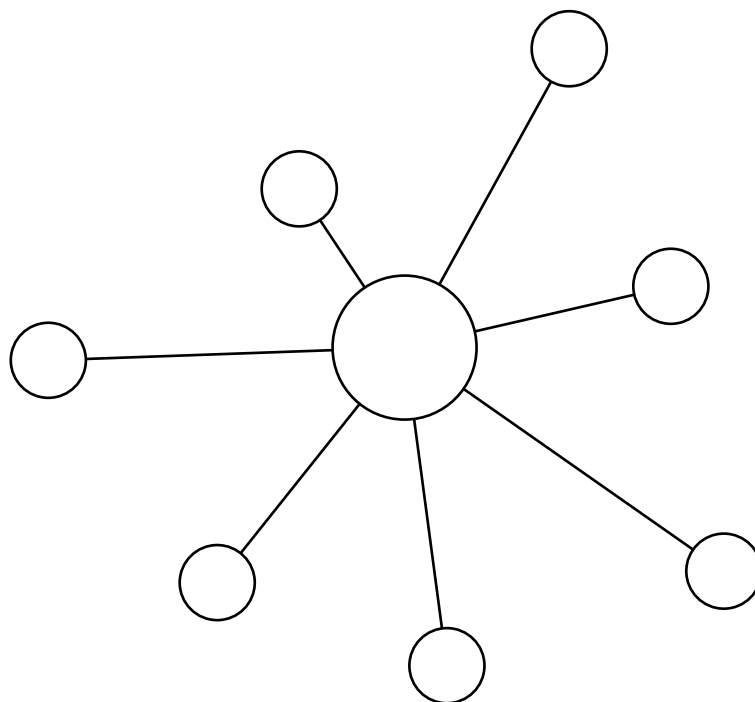


FINAL REPORT SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

An Evaluation of the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Pilot Project: Open Window Hub



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*The project and work included herein has been the sole responsibility of the
Corporation of the City of Mississauga.*

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Executive Summary

Mississauga is considered an affluent community; however, 45% of Peel neighbourhoods are considered low or very low-income areas, and more than half of these residents are only one paycheck away from financial crisis (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). In Mississauga, over 220 000 people experience poverty and struggle with affordable housing, employment, and other basic necessities, with estimates stating that 1 in 7 people in Mississauga are living in poverty (Mississauga Food Bank, 2018; Newport, 2016). While there are a substantial number of persons in Mississauga struggling from poverty and homelessness, there are limited organizations in the Peel Region whose work is targeted at assisting the homeless with their basic needs, such as finding shelter and affordable housing. As a result, nearly half of homeless men in Peel and 31% of homeless women state that they do not sleep in shelters, and many persons live in varying states of chronic homelessness (Mussell & Leblanc Haley, 2016).

The **Innovative Solutions to Homelessness** pilot project is designed to support and empower individuals and families who are experiencing episodic or chronic homelessness within the City of Mississauga. The project involves the use of libraries as a site for connecting homeless individuals with resources and services including computers and information about local shelters, rental and housing opportunities, food banks, job banks and counselling agencies. This project aims to ensure that strategic partnerships are developed between service organizations to coordinate resources and provide streamlined services to these individuals in a location in which they are comfortable and capable of accessing - through the library.

Key partners in this project include internal City of Mississauga departments (recreation, security services, and planning & building), as well as external organizations, including the Canadian Mental Health Association Peel (Peel Outreach Team), the Region of Peel (Housing and Homelessness), and the University of Toronto.

The Innovative Solutions to Homelessness project was **funded by an Employment and Social Development Canada grant** from the Canadian Federal Government.

Pilot Project: Short Term Outcomes

The **short-term outcome goals** for the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness pilot project are:

1. Increased agency/client awareness of homelessness supports available through libraries
2. Reduced barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing
3. Increased client access to community supports
4. Increased partnerships/collaboration with community agencies
5. Increased knowledge and skills for staff on homelessness needs/supports

To date, three **milestones** have been achieved for the pilot project: 1) Hire a Homeless Prevention Outreach Worker; 2) Train staff on how to handle situations related to homeless individuals and to refer them to appropriate support services; 3) Establish a community hub within the Mississauga Library System to promote services and resources.

Pilot Project Evaluation – Executive Summary

This evaluation is one piece of information to assess the progress of the pilot project and to provide recommendations on future directions for the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness project. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness pilot project, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the project throughout the past year, and to make recommendations to further strengthen the project in the future.

