



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	WARDEN AND LAMBTON COUNTY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT:	HOUSING SERVICES HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES ONTARIO WORKS
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MEETING DATE:	October 2, 2024
INFORMATION ITEM:	Homelessness Prevention and Affordable Housing Update

BACKGROUND

At its meeting dated April 3, 2024, Lambton County Council asked that staff *provide brief monthly updates on its affordable housing projects and homelessness prevention efforts within the community.*

As the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (“**CMSM**”), the Social Services Division is responsible for the delivery of homelessness prevention services as well as housing services.

This report is an update on the current state of each program area.

DISCUSSION

Ontario Works

Ontario Works (“**OW**”) provides financial assistance to those in financial need including emergency assistance to individuals and families at risk of becoming homeless. Financial assistance is provided to assist with living expenses including food, rent and utilities. OW is often the first point of contact for someone who is at risk of becoming homeless and in addition to financial support, action plans are developed, and referrals are made to prevent homelessness. This plan may include housing applications, childcare applications, life stabilization supports and employment readiness activities. Hundreds of households receive these supports monthly.

For the month of August 2024, the OW caseload was 3,058. This represents a small increase over the July 2024 caseload and a 4.8% increase over August 2023. During the same time frame, the number of OW emergency applications received were 81. In addition to this, 106 households were supported through the Housing Stability Assistance benefit. This includes households in receipt of OW, Ontario Disability Support Program (“ODSP”), low-income families not in receipt of social assistance and seniors. OW data is extracted from the provincial database called the Social Assistance Management System (“SAMS”).

Housing Services

The Housing Advocacy Program is an eviction prevention program. Community Support Workers (“CSWs”) within this program provide outreach and supports to tenants and their families by advocating on behalf of tenants to improve their quality of life while maintaining their housing. The CSWs have caseloads that consist of many hard to serve individuals with complex needs.

During the month of August:

- 118 unique tenants were assisted to maintain their tenancy.
- 240 visits/contacts were made.
- 14 evictions were prevented.
- 7 applicants were housed from the centralized housing wait list.
- 45 applications were received for the centralized wait list.
- 916 households remain on the centralized wait list.
- 48 months is the average wait time on the list for a one-bedroom unit.
- 4 Lambton Renovates conditional letters of approval were issued.
- 2 Home Ownership conditional letters of approval were issued.

Kathleen Avenue Development

Pre-development work is progressing on Kathleen Ave. A completed zoning application has been submitted for this property and staff are awaiting information regarding the timing of the public meeting. Staff will be holding a public information session on October 8, 2024 to share information on the development with the neighbourhood.

Victoria Street Parking Lot

After receiving Council approval on June 5, 2024, staff reached out to City of Sarnia staff to discuss the amount of the site the City would like to retain for use as public parking. A proposed draft Option Agreement was also presented to City staff. Once the portion of the parking lot to be donated is determined by the City, the Options Agreement can be finalized and staff will return to Council for final instructions and directions on the proposed options agreement.

By-Name-List

The By-Name List (“**BNL**”) is a comprehensive, real-time list of every known and consenting individual experiencing homelessness. This number includes individuals experiencing absolute homelessness (i.e. living rough) as well as individuals or families without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring housing. As of August 31, there were 321 individuals on the BNL. This represents an increase of two individuals or 0.6%. There were 210 individuals who were experiencing chronic homelessness, which represents an increase of three individuals. Chronic homelessness refers to individuals who are currently experiencing homelessness and have a total of at least six months of homelessness over the past year.

Integrated Homelessness Prevention Team

The County’s integrated homelessness team contains CSWs that serve as either Intensive Housing Case Managers or Rapid Rehousing Workers. Intensive Housing Case Managers support lower caseloads of households that are experiencing chronic homelessness, often facing concurrent complex mental health and addictions challenges, to secure and retain permanent housing.

Rapid Rehousing Workers support larger caseloads of households that are newly or episodically experiencing homelessness, to retain or quickly resecure permanent housing. Both forms of CSW offer life stabilization supports, and work in close partnership with several local multidisciplinary teams to ensure the health and social needs of these households are supported.

During the month of August:

- 181 unique individuals received services from a CSW.
- 473 visits/contacts were made.
- 8 individuals/families were moved into more permanent housing.
- 5 rent supplements were approved to assist individuals move into more permanent housing.

Community Outreach Workers

The Community Outreach Workers provide assertive community outreach to households experiencing homelessness. The team’s efforts are primarily directed toward individuals that are experiencing absolute homelessness. The housing case management provided through this team is brought to households experiencing homelessness, wherever they are, and is often delivered outside. Assistance is concentrated on progressing the household along the housing continuum for long-term success. While addressing the basic needs of this vulnerable population is a vital component of the service, the primary goals of engagement are housing centric. Tools for engagement are commonly used to meet immediate needs including food security, temporary shelter, hygiene, health, and sanitation.

