

*Lived Expertise is rooted in direct lived experience of people impacted by poverty and marginalization; in their understanding of the systems that create inequities; as well as in their advocacy work.*

- **Lived Expertise leadership throughout** – in planning, implementation and evaluation phases of plans and strategies that impact their lives.
- **Acknowledge ongoing trauma, loss and death** – recognize how systems actively cause harm and remain unaccountable to people living the experience.
- **Everyone involved brings their whole self to this work of reconciliation** – mind, heart, body and spirit to be able to take appropriate actions and rebuild communities of care.
- **Reform of government/governance and service systems through respect of human rights** – redistribute power and resources to the lived experience groups, advocacy groups and community-based entities for the irreplaceable work they do alongside service providers.
- **Challenge the appropriation and privatization of the Indigenous land** – partner with the Six Nations of the Grand River and local First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities – release public lands for alternative housing solutions outside of the private market.
- **Decriminalize poverty and homelessness** – policing, bylaws enforcement, risk management, policies and procedures to be either removed (neo-vagrancy bylaws) or transformed to also benefit the poor and the homeless.
- **Rebuild communities and involve the capacity of the whole community** – residents, support groups, activists being a part of the continuum of care, from informal to system supports complementing each other.



## 5. Narrative: Homeless by 'choice' but unable to make choices?

While it is often expressed that Canada, and in Particular the Waterloo Region, is a free space that offers a variety of choice and autonomy, it is clear that this narrative is simply inaccurate. When faced with homelessness, autonomy and choice no longer apply due to the dominant neoliberal discourses that articulate how an individual is responsible for their own fate. There is also a mainstream belief that people living through poverty and homelessness are not able to make decisions, self-govern, or take care of each other. However, as our research and the work of many others shows, it is often overarching system that get in the way. There are colonial and capitalistic stipulations and conditions that are placed on people in order to be able to enjoy the 'freedoms' offered in this country; if you do not live up to those conditions, your 'freedoms' and choices are then taken away.

*"The first place they offered me, it was like two months after I'd been on the list, they offered me a place, and it was a new place. And it was way out in east end Waterloo. There was no buses, no shopping, nothing nearby. And I told him, I couldn't take it because, I couldn't get to work. I couldn't get anywhere and they were so nasty with me [saying] that 'you're never going to get a place if you're turning them down. You're only allowed to turn down one more and then we drop you off the list.' And it's like okay, maybe I should have been pickier when I was selecting, so I didn't know they were going to offer me a place in the middle of nowhere where there was no transit or anything as poor fuck like, what did they expect me to do fly, you know? So they offered me another place after that. And I took it immediately." (Mid 40's Indigenous female residing at a homeless safe house)*

Lived Experts can clearly see and articulate the root causes that keeping us stuck in worldviews and beliefs that are perpetuating poverty, homelessness, and preventing systems from evolving. One of these 'stuck beliefs' is that encampments are dangerous, and therefore must be forcibly closed and the residents must be evicted. However, we were told over and over again by lived experts that they are not more dangerous or unsafe than other forms of homelessness. In fact, according to them, these tents are their homes.

*"Mostly kids also are under 16. And they're too young to sleep at One Roof; they're not allowed to sleep there. So they were sometimes allowed in the overflow shelter in the winter, but then they cracked down on that and stopped letting them in that too. So they're literally sleeping on the sidewalk, which is way safer than the overflow shelter. You know, literally. I know several girls who've been sexually assaulted at [an overflow*

*shelter] in their rooms by the staff.” (Mid 40’s Indigenous female residing at a homeless safe house)*

Throughout our conversations it was clear that in system-funded areas, such as shelters, lived experts do not have the ability to make their spatial environment feel like a home. Again, these are harsh stipulations that only apply to those experiencing homelessness. We must rethink our notions of what a home looks like to account for the diverse ways in which folks feel safe, comfortable, and free.

*“I need that, I made it my home. We made it [a tent] our home, and that was our home. And it didn’t have the traditional walls and a roof like that. It wasn’t not a lock, it per say, but we didn’t we locked her, too. We had locks on her tent, so it’s not so much. It’s more for this shows that it belongs to somebody” (Mid 40’s female now residing in rent geared to income housing in Kitchener)*

Internal conversations about decriminalization must take place before we move forward with decriminalizing unhoused people, spaces, and the people that support them. Systemic internal reflections are needed to understand the perpetuation of criminality that the system reproduces in a cyclical nature, further forcing people into homelessness.

*“This is the thing the whole system doesn’t understand; they’re like: Okay, well, we have all these laws, the risk management, and so all those laws, force people out of anything official right into the streets” (Mid 40’s Indigenous female residing at a homeless safe house)*

## 6. Radical Change: The Tree Analogy

**Only a commitment and actionable radical change of the institutions can eliminate homelessness.**

The framework for our prototyping process was guided by the idea of the tree, where all parts of the tree (the roots, trunk, branches and fruit) need to be addressed in order to deal with the challenge.

**ROOTS** are invisible, but root causes affect the current state of affairs in many ways. We tend to work on addressing root causes the least because they remain invisible. Yet they permeate throughout the culture and systems we live in, which also benefit from keeping them hidden: colonization in the government and our organizations; theft and privatization of land; capitalism and exploitation of the labour of the racialized and marginalized; criminalization of poverty and homelessness; Western thought and rationalism (such as the Doctrine of Discovery, which legitimized the genocide of non-Christian populations, as well as the theft of land and resources throughout the history of colonization).

**TRUNK** of the tree are the enforcing elements such as laws, courts, police, bylaws, education systems, the media and health systems. Trunks are important because they involve different stakeholders in ways that perpetuate systems of exploitation and dehumanization. This prevents us from returning to the wholeness of our existence with nature and each other. This level is more visible than the roots, and, like a tree trunk, is presented as a “natural” order, something taken for granted as a testimony of progress. Compared to branches, trunks are far more difficult to move. Questioning the key systems and stakeholders that comprise the trunk brings consequences to individuals, while as communities, people can withstand the carceral logic more successfully. The hurt and the loss is spread through resistance to this process, impacting both people in institutions, general population and the marginalized. The Earth is suffering without a doubt (by destroying the natural world we are destroying ourselves).