The **specific aims** of this pilot project evaluation were:

1. To outline the strengths of the pilot project, including the addition of a Homelessness Prevention Outreach Worker to city staff, and the creation of the Open Windows Hub at the Central Library.
2. To identify opportunities to improve pilot project awareness and effectiveness in order to increase program success in the future.
3. To develop recommendations for future strategies to enhance the goal of creating operational solutions to homelessness in City libraries, as well as for a Citywide approach in the future.

The **methods** for this study include the use of **qualitative and quantitative data from three data sources**:

1. **Tracking data** provided by the Homeless Prevention Outreach Worker (HPOW) to track number of interactions with clients.
2. **Survey data** to evaluate library staff knowledge, skills, and awareness of project goals and homelessness needs and supports. An online survey was sent to all employees of the Mississauga Library System, as well as City of Mississauga transit and municipal law enforcement officers.
 - 93 employees within the Mississauga Library System completed the survey from a range of library locations (72% females, 23.7% males, 4.3% non-conforming/prefer not to disclose).
 - Survey respondents had worked within the Library System between 1-7 years (average = 4.58 years).

3. **Qualitative data** consisting of focus groups with library staff and municipal law enforcement officers, as well as an individual interview with the HPOW to evaluate pilot project effectiveness and identify future strategies for addressing homelessness through City libraries. Three focus group interviews were conducted with 13 front facing library staff and Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEO). Nine libraries were represented within the focus groups. We also collected qualitative responses to open-ended questions on the online survey regarding participants' experiences and perspectives of the Open Window Hub pilot project.

Results – Executive Summary

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 1:

Increased agency/client awareness of homelessness supports available through libraries

We identified specific examples of instances where the HPOW role and Open Window Hub in the library was successful in assisting people to improve their livelihood and find housing. These examples provide evidence of increased agency/client awareness and use of homelessness supports provided through libraries. However, this study did not evaluate the awareness of homeless individuals regarding the Open Window Hub services directly due to ethical and safety issues during the research process; future evaluations may seek to solicit feedback directly from these clients.

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 2

Reduced barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing

Evidence from the qualitative interview data suggests that the Open Window Hub helped to reduce barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing by operating as a central resource for homeless individuals in a location that was familiar and accessible to them. The HPOW hired during the pilot project was instrumental in providing supports to homeless individuals.

Despite the development of partnerships and the integration of supports for homeless individuals within the Library System, the HPOW identified ongoing struggles and barriers he has encountered throughout the pilot project when trying to get persons into emergency shelters and housing. These barriers exist beyond the scope of the Library System and highlight the need for greater communication between regional municipalities, specifically with regard to sheltering the homeless.

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 3**Increased client access to community supports**

Evidence from all three data sources indicates that there was increased client access to community supports. Evidence from the tracking data as well as qualitative responses in the focus group interviews and open-ended questions on the online surveys indicated that participants reported providing increased client access to community supports as a result of the Open Window Hub and due to the HPOW.

- There were 862 contacts/interactions with clients from Sept. 2017 to Aug. 2018.
- In total, 135 clients were served from Sept. 2017 to Aug. 2018.
- There was an increase in clients served and in the total number of interactions over the course of the project and during the summer months.
- City staff interact with homeless clients on a frequent basis, with most respondents reporting that they interact with the City's homeless population multiple times per week.
- Survey data also indicated that City staff provided a number of services and connections to community supports to homeless clients. The most frequently reported services were assistance with library resources (e.g., computer, photocopier, etc.), providing a First Step card, connecting individuals with the HPOW, and recommending housing/shelters and food banks.

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 4**Increased partnerships/collaboration with community agencies**

Evidence from all three data sources indicates that there were increased partnerships and collaboration with community agencies. Library System staff described providing supports and resources across a range of community agencies (e.g., shelters, employment, food banks, mental health or addictions help, transportation). The HPOW described connections made between City departments and services, as well as with external organizations to promote better services for homeless individuals. However, increasing collaboration is necessary to improve the provision of service and efficient communication between community agencies, as a lack of communication within and across municipal departments was frequently cited as an ongoing challenge in providing services.

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 5**Increased knowledge and skills for staff on homelessness needs/supports**

Evidence from the survey data and the qualitative interview data indicates that there was increased knowledge and skills for staff on homelessness needs/supports.

- Employees who had received training were significantly more likely to report feeling knowledgeable and comfortable interacting with homeless clients compared to employees who did not receive training.
- Employees who had received training were also significantly more likely to report feeling that they had more appropriate skills when interacting with homeless clients compared to employees who did not receive training.

These findings provide direct support that training employees is effective in increasing knowledge and skills for staff on homelessness needs/supports.

