



## SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>CHAIR AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS</b>
<b>DEPARTMENT:</b>	<b>Homelessness Prevention and Children's Services</b>
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<b>MEETING DATE:</b>	<b>April 20, 2022</b>
<b>INFORMATION ITEM:</b>	<b>COVID-19 Emergency Shelter Response Update</b>

### **BACKGROUND**

On November 24, 2021, Council received a report which provided an overview and update on the Homelessness System's COVID-19 response to date and plans for the provision of overflow shelter beds with winter months approaching. This report furthers the November update on the County's temporary congregate care site located at 220 George Street in Sarnia and provides an update on system-wide shelter statistics.

The system pressures resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic have continued to disproportionately impact Lambton's most vulnerable. The need for physical distancing in shelters, as well as the 400% increase in households experiencing homelessness during the height of the pandemic have led to needs that exceeded what can be supported by local emergency shelter capacity for the past two years. To progress individuals out of these overflow shelter sites and through the housing continuum, the County minimized its use of local motels at the end of 2021 and began serving clients at the temporary congregate care site located at 220 George St., also known as the "Central Site." The short-term use of this location primarily served two purposes: to create a more affordable temporary overflow shelter solution and to offer better on-site supports directly to clients through a collaborative network of homelessness service providers.

### **DISCUSSION**

Since March of 2020, the overflow shelter system and housing and homelessness pandemic initiatives have resulted in the following assistance:

- Over 2,000 shelter stays have been supported through the emergency housing system;
- 1,127 unique individuals have stayed in emergency housing;

- 477 individuals have been successfully diverted from entering emergency housing;
- 140 households were assisted to secure or maintain housing through the Rental Assistance Program;
- 53 households successfully transitioned off of the Rental Assistance Program; and
- 232 individuals have progressed into more permanent housing.

These initiatives have been the result of strong community partnerships and collaboration amongst shelter providers, social services, local mental health agencies and non-profit service providers. Such partnerships were vital to the intensified efforts and client supports provided at the Central Site throughout the winter months.

### Temporary Shelter at Central Site

On December 29, 2021 the County of Lambton and the Inn of the Good Shepherd opened a temporary congregate care site and began accepting clients from the County's overflow locations and the Good Shepherd's Lodge. Staff from the Good Shepherd's Lodge operated the Central Site with the same day-to-day operating structure and hours as the Good Shepherd's Lodge with the assistance of staff from the Social Services Division. This opening created an additional 28 temporary beds, increasing Lambton's overflow capacity so that we could discontinue the use of motel rooms. The Central Site is a male-only shelter and has typically operated at or near capacity since the first few weeks of opening. The location has provided an array of supports and services to clients to assist them with moving into more permanent housing solutions. The site will close by the end of April 2022 as planned.

### System Supports

Meals are provided to individuals residing at the Central Site through both the Inn of the Good Shepherd's Soup Kitchen and dinners delivered by local hospitality partners. Meal transportation services are provided by the Canadian Red Cross – Lambton Branch. Additionally, one day a week the Salvation Army's food truck provides a hot dinner to clients. Collectively, over the course of late December to mid-March, approximately 1,484 meals were served at Central Site.

In addition to full-time support from Inn of the Good Shepherd staff, caseworkers from the Ontario Works Department are stationed on-site every day to connect their clients to appropriate income, employment, housing, and life stabilization supports. The Homelessness Prevention Team's Community Support Workers visit the shelter during morning hours to assist clients in their housing searches and to connect, refer, and assess them for homelessness prevention supports.

Beyond housing supports, the shelter has acted as a convenient and low-barrier access point for clients to engage with local health services. The West Lambton Community Health Team offers Nurse Practitioner services on-site two times a week and the Canadian Mental Health Association's Housing Team sends team members to visit four

times per week and assist clients with housing barriers related to mental health and addictions.

### Progressing Clients through the Housing Continuum

Since the inception of the Central Site, 61 clients have been successfully diverted from emergency shelter. A total of 73 unique clients have accessed the shelter to date resulting in 1,484 total shelter stays provided. Clients stayed in shelter for an average of 12 days before going elsewhere or being housed. Among those assisted, 32 out of 73 (44%) were experiencing chronic homelessness.

Identifying and assisting individuals experiencing chronic homelessness is one of Lambton's top housing and homelessness prevention priorities, as identified in the Housing and Homelessness Plan 2020 - 2024. Bringing these individuals to a centralized location where they can receive wrap-around supports and develop relationships with service providers has helped them feel supported. Individuals feel they have been given many tools to successfully exit chronic homelessness (see Appendix A for testimonials). To date, nine clients have successfully progressed out of the Central Site and into private housing, and six out of these nine clients were experiencing chronic homelessness prior to entering the Central Site.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is no financial impact on the County Budget as a result of this report. To date, the impacts of COVID -19 on the homelessness system have been addressed using the Social Service Relief Funds from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Federal Government under the Reaching Home Agreement. In addition to this, existing staff from the Social Services Division have been redeployed to assist in the delivery of homelessness prevention programs and the operation of the overflow shelter.

### **CONSULTATIONS**

Consultations have taken place with members of the County of Lambton Housing and Homelessness Advisory Committee, 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 Overflow Shelter System has supported over 1000 individuals seeking shelter to date and progressed 232 individuals experiencing homelessness into more permanent housing. The Central Site has aided these efforts through reducing system-wide homelessness and bringing clients closer to the intensive supports that they require. As operations at overflow sites wind-down this spring and the system returns to its pre-pandemic capacity, the Social Services Division and partners will continue to invest in upstream solutions to address homelessness, including prevention, wrap-around supports, and the creation of affordable housing.

## **APPENDIX A**

### TESTIMONIALS

The following testimonials were provided by clients who have stayed at the Central Site. Please note that the names below have been changed to preserve client anonymity.

#### **Steve's Story**

At age 34, Steve found himself homeless due to his addiction to cocaine, which had taken over his life. Although he was working at the time, Steve turned to gambling to supplement his income and cover the cost of cocaine. He quit a good job when his employer started to question his dedication to the job after he began calling into work sick on a frequent basis.

Unemployed and without money Steve found himself sleeping on the beach or couch-surfing at friends' homes until he wore out his welcome. Steve found the lockdown resulting from COVID-19 especially difficult as his income and employment relied on the restaurant industry and now everything was closed.

In December of 2020 Steve turned to the Inn of the Good Shepherd for help and was provided shelter at an overflow motel space. Although Steve was fighting his addiction, after a few slip ups he found himself discharged from his motel room as he failed to follow the rules about checking in and being accountable with shelter staff. Again, finding himself with nowhere to turn, Steve returned to the Good Shepherd's Lodge. Staff were able to help Steve find another shelter space, where he stayed for the next 13 months before moving to new Central Site.

Steve said, “I am grateful for the time spent in shelter – I looked around and that motivated me as I could see where I could end up down the road”. He added, “There are some good people who need that service. They are trying to move forward but just need a bed and a meal”.

Steve says the staff at the shelters were kind and very accommodating to him as he has now returned to work in a restaurant. Staff assisted Steve with finding a permanent place to live. Because Steve was now working two jobs, he was able to find a place through an advertisement on Kijiji and move into an apartment of his own. Now, at 36 years old, Steve shared he will be moving to a new city soon as he has secured a management position.

### Tom's Story

Tom had previously been staying at The Lodge and was transferred to Central Site. Upon his arrival, shelter staff connected Tom with one of the Community Support Workers (CSWs) that was present during weekday mornings. He sought out housing opportunities himself and used staff for support when needed. Every night Tom would sit with shelter staff and scan the weekly housing lists for something that fit his needs. Eventually, he was approved for both a housing unit and housing supplement and his CSW helped him facilitate a smooth transition to his own apartment by seeking out food, transportation and furniture options. Tom is currently housed and living on his own. His CSW continues to check in with Tom and offer supports to maintain his independent living.

### Jacob's Story

As one of the first clients to stay at Central Site, Jacob was previously staying at a motel through the overflow shelter program. Although hesitant at first, he responded well to the help the shelter manager, shelter staff and the Community Support Workers (CSWs) offered him. Jacob had an extensive medication regimen and staff worked to help him keep track of new medications and treatments he was being prescribed by his medical team. A CSW helped secure him a smartphone and showed him how to schedule his appointments into the calendar app as well as call his friends and family. Jacob would buy books at the used bookstore and bring them back to the shelter for other clients to read. His CSW accompanied him to apartment viewings and helped him furnish the place that would eventually become his apartment. Jacob is within walking distance to several community supports now and is doing well in his new place.