



SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

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| REPORT TO: | CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS |
| DEPARTMENT: | HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES |
| PREPARED BY: | Melissa Fitzpatrick, Manager Ian Hanney, Supervisor |
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| MEETING DATE: | January 18, 2023 |
| INFORMATION ITEM: | Homelessness Prevention Update |

BACKGROUND

On October 19, 2022 Council received an Information Report which provided an update on the most recent local efforts to address the growing need for housing and homelessness supports. This report provides further updates concerning local homelessness prevention data and solutions.

The October Information Report sought to convey how the scarcity of affordable housing, stagnant social assistance rates, continuing opioid crisis and untreated mental health concerns of many individuals accessing social services are contributing to a drastically elevated strain on local capacity to address housing precarity and homelessness. Further, this report described the various novel cross-sectoral and interagency initiatives to address this crisis, including the use of a local By-Name List to increase equity and efficiency of local service, the introduction of Community Outreach staff, the expansion of youth-dedicated services, and an increase in dedicated Community Support Workers to support Housing Services Department case management capacity.

Following the Provincial direction of ensuring shelter and safety of households at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lambton County temporarily expanded local emergency housing capacity. As the emergency Provincial funds used for this expansion were scaled back, a temporary congregate care site located at 220 George Street was utilized to offer a more affordable temporary emergency housing solution and to provide better on-site supports directly to clients through a collaborative network of homelessness service providers.

Since the closure of this temporary congregate care site in the spring of 2022, the dramatically elevated rates of households experiencing homelessness persists and has continued to rise. At the time of this report, there are over 220 individuals actively

experiencing homelessness in Lambton County, with more than 70 who have been identified as sleeping rough at some point in the last three months. Across this same three-month period, there have been more than 50 newly identified individuals that have utilized either emergency housing or outreach services. Despite tremendous success with moving individuals to permanent housing, among County and community partner agency staff, this rate of increase outpaces the rate at which households experiencing homelessness are assisted into more permanent housing. Further, as existing and newly identified households continue to experience homelessness they will age into chronic homelessness. Strong evidence exists connecting experiences of chronic homelessness to various detrimental social and health outcomes.

DISCUSSION

Preventing and Ending Homelessness

As described in the October Information Report, emergency housing solutions are costly and temporary compared to both permanent and upstream services that can more quickly resolve or even prevent an experience of homelessness. The Housing and Homelessness Plan 2020 – 2024 identifies various goals that seek to promote this shift from reliance on emergency supports to long term and prevention solutions.

One such prevention solution introduced under this plan is homelessness diversion, wherein households at imminent risk of homelessness are supported to find safe, suitable alternate arrangements to emergency housing. Avoiding shelter stays can reduce harm and trauma. Evidence exists demonstrating those who enter shelter have longer experiences of homelessness than those that are diverted.

The Plan further describes the need for solutions to follow a Housing First model, in which households experiencing homelessness are connected to permanent housing and appropriate wrap-around services without any preconditions or readiness criteria. Increases in local capacity to offer housing case management, in addition to the use of the locally developed short-term rent supplement known as the Rental Assistance Program (RAP), have contributed greatly to progressing households along the housing continuum while following the Housing First model. Refer to **Appendix A** for a recent example client story of this work.

Since March of 2020, local novel homelessness solutions have resulted in the following assistance:

- Individuals have been successfully diverted from entering emergency housing in over 550 instances.
- Nearly 1,300 unique individuals have utilized emergency housing solutions.
- 361 unique individuals experiencing homelessness have progressed into more permanent housing.
- 384 total unique individuals have been supported through RAP.

- 120 unique households have been assisted through RAP to secure new accommodations.
- 102 unique households have been supported through RAP to maintain existing at-risk accommodations.

Community Outreach

There remains a drastically elevated number of households experiencing street-level homelessness in Lambton County. Community Outreach staff, as part of the Social Services Division Homelessness Prevention team, continue to work closely with households sleeping rough to provide assertive community outreach. Households are offered common intake and assessments, supported with document readiness, and assisted with all elements of housing case management. In addition, multi-disciplinary efforts are being conducted with partner agencies such as Lambton Public Health and North Lambton Community Health Centre to ensure households are better connected to primary care services and harm reduction supports.

There has been a slow decline in the number of unique individuals identified to be sleeping rough month-to-month since September. However, there have been more than 70 unique individuals found to have been living rough at some point across the past three months. This represents a severe increase from previous years. In total, since the Community Outreach roles commenced in July, there have been over 115 unique individuals that have declared they experienced street-level homelessness at some point.

The following charts sets out the primary reasons cited for sleeping rough in November following discussions with impacted individuals:

| Reason for sleeping rough | Proportion |
|--|------------|
| No available shelter beds | 17% |
| On service restriction from emergency housing | 22% |
| Unaware of emergency housing options | 0% |
| Chose not to stay in shelter, safety | 0% |
| Chose not to stay in shelter, personal relationships | 6% |
| Chose not to stay in shelter, substance use | 26% |
| Chose not to stay in shelter, mental health | 28% |
| Unknown/Declined to answer | 2% |

Out of the Cold Program

Despite the necessity to change available local service provision away from emergency services, rates of homelessness and the consequent need for emergency services continue to rise. Therefore, emergency housing solutions must be offered to meet these elevated needs concurrently with this essential planned shift towards prevention. In particular, households sleeping rough face a significantly increased risk for harm during

the colder months. Accordingly, offering temporarily expanded emergency housing solutions is most vital during this time.

To address these needs, Lambton County Social Services Division is partnering with the Inn of the Good Shepherd to offer a temporary Out of the Cold congregate care site that will offer shelter up to approximately 28 men. This site will be operated and overseen by the Inn of the Good Shepherd but supported closely by the County Social Services Division. County staff will offer on-site intensive case management and rapid re-housing services, and local service providers with specialized expertise will be leveraged for additional on-site supports. Social Services staff are working with the City of Sarnia to obtain necessary approvals for occupancy. Once approval is obtained, formal communication related to the location as well as other program details will be shared with County Council and the public.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no financial impact on the County Budget because of this report.

CONSULTATIONS

Consultations have taken place with members of the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee, the Executive Director for Inn of the Good Shepherd, the General Manager of Social Services, internal Social Services Division staff, and numerous social services 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 County of Lambton continues to invest in upstream solutions to address homelessness, including prevention, wrap-around supports, and the creation of affordable

housing. The significant increase in households experiencing housing precarity or homelessness requires a temporary Out of the Cold emergency site to operate over the cold months to meet the immediate shelter demands of households sleeping rough. Concurrently, our local efforts continue to shift towards evidence-informed, prevention-focused solutions as outlined in the Housing and Homelessness Plan. To address the increased scale of this issue locally, a cross-sectoral approach in addition to significant investment from upper levels of government are necessary to affect the primary barrier of scarce affordable housing.

APPENDIX A

Example Client Story

After an abusive relationship breakdown, a single mother of four children ranging from ages five to 15 found herself residing in a rental unit containing mold, broken pipes, holes in the wall and an unhealthy living situation with no supports or money to get ahead. After seeking assistance from family, the mother moved back to her hometown with her mother and stepfather to be closer to supports. The new living arrangement quickly became untenable, with newly imposed restrictions reintroducing trauma from the recent abusive relationship breakdown. Resultantly, the mother chose to return the family to Lambton County rather than remain with family.

The family sought shelter spaces through the Inn of the Good Shepherd and utilized emergency housing from late summer to November. Through the local By-Name List and Coordinated Access process, the family were quickly referred to a County Community Support worker (CSW) on the Social Services Division integrated team. During their time in emergency housing, they were very active in searching for permanent housing alongside their CSW. There were several health setbacks with the children while living in these temporary accommodations, causing additional barriers and concern for this family. One child was suffering from depression, and another became ill enough to require an extended stay at the hospital, resulting in missed time at school for both at the beginning of the school year. The other two children were also struggling with bullying at school due to their housing circumstances.

With significant support from their CSW, the family finally found and accepted the offer for their current home at the end of November and moved into the home December 1, 2022. The family was supported with move-in and housing setup processes, and is now in a safe, warm home. Through various inter-agency collaborations, the family has been assisted with many added supports, including additional move-in items. Their CSW meets with them one to two times per week to continue to support and assist with the transition back into a home and independent living. The children are thriving and happy - within three weeks they had friends in the neighborhood and were glad to be going to school and hanging out with classmates again. The child that had not been attending school since the first week of September is returning in the new year and the medical concerns are being properly addressed. The child struggling with depression is noticeably joyous, smiling, and full of stories every time they meet with their CSW. The remaining two children have not mentioned bullying since moving into their new home.