

# Experiencing Homelessness

Second Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa (Jan-Dec 2005)

Published February 2006

## Grade C+ Only slight progress made.

Homelessness	Base Year 2004	2005	Change
# of individuals in a shelter	8,664	8,853	2% more
<i>Single men</i>	4,845	4,905	
<i>Single women</i>	1,221	1,267	
<i>Youth</i>	509	543	
<i>Families</i>	631	668	
# of times shelter beds were used	323,612	310,299	4% less
Average length of stay in shelters (days)	38	36	4% less
<i>Single men</i>	40	39	
<i>Single women</i>	31	32	
<i>Youth</i>	23	17	
<i>Families</i>	45	37	

Community social service agencies in Ottawa have devoted significant efforts in assisting the large number of people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in 2005.

In spite of their efforts, there has been only slight progress in ending homelessness in the past year as reflected by shorter stays in shelters for some, development of new supportive and affordable housing units, and a small decrease in private market rents.

There were also small rises in income for persons on income support or earning minimum wage.

However, these small gains in the area of housing and income are offset by the larger number of people experiencing homelessness in Ottawa in 2005.

### Housing

# of social housing units (all pre-1995)	22,400	22,400	
# of rent supplements	3,000	3,085	1% more
# of supportive housing units	500	669	
# Action Ottawa & NHI* units	356	441	
# households on social housing waiting list	10,500	9,914	3% less
# on supportive housing waiting list	2,000	2,214	
<b>Market Indicators</b>			
Rental vacancy rate	3.9%	3.3%	.6 less
Average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment	\$771	\$762	1% less

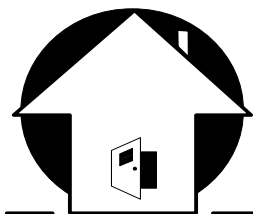
### Income

Social Assistance for a single person	\$520	\$536	3% more
ODSP Assistance for a Single Person	\$930	\$959	3% more
Average monthly # of Ontario Works cases	17,879	17,552	2% less
Minimum Wage	\$7.15	\$7.45	4% more
Increase in Consumer Price Index	N/A	2.3%	N/A

### Our Grades

- A = Significant Progress
- B = Some Progress
- C = No Progress (C+ = *Slight Progress*)
- D = Some Loss
- E = Significant Loss

Sources – Homelessness: HIFIS City of Ottawa. Housing: City of Ottawa (\*National Homelessness Initiative) and CMHC Rental Market Survey. Income (and Support Programs): Province of Ontario Website.



The Alliance to End Homelessness in Ottawa is a coalition of community stakeholders committed to working collaboratively to eliminate homelessness by gaining a better understanding of homelessness and developing and implementing strategies to end it.

For more information about the Alliance or to download an English or French PDF version of the Report Card, please visit [www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca](http://www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca)



# Local family . . . national problem



## One family's story

I'm a housing loss prevention worker. We're part of a network of six agencies in the city of Ottawa. Often people have a crisis such as abuse, unemployment, lack of adequate income or physical or mental health challenges which result in rent not being paid. They end up in a precarious situation and get evicted. Right now I'm working with a lot of people who are experiencing anxiety disorders and phobias. The poverty, the lack of housing choices and the stigma – whether it's from depression or from being poor – takes its toll on people.

I'll give you the situation of a mother and child that I originally met at a shelter. They moved into a private market unit where they were spending most of their money on rent. They were housed, but with what they could afford, their accommodation was substandard. In the winter, the cold wind and snow were coming through the door. There was mould in the unit and the ceiling actually started to come down on them. We called Property Standards, the landlord decided to let them out of their lease, and the place was condemned. She moved in with her partner for a while and then abuse started, so she ended up homeless again. After three years of not having a stable home, they were finally offered a social housing unit. They had to go through physical and mental health stresses and a lot of upheaval. I remember when they went to view the unit, her son who was sixteen years old at the time, said "I can finally invite friends to my home."

Solutions ↔ Research

## Towards a national understanding

By Elizabeth Debicka, HIFIS, National Secretariat on Homelessness and Ellen Herreria, Ontario Regional HIFIS Coordinator

A database called HIFIS (Homeless Individuals and Families Information System) is being used to gather data about homelessness in Canada. Emergency shelters in many cities are now sharing statistics about the demographics and length of stay of people who access their services. The clients' privacy is protected.

- The National Homelessness Initiative (NHI) estimates that 150,000<sup>1</sup> Canadians (or approximately one out of every 200 people) were experiencing or have experienced absolute homelessness over the past year.
- This figure represents a conservative estimate that does not include people who lived in substandard, overcrowded and temporary housing.
- To date, 852 shelters have reported a total capacity of 22,627 beds (both regular and overflow). An analysis of national statistics will soon be made public.

<sup>1</sup> This statistic is derived from a 2004 NHI review of data derived from the National Research Program, the National HIFIS Initiative, shelter use statistics across Canada, as well as from data from counts done in the shelter system. It includes data from the following cities: Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton, Quebec City, Winnipeg, Hamilton, Halifax, Victoria, Saskatoon, Regina, and Sudbury.

## What is homelessness?

The Alliance to End Homelessness defines homelessness as living on the streets, staying in a shelter, living in places not meant for human habitation (such as cars), or "couch surfing" – moving continuously between the homes of friends, family or strangers.

## Who is "at risk of homelessness"?

Families and individuals can lose their housing for any number of reasons: fleeing abuse, losing a job, or having an income too low to stay in suitable housing. Some are at risk because of mental illness, or substance use problems, or lack the life skills or ability to live on their own.



