



“A PLACE FIRST”

Executive Summary: Community Plan on

Housing and Homelessness in Kingston



Produced by United Way
serving Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington

MAY 2009



The 2009 Community Plan on Homelessness and Housing is a collaborative community effort, coordinated and developed by the United Way serving KFL&A. Volunteers and staff analyzed data, consulted extensively with community members, researched other homelessness plans and developed recommendations about ways to tackle the issue of homelessness in Kingston.

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Community Plan on Housing &
Homelessness in Kingston

FACTORS LEADING TO HOMELESSNESS

The factors leading to homelessness are numerous and complex. The following were identified as factors that may lead to homelessness in Kingston:

- 1 Poverty
- 2 Vacancy Rates
- 3 High Rents
- 4 Affordable Housing, Social Housing Registry Waitlist
- 5 Health Issues
- 6 Mental Illness and Addictions
- 7 Government Policies
- 8 Personal
- 9 Emergency Shelter Usage

KEY DATA FINDINGS

Kingston is a city divided. With a highly educated work force and relatively stable jobs, it is an attractive place to live. However, many in the city have a hard time making ends meet.

There is a wide income gap

Kingston's median family income is \$67,908, lower than the provincial median income (\$69,156) but higher than the national median income (\$63,866).

There are large discrepancies in family income within Kingston. The highest median family income is \$131,948 in one neighbourhood and the lowest is \$35,247 in another.

Ontario's minimum wage has increased but individuals and families struggle

Minimum wage rates have increased from \$6.85 in 2004 to \$9.50 in 2009, an increase of 38.68%. In spite of these increases, a person making minimum wage, working steadily through the year, will find it challenging to pay rent as well as eat healthy food.

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Low Income Cutoff (LICO)

LICO for Kingston (urban area with a population range between 100,000 and 499,999) is between \$18,260 for a single person and \$34,671 for a family of four. In Kingston, 13.4% of the population (19,820) people live below the Low Income Cutoff level.

Affordability

With high rents, many individuals and families struggle to pay rent and afford healthy food and utilities. Families and individuals who pay more than 30% of their income on rent do not have enough money left for necessities. By definition, a household spending 50% or more of its income on shelter would fall below the affordability standard.

One in two households in Kingston spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Even worse, one in five spend half their income or more on housing, leaving very little for other basic needs.

Many struggle to pay for utilities. Gas has increased by 62% and heating fuel has increased by 89% since 2003. More and more people are accessing the utility banks in Kingston.

Kingston's average rents have increased

Vacancy rates in Kingston are low. Wait list and wait times for social housing are high. With low vacancy rates and long social housing registry waitlists, there are not enough affordable housing units in Kingston.

New affordable housing is being built but is not always affordable. The amounts identified as 'affordable' in fact are unaffordable for many. The average rents in Kingston are high.

Over the last 5 years, average rents have increased between 14.6% and 55.9%. Kingston has the highest rent for a three-bedroom apartment in the province of Ontario.

A “healthy” vacancy rate is considered to be 3 to 5%. Kingston's vacancy rate is a low 1.3%.

The number of households on the centralized waiting list for social housing has increased from 979 in 2005 to 1,073 in 2008, a 10.6% increase. Just 321 households from this list were housed in 2008.

The approximate wait time for families is 6–24 months, for seniors 2 years and for singles it is 4 years or more.

The demand for services is increasing

More residents are accessing meal programs, food bank usage, addiction services and counselling. Since 2006, there has been a 6% increase in the number of bed nights in the emergency hostels. Kingston Hostels and Shelters all report longer stays and an increase in the number of people turned away.

Meal providers in Kingston have seen a 4% increase in the number of meals served in 2008: Partners in Mission Food Bank has seen a 12% increase in demand for their services. 7,454 children accessed their services in 2008. The Food Sharing Project served 9,092 students in 2008, up from 5,218 students the previous year.

Addiction Services report an increase in the need for services and have added additional programs over the past couple of years. The Kingston Detoxification Centre reported that the length of stay has increased by approximately 25%.

Cost of poverty and homelessness

Poverty has a significant cost for governments. The federal and provincial governments are losing at least \$10.4 billion to \$13.1 billion a year due to poverty.

It is estimated that the cost of a homeless person is about \$134,000 per person per year. People who are homeless are more likely to access health care services, many of them are also more likely to spend time in correctional facilities. All studies indicate that it costs less to spend directly on supported social housing.



“Homeless people want housing. Continuums are neither linear nor continuous, and blind referrals don't work”

Iain De Jong, Manager of Toronto's Streets to Homes Program

HOUSING FIRST: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

There are essentially two approaches to homelessness. One approach is to provide a continuum of housing services, with shelters, transitional housing and affordable housing, along with related support services to move individuals and families through this continuum. The other is securing housing as a first step and then addressing other specific needs after the housing is in place.

In recent years, several cities across North America have adopted the Housing First model, which eschews the continuum approach in favour of addressing the most pressing need: stable, sustainable permanent housing.

Established in New York City in 1992, the Housing First model places homeless people directly into permanent housing first and then addresses other specific needs after the housing is in place. This model is successful when paired with intensive supports and services for the individuals and families.

The Housing First model has since been adopted in Canadian cities including Toronto, Halifax, Calgary and Vancouver. Evidence compiled in those cities suggests that the approach has resulted in reduced hospitalization rates and lengths of stay, fewer court appearances and arrests and, most importantly, clients reported higher self esteem with an improvement in health and safety. Moving homeless people directly into stable, permanent housing has proven to increase their ability to learn vital life skills and allow them to become self-sufficient.

Additional evidence suggests that Housing First reduces costs borne by the community and taxpayers. It costs less to place people in permanent supportive housing than to accommodate them in emergency shelters.

There are some successful examples of the Housing First model in Kingston. Kingston Home Base Housing provides permanent housing for homeless people in units on Joseph Street. Early reports show that this initiative has had a positive impact on shelter use. Frontenac Community Mental Health Services and Providence Care Mental Health Services have also taken this approach with some of their clients.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Shelters/Hostels

There will always be a need for shelters and hostels for those who face crises and emergencies. Our community needs to ensure that we continue to provide support services, beds and meal programs for those who are homeless as well as those who are at risk of losing their homes.

We recommend sustaining and maintaining shelter beds to meet the community emergency needs. We need to identify ways to reduce the number of chronically homeless people in emergency shelters and reduce the average stay in emergency shelters to less than seven days.

2 Housing First

Building on the success of Housing First models across North America and local initiatives, working with community partner agencies, we recommend that a local Housing First approach be developed that recognizes housing as a first priority with the required supports to help maintain tenancy.

We recommend that a Community Leadership Group work with all stakeholders to develop a plan to oversee the implementation of this model. A comprehensive plan for coordinated case management will be critical to the success of this approach.

All levels of government, funding agencies, shelter providers, developers and the private sector need to work together to find new, innovative ways to increase the housing supply to eliminate homelessness.

3 Keep People Housed

One of the best ways to reduce homelessness is to prevent people from losing their homes. We recommend that place-based services and eviction prevention support need to be in place to help people stay housed, with fewer evictions and more rent subsidies in place across the city, including support for low-income seniors and families.

A copy of the full report is available at www.unitedwaykfla.ca or by calling (613) 542-2674.



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