Participants in this evaluation expressed they wanted more training to assist them in feeling adequately comfortable, safe, and prepared to work with the city's homeless population.

Participants would benefit from training related to:

- How to safely and effectively use language that is comforting and non-offensive
- Training with regard to mental health and addictions
- De-escalation and non-violent crisis intervention training
- Information on how to refer people to the HPOW or services that they are looking for – this includes understanding the systems and resources that currently exist
- Training on personal security for situations when incidents escalate

Study Recommendations

Based on this evaluation, we provide several recommendations regarding the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Project:

Recommendation 1:

The Innovative Solutions to Homelessness program should be continued and its programming and city-reach should be increased. The role of the Homelessness Prevention Outreach Worker and Open Window Hub is having the intended impact for those who have been able to access the service.

Recommendation 2:

We recommend that library and security staff be provided with additional and repeated training on interacting with homeless individuals and individuals with mental health issues, as training was significantly associated with improved knowledge, skills, and comfort for staff interacting with homeless individuals.

Recommendation 3:

We recommend improvements to the dissemination of information within the Library System regarding resources for homeless individuals to streamline the information that is available to staff and clients. Resources should be made available in multiple languages where possible.

Recommendation 4:

We recommend continued communication among library and security staff at all levels about the goals of the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness project, in order to improve awareness of the project among staff members. Improvements in staff awareness of the program would be valuable in improving staff members' ability to provide individuals with information about the program and services available within the Library Systems and Open Window Hub.

Context and Pilot Project Overview

In 2014, the Mississauga Library Master Plan, “Future Directions 2014” was launched and provided an innovative, sustainable, and fiscally responsible framework to guide the City of Mississauga’s provision of library facilities, programs and services. The scope of this plan covers a five-year period (2014-2019) and includes strategic directions that include renewing our commitment towards providing high quality public library spaces that are safe, welcoming, flexible, and that foster connections amongst residents of all ages, interests and backgrounds. Because of this welcoming atmosphere, library staff may encounter individuals who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. These customers may be vulnerable and require specialized services or referrals to other services that library staff are not in a position to provide. The intention of this pilot project was to implement a number of connections within the library to assist this population. Funding for this project was provided through a \$122,523 grant from Employment and Social Development Canada to support this research.

Background information

Incorporated in 1974, Mississauga is recognized as Canada’s 6th largest and fastest growing major city with a population of 766 000 residents and stands as one of the world’s most diverse cities, representing cultures from around the world, with 52.9% of residents identifying as immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2011). Mississauga has built a reputation as an outstanding city in which to live, learn, work, and play. It is a place where students and older adults, entrepreneurs, and employees, new immigrants and families can fulfill their future promise and realize their goals.

The Mississauga Public Library Board exists to provide library services to meet the life-long information, educational, cultural, and recreational needs for all citizens. The Mississauga Library System is one of the largest public library systems in Canada with over 300 000 users, 18 branch locations, including a multi-floor central library (City of Mississauga, 2016).

Poverty in Canada and Mississauga

The number of people in Canada living in poverty has been estimated to be between 1 in 10 to 1 in 7, existing on a continuum from relative to absolute (The Canadian Press, 2011; Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2017; Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2017). Many low-income families living in relative poverty struggle to afford to pay their rent and buy groceries. This type of poverty is not an anomaly. In Canada, 1 in 5 households living in rented properties are spending more than 50% of their household income on paying their rent (Raising the Roof, 2017). Absolute poverty is a description of human depravity. This is a situation wherein a person cannot afford their most basic needs, including food, shelter, clothing, and transportation (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2017; Library of Parliament, 2008).

Beyond income, prolonged experiences of poverty make persons more vulnerable to adverse health outcomes (Hwang, Martin, Tolomiczenko & Hulchanski, 2003) than those earning a living wage, and in turn they use more healthcare resources, as illness can make it harder to get out

of poverty. Poverty can lead to sickness because of inadequate housing, poor nutrition, and less access to preventative health care (Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2017; Arai & Burke, 2007). When poverty is considered on a broader community level, impacts such as the financial costs in terms of physical infrastructure, culture, social inclusion, and healthcare are apparent. These costs reveal the erosion of social fabric, where the safety, health, and overall wellbeing of a community is threatened when cycles of poverty are unaddressed (Arai & Burke, 2007).