**BRANCHES** and **FRUITS** are the superficial level of service delivery, policies, protocols, rules and hierarchical relationships. Like branches of a tree, these are the most malleable aspects and also what most of our attention focuses on when we say we are bringing about change. However, with the strong trunk and the roots, superficial changes at the branch level do not lead to a radically different and transformed reality, particularly for lived experts.

## 7. Principles for the Prototyping Work

### **What is the first step in bringing an emerging future to life?**

There are a number of steps to help bring an emerging future to life. They operate at different spatial scales and with different partners and players. What binds them all together is the centring of community members, lived experts and those with experiences of homelessness.

### **Rebuild communities**

Organize where you are and within your community  
Create collectives where everyone does their part

### **Reach out to the general population**

Break the denial of the general population  
Action of the Grinch as opportunity for transformation, not criminalization  
For those working in the system, be imaginative not fearful and work to build connection with lived experts

### **Transform service systems**

When people and agencies work together, working *with* the homeless should guide the process  
See people as people and not numbers: while there are broad trends and processes, individual circumstances always play a major role. People don't fit into boxes.  
Judgement and slipping through the cracks  
Social and housing agencies: there is a whole industry and ecosystem that profits off of homelessness. The whole shelter system benefits in some ways, but at a great cost to the people working in the system such as front-line workers, as well as low income people)

### **Transform governments**

Accept the extent of criminalization and then dismantle criminalization  
Accept current limitations, although temporary, first step better than none  
Acknowledge that the future not based on present/limitations  
Truth telling to bridge  
See people in institutions not as cogs in a machine

### **Involve People with Lived Experience**

Go to people with ideas of how to create something new, hear what they say, go back to them, implement *with* them, again ask what needs to happen next, improve  
The grinch as a criminalized person seen as a threat for going against the status quo

**Redistribute power to make change**

Talk and plans will continue with little action unless meaningful power is redistributed and people take the power

Being mindful of what is in our realm to do – the first steps to sharing power is to be able to be heard, and to contribute what we have to give

## 8. Ideas and Reflections on Chronic Homelessness

### **Working definition of chronic homelessness definition is limited and limiting**

In the stories shared, it all starts with precarious housing; the consequences are far worse for children who are used to the lack of safety and security where they live. Even if regarded as being housed, households living in unhealthy, substandard, crowded, and unsafe conditions do not have any control on where, how, with whom they live and are deprived of the autonomy that the majority of people in stable housing or home and property owners take for granted and therefore cannot relate to.

The definition of chronic homelessness is limited and limiting. Some suggest we need to focus entirely on housing as a human right and prevent vicious cycles of inadequate and unaffordable housing. It also limits us in seeing the big picture and mobilizing for bigger picture actions recognizing inherent injustices that avoid the systemic root causes of current economic, social and political inequities: who owns the land, who builds, what is being built and what the connection is between the private and the public interests.

Abuse and violence, ageism and ableism, often direct discrimination, racism and homophobia, in families and communities, including frequent practices of small or corporate landlords, create repeated harm and trauma that further diminish an individual's capacity to self-regulate or develop a healthy self-appreciation and reliance, leading to a spiral into self-medicating with accessible substances, while at the same time becoming prey to loan sharks, drug traffickers and prostitution. Youth being shuttled in and out of foster homes, families couch surfing, individuals sleeping in cars while on community housing waiting lists, all reinforce a feeling of abandonment and lack of worth. Many have repeated experiences of being in and out of rehab or jail, and with further difficulties adjusting to service rules and regulations, they seek safety in tents and rooming houses, or live hiding from angry homeowners, security, bylaw or police officers in the crevices of cities or in wooded and bushy areas.

The accompanying factor in today's stigma-riddled society is isolation. Isolation (to keep their kids, to protect themselves from abuse, to protect their immigrant status, to keep their jobs) is preventing many from seeking or accessing existing supports, or being heard in their exasperated calls for change in service frameworks. Over and over again, the fractured family environments are determining many life paths, but instead, many build strong and lasting relationships with their peers and friends, who become their families. Therefore 'no visitor' policies found in some shelters are difficult to implement as friends rely on the mutual trust of everybody involved to ensure more humane

spaces and dwellings for the individuals and relationships they need to feel safe and supported. Taking away a trusted relationship, be it a pet or a human, is like “taking a soother from a baby”.

“Love” is a recurrent theme in many of the conversations we had and we wanted to hear from people who are un-homed how it resonated in their lives. It is hard to imagine that love is still a hard currency in highly volatile conditions of the unsheltered and criminalized communities. Love is also not part of the vocabulary in social services yet, but in community-based and more informal networks of support, it is often the ingredient that saves lives and saves souls. Those who seek and find a place in temporary housing such as ABTC, despite an unusually permissive and warm approach, adapt in many ways to retraumatizing conditions and lack of control over their own livelihood, while adjusting to a constant influx of seekers for limited support and resources, or threats of becoming prey to outside criminality. Substance use is a short and debilitating break from reality; old and new survival conflicts impose constant vigilance; chronic health problems and unhealed injuries cannot be treated within the current health system without prejudice and judgment. All of these are aggravated by a downward spiral of mental health issues and the breakdown of a sense of self, until heat or cold, exhaustion or fighting, sickness and overdose end in loss of life. The lack of responses over decades by the health, social, governance and political systems to the lack of income security, employment protections, and rental housing, exemplified in the gentrification crisis, all are considered by many with lived experience and advocates as “state sanctioned violence”.

This becomes clear if we look at the pervasive policies preventing people from getting ahead such as financialization of housing, the lack of strong rent control, stagnant social assistance rates, the lack of enforcement of both Residential Tenancies Act or the Employment Standards, and inability of the systems to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Calls to Action at all levels of government.

