

REGION OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
RÉGION D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

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| DATE | 1 June 1999 |
| TO/DEST. | Co-ordinator Community Services Committee |
| FROM/EXP. | Commissioner Social Service Department Medical Officer of Health Special Advisor on Social Housing |
| SUBJECT/OBJET | ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS AND END HOMELESSNESS IN OTTAWA-CARLETON |

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That the Community Services Committee recommend Council approve the Community Action Plan for further development and implementation.**
- 2. That the Community Services Committee recommend Council allocate \$1 million from the 1998 Social Housing budget surplus towards the implementation of the Community Action Plan recommendations, and that specific expenditures be subject to Committee and Council approval.**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to present the recommendations of a Community Action Plan to reduce and end homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton. This report follows the November 14, 1998 Council motion requesting that the Federal Government declare homelessness a national disaster. It also follows the release of the Environmental Scan as the second phase of a Community Consultation process. The Community Action Plan will form the foundation for taking action to end homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton.

On April 15, 1999 Community Services Committee received the Environmental Scan and approved the recommendation that the Region assume the role of a local service system manager for homelessness. An important part of that role was the production of the attached Community Action Plan to end homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton.

Although Ottawa-Carleton, at the level of both the community and municipal government has taken steps to deal with homelessness in the past, the problem persists. Patterns in systemic level factors have contributed to the growing problem. Since October 1995, the 21.6% cuts to social assistance benefits have resulted in less income for individuals and families, consequently affecting their ability to compete in the rental housing market. Even for persons who do not receive social assistance, there is a marked increase in poverty in Ottawa-Carleton. At particular risk are single-parent families and children. As noted in the Environmental Scan, almost 50,000 renters in the Region spend more than 30% of their income on shelter.

The introduction of the Tenant Protection Act in June 1998 amended rent control measures and removed the right to appeal applications for eviction in the Ontario Court. From 1996-1998 there was a 16% increase in the number of formal evictions in Ottawa-Carleton. Furthermore, 20% of families using the Region's Family Shelters report eviction as their reason for need. The average length of stay in family shelters is 50 days in 1998. This reflects a family's inability to compete for the scarce amount of affordable private market housing.

The allocation of resources to reduce homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton needs to be balanced between intervention and prevention strategies. This balance is necessary in order to achieve both the goals of assisting persons on the street and in shelters to find permanent accommodation and support people in maintaining their housing.

If all available resources are used for emergency-based solutions (such as emergency shelters) then a temporary solution can be reached for a smaller percentage of the overall population in need. For example, in 1998, this would have assisted some of the 5,000 individuals who used emergency shelters, of which 872 were children.

A comparative estimate of the number of persons currently at risk of becoming homeless is reflected in 15,000 outstanding applications for social housing and over 20,000 persons using housing help services in 1998. It is unknown when those currently "at risk" will become homeless, adding to the population currently using emergency services. What is known is that the factors that place individuals at risk of becoming homeless will not be removed by inaction or the passage of time.

Prevention strategies are required immediately to stop the increase of the number of persons who are homeless. The scope of homelessness is not just the number of persons on the streets or in the shelter, but the growing population precariously perched at the edge of homelessness. Therefore there is an urgency to direct resources towards implementing the recommendations of the Community Action Plan.

The recommendations are presented in five categories: regional ownership; provincial and federal ownership; housing supply and support; enable access to housing; and provision of support services. For each of the 21 recommendations, the rationale, actions and timeframes and outcomes are detailed. In addition, supporting research or initiatives for each recommendation are presented. The recommendations presented vary according to the immediacy of the action to be taken and the steps involved in implementation; however, taken together, they form the basis of initial actions to address and end homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

This Community Action Plan represents a process of Community Consultation during which a broad range of stakeholders came together to develop recommendations to end and prevent homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton.

The community consultation process was fundamental in building the Community Action Plan. The methodology for the Community Consultation process included: Key Informant Interviews, a Community Forum, an Inventory of Services and the development of recommendations. Stakeholder groups involved in the community consultation process involved representatives from: front-line staff, program managers, community agency directors, federal, provincial and municipal elected officials, federal, provincial and municipal representatives, private housing developers, persons from the business sector and persons previously homeless.

Key Informant Interviews were conducted with 40 stakeholders who helped identify solutions and strategies to end homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton. On April 8th 1999, a Community Forum was attended by 100+ community participants who identified strategies needed to implement solutions to end homelessness. These solutions were used by five community-based work groups who developed the recommendations that formed the foundation of the community action plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No new funding is being requested at this time to fund the Community Action Plan. Rather, funding may be available from three different sources: \$733,000 comes from the Provincial Government's allocation of the Homelessness Initiative Fund; approximately \$1 M from the budget surplus from social housing, and future reinvestment of up to 15% of per diem funding from emergency hostel funding.

The Homelessness Initiative Fund should be allocated in Fall 1999 to fund local initiatives to end homelessness. This fund is now annualized in the Social Services Department base budget.

There is a budget surplus from 1998 Social Housing expenditures. It is recommended that \$1 M of surplus money be allocated for implementation of recommendations in the Community Action Plan. Due to the source of those funds, it will be necessary to focus on one-time initiatives.

As investments in the community, from the above funding sources, result in decreases in the need for emergency shelters, a further \$500,000 to \$800,000 could be reinvested in the Community Action Plan implementation in future years through a reallocation process.

CONCLUSIONS

This Report represents the second stage of a community consultation process designed to have a broad range of community stakeholders involved in developing recommendations to end homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton. From the release of the Environmental Scan in the first stage of the process, it has been noted that homelessness in Ottawa-Carleton is a problem that is large in both its scope and magnitude. In addressing this problem, a commitment by all levels of government, service providers, funders, the private sector, and citizens of Ottawa-Carleton needs to be made to work together. The production of this Community Action Plan represents a collaborative process of working together and outlines further actions required for continued partnerships to end homelessness.

*Approved by
Dick Stewart*

*Approved by
Dr Robert Cushman*

*Approved by
Joyce Potter*

FINANCE DEPARTMENT COMMENT

The 1998 Report of Operations will be tabled with Corporate Services and Economic Development Committee on 6 July 99. This report recommends a \$1.5 million contribution to a new Social Housing Reserve Fund. These funds represent the unspent funds in the 1998 Social Housing Program. The report before the Community Services Committee recommends that \$1 million from the Social Housing Reserve Fund be allocated for the implementation of the Community Action Plan recommendations.

*Approved by T. Fedec
on behalf of the Finance Commissioner*