Housing Loss Prevention services at South East Ottawa Centre for a Healthy Community

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# What's changed in 2005?

## 1% Ottawa population homeless last year:

### Progress towards ending homelessness merits "C+"

With 8,853 different individuals experiencing homelessness in Ottawa in 2005 in a population of approximately 800,000, this rate is approximately 1% of the population. Since 2004, there has been a small increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in Ottawa. However, the length of stay in emergency shelters has decreased, especially among youth and families.

In a large housing market such as Ottawa, one would not expect to see major changes since the first Report Card on Homelessness published in 2005. Nonetheless, there are some small positive steps in the right direction. There was a reduction of 586 households on the social housing registry. Ottawa's social housing stock continues to provide affordable housing for more than 22,000 households. However, almost 10,000 households remain on the social housing waiting list.

There was an increase in the number of supportive housing units available from 500 to 670. In these projects, on-site assistance is available to the residents. Supportive housing can be an important step on the road to full independence. Despite the increased number of supportive housing units, the waiting list for this type of housing has grown over the last year to more than 2000. There was also a small increase in the number of rent supplements made available for people with severe and persistent mental illness through the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

The Federal-Provincial agreements to increase the availability of affordable housing are slowly bearing fruit. Since 2000, some 440 units have been built under the Action Ottawa initiative. In 2005, there were 85 new affordable units built in Ottawa, 60% (51) of which are available to people on the social housing waiting list. There are a further 420 in the pipeline. Also, the City of Ottawa now permits accessory suites throughout the city allowing basement rentals and that could increase the supply of affordable housing. CMHC has reported that rents have eased somewhat leading to a small decline in the vacancy rate as the units are absorbed.

Many who are homeless or at risk of being homeless are dependent on the income support system (Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program) or work at a low wage job. Last year's 3% increase in income support payments in Ontario represented the first increase in a decade. The minimum wage also increased in 2005 from \$7.15 to \$7.45. A recent increase in 2006 brought the minimum wage rate up to \$7.75. However, a person earning at or close to the 2006 minimum wage will still spend a significant proportion of their income for market housing in Ottawa (see page 8).

### Small steps in the right direction

There has been some progress in the past year, notably in increasing the number of supportive housing units and the number of affordable housing units. There were also small rises in income for people on income support or earning minimum wage. These small gains in the areas of housing and income over the past year are offset by the larger number of people who experienced homelessness in Ottawa in 2005.

Community social service agencies in Ottawa have devoted significant effort in assisting the large number of people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. However to make real headway in decreasing homelessness in our city, a major commitment is needed by senior levels of government in developing more affordable housing and increasing income levels of individuals and families living in poverty.

The risk of homelessness remains very high in the Ottawa area for a large number of individuals and families. Overall, we would grade the progress in reducing homelessness in Ottawa as a "C+" reflecting some very small gains.



**Family shelter room  
City of Ottawa**

## Shelter use in 2005\*

In 2005, 8,853 different people used the shelter system in Ottawa. There were small increases in all categories except for the number of children in families.

	2004	2005
<b>Homeless people who stayed in a shelter</b>		
Total	8,664	8,853
Adult men	4,845	4,905
Adult women	1,221	1,267
Youth	509	543
Families	631 (1092 children & 997 adults)	668 (1,035 children & 1,103 adults)
<b>Length of stay (average # days)</b>		
Total	38	36
Adult men	40	39
Adult women	31	32
Youth	23	17
Families	45	37
<b>Daily shelter use (average)</b>		
	932	880

*\*Based on the first year-over-year comparison of data from the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) in emergency shelters in Ottawa.*

### 964 shelter beds in Ottawa in 2005

510 for single men; 108 for single women; 36 for youth; 260 for families; 25 for mixed population and 25 for overflow (more overflow shelter spaces are made available as needed.) In addition, there are 64 beds for women and children fleeing family violence.

# Housing is the answer



## One man's story

I am 53 years old, and I come from Longueuil, Quebec. For many years I was a supervisor at a big homeless shelter in Montreal. Now I'm homeless, living at the Salvation Army and it's very strange for me. I stopped working at the mission because I became depressed, and the doctors diagnosed me with schizophrenia. I quit my job and traveled through Vancouver and Calgary, staying with friends and at shelters. I was on my way back to Montreal, but I had to stop in Ottawa because I started to get chest pains. The doctors found blood in my stomach, intestines and liver, so I had to stay in the hospital for a month and a half. Now, I'm here at the Salvation Army, and they saved my life. Being homeless is very hard, you become solitary. I'm becoming really depressed so I just try to keep myself busy. The end of the month is coming soon, and I want to be gone. I try to find a bachelor apartment in Ottawa and it's \$500 or \$600 a month, but welfare gives me \$660, so I can't do that. Some places want first and last month's rent too, so that's more than \$1100, and I can't do that. I want to find a job, but companies would ask: Are you healthy? And I have to say no, I have a triple bypass, a pacemaker and I'm 53 years old. No company would want me because it's better to hire a guy who is 20 years old. I need a social worker, a street social worker. I put my name on a list, and they told me I have to wait for two years. I don't even know if I'll be alive in two years. Every shelter needs a permanent social worker.

Men's shelter dorm  
at the Salvation Army Booth Centre

## 'Housing First' Strategies

By Tim Aubry, Centre for Research on Community Services, University of Ottawa

What would happen if you provided people with psychiatric problems and addictions who are chronically homeless with their own apartment? It may surprise you but the majority of them remain housed! At least, that is the conclusion of research conducted by Pathways to Housing, a community agency that was started in New York City in 1992. In fact, Pathways has been so successful that it recently won the 2005 Gold Award for community-based services of the American Psychiatric Association. The approach is now being funded by the White House for implementation in cities across the United States.