Located within the Peel Region, Mississauga is considered an affluent community; however, 45% of Peel neighbourhoods are considered low or very low-income areas, and more than half of these residents are only one paycheck away from financial crisis (Gaetz, Donaldson, Richter, & Gulliver, 2013). In Mississauga, over 220 000 people experience poverty and struggle with affordable housing, employment, and other basic necessities, with estimates stating that 1 in 7 people in Mississauga are living in poverty (Mississauga Food Bank, 2018; Newport, 2016). While there are a substantial number of persons in Mississauga struggling from poverty and homelessness, there are limited organizations in the Peel Region whose work is targeted at assisting the homeless with their basic needs, such as finding shelter and affordable housing. As a result, nearly half of homeless men in Peel and 31% of homeless women state that they do not sleep in shelters, and many persons live in varying states of chronic homelessness (Mussell & Leblanc Haley, 2016).

Though a substantial struggle for this particular population is finding a safe place to sleep for the night, one commonly overlooked daily hurdle for the homeless is how to spend their time during the day when they have nowhere else to go and when dealing with Canada's often extreme climate. In the absence of any long-term solution, a common place of refuge is the local public library (McKendry, 1993; Reith & Huncar, 2014).

The Library as a Space of Possible Refuge

Many people experiencing homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health issues find refuge in the Mississauga Library System, as the library is seen as a safe and welcoming space. Because of this, library staff are in a key position to identify individuals who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. Librarian staff are often the first point of contact for individuals and families who are seeking emergency and crisis assistance for housing and the library often has many resources individuals who are homeless can access, such as computers and information about local shelters, rental and housing opportunities, food banks, job banks, and counselling agencies.

Moreover, while there are social services available, finding the location where the service is provided, navigating through public transit, receiving referrals when required, and the limited business hours of these services can be barriers to success. Given the many factors preventing homeless and at-risk individuals from accessing these services, the object of this project is to ensure that strategic partnerships are developed between service organizations to coordinate resources and provide streamlined services to these individuals in a location in which they are comfortable and capable of accessing - through the library.

Homeless and at-risk populations are significant users of library programs and services in the City of Mississauga, as often it is their only means for accessing resources and supports on a daily basis and may be the first place they come to when they need a safe place. When surveying the homeless, they often cite a need to see increased services from their libraries. In recent years other Canadian libraries, including Edmonton Public Library (Ramsay, 2014) and American libraries, including San Francisco Public Library (Fraga, 2016) and the San Jose Public Library (San Jose Public Library, 2018) have hired library social workers to provide assistance to the homeless population, with a variety of outreach programs in place at each of the different libraries. These include deposit collections, reading rooms, story hours, coaching parents in read-aloud techniques, computer labs with educational software, homework help in shelters, issuing library cards, bookmobile services, literacy programs, reading groups, and library instruction (Dowd, 2013; Ramsay, 2014; San Jose Public Library, 2018). Libraries can act as an important space of refuge and respite for homeless persons in the community.

Pilot Project Overview

Following the examples of previous library successes, the City of Mississauga, since May 5, 2017, launched a pilot project in which the city's libraries began working in partnership with a number of internal city departments including recreation, security services, and planning & building, as well as external organizations, including the Canadian Mental Health Association Peel (Peel Outreach Team), the Region of Peel (Housing and Homelessness), and the University of Toronto to ensure an inter-disciplinary approach. These partnerships were created to promote an inter-disciplinary approach, to leverage and align the project with best practices, and to provide additional support to individuals who experience homelessness in the City of Mississauga.

This project included the creation of a logic model which highlights some of the intended actions of the project (short term), as well as long terms goals of the actions initiated by the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness project (see Figure 1).

Mississauga Library Pilot Project: Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Logic Model (updated December 19, 2017)

Risk(s)	Assumption(s)
Library staff turnover and resulting training.	This pilot project is in development therefore higher level outcomes are broad assumptions to be determined following pilot project.
Appropriate tools need to be in place for accurate and consistent data collection and monitoring.	A system of care is a long-term approach.
Components of Program Development and Staff Training are integral precursors for achieving these outcomes.	

Note(s): Short-term outcomes within colored boxes are achievable within the pilot project timeframes.

Developed by Region of Peel Strategic Planning, Management and Evaluation Unit, Strategic Initiatives Division, Human Services Department in collaboration with the City of Mississauga Core Working Team.