### **Limitations: Hidden Homelessness**

*“Further, the report estimated that as many as 80% of Ontario’s homeless population experiences “hidden homelessness” such as couch surfing, sleeping in abandoned buildings or camping under bridges and in remote locations.” 2021 Auditor General’s Report on Homelessness.*

Reaching and engaging with the hidden homeless population is difficult , as is estimating the scope and numbers of people involved. The team decided to connect to

the frontline workers who support these populations who are either not accessing the shelter system, or not staying in it for long, such as immigrant and refugee populations, as well as youth and students, especially international students. Yet, in terms of the totality of those who strive to remain invisible to the criminalization, police, bylaw and security enforcement or “move along” tactics, we have barely uncovered the tip of the ice-berg of individuals who have been stripped of their human and Charter rights through concerted systemic and institutional discrimination and deprivation. More seniors, youth and immigrants are coming to shelter doors, and we still do not do the obvious thing – build housing for them that they need and choose.

It is difficult to reach and provide supports to hidden homeless, due to the fact that the populations are marginalized to begin with, usually minors, students, victims of violence, justice involved, due to income insecurity, health, mental health, substance use and other factors that make it difficult to interact with the government, enforcement and service systems. They lack the capacity to stop the vicious cycles of homelessness, or to follow through the unrealistic expectations and requirements of the service systems, and fall back further behind into unsheltered homelessness.

As already stated, we tend to assume that hidden homeless individuals had to self-identify as homeless to be considered as such. However, through conversations with settlement workers and with international students it was revealed that many rarely think of themselves as being homeless. In addition, the word “homeless” itself does not have the same meaning for a range of ethno-cultural groups because the concept does not exist in their countries of origin. Communal cultural contexts are far more permissive of cohabitation in different forms, while co-dependence for shorter or longer periods of time is a norm when compared to the individualistic and privacy-focused North American context. Communal, mutually-involved, and spirituality-rich types of cohabitation are still dominant for certain immigrant communities, where they can have their family-privacy while at the same time accessing the immediate social groups and supports which are embedded in the physical space and buildings in which they live. This is especially apparent in the testimonies from refugees about refugee camps where similar configurations of dwellings would be clustered to allow for close relatives and families to live together amidst the broader ethnic and cultural mix.

In the last two years, Waterloo Region has witnessed extreme pressure to house thousands of government accepted refugees from both Afghanistan and Ukraine. Living in motels or overcrowded dwellings retraumatizes families and makes the experience unbearable despite the best efforts of the community memes and groups to provide for the basic necessities of life from food, hygiene to winter clothing. In the aftermath of loss fleeing conflicts and violence, they are stripped of their dignity, self-determination, and



choice experiencing a situation that gravely resembles refugee camps or living under siege.

Students are particularly vulnerable, even with accommodations there can be ten to fifteen people in a three room house; there is a roof over their heads, but it is difficult to adjust. Scams from landlords, paying for viewings, not knowing their rights all contribute to the student experience of hidden homelessness that leaves people limited, and confined to live precariously. Students experience difficulties with safe accommodations due to financial instability where the rising rents then lead to eviction. The school is a resource; Conestoga provides many supports, however, most of the students are unaware of the resources.

Our conclusion is that the definition of hidden homelessness does not necessarily include self-identification and needs to be looked at through a lens that includes lack of a lease in the person's name; repeated episodes of temporary accommodation; no financial means to secure housing; living in dwellings that are unsafe physically, psychologically, and emotionally; lack of knowledge about available supports or the means to follow through on accessing justice, housing or income support. The extent of undue harm, stress and lack of a sense of safety and security of life determines whether the person is homeless through this shared lived human experience.

## 9. Participatory Action Research

In the process of arriving at community conversations, Professor Laura Pin from Wilfrid Laurier University conducted two training sessions on participatory action research (PAR) where Lived Experts, Social Development Center staff, and Regional staff partook in discussions on equitable and community-led research methodologies. PAR-based “community conversations”, a give and take, feeling more like conversations than formal interviews. PAR became the framework for engaging with the community, developing the interviewing process, analyzing the conversations and writing this report. This centring of these perspectives helps to ensure community members' voices lead the conversation about finding solutions.

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### Using PAR

**Prototyping** (or piloting) – learning by doing, by testing out and assessing

To address homelessness in Waterloo Region...

1. What needs to be happening (but isn't)?
2. What is working and should be expanded?
3. What could be prototyped with the time and resources available?



During the training, Lived Experts noted the significance of power and ownership within traditional research methods. The histories and contextual components to which research operates is often harmful and extractive to marginalized communities, as well as lacking sufficient representation of community needs.

The community conversations were defined by the group as non-academic but academic-friendly (ethics clearance for this work was obtained through the University of Waterloo). Central to these conversations was being mindful of minimizing the harm to participants, such as remaining conscious of the potential re-telling of traumatic experiences. This was balanced with still needing to maintain some of the traditional

ways to collect demographic data, the ethics review by the university, or recording conversations to prevent loss of data. With the PAR-centred approach, honest and safe conversations between a Lived Expert and a community member were prioritized. After each conversation, there were debriefs, with opportunities to connect to the counsellor on the team, ensuring other personal supports were in place.

## 10. Cautionary Tales

**When considering prototyping and next steps in The Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, Lived Experts not only suggestions for how to improve the situation. They have also cautioned us about what NOT to do. These ideas vary in scope, responsibility and agency. Below are some of the most important things to avoid when developing a plan to end chronic homelessness:**

- Engaging the community and then something entirely different;
- Deny people basic needs (such as nutrition) and human rights;
- Hire third party security officers at sites such as encampments and other places unsheltered people congregate;
- Breaking up communities. An example of this would be creating rules that stipulate people can't have friends over in places such as shelters;
- Not involving the community;
- Tell people to fit into a recycling box;
- Charging and arresting homeless activists and advocates;
- Offer useless services and make people run around for supports;
- Impose different rules for different living places;
- Take away agency and choice.

## 11. Prototyping Steps

As per the ULab process, meaningful and intentional prototypes are developed through a five-step process that is centred and grounded in the voices of Lived Experts.

### **Step 1: Clarify Intention**

The intention of a prototype is its driving force! Prototyping begins when the intention has been clarified. This happens at the bottom of the U-process.

### **Step 2: Sense the System and Stakeholder Perspectives**

Explore the perspective of the users, stakeholders, and other persons who will be served by the prototype.

Step into their shoes. This is best done physically; for example, imagine that you are the customer. The longer and more concrete this exploration, the better. You might want to use the Stakeholder Interview or Learning Journey tools to develop these perspectives.