The Pathways model, also known as a 'Housing First' approach has three main features. First, it assists clients to move into regular housing immediately. Secondly, clients are provided with money management assistance which ensures that they pay their rent, set at 30% of their income. Thirdly, clients have access to intensive community support from a multi-disciplinary team of mental health professionals.

A clinical trial compared the Pathways' 'Housing First' approach to standard care which focused on encouraging abstinence and leading eventually to regular housing. Research findings showed a higher proportion of Pathways' clients (75%) achieving stable housing after 48 months than those in standard care (50%)<sup>1</sup>. As well, there were no differences between the two groups in either alcohol or drug use or level of psychiatric symptoms.

Similarly impressive findings were reported in the evaluation study of the Emergency Homelessness Pilot Project initiated in the City of Toronto to assist the group of people evicted from Tent City in 2002<sup>2</sup>. In this project, individuals with chronic histories of homelessness were provided with immediate access to private rental housing using rent supplements combined with intensive community support. Eighteen months after the launch of the program, most of the Tent City residents (88%) were stably housed.

The demonstrated success of 'Housing First' programs such as Pathways to Housing in New York City challenges popular misconceptions that some people choose to live on the street or that people with chronic histories of homelessness can never return to regular housing. They also demonstrate that making affordable housing available is a critical ingredient to addressing chronic homelessness and maximizing the effectiveness of community supports.

<sup>1</sup> Padgett, D. K., Gulcur, L., & Tsemberis, S. (2006). *Housing First services for people who are homeless with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance abuse. Research on Social Work Practice, 16*, 74-83. <sup>2</sup> Gallant, G., Brown, J., & Tremblay, J. (2004). *Tent City to Housing: An Evaluation of the City of Toronto's Emergency Homelessness Pilot Project. Authors: Toronto, ON.*



## Outreach

The Salvation Army outreach van patrols the downtown streets seven days a week from noon to 4:00 am to ensure that people are safe and offers a ride to a shelter to those who are interested.

Over 3,300 people – 2,260 men and 1,070 women – had contact with the outreach service in 2005. Almost 1,300 accepted a ride to a shelter.

# Panel Study – What happens over time?

The panel study on homelessness in Ottawa has followed a group of homeless people over time - single adults, families and youth. The study is funded by the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council and the National Homelessness Initiative (‘SCPI’) through the City of Ottawa. In 2004 and 2005, two years after an initial interview, researchers from the Centre for Research on Community Services at the University of Ottawa, Carleton University, and Saint Paul University, re-interviewed 255 (62%) of the 412 originally homeless individuals.

## Success in leaving homelessness

The good news is that approximately three-quarters (76%) were housed at the time of being re-interviewed.

Participants were considered stably housed if they had been living in their own place for 90 days or more.

The most common type of housing was apartments (52%), followed by townhouses (17%), and houses (14%). Over three-quarters (79%) of those housed, rated the quality of their housing as being “somewhat good” to “very good”.

There was significant variability among the different subgroups

- Virtually all the families (97%) were housed. Of all the subgroups, families, on average, had been housed for the longest duration (Avg. = 646 days).
- In contrast, less than half of the single men (47%) had exited homelessness.
- As well, on average, single men were housed for the shortest duration of all the subgroups (Avg. = 265 days)

Percent individuals & families housed at the 2-year follow-up	
Subgroup	Housed
58 Families	97 %
50 Female youth	90 %
55 Single women	73 %
49 Male youth	67 %
43 Single men	47 %

## Pathways into housing

An examination of the housing history over the two-year period between interviews found that many panel study participants experienced multiple moves, suggesting that their housing situation remained precarious.

- Female and male youth were the most transient with, on average, five moves over the two-year period.
- Families showed the most stability, having on average less than two moves.
- A wide range of community agencies that assisted participants to leave homelessness were identified, especially emergency shelters, drop-in centres, housing-focused services, and community resource and health centres.

Panel study researchers are now analyzing data from the two sets of interviews to identify the factors that assist or impede individuals and families to leave homelessness.

Average number of moves over 2-year period since initial episode of homelessness	
Subgroup	Average # of moves
50 Female youth	5.0
49 Male youth	4.9
43 Single men	4.2
55 Single women	3.0
58 Families	1.8

## Cost of housing

Among participants who were housed, 40% reported that their rent was subsidized.

- A large majority of housed families (78%) and almost one-half of housed single women (47%) indicated that they lived in subsidized housing.
- In contrast, none of the housed single men described their housing as being subsidized.
- These differences among subgroups are likely related to priorities set for the social housing waiting list, which include homeless families and women fleeing family violence.

### Non-subsidized housing

- Almost two-thirds (65%) of the individuals and families living in non-subsidized housing are paying over 30% of their income on housing, placing them at an increased risk of further episodes of homelessness.
- A majority of single women (56%) and single men (57%) living in non-subsidized housing are paying over 50% of their income on housing.

Housing costs for participants in non-subsidized housing	
Subgroup	Average monthly cost
11 Families	\$672
17 Single men	\$488
19 Single women	\$478
24 Male youth	\$347
36 Female youth	\$159

*Less than half of the single men (47%) had successfully exited homelessness*

# Youth homelessness – a troubling phenomenon

“Youth homelessness is not just a downtown issue... we have kids coming from Kanata, Barrhaven and Orleans needing our support.”