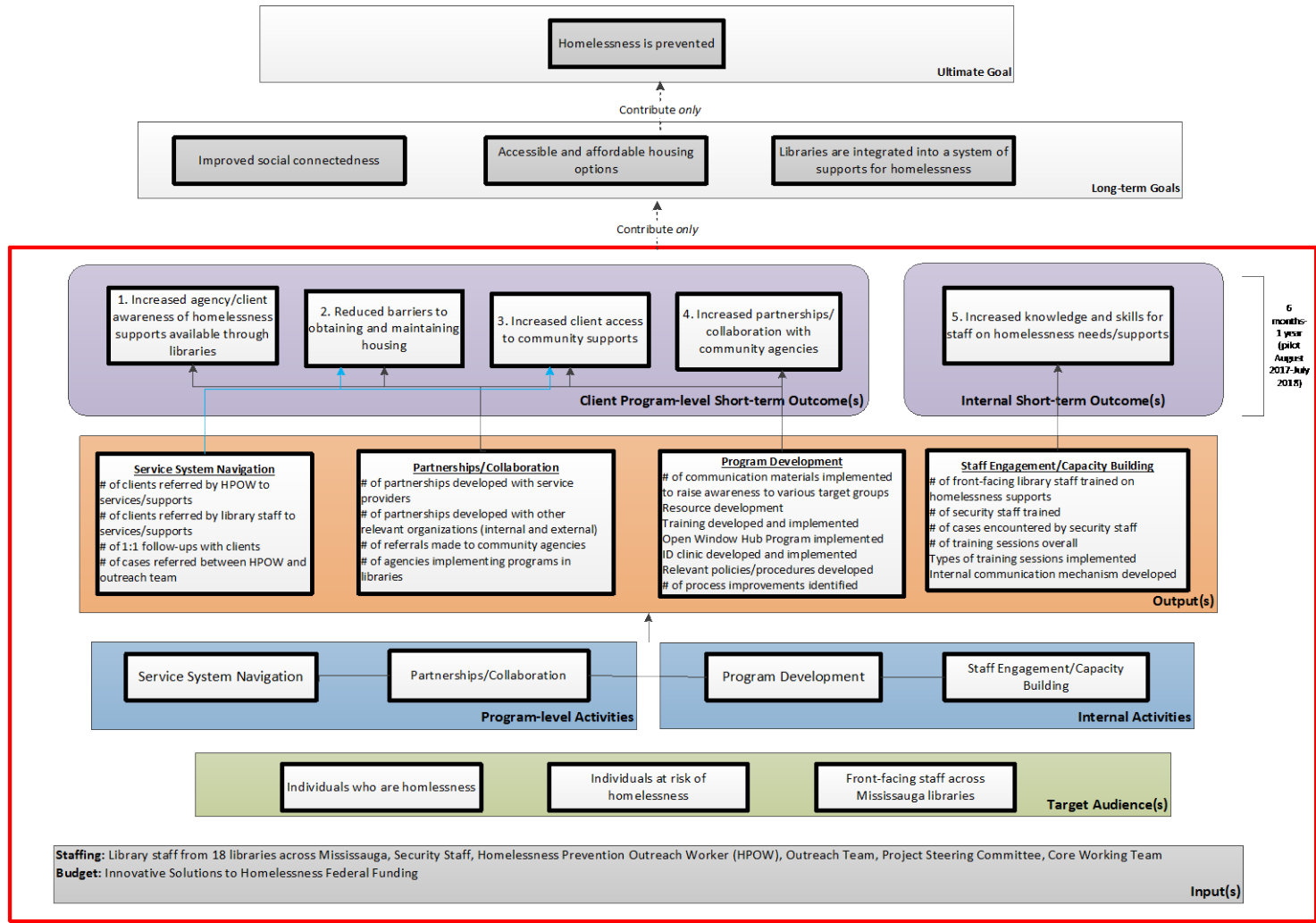


Figure 1. Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Logic Model

Based on the Logic Model, three specific milestones were established for the pilot project:

Milestone 1: Hire a Homeless Prevention Outreach Worker (HPOW)

The HPOW will operate within the library to support and empower at-risk individuals, meeting them where “they are at” and in a place that they already feel safe and welcome; develop resource materials at each of the other 18 library branches that provides supports and information for those at imminent risk of homelessness; and work collaboratively with community partners to develop a system of care approach to addressing those who are experiencing episodic or chronic homelessness. It is well documented that a system of care approach that is strengths-based, culturally relevant, and has a participatory framework for working with individuals with complex needs is a successful model. A system of care approach utilizes inter-agency collaboration, individualized programming and community-based service provision. In the homelessness sector, a system of care is a method of the community delivering a service differently to people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2017).

Milestone 2: Train staff

Provide training to staff on how to direct and handle specific situations as it relates to homeless individuals and how to assist or refer them to appropriate support services.

Milestone 3: Establish a community hub within the Mississauga Library System to promