



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

REPORT TO:	CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS
DEPARTMENT:	HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES
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MEETING DATE:	April 17, 2024
INFORMATION ITEM:	Out of the Cold Shelter Program

BACKGROUND

In October 2023, Lambton County Council received a report which provided an overview of emergency housing in Lambton County, including the re-opening of the Out of the Cold Shelter Program. In January 2024, Lambton County Council received a report which provided an update on several key initiatives within homelessness prevention. These reports described the continued elevated demand for a broad range of preventative and downstream emergency services, despite tremendous housing outcomes across the network of community providers that support individuals experiencing homelessness.

This report seeks to provide Council with an update related to the gradual closure of the Out of the Cold Shelter Program in April 2024.

DISCUSSION

Households experiencing unsheltered homelessness are at a significantly elevated risk for harmful outcomes during the cold months. Despite the necessary prioritization of preventative and upstream solutions to address homelessness, this elevated risk and the drastically increased demand for emergency housing solutions necessitated the reintroduction of a congregate care overflow shelter in the Fall of 2023.

In October 2023, the Out of the Cold overflow shelter was opened at the former Laurel-Lea St. Matthews Presbyterian Church to create additional emergency housing spaces for individuals experiencing homelessness. The site and its operations were led by the Inn of the Good Shepherd, with close support from the County of Lambton's Social Services Division. There were 28 overnight beds made available for single adult males. These spaces were in addition to the permanent emergency housing spaces offered through the

Inn of the Good Shepherd at the Good Shepherd's Lodge and The Haven. If at any time demand exceeded the available emergency housing locations, additional beds were made available to temporarily expand the capacity of the program.

The Inn of the Good Shepherd has stretched its staffing compliment significantly, in addition to substantial staffing support from the County of Lambton and third-party security services to meet the needs of this program.

Now into early Spring, the proportion of beds utilized has, and is expected to decline over time. Since the opening of the program, on average, 73% of available shelter bed nights have been used. During the month of April to date an average of 10 beds a night were utilized. This includes beds that are held for admitted clients who do not present to use their space. There are spaces available for anyone who wished to access a bed unless an individual is restricted from the program due to their behaviours. With concurrently open and available beds at both The Good Shepherd's Lodge and The Haven, there is an opportunity to consolidate these programs through the closure of the Out of the Cold shelter.

During late March and early April 2024, individuals staying at the Out of the Cold overflow program will be gradually offered shelter beds at The Good Shepherd's Lodge. Over this period, the goal will be to offer emergency housing accommodations to every individual that is currently supported in the program. As shared in previous reports to Council, individuals choose not to access available shelter beds for various reasons, including substance use, mental health, and personal relationships. The proportion of individuals that choose to live unsheltered will unavoidably increase in the warmer months. When this occurs, community outreach is available to offer mobile housing case management and relevant referrals to those experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

At the time of authoring this report, there have been 100 unique individuals that have accessed the Out of the Cold program, for a total of more than 3,300 bed nights utilized. On average, the nights stayed at the Out of the Cold program is approximately 14. During this period, there have also been more than 560 instances of diversion services offered to households seeking shelter. Further, across the duration of the program there have been nearly 90 unique individuals experiencing homelessness that have been progressed into more permanent housing across all partner programs, accounting for nearly 50 households. This tremendous impact is a shared success between many community partner agencies.

The co-located Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre ("**HHRC**") will continue to operate at the site beyond the closure of the Out of the Cold overflow program. The HHRC focuses on progressing households along the housing continuum with dedicated expert housing case managers. It also serves as a low-barrier access point to offer multidisciplinary supports from a broad range of community partners including Lambton Public Health, Canadian Mental Health Association, the North Lambton Community Health Centre and more. The HHRC serves any individual that is experiencing homelessness, but is primarily targeted toward the most vulnerable, often those living unsheltered. By

creating an accessible location with various on-site supports, individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness can better meet their basic needs, reduce potential harm associated with substance use, and make progress towards more permanent housing solutions. Promotion of the HHRC is offered through all social service community partners, with particular focus by outreach teams to those currently living in encampments. This multidisciplinary approach is necessary to address the most complex cases and small minority of households experiencing homelessness that are chronically unsheltered. The County Community Outreach team offers support related to housing case management, harm reduction and social service agency referrals. While this team operates in close partnership with distinct programs including Sarnia Police Service IMPACT, the County of Lambton homelessness outreach team does not have the mandate to offer interventions related to park maintenance or by-law enforcement.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no financial impact on the County of Lambton Budget as a result of this report.

CONSULTATIONS

Consultations have taken place with members of the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee, the Lambton County Community Advisory Board, the General Manager of Social Services, internal Social Services Division staff, and numerous social service agencies in the community.

STRATEGIC PLAN

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

- Advocating in a manner that raises the profile of the County and its needs in order to secure improved government supports, funding, grants, and other resources.
- Developing programs and initiatives that address poverty reduction and promote social belonging.
- Planning for and responding to the ever-changing needs of an aging population, homelessness and retaining young people in the community while supporting their transition to being employed community members and future leaders.
- Actively pursuing joint opportunities with community partners that contribute to the well-being of the Lambton Community.

CONCLUSION

The demand for emergency housing is expected to gradually decrease into Spring and Summer. The temporary congregate care Out of the Cold shelter program will be phased

out across March and April. Staff will continue to monitor shelter usage and work with the Inn of the Good Shepherd to ensure beds are made available for those wanting to access the emergency shelter program. Overall, our community continues to see significantly elevated rates of homelessness that exceeds local collective capacity to progress individuals into permanent housing. Low barrier services such as the Housing and Homelessness Resource Centre and mobile community outreach seek to support the needs of individuals that choose not to access available emergency housing solutions.

Appendix

Helping someone who may be experiencing homelessness in Lambton County



If you or someone you know are currently experiencing homelessness and need immediate assistance, please follow the QR code below.



<https://www.lambtononline.ca/en/resident-services/emergency-assistance.aspx>

Homelessness Prevention Website Pages

 	Addressing Homelessness
 	By-Name List and Coordinated Access
 	Community Supports
 	Data Dashboard
 	Reports
 	Community Outreach
 	Housing & Homelessness Resource Center