Youth Services Bureau (YSB)  
housing program staff

The presence of youth among the homeless population has been growing over the last decade. We are seeing young people drifting from one place to another, often living in shelters, on the streets, with friends, in abandoned buildings, or in other situations which place them at risk.

The trek to a better life often takes many turns as they battle against isolation and fear, discrimination, poverty, addictions and abuse.

Many struggle as they try to navigate through the social support system and overcome the obstacles they face to achieve safe and suitable housing.

Recent figures indicate that 543 homeless young people stayed in shelters at some point in 2005. This number speaks only of the young people who use shelters and not the many others who ‘couch surf’, stay with friends and relatives, live in public spaces or on the street.

“We need to remember that these are our children...they are adolescents...at a complex age, experiencing all the uncertainty of being young.

We expect them to find housing, get a job and go to school while at the same time they have experienced a lot of trauma in their lives.”

YSB staff

Homelessness is a complex problem caused by a multitude of factors. Pressures in the housing and job market, low income, and reduced rates of social benefits have all contributed to the increasing numbers of homeless youth.

For youth, a key factor in homelessness is estrangement from their families due to conflict and emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse.

Many have been raised in foster homes, suffer from mental health issues, or have problems with substance use. A number of youth are also dealing with sexual orientation and gender issues. The most commonly cited reasons, however, tend to revolve around family.

“For many of them, there is no choice. They face issues where home is just not an option.”

YSB Shelter Director

The pathway out of homelessness is not a linear one. It takes access to the right combination of service interventions, housing policy and individual action, to achieve long-term housing. Occasionally, however, long term housing with continued support is needed.

Supports are available in the forms of drop-in centres, emergency shelters, and supportive housing. The goal is to provide young people with healthy social connections, positive coping skills, and feelings of safety so they can achieve permanent housing and independence.

## YSB Downtown Services and Drop-In

In 2005, the Drop-In at 147 Besserer Street provided a safe place for 865 youth who were homeless, in unstable housing or living on the streets – 18,973 separate visits. The Drop-In provides vital free services: crisis counselling, workshops, housing support services, employment programs, HIV/AIDS prevention and education and health and medical services.

**The Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa (YSB) serves youth aged 12 and older. The focus is on youth experiencing difficulties which affect their physical and/or emotional well-being and development. They support youth in making positive health and lifestyle decisions. For more information, contact YSB at 729-1000**

Most pressing issues facing street youth	Risk factors associated with homelessness
<p><b>Inadequate</b> social assistance to cover the cost of living</p> <p><b>Lack</b> of access to affordable housing</p> <p><b>Lack</b> of available agency support</p> <p><b>Serious gap</b> in the community around supports and services to help youth learn skills for independent living</p>	<p><b>Family</b> conflict</p> <p><b>Few</b> family resources</p> <p><b>Mental</b> health issues</p> <p><b>Addiction</b> issues</p> <p><b>History</b> of out-of home placements</p> <p><b>History</b> of abuse and/or neglect</p>

# A new shelter model for youth

## Current Shelters

For the past ten years there have been two youth shelters in Ottawa: the Young Women's Emergency Shelter operated by Youth Services Bureau (YSB) and the Young Men's Shelter managed by the Salvation Army. Both offer emergency short-term shelter to youth aged 12 to 20, offering a wide range of supports including supportive counselling and advocacy.



The new Young Women's Shelter will open Spring 2006

## The new model: emergency shelters to transitional housing

The Youth Services Bureau (YSB) has developed a new model for two new facilities for young women and young men. In separate locations, 30 young men and 30 young women will be provided with emergency to transitional safe housing and access to professional staff who will help them address the varied issues they are struggling with.

Together the new facilities will include:

- 24 shelter units for emergency short-term accommodation with one bed each unit
- 24 bachelor apartments dedicated to transitional housing
- 12 one-room units to be used as shelter overflow or transitional housing
- Programming tailored to the needs of each youth to develop independent living skills in a safe and secure setting for up to one year through life skills and social skills coaching, and peer support.

## Program Goals

- To increase youth chances for successful reintegration into the community, and
- To reduce length of stay in the shelter by moving youth toward independence and thus lowering their risk of 'graduating' into the adult shelter system.

The facilities can be converted to independent housing if the need for shelter services declines. Capital funding for this initiative is being provided by the National Homelessness Initiative ('SCPI'), with operating funding from the Province of Ontario and City of Ottawa. The new Young Women's Shelter will open this spring and the new Young Men's Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing Program is currently under construction with a target occupancy date of Fall 2006.



In 2005, over 200 young women stayed in the current Young Women's Emergency Shelter.

- As the shelter does not turn anyone away, occupancy rates are consistently very high.
- Since 1995, the shelter has provided service to over 1300 young women.
- The shelter can accommodate 12 young women with an overflow capacity of 2 additional mats.
- Staff provides supportive counselling, crisis intervention, referral services for appropriate housing and reconnecting to the community.

## Non-profit housing

The YSB Non-Profit Housing Program operates three subsidized apartment buildings for young adults aged 16 to 21 who, at some point, were either homeless or unsuitably housed. There are 7 bachelor units, 45 one-bedroom units and 13 two-bedroom units designated for single parents.

Apartments are assigned on the basis of priority and need and the program is promoted as a Bias Free Zone where all youth regardless of their diverse backgrounds are afforded respect and safety.

The Housing Program is designed to accommodate independent young adults who are actively pursuing personal goals. In addition, both buildings have a drop-in program on their premises where assistance is available for general life skill issues and crisis support.

# Trying to pay for a place to call home

## Percent of income spent on rent by income sources per month in Ottawa in 2005

Renter	Rent as of October 2005 (average monthly)	Ontario Works <sup>1</sup> (OW)	Ontario Disability Support <sup>2</sup> (ODSP)	Senior's Income <sup>3</sup> (OAS & GIS)	Minimum Wage <sup>4</sup> @ 40 hours a week	E.I. Income <sup>5</sup> (based on \$30,000 salary)
1 Person in a Room	\$450	84%	47%	36%	35%	33%
1 Person in Bachelor	\$623	116%	65%	51%	48%	45%
1 Person in 1 Bedroom	\$762	142%	79%	62%	59%	55%
1 Parent, 1 Child in 1 Bedroom	\$762	77%	52%	–	59%	55%
1 Parent, 2 Children in 2 Bedroom	\$920	93%	54%	–	71%	67%
2 Seniors in 1 Bedroom	\$762	–	–	41%	–	

1. Ontario Works (OW) = \$536 single person, \$987 for 1 parent & 1 child, \$1,161 for 1 parent & 2 children, rate as of March 2005
2. Ontario Disability (ODSP) = \$959 single person, \$1,468 for 1 parent & 1 child, \$1,690 for 1 parent & 2 children, rate as of March 2005
3. Senior's income (OAS + GIS) = \$1,233 for a single person and \$1,868 for a couple
4. Minimum Wage @ 40 hours/week = \$1,291 (Ontario wage rate as of February 1, 2005)
5. E.I. income based on \$30,000 salary = \$1,375

## Affordable Housing

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation defines 'affordable housing' as housing that costs no more than 30% of pre-tax income. Exceeding this amount places a burden on individuals and families to meet the cost of basic living expenses (e.g., rent, food, over-the-counter medicines, transportation, clothes, etc.).

### 'Minimum Housing Wage'

The Canadian Housing Renewal Association (CHRA) has determined that Ottawa is among the most expensive rental markets in Canada. CHRA has calculated the 'Minimum Housing Wage' as the hourly wage required to pay the average rents for units of different sizes, using information from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's Rental Market Survey. The calculation is based on a full time worker (40 hours a week for 52 weeks) devoting 30% of their salary for rent.

A tenant would have to earn \$12.08 an hour to pay for a bachelor unit in Ottawa. That would rise to \$14.65 for a one bedroom unit, \$17.69 for a two bedroom and \$21.44 for a three bedroom.

The minimum wage in Ontario is now \$7.45, so it would take two persons working at that wage to afford a one-bedroom unit. Often, low wage earners do not work full time, making it more difficult to access market housing. Source: *Minimum Housing Wage - A New Way to Think About Rental Housing Affordability*, Steve Pomeroy, Focus Consulting for the Canadian Housing Renewal Association, Ottawa, January 2006

**Vacancy rate & average rents:** CMHC reported that the vacancy rate in the Ottawa rental market decreased to 3.3 percent from 3.9 percent in 2005. One reason cited for this change was the improved employment rate for youth. The cost of renting changed very little over that period. Bachelor unit rents were identical to 2004, whereas one bedroom, two bedroom and three or more bedrooms declined by nine, 20 and 31 dollars a month respectively. Average rents in Ottawa in October 2005 were \$623 for bachelor units, \$762 for one-bedroom, \$920 for two-bedroom and \$1,056 for units with three or more units. Source: *Ottawa Rental Market Report*, CMHC, Ottawa, December, 2005

**Rooming houses:** Rooming houses provide affordable housing for low income individuals. There are approximately 200 rooming houses in the City of Ottawa with an average of ten rooms each.

# An affordable, appropriate home

## Social Housing Units

There are 22,400 'Social Housing' rental units in Ottawa, all of which were built with government assistance prior to 1995. Access to these units is through the Ottawa Social Housing Registry.

- Over 56 independent non-profit housing organizations (the largest is Ottawa Community Housing Corporation) are funded through programs delivered by the City of Ottawa.
- Units are available to low income households, which would have difficulty renting on the open market.
- Households pay 30 per cent of their income in rent 'geared to income'.

## Action Ottawa

Government-assisted affordable housing in Ottawa is now being created under the *Action Ottawa* program in mixed income communities.

Approximately 60% of the units have rents affordable to low income households on the Social Housing Registry and 40% are affordable to moderate income households (maximum rents are equal to the CMHC average market rent).

- Since 2000, the Action Ottawa and National Homelessness Initiative ('SCPI') funding have combined to fund a total of 441 units (*16 in 2000, 61 in 2001, 147 in 2002, 100 in 2003, and 32 in 2004*). In 2005, 85 units were completed and funding was awarded for another 420 units.
- Mixed-income housing is created, with a fixed percentage of the units affordable to moderate and low-income households.



Blue Heron Co-op, the first in 10 years, is a mixed-income project in the West End

- Action Ottawa projects are made affordable by combining federal funding (including some funding from the National Homelessness Initiative) and provincial funding with reduced municipal property taxes and development fees.
- Participation in projects is open to private and non-profit developers who may partner with agencies that provide housing support.

## Affordable housing for people with mental illness

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) administers rent supplement units for people with mental illness, funded by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

These units can be in private rental structures as well as in non-profit projects, where people can be supported by CMHA workers.

## Supportive Housing

Supportive Housing provides individuals with on-site counselling and support where they live. Their rent is based on their income (those on social assistance pay rent based on the shelter component of their assistance).

- There were 670 supportive housing units in Ottawa in 2005 operated by twelve organizations.
- Almost 2,200 people are on the waiting list for supportive housing.

## Apartments in homes

Apartments in homes could add to the stock of affordable housing. Effective September 2005, homeowners may obtain a building permit to create an apartment on any floor including the basement, despite their current zoning as long as the existing 'footprint' of the building is not increased.