### **Step 3: Find Stillness**

Create a moment of stillness for yourself and for the team. Consider using practices of mindfulness, or simply sit in silence.

### **Step 4: Brainstorm**

After stillness, begin to brainstorm ideas. There are no limits on time or the number of ideas that can be generated! Again, the details of the brainstorming phase are determined by the project or idea.

Collect the ideas on cards or Post-It notes and arrange them on a board in front of you.

### **Step 5: Develop the Idea**

Now step from the brainstorming phase into a decision-making model. A good prototype is a microcosm of a world you are trying to create and is refined with awareness of the whole ecosystem.

### **As we develop Prototyping ideas, it is important to consider:**

**People:** Is the idea or project relevant to key stakeholders? Who needs to be included? Does the prototype leverage the strength of existing networks and communities?

**Timing:** Can you test your Prototyping idea quickly? You must be able to develop experiments right away, in order to have enough time to get feedback and adapt. What is feasible, practical, and useful for you to do?

**Scale:** Can you develop a small prototype at first and then scale it up? Can you experiment with your idea locally, and let the local context teach you how to get it right?

**Intervention:** Considering the ecosystem of your Prototyping idea:  
How does it address the root causes of the challenge, rather than just the symptoms?  
How does it deepen awareness of, and within, the ecosystem?  
How will it shift relationships in that system?

**Feedback:** How will you pay attention to messages from the “universe” along the way?

**Learning:** How will you harvest the learning and iterate your idea?

## 12. Themes and Prototypes

In this section, we discuss some key takeaways from our work. There were two inter-related parts to this work: the Core Group discussions and community conversations. The Core Group consisted of SDC staff, Lived Experts, Region of Waterloo staff and academic researchers (see appendix 1 for a list of Core Group members). The group met regularly throughout 2023. These discussions led to many key takeaway messages, policy recommendations and systematic changes that are essential to the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. From that, members of the core group also took part in 27 community conversations with people experiencing a variety of types of homelessness. In this section, we will discuss the main takeaways from this work, divided into key themes. For many themes and takeaways, we have included detailed quotes from our community conversations that help to illustrate key points, experiences and knowledge.

### 1. The SDCWR Lived Expertise Prototyping process - Allowing the System to See and Sense Itself

*“You cannot understand a system unless you change it. You cannot change a system unless you transform consciousness. You cannot transform consciousness unless you can make a system see and sense itself.” (Otto Scharmer, 2020)*

Our project created a space and a process to build mutual understanding, trust and capacity to work together with Lived Experts, frontline workers, advocates and RoW staff. We envision this as the first step towards initiate lasting and meaningful system transformation.

To do this, our work focused on creating a safe and equitable forum for the community to discuss, debate, and build consensus about future actions. While this was a standalone project, it was also firmly connected to other aspects of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness, including integration with the co-creators groups working towards the implementation of the Plan.

The community conversations and prototyping process itself was a project where Waterloo Region staff and Lived Experts could work together to co-initiate, co-sense, co-presencing, and co-creating through the U-Lab process.

#### **Some Core Group Takeaways:**

- That it is possible to take people from different backgrounds and lived experiences and work together to produce wisdom forged out differences;
- Systems don't change unless they see themselves and nurture the ability to see destructive patterns within;
- The importance of putting things in writing, rather than just talking. This is important for future discussions without our own community and so that others can revisit and gain knowledge from our learnings;
- Learning how to trust that I can move from one location to another to see dimensionality *and various perspectives* (greater awareness of presuppositions and assumptions)
- Different approaches are required with different people and different groups; taking the time to develop meaningful, respectful and trustworthy relationship allows for more honest and respectful conversations;
- Our emphasis was focused on how to talk about a social challenge and build around that with the conversations guided and led by Lived Experts, rather than pushing an agenda

## **2. Review and Change Bylaws & Risk-Management Processes - Decriminalizing Homelessness and Care for Unsheltered Communities**

This aspect of the project focused on opening up a conversation about the overall Regional bylaws, Regional land use, risk-management process, and standard operating procedures as they related to encampments. The aim was to set up and develop new parameters, guidance and recommendations on how to support community-led initiatives on Region-owned land.

### **Core Group Takeaways:**

- How do we get the Region to incorporate and implement a human rights approach to encampments? There is a need to create a structured and manageable starting point for review, then work our way through how the entirety of the housing system fits within this human rights framework.
- Focus is on developing a process that can then review the major pillars of the current housing system. An example of this would be working with community members to create a risk management framework within encampments.
- Bring together a team to define a Human Rights evaluation framework so Region of Waterloo staff have a concrete understanding of what a human rights based approach is.



- Prototyping projects should start small, and be manageable yet tangible so everyone has an idea of what they look like. Then these approaches can be built out throughout the system as long as regional staff open doors to be reviewed.
- Project needs to name and prioritize policies and procedures within region must apt for review (eg. what are the low hanging fruit and what are the critical points where change is urgently needed?)
- The Region of Waterloo has three rings of tools to be reviewed. 1. Policies and procedures within Housing Services 2. Policies and procedures in other departments that impact housing (ie. bylaw, public health), 3. Policies and procedures of partner institutions (ie. cities and agencies)
- This is about bylaws and standard operating procedures (SOPs) because they reinforce each other.

### **Takeaways from Community Conversations:**

- Review bylaws that prescribe infractions and fines/impact unhoused folks
- Review bylaws that dictate where people can and cannot sleep/camp

“They have bylaws that have to do with panhandling, I guess they could take that away. That would help, because a lot of us panhandle, and they can actually give us tickets and fines for doing it, yeah.” (Mid 30’s resident at A Better Tent City)

“I guess there’s a whole bunch of bylaws about where people can set up their encampment and stuff that makes it difficult. I’m sure you know ... there’s certain areas where they won’t let you put up campsites and stuff, like some of the people that don’t have cabins here [in A Better Tent City], they live in a tent all summer long. Well, they have to find a good place to stay, a place where they put their tents up, right, where the owner of the property doesn’t come and tell like you like this is my property or whatever.” (Mid 30’s resident at A Better Tent City)

“Well, yeah, for sure the bylaws, but that should be already figured out I think. You know what I mean? Because they should automatically be a part, they should be a team, they should work together with you, they already have it figured out. You shouldn’t have to apply for this and that because they’re right there beside you. They work together with you to make change. Well, they make it so hard for you to make change because all “you can’t do this. You can’t do that. You can’t stay here.” Just land that land, This land, right? They make everything a struggle. When you shouldn’t have to because they’re a part of the struggle too, because why would they make their life a struggle? Because it’s only going to make their life a struggle, right? You should be on the same team working together, right? You shouldn’t have to apply for this or that, because when you want to

do something, you should both talk about it and then OK, this is where we can do it right.” (Mid 40’s male with no current residence)

“I can buy cocaine for maybe \$100 an ounce. Now, by the time it gets here it’s \$3000 an ounce. So for me to support my habit it cost me \$3000 For an ounce. The government can easily go there and buy it for \$60-70 and \$50, And they can eliminate. Why would it cost that much when now it’s \$100 instead of \$3000. It would create a lot of less crime, big time, a lot of less deaths, you know, you know what I mean? Make it a whole a Lot cheaper.” (Mid 40’s male with no current residence)

### **3. Continuum of Care - Collaboration across the community and service providers in offering direct supports to unsheltered/hidden communities**

This section discusses a variety of different aspects that all fall under the theme of ‘continuum of care.’ These include system accountabilities regarding funding for lived experience and community peer workers who provide direct support, and the oversight and evaluation of implementation and impact of the Plan to End Chronic Homelessness through direct and meaningful lived experience involvement. An important aspect of this is holding service systems accountable to the Human Rights approach and the transfer of power to the community stakeholders to do this work. This involves supporting unsheltered individuals (including those experiencing hidden homeless) in working together with the Region to demonstrate the benefits of healing/restorative practices rooted in a holistic approach and human rights based on local evidence.

#### **Core Group Takeaways:**

- Continuum of care, from service providers, to peers, to friends
- How to collectively work together towards the same goals at all levels?
- Regional staff that are facilitating different working groups have a desire for stronger direction from the community advocates and need a stronger process to provide care to the sheltered populations
- Preparing for another winter is urgent again with agencies, community activists, and the Region to provide care and support
- Openness and uncertainty, yet willingness, in collaboration from the Region of Waterloo with community activist and partners

#### **Takeaways from Community Conversations:**

- Accessible resources for mental illness and substance use
- Shifting the collective understanding of homelessness within communities and care spaces

- Proper staff that have received the training and knowledge to work with the populations that they serve
- Accessible medical care for those without ID
- Access to supports at a centralized location
- Peers teaching each other and providing care based on a focus of strengths
- Inclusion of peer workers that have lived experience
- Introducing programs that are led by lived experts

“We all understand what it's like to be where we've been. We all understand what each other are going through and what it takes to be out there and how to try to support each other. We become like family out here.” (Mid 40's non-binary resident of A Better Tent City)

“A Better Tent City is working just to house the people. But that's pretty much all it's doing right now, just housing people, it's not actually working on actual problems. And the problem would be like drug addiction and mental disorders and whatnot. Something that should be worked on first is the drug addiction and the mental disorders and if they worked on that there won't be as much homelessness... Yeah with resources, because I'm sure there's resources here, but they don't really push resources, like mentioned here and there, but then to actually have someone come in and say, okay, here I'm here for you to talk to you or whatever. In private or whatever. I think that will work.” (Mid 40's university graduate residing at A Better Tent City)

“People's attitudes and people's idea of what homelessness is truly all about... They need to know that we're not lower than low. Like it could it could happen in a matter of seconds. That one day, you're going to your job, and the next day? You're homeless? And then what do you do? Yeah. I mean, that's what happened to me, like one day, I'm going to work and the next day, I'm like, Okay, now what, now I'm living in a tent in the forest. And I don't know what to do.” (Mid 40's university graduate residing at A Better Tent City)

“You know they need the right staff to properly to work with the people.” (Mid 30's male resident at A Better Tent City)

“[what] needs to change is more help like we have [at] the hospitals around, the hospital then that comes around. Which is great because I don't have ID and a lot of homeless people don't have ID. They get a lot of our stuff gets stolen overnight and they fall asleep and wake up and then every single moment it's gone. So that bus that comes around is good. I'm thinking more along the lines of another bus that offers help and tips

in the survival of nature, living in the woods.” (Mid 30’s college graduate currently living in a tent in Kitchener)

“I can barely walk. I’ll go to the wall, so I should be getting ODSP. I’m getting \$390.00 a month; they give you 2 bus passes. So I have to go to this place, to that place, to this place, everywhere. Everything’s go here. Go there. Go there. Go there. Go there, go there and [it] wears you out. Because you go here and here. Oh, I gotta get bus tickets and I go way back here and I now I ran out of time, so next day, always too late.

Everything should be in one place. Like when you need these things, it should be like a big huge building where you get your ID. You get this, everything’s [there]. You go to the doctor, everything is in the one building right. I find the Health Center downtown, I recently been going there and I find they have very good ideas and there it just feels right. Like they have the right plan I find.” (Mid 40’s male with no current residence)

“ I was never homeless. So it’s kind of new to me. And then it makes you change big time. It makes you lean towards a destructive life, kind of like resentment. Like you have something against them, like if no one’s going to help you, then you just help yourself. You find yourself doing thefts and stuff like that, like taking whatever you want. To you, it’s like it’s not even an issue, it’s like that’s how I got to help myself then, right? It’s like there’s no one, It’s just like you’re all alone. Right...” (Mid 40’s male with no current residence)

“... Like, that’s the way I look at it, but when you step up and do the right thing, you find a lot of people that follow by example. Right. So just no matter what people say, to show love, when you just ignore certain things, when you show love, kind of like a contagious thing. ... Or try new things. Take a walk down a different street sometimes right? Like instead of taking the same path, just try something new. It’s good to sit down and listen because you can’t teach till you learn at the same time some of us are hard learners.” (Mid 40’s male with no current residence)

“Like something with more showers and bathing, like bathing and laundry would be more adequate because there’s only the one place here to get showers right now. Over at Vineyard and laundries I’ve been hearing. And like extra food is the food bank or Vineyard. You get extra lunches and stuff from Trinity, but They only go so far, you can only eat the same ham sandwiches or something so many times in a week. Yeah, somewhere where There’d be another area for laundry and and being And would be good.” (Mid 40’s male residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

“Teach people. It’s like that whole philosophy. You give people fish, they eat for a day; you teach them how to fish, and it might have to be forced. If you have 100 mothers with one kid not working. I know there’s certain situations again. But you can take five of those mothers and take care of those 10 kids in a facility. We have lots of dead space. If

we're gonna blow all this money doing dumb stuff, why not have a government building? They love those. Put it in to where daycare with that five get taught how to better themselves in whatever form so we find out what are you good at? Instead of okay, you're a monkey, you're a fish and try to make the fish climb a tree? Well, it's a fish teach it to swim. Like, even if you're really messed up, I can guarantee you can talk. Maybe it's a matter of you talk to another mother or whatever. It was a similar problem. And guess what? but you don't keep dancing around the problems.” (Mid 40's male with college education currently residing in his truck)

“Like addictions support, OK, because at the encampment here at 150 [Main], OK, there's all drug users. OK, So what we really need is to have the drug abuse support system, OK? We need more counselors, more outreach workers, people that are offering, say, if we are able to get counseling to bring us to appointments or something like that, like a lot more resources because more information we're given and it's a lot easier for us to be able to access things, to be able to provide for our own selves and everything like that. So it's like yeah, more supports.” (Female Indigenous college graduate residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

“Ok with that, we would need somebody like an addictions worker to come out and talk, to have like a little picnic or something. You know, be like, ‘hey, come and talk, chill, whatever’. Right. And then they open up with how they became addicted to a substance, you know, talk about their [addiction]. Peer support is definitely needed out here, you know. And they're freely opening, sharing their information of how they became addictions worker because they [share] their struggles and everything, and how they affected them, their family and whatever else.” (Female Indigenous college graduate residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

#### **4. Utilize Land - Quicker Creation of Alternative Types of Housing**

The key takeaways about land are centred on opening space for Indigenous communities and the Six Nations to address the treaties that were not respected in the public realm, as well as making surplus public lands readily available for people to house themselves. This is especially important and timely as the lack of acceptable alternatives continues. Conversations about how legal and financial models have to change, and public lands sanctioned and repurposed to realize and respect of human rights. Charter rights to safety, security and life have to be ensured through self-determination of all, and public land (especially Region-owned sites) are essential to achieving this.

### **Core Group Takeaways:**

- The strategic plan named overall unlocking land as a goal for the Region
- Identify land that can be used for people constructed temporary or long term alternative housing
- Opening conversations about how legal and financial models have to change and public lands sanctioned to realize the respect of human rights.
- What does it look like to bring this process into corporate space that is ruled by secrecy and developers?
- Managing liabilities and risks associated with alternative types of housing
- Lived experts can build their own housing, fast, which is especially important for the winter
- Tents, tiny homes, cabin construction, sandbag houses
- Turning existing buildings into housing units

### **Takeaways from Community Conversations:**

- Unlocking land in the countryside of the Region
- Review/research into benefits and ways to create intentional communities on public land
- Safe and designated areas for people to set up tents or park their vehicles as an emergency sheltering option
- Homeless people building their own homes by their own hands

“Like more in the country, like the countryside, I think it brings a little more beauty. You can breathe easily or there's less noise, less traffic. Because I find sometimes, like your anxiety as well of your loneliness or what you're going through and then there's so much noise, so much going on, that's what's happening. There's so much going on, and so many people available and you're just your head's spinning, right? As soon as you see, break yourself free. Like I find the country where there's trees and trails and things like that. You and running water. It's just a totally different environment, right? And that's what we needed, I think. I know me personally that's what works for me. Sometimes I'll always just go, and that's where I find peace and that's where. That's where I cry. You know what I mean? Me, It's hard to say. Like kind of down by the Grand River, like in certain places along the Grand River. I think just away [from the city], but maybe like Blair Rd out towards Cambridge. Or north of Waterloo. Like see St. Jacobs there, or Elmira in those places I think it's a little more, but not right in the city, like on the outskirts right?” (Mid 40's male with no current residence)

“Well for camping-wise I guess it is more safe camping areas or more available areas to camp because people are camping everywhere now. If they're up in the area where

they're not [allowed], we're not supposed to be. I was asking to leave from there at that area so.” (Mid 40’s male residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

“Land.. Yeah, Like even if people were like, we would love to like look in the newspaper, or around the internet just for land, you know, like ten of us get there and say hey. Even getting a contract or get a loan or something for the rest of it right... Or, you know, farmland or something. Wouldn't be so damn dirty or bad. And clean needles, we need a clean site.” (Mid 30’s female residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

“Even it's like with my situation that I did if they had someplace where they couldn't get into a place right away that they could park; now we've all heard that would be helpful” (Mid 50’s male high school graduate residing in rent geared to income housing)

“Like the, it's like I'm not homeless enough for the region to be here and I'm a single, but they don't see the places are telling them it's not safe for her to be in these places. But they're still giving me a hard time about being here. I just need somewhere to park my car.” (Mid 30’s female residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

## **5. Intentional community pilot - Self-governance and greater diversity and involvement of communities during the housing crisis**

A key aim of the prototyping project is Demonstrating the viability of intentional communities, rooted in pre-existing relationships and alternative types of housing models. This requires support for intentional communities using a self-governance and a mutual-support model (e.g. visible and invisible ways of making money/bartering). Additionally, there needs to be collaboration with service providers and mutual-aid groups. Ensuring community justice approach model (e.g. People’s Tribunals as a form of restorative justice for creating intentional communities) means the intention is not to punish, but to fix). There is also a need to learn from other institutions regarding non-punitive approaches.

### **Core Group Takeaways:**

- Self-governed alternative housing must be implied as in the Tent City and other encampments
- The need for a research or review piece to learn about what is being done in other places, as well as what’s working elsewhere
- Support existing intentional communities, such as squat houses and safe houses
- Understanding what we need and what the barriers are, such as, city zoning bylaws in prohibiting what can be done

- People's Tribunals as a form of restorative justice for creating intentional communities

### **Takeaways from Community Conversations:**

- Incorporation of community, autonomy, and team building into each prototype
- Buy cheap or transform abandoned houses and turn them into rooming homes
- Unhoused can make their own housing and communities by using their skills and trades
- More communities that resemble ABTC (especially in Cambridge)
- Community integrated jobs for lived experts within it, such as cleaners, deliveries etc.
- Youth influence/ youth self-governing communities

“Like I said, I think I would try to scoop up as many houses out of the university area as I could, because I know that they're all bought up as cheap as they can buy them. They don't care what they look like when they buy them... So they, they scoop all these houses up, and then they charge people. At least two people per room. It's almost per wall, four in one room. 400 each, I would never do that. But that's just showing you how much of the potential is there when you take it away? Just you know, you've got all kinds of rooms in a house.”

“Honestly, more communities like this [A Better Tent City] run the same as this one though not like the new one [on Erbs Road] ... Just people who have been out on the streets like us, we are used to not so much conformity and having that many rules and being out in the middle of nowhere like that makes it really difficult for people like us, they can't even have friends visit, that just feels ridiculous for someone like us. Because we don't have actual family most of us, we have friends, our friends are our family.” (Mid 40's non-binary resident of A Better Tent City)

“I would say, end the stigma against homelessness and that we're not all just like, thieves and criminals and whatnot. And there's tons and tons of abandoned homes; when you switch up the homes to boarding houses for homeless people. Have more like more A Better Tent Cities.” (Mid 40's university graduate residing at A Better Tent City)

“My boyfriend and I went out one night and we counted how many abandoned houses there was. ... we literally went down every side street everything and there's 497 abandoned houses in Kitchener-Waterloo (a few years ago) that they can turn into boarding houses if they really wanted to...” (Mid 40's university graduate residing at A Better Tent City)



“I would take one of those big factories and turn it into one great big apartment building and have it for the homeless and have resources there for the mentally ill and for drug addiction and for every other every other aspect and help the relationships that are there and help people get their kids back and stuff again. Have a place for them to bring their children that is safe.” (Mid 40’s university graduate residing at A Better Tent City)

“It would be like getting houses and a nice place that we can take care of it. And it's like, going to rent a place. Yeah and you're not worried about someone stealing your shit and all that. I mean, they're not rules but if you don't come to two days, you can't lose your spot. If you want to go away for a month or so, it's up to you, family vacation, whatever.” (Mid 40’s Black male residing at A Better Tent City)

“I guess more of these encampments and getting more of these encampments like this. We like more tiny homes. That would probably be the best way, if they found a way to get everybody one of these small homes. Because technically, once you have one of these homes like, you're not really homeless, right? So. Yeah, like they did at Erb right. How they built another one together, you know, they should do that again. Once those 50 are full, if we still have more homelessness, then you build one more, another 50, right? And then see if eventually everybody comes around that one right and if that one goes up. You don't quit, Keep going.” (Mid 30’s male resident at A Better Tent City)

“I need that, I made it my home. We made it our home and, and that was our home. And it didn't have the traditional walls and a roof like that. It wasn't not a lock, it per say, but we didn't we locked her, too. We had locks on her tent, so it's not so much. It's more for this shows that it belongs to somebody.” (Mid 40’s female residing in rent geared to income housing in Kitchener)

“Maybe I didn't want anyone to take him away (the pet), but they knew he was well taken care of and very warm in the winter. He got seasonal Affective disorder really early that year. Because when you insulate your tent. Yeah, it's darker, darker and darker. I've never been, I'm not the poster girl for being neat and tidy until urban. I don't even know somebody called like glamping. It's not glamping, it's, I call it urban camping. There you have to bend the rules, not everything. We're camping, people. We grew up camping. We do things a little differently, we hung our stuff in the tree. Not because of bears, because of chipmunks and squirrels. Squirrel that was after bread, just bread. He actually broke into her tent and stole one bun. And that's when we started hanging everything out.” (Mid 40’s female residing in rent geared to income housing in Kitchener)

“And that’s it, some of these youth they were involved in helping set it up. They can help us figure out, the one kid is at my house, he’s the best enforcer. He knows how to keep all the others in line and not necessarily with violence. Maybe a little violence, but not much. They know how to handle each other. And so you know, they I mean, they, if they were heavily involved and could actually be trusted with people they trusted.” (Mid 40’s Indigenous female residing at a homeless safe house)

“Using the buildings that are unused around, no one has lived in for however many [years], however long, like redoing homes that are kind of not even used anymore, and reconstructing them to be homes for people that need a place to live, or like that one show on TV that’s like a do it yourself thing... But not flipping them, but like actually just any properties that are not used, or houses that are boarded up and shut down, or something, or businesses that aren’t even rented out or something. Any space that’s not used by anyone. Those pieces are used for community places are actually for apartments for people to live in to make some input to them for homelessness.” (Mid 20’s female)

“Me personally, I would. I would definitely make sure they had a place where they had heat and they had hydro and running water. I think that’s the free necessities. Yeah, but I think building community brings a lot of bonding to where they get involved with the leaders to build their own, where they learn at same time, right. It creates like a bonding, right? You learn how to bond as a team. And the sky is the limit. In the end you might end up being really good at what you do and you might start a company or you go further, right?” (Mid 40’s male with no current residence)

“Gotta get homes, apartments, or a place to live. You know, this is the biggest thing. And I mean people got kids and stuff they got nowhere to go and the price at home, the price has to go livable because people that are older, and the price is going up. You only have so much. You can’t get that. You know, you got the one that they have for old people. They offer 300 bucks a month. Can’t people that are on that help them, something to do and maybe a job in their apartment? So this guy is a cleaner, this guys you know this that and that and he cleans up so it pays the bills for them.” (Mid 40’s black male residing at 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

“That’s where you’d have to do like they did. Or buy one of those hotels that are closed up and rent, you know. But then you know, that’s an insurance thing and there’s a whole lot of paperwork to go with that crap. Yeah, that’s the only way you could get people out of the tents. But then you know, some people like the tent, yeah. They got their own freedom. They got their own choices, you know, they can do as they wish. Come and go as they wish. Whereas you know some places that might be getting set up for people,

rules and regulations, nobody over, you know, like over at Erb. I hear there's no outside guests, or it's just that and stuff like that, where if they had their own space, they could have guests over and everything.” (Mid 40’s male residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

“The little houses to be built down the way they were designed... No, my idea was portable style. Have two or three, even four and have a little village and then the kitchen and bathroom like shower off the side” (Mid 30’s female residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

“The only success I can see from a transition place is having somewhere where they will actually go on their own terms, where there is counseling. Then again also you can have the counseling, but with the homeless really you can’t shove it down their throat, it has to be there.” (Mid 50’s male high school graduate residing in rent geared to income housing)

“Yeah. Well, instead of that little space out in the open, what happens if you put a big apartment building to 100 little homes you know, 10 times more because they only go up this high, right. So if you build levels, you can do a little one bedroom that has adequate [space] but then it's easy to monitor. That would have fixed the problem” (Mid 40’s male with college education currently residing in his truck)

“Try getting like the Erbs Rd there. Get us little tiny homes down here [in Cambridge] where, I don't know why they only secluded it up to that area where they should have been. OK, this is tri-cities. You know Waterloo, Kitchener and then Cambridge, right. Why didn't they build some pods for down here first when they were opening up Erbs? You know, like, if we had the little homes here, I think it would be a lot cleaner outside.” (Female Indigenous college graduate residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

“Like we all have trades outside. We have a tool and die operator, we have a mechanic. We have an architect. We could all work together, we have electricians out there too; if we worked all together we could build a house.” (Female Indigenous college graduate residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

“It's just disgraceful that these people can sit in their houses and have something to say and complain about people that are actually being housed in tents with the Region’s dollars. We have warehouses upon warehouses that are empty, that could be used. The region could be taking funds out of the stupid things like the Pride Walk has to be painted three times, like \$10,000 for spray paint. Like, come on that Craig's bridge,

that's already looks like shit after a year. The money that we waste in this city is disgusting, for councils and mayors and they're [buying a] fancy new \$150,000 or \$250,000 living wall that they're putting all over City Hall now that they're investing in it. That's absolutely disgusting when \$250,000 could go a long way for people that are living in like; there is hundreds of people around the city living in their cars.“ (Mid 30's female residing at the 150 Main Encampment in Cambridge)

## 13. Conclusion

In order for any plan to end chronic homelessness to succeed, it must be led and informed by community members who have direct experience with homelessness. This is about planning with communities, not for, or about communities. The knowledge of those with Lived and Living Experience needs to be centred in the entire implementation process of the Region of Waterloo's Plan to End Chronic Homelessness through a community-wide governance structure, which will advise on strategy and priorities, focusing first on co-designing "coordinated" services, the housing supports continuum, and community-based support for encampments.

The expertise and insight of Frontline Workers also need to be centred, with the strong acknowledgement that a COMMUNITIES-centred system (here we mean the unsheltered self-determined communities) must focus on both those we are trying to help and those that are doing the critical work every day.

This means that frontline workers will be engaged as full participants on the implementation tables and funding should be provided for agencies that need to backfill with relief staff to make this possible. There will also be a workforce development implementation table to determine the best way to meaningfully prepare, train and engage frontline workers in an ongoing way and address the creation of the Continuum of Care from peers, to friends, mutual-aid groups and front line service providers.

The Continuum of Care Prototype (including Human Rights Approach to land use, bylaws, policies and frameworks group, the Mutual-Aid and Frontline Worker Care group, and Intentional Communities group) will co-design a strategy for supporting encampment communities and ensure recognition and advocacy about encampments being a part of many people's housing journey. The Prototype will develop principles and actions for coordinated outreach and supports to those in encampments, and how they interact with "coordinated" services and the SM.

### **Deliverables and recommendations**

The deliverables recommendations identified in this section are based on initial understandings of scope at the outset of the Plan development; they may be refined as the Implementation Table conducts its work. These deliverables and recommendations include:

- Develop an endorsed encampment management strategy:

- Engage and centre people with lived and living experience in the development of this strategy. To succeed, this should be done in ways that work for them, based on their needs and perspectives, and related to encampments through the Prototyping Process and Co-Creator Process
- Ensure endorsement and sanctioning of encampments by the Region (and other municipalities subsequently due to the ruling at 100 Victoria, and Region Code of Conduct Bylaw 2024)
- Aggregate existing practices from organizations and individuals serving encampments to identify gaps, duplications, and opportunities
- Conduct scan of good practices for encampments in other communities including the Lived Expertise Working Group (SDCWR) work and the Human Rights Applications prototype group with the SDCWR Lived Experience Prototyping Project. These best practices should inform the development of a local encampment management strategy
- Identify core principles and scope of an integrated encampment strategy rooted in lived experience models (Response to Drug Crisis and Homelessness)
- Identify how an encampment strategy aligns with the broader System Response
- Develop coordinated outreach approach / continuum of care and funding sources from broader range of partners (including the foundations, public and financial institutions and the business community)

### **Develop an implementation plan**

- Create training and resource for organizations, groups and individuals serving encampments based on the local learnings during the Prototyping Process, as well as informed by current and previous experiences of lived experts, frontline workers and mutual-aid groups (both the organizations conducting coordinated outreach and community outreach)
- Set up coordination of information, people and resources for the implementation across the continuum of care composed of prototype encampment residents in Kitchener and Cambridge, activists, frontline workers, agencies and Region staff

- Secure funding for the creation of a prototype encampment based around the ideas of Intentional Communities (dedicated lands, waste management, water and electricity, emergency access and protocols, food and clothing distribution, etc.)
- Identify and engage living experience facilitators in two prototype communities (comprised of smaller groups of both residents using and not using substances).
- Employ and dedicate frontline workers to the two prototype communities and coordination of health, safe consumption, communications, identification papers, etc. agency supports
- Employ and resource mutual-aid coordinators in two cities
- Support and engage residents in prototype communities to take on the roles of self-governance, shelter set up and construction, garbage collection, pest and rodent control, safety and substance use /drug trafficking, sex trafficking, warming and community supported activities.
- Monitor and adapt response as required

## Appendix 1 – Core Group Members

### LIVED EXPERTS

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### REGION OF WATERLOO STAFF

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