During the month of August:

- 64 unique individuals were served.
- 85 contacts/visits were made.
- 1 individual moved from the street to more permanent housing (some individuals may have entered the shelter system for several nights).
- 74% of the above-noted contacts took place at or were related to Rainbow Park, in the City of Sarnia.
- 12 successful referrals to external services were made.
- 14 coordinated visits with partner outreach teams occurred.

Top three reasons 64 individuals provided for sleeping rough:

Reason for sleeping rough	Proportion
Chose not to stay in shelter, personal relationships	20%
Chose not to stay in shelter, substance use	28%
Chose not to stay in shelter, mental health	22%

Emergency Shelter Capacity.

The County provides funding to the Inn of the Good Shepherd to operate the following shelter services:

- The Good Shepherd's Lodge – 35 beds. 83.9% occupancy during August.
- Out of the Cold Program – 28 temporary beds. 75.10% occupancy during August.
- Haven Youth Shelter – 9 beds. 32.3% occupancy during August.
- Overall system occupancy for the month of August was 73.9%.

In addition to the above, the County has secured additional beds through local motels and hotels to provide greater capacity and flexibility within the emergency shelter system, should the need arise. There are several families experiencing homelessness presently placed within motels. Due to staffing challenges, the Inn of the Good Shepherd has not been able to fully staff the Out of the Cold overflow shelter and as a result County Social Services staff have been operating the program.

The overall emergency shelter system is operating at 74% capacity and will remain open due to the situation at Rainbow Park and in preparation for the winter weather.

The emergency shelter system aims to be responsive to the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness with the provision of necessary social supports and the County Social Services' team will continue to monitor and evaluate these supports. All individuals seeking assistance have their needs assessed and reasonably accommodated. This includes, among other accommodations, couples and families, as

well as individuals experiencing homelessness who own a pet. The additional beds secured through local motels and hotels are used for various reasons, which may include couples wanting to stay together, families and individuals with special requirements. Every situation is evaluated individually. Moreover, all reasonable efforts are made to find accommodation for the pet, either at the Sarnia District Humane Society or a private kennel.

As noted above, based upon our engagement with individuals living rough, those choosing to not attend shelter spaces is not because of an accessibility barrier, but rather because of external factors influencing their decisions, like substance use or mental health.

Landlord Engagement Worker

The County Integrated Homelessness team contains a landlord engagement support worker role. This position focuses on directly engaging local property managers and landlords for the purposes of strengthening communication and cooperation related to households supported by case managers. This work better enables mediation to maintain existing tenancies and securing private market rental opportunities for housing case managers.

During the month of August:

- 52 landlords were engaged.
- 15 tenancy concerns were addressed.
- 4 apartment units were viewed with individuals experiencing homelessness.

The total number of unique individuals experiencing homelessness that progressed into more permanent housing with assistance from the integrated homelessness prevention team during the month of August was 13.

Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre

- 112 unique individuals were provided supports at the centre.
- 540 visits were made to the centre.
- 70 referrals were made to support services and community partners.

During the month of August referrals included but are not limited to, Canadian Mental Health Association, Community Legal Assistance Services, assisting with ODSP and OW issues, connecting clients with their doctors and setting up telephone and virtual appointments, meeting with clients and possible landlords, referrals to Bluewater Health mental health and addictions services, calling The Lodge for beds (male and female), assisting client with reconnection of hydro, assisting with income tax preparation, and connecting with IMPACT for wellness checks on clients that have not been seen or staff have concerns about, and referrals to the County's CHIC team for medical and health related concerns.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

CONSULTATIONS

Not applicable.

STRATEGIC PLAN

The activities of the Division support the Community Development Area of Effort #3 in the County of Lambton's Strategic Plan, specifically:

- Strengthening the County's advocacy and lobbying efforts with other levels of government to raise the profile of the County and its needs to secure improved senior government supports, funding, grants, and other resources to meet emerging infrastructure and service needs;
- Consulting with the community and stakeholders on ways to increase housing options and affordability, and innovative programs and initiatives that focus on poverty reduction and promote social belonging;
- Supporting the development of a variety of affordable housing to meet demand;
- Implementing, monitoring and updating community health and wellness-related plans and priorities, including, but not limited to, the *Housing and Homelessness Plan*, *Community Safety & Well-Being Plan*, the Long-Term Care division's mission, vision, and values, *Age Friendly Community Planning* framework, Lambton Public Health's strategic priorities, *Lambton Drug & Alcohol Strategy*, *Lambton EMS Master Plan*, and *Child Care and Early Years 5-Year Service System Plan*; and
- Advocating for, and supporting access to, mental health and addiction services.

CONCLUSION

This report provides a snapshot of the work the three Departments within the Social Services Division delivered through an integrated program delivery approach. It includes the outputs and outcomes of each program. It does not include the longer-term systems related to planning occurring within the Division and with community partners on an ongoing basis to address the underlying issues of homelessness.