Potentially 208,000 dwelling units could be created in the urban area of Ottawa through this intensification initiative, which has proven to be successful in other Canadian cities.



CCOC's award-winning 2005 non-profit development on Richmond Road

**Almost 2,200 people are on the waiting list for supportive housing**

# Drop-ins – a safe place during the day

The programs profiled here serve women.



“Just come in and hang out. Many people from the community are uncomfortable around our women but there’s a lot of camaraderie here.”

Staff member at The Well/La Source

## What is a drop-in program?

A network of drop-in centres or day programs is operated by faith and non-profit groups with funding from the City of Ottawa. They provide men and women who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness with food and other supports and a base where people can:

- Contact employers or programs that could help to re-establish them in stable housing, and
- Be reached by families and friends, medical services, etc.

## Drop-in Services

- Meal programs
- Shower and laundry facilities
- Emergency food supplies
- Clothing
- Computer access
- Counselling and/or support services
- Life skills & special interest workshops
- Social activities

In 2005, there were more than 400,000 separate visits to these programs, up from 375,000 in 2004.

## The Well / La Source

In existence since the early 1980s, The Well has grown considerably in recent years and is now housed in newly renovated space at St. John the Evangelist Church. On average, 137 women and children visit each day.

Above everything else, homeless and at-risk women often suffer from loneliness and isolation.

The Well provides a welcoming environment where they can relax, develop a support network, obtain information, and follow programs such as the 12 Step program. Programming at The Well is very much participant directed and many give back to the centre by volunteering for daily tasks.

Staff member Janet McInnis emphasizes that the work performed at The Well “is all about empowering women”. Staff, volunteers, and participants work collaboratively to provide women with the resources, skills, and tools needed to foster independence.

This, however, requires community support. In addition to donations, Ms. McInnis says that she would like to see more acceptance and involvement from the community. *For more information, please contact (613)594-8861 or janet@the-well.ca*

## Centre Espoir Sophie

At Centre Espoir Sophie, the women come from many backgrounds – some are young, others older; some are recent immigrants, and others were born in Ottawa. Some are single-mothers, others have no children or have had them taken away; some live in shelters, others pay rent. Some receive social assistance; others hold low-wage jobs and some have university education, while others are illiterate. Most have been diagnosed with physical or mental illnesses.

Most have experienced violence or abuse and have thus severed ties with their families. And all experience poverty.

Centre Espoir Sophie is the sole francophone day program in Ottawa and provides a bridge to mainstream society for many French-speaking women. Women are warmly welcomed and can seek guidance and obtain information about resources in a culturally and linguistically sensitive atmosphere. The centre also has some evening hours.



Renewable operating funding is currently a challenge, but without Centre Espoir Sophie, homeless and at-risk francophone women would lack a safe and peaceful space. *For more information, please contact (613)789-5119 or centrespoirsophie@bellnet.ca*

# Women and homelessness



## St. Joe's Women's Centre

St. Joe's began twenty-two years ago in order to assist women living in a temporary shelter in Ottawa's Sandy Hill. Today, the drop-in continues to provide a safe place during the day for women and their children who are isolated or homeless. St. Joe's prides itself on being a nurturing safe haven.

Director Marsha Wilson is pleased with all of the services provided by the centre as together they address the various needs facing homeless and at-risk women. When resources permit, the centre offers nursing, social work, and legal services. There is children's programming as well. A range of services is necessary due to the diversity of visitors. One year on International Women's Day, women from 26 ethnic backgrounds were present at the centre.

However, Ms. Wilson notes that gaps remain. The women would benefit from work placement opportunities, which would

boost their self-worth and provide valuable employment skills. St. Joe's also wishes it could offer evening services in order to best serve Ottawa's working poor.

However, the centre is thankful for its strong partnerships and networks throughout the community and with other organizations. These help to strengthen the services offered at St. Joe's and create a united front in combating women's homelessness.

*For more information, please contact (613)231-6722 or [sjwomensctr@hotmail.com](mailto:sjwomensctr@hotmail.com)*



Oshki Kizis Lodge is a 19-bed emergency shelter mainly for aboriginal homeless women and children, many of whom are fleeing abuse. As part of the Aboriginal Women's Support Centre/Minwaashin Lodge, Oshki Kizis offers culturally appropriate support services.



## One woman's story

I'm 55 years old. I live in supportive housing. I left home when I was 18 and got my bachelor's degree at Concordia. I was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, and I didn't want to be institutionalized. At that time, there weren't many humane places for people with schizophrenia to go. I've been homeless for years and years and years, 10 years, maybe even 20. I rented short-term places. But those didn't last, so I was always moving from place to place. And when your living conditions are unstable, it's hard to take your medication and get stable that way. It was difficult, you know, you just have to get by and survive, and I survived. I think it's really amazing that I'm alive. I like where I'm living now, I have my own room with a lock. It's important to have privacy, you need a place where you can just go, and have peace and quiet. I get a lot of help from my CMHA worker and from the staff here. I get support from ODSP too, but they make it hard to work part-time because if you make over \$160 a month, they start taking deductions. I volunteer teaching art sometimes, and one thing that helped me is that I do art workshops and put on a lot of shows. Quality of life is important. I think society needs to find humane ways to help people with problems. You have to understand the problems and look at what each person needs.

# Housing and health

## The CHEO Housing Checkup

Housing is a key determinant of health. The physical health, mental health and overall well-being of children and youth are affected by housing conditions. Affordability issues may result in less money for food. Housing in need of repairs may result in injury. Crowding may result in increased exposure to infectious diseases and lower school performance. Unstable housing disconnects children and youth from their community.

In April 2005, the **CHEO Housing Checkup** survey was administered to youth and families of children registered in the emergency department at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO). The survey was an effort to better understand the housing needs of children and youth who are cared for in the CHEO emergency department.

A total of 1360 surveys (25% of registered patients) were completed. The results have shown that a significant number of those children, youth and their families are living at risk of homelessness.

### Study Findings

- 33% of households were spending more than 50% of their income on housing, placing these families at risk of homelessness.
- 17% of families felt there was something unsafe in their home or neighbourhood.
- 9% of families lived in crowded conditions.
- 8% of families lived in housing in need of major repairs.
- 7% of children and youth had stayed with relatives or friends as they had no place else to stay.

**Next Steps** The Ottawa Child/Youth Housing Advocacy Initiative, a partnership between the health care sector and housing experts, was formed and will be using the survey results to develop an action plan to improve the housing and health of children, youth and their families in Ottawa.

### Families at risk

- 71% of families living in rental units reported having had difficulty finding affordable housing.
- 21% of single parent families had relied at some point on emergency shelters or had stayed with friends or relatives as they had nowhere else to stay.
- 21% of immigrant and refugee families were living in crowded conditions.
- More than half of the families in the study were living in housing that was crowded or in need of major repairs or were paying more than 50% of their income for shelter.

## Housing Loss Prevention Network

The Housing Loss Prevention Network is one of several programs helping people to keep their housing. A collaborative partnership of six agencies – three Community Health Centres, one Community Resource Centre, Action Housing and Housing Help, work together to provide a comprehensive range of housing support services for individuals and families at risk of homelessness with federal and provincial funds via the City of Ottawa. Recently, the network expanded its work to include early identification and intervention strategies. These included: tenant support and education; community outreach and workshops; referrals and linkages with community programs and services; projects and collaborative working relationships with private and social housing landlords; and training for service providers.

### Early prevention makes the difference\*

- 2537 households, representing over 5800 individuals, were helped in 2005.
- 80% of those households kept their housing.

*\* These figures represent only those people helped by this program and not the full range of intervention work done through out the city.*

The Housing Loss Prevention Network has identified three key factors that would lead to a reduction in the number of people who experience a housing crisis:

- (1) adequate income
- (2) more affordable housing
- (3) a revision of the Tenant Protection Act.

Housing Loss Prevention services at Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services



# Working at making a difference

Solutions ↔ Research

## Homelessness, housing, and harm reduction: stable housing for homeless people with substance use issues

*Study by Deborah Kraus, Luba Serge, Michael Goldberg and the Social Planning and Research Council of BC. Funded by CMHC and the National Secretariat on Homelessness*

This study investigates innovative programs that provide housing and services to persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and who have issues associated with substance use (e.g. drugs, alcohol or other substances). The researchers undertook a literature review and profiled 13 initiatives in Canada, the US and the UK. The researchers also conducted face-to-face interviews with 33 individuals who were living in (or had lived in) housing provided by the case study agencies and/or were receiving services from these agencies.

All the projects adhere to a harm reduction philosophy, defined as an approach aimed at reducing the risks and harmful effects associated with substance use and addictive behaviours, for the person, the community and society as a whole, without requiring abstinence. The report distinguishes between approaches that are primarily a 'tolerance of consumption' and 'harm reduction', which seeks to actively engage the individual.

A number of the initiatives also adopted a 'housing first' approach; defined as the direct provision of permanent, independent housing to people who are homeless. Central to this idea is that clients will receive whatever individual services and assistance they need and want to maintain their housing choice. The housing is viewed primarily as a place to live, not to receive treatment.

The case study programs are working well to address the needs of people who are homeless and have substance use issues. All the agency key informants reported that their clients have undergone positive changes since becoming involved in the project including housing stabilization, and improvements around substance use, physical and mental health, and income.

Almost all the agency key informants identified housing – having a place to live – as the most effective service provided; it provided the safety and security that make it possible for people to begin to reduce their substance use as well as a base for residents to form friendships and become connected to the community. Participants also discussed how support from the case study agency was responsible for the changes in their lives.

The study concludes that the term 'hard-to-house' should be put to rest. It shows that people who are homeless, even if they have complex needs and a long history of living on the streets, can be successfully housed in permanent housing if they are given the right supports – as needed and wanted. If solutions can be found to end homelessness for this population, then key elements that distinguish the case studies, such as housing first and a client-centred approach, can be applied to end homelessness for others who find themselves without a place to live.



Harm Reduction Program at Shepherds of Good Hope

## Causeway – building a bridge to the workforce

Causeway is a community organization in the Ottawa area preparing people for the work force who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, particularly those suffering illnesses or with disabilities. Operating from their spacious building in the West End, Causeway offers:

- One-on-one skills training to update computer skills
- Job search programs
- Youth job preparation programs, and
- Supported employment to help those new to the workforce.

Causeway also operates social businesses, a term describing an organization that provides a commercial service while meeting a social need, such as supplying casual labour for senior citizens for snow removal, yard work or other household chores.

## Krackers Katering

One of Causeway's social businesses is called *Krackers Katering* which will cater any social event from a wedding to a business meeting and accommodate special diets, etc. They provide job training for persons with mental illnesses and other challenges, employing 10 to 15 people at any one time.

A large number of organizations in Ottawa have used *Krackers Katering* for catering at business and social events. *To contact Krackers Katering, call (613) 792-4954, fax (613) 792-4957 or email [krackers@magma.ca](mailto:krackers@magma.ca).*



# Building an inclusive community

Solutions ↔ Research

## Newcomers experience profound disappointment

By Fran Klodawsky, Carleton University

Immigrants and refugees are searching for a better future for themselves and their families. Immigrants have been led to understand that their skills are in demand when they discuss plans with Canadian officials for months or even years.

Refugees are seeking freedom and dignity after fleeing war or torture; they arrive very suddenly, without much ability to plan or prepare for a period of transition.

Both groups are experiencing profound disappointment in their ability to support themselves or use their skills in an appropriate manner. A 2003 report by the United Way in Ottawa found that "recent immigrants...aged 25 to 44 with university degrees are four times more likely to be unemployed than residents who have lived in Canada for 10 years or more (17% compared with 4%)".

It is not surprising that many newcomers in Ottawa face housing difficulties. In the *Panel Study on Homelessness in Ottawa* about one quarter of those interviewed in 2002/3 were not born in Canada. These individuals were both newcomers and people who had arrived in Canada more than 10 years ago. They were as likely to be refugees as they were to be immigrants. Overwhelmingly, they were female and most were women with children. In contrast to respondents born in Canada, immigrants and refugees were more likely to identify 'economic factors' and 'family conflict' as reasons why they became homeless. In most instances, these reasons can be tied to settlement gaps and unmet needs.

These findings add to the growing evidence that better coordinated settlement services are required in Canada. Currently, there is a gap between the federal level where immigration policy decisions are made and where supports for settlement and integration take place. The municipal level of government has a potentially important role to play but does not often have access to adequate resources. Community organizations can also help by ensuring that their services are accessible to newcomers and by reaching out to show newcomers that they too are part of community life.



## HomeSafe

The HomeSafe program provides a rent bank in addition to other services, such as help with utility payments and budget coaching, to help people maintain their housing. The Salvation Army operates the program with provincial funding to help low-income tenants avoid losing their housing and using emergency shelters. Having short-term rent arrears is the most common reason tenants become homeless.

During 2005, 240 households were helped by this program, 72 by way of financial assistance and the remainder through financial coaching and referral to other services.

## Winter Warmth Program

Working with United Way Ottawa and organizations such as the Salvation Army, the Winter Warmth Fund provides one-time financial assistance to low income families and individuals who are struggling to meet all their financial commitments.

Resources are contributed by Enbridge Gas Distribution and, this year, Hydro Ottawa Limited. With Hydro's contribution, the Winter Warmth Program will increase to approximately 150 households.

Customers who have received a disconnection notice or are disconnected may also qualify for funding.

### December 2004-April 2005

- 63 households supported (49 women and 14 men)
- Average household monthly income: \$1410
- Average arrears: \$476.19

*Families and individuals can apply to the Winter Warmth Fund by contacting The Salvation Army Ottawa Booth Centre at (613) 241-1573.*

## Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal

Despite easing in the level of rents, the level of applications to the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal remains high in Eastern Ontario.

- In 2005, there were more than 5,700 applications to the tribunal by landlords because of non-payment of rents.
- More than 3,300 of those applications resulted in default orders for eviction.
- Only 2,200 cases involved a hearing to resolve issues.

# Message from the Alliance to End Homelessness

It's time to make homelessness a priority!

Political teamwork can end homelessness.

Ending homelessness is a worthwhile investment . . .

*. . . with dividends of better and reduced health costs, a much-needed economic investment in housing, a more employed and better-educated work force and, best of all, a more vibrant community for all its members.*



## You can help

**Skills** Offer your professional skills – accounting, communications, fundraising, tutoring, counselling, legal, or medical – directly to community agencies.

**Energy** Use your energy to write letters or approach politicians on behalf of those experiencing homelessness.

**Money** Use your money to provide material assistance – bus passes, phone cards, grocery store gift cards, toys, etc., to agencies helping people experiencing homelessness.

**Time** Spend your time on committees and/or coalitions working to develop strategies to end homelessness.

**Inform** Most importantly, continue to inform yourself, your family and community!

**Donate** Offer supplies, equipment or financial assistance to community organizations to help them continue working effectively.

## Politicians need to work as a team

The policy and program tools to address homelessness are well known. All that is needed to make homelessness a priority is political will from politicians at all three levels of government.

### FEDERAL LEVEL

**Unilaterally and significantly increase social and affordable housing** or find a way to work effectively with the Ontario government to spend funding in the Affordable Housing Program, including the allocation of the \$1.6 billion for housing in the 2005 Bill C-48.

**Renew, increase and make permanent the funding** for the National Homelessness Initiative, the Supporting Community Partnership Initiative and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program to support solutions at the local level.

**Increase rates** for Employment Insurance and seniors benefits to bring them more in line with rents.

### PROVINCIAL LEVEL

**Increase and speed up provincial funding** for the Affordable Housing Program and work with the Federal government to significantly increase new social and affordable housing.

**Increase funding for supportive and supported housing** along with an increase in funding for mental health and addictions services.

**Increase benefits** for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program and increase the Minimum Wage to bring them all more in line with rents.

### MUNICIPAL LEVEL

**Continue working** to prevent homelessness, to support people when they are homeless and to help people find and maintain appropriate, accessible housing while advocating for long-term solutions.

**Continue to ensure** there is a full range of affordable housing options and appropriate supports for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness – supportive and supported housing, social housing, transitional housing and rent supplements.

**Continue to provide** opportunities for people to move out of homelessness through training and employment support.



The Second Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa is produced by the Alliance to End Homelessness with support from United Way/Centraide Ottawa.



[www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca](http://www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca)