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To be listed on the Community  
Services Agenda, 16 Sep 99

DATE 07 July 1999

TO/DEST. Coordinator, Community Services Committee

FROM/EXP. Commissioner, Social Services

SUBJECT/OBJET **REGIONAL RESPONSE TO HOMELESS SITUATION NEAR  
CANAL**

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PURPOSE

The following is in response to Councillor Byrne's request for practical and effective ways in which the Region can respond to situations such as the encampment of homeless people under the Laurier Avenue Bridge.

BACKGROUND

There has been an encampment of homeless people under the east end of the Laurier Avenue Bridge since the Fall of 1998. There is a large heating grate from the National Defence Headquarters Building on which people sleep and live during the day. This place is highly visible to many passers-by from the canal foot paths and Colonel By Drive.

On April 30, 1999, Regional Police and Regional Security evicted the people from under the bridge. The eviction went without incident. No one knows for certain where the people under the bridge went upon their eviction. No names of the evicted people were taken save a few street names. The Manager of Initiatives to End Homelessness was informed only hours before the eviction. The Health Unit was not notified despite stated concerns around health and community health issues [sanitation, individual health status] as reason for eviction.

The Public Health Nurse who knows this area in her capacity as an outreach nurse to some of the downtown shelters, states that many of the individuals camping under the bridge are 40-60 years old men who can not access shelters because they have pets [mostly dogs] and are usually inebriated. They are often well known to services but can not use them if inebriated. Five of those evicted "were from out of town".

The newspapers began to cover the story on 20 May 99 with articles in The Citizen and The National Post. On May 21 1999, The Alliance to End Homelessness wrote to the Regional Chair to demand that the Region have a more comprehensive response to complaints of this nature that involve homeless people. Councillor Byrne also raised the issue at the Community Services Committee on May 20, 1999 and directed an inquiry on the matter to regional staff.

## RESPONSE

Regional staff from the Health, Social Services, Regional Police Services and Regional Security met on 3 June 1999 to prepare a co-ordinated regional response plan for similar situations involving homeless people in the Region. Regional representatives from this group will establish a liaison with the other public landlords eg. NCC, DND and the City of Ottawa to further enhance co-ordination in responding to complaints regarding encampments of homeless people.

Some elements of an effective co-ordinated response might be:

- timely notification of the regional and community participants in the intervention,
- reviewing the nature of the complaint[s] and verifying the information,
- plan & co-ordinate an intervention by:
  - addressing health hazards/ complaints/concerns,
    - carrying out health inspection process - public health inspector,
    - determine health status & link to services - public health nurse,
  - insure access to hostels, necessary income supports [if eligible], & contact other community support services - case co-ordinator from social services,
  - co-ordinate the eviction - police and/or security attended by appropriate service providers to do on site info/referral and transportation to the required service or resource

There are underlying causes to homelessness such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, addictions and untreated mental illness. These underlying causes are addressed in the action plan on preventing and ending homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton tabled at Community Services Committee on 17 June 1999.

*Approved by Dick Stewart*

c.c. Manager, Initiatives to end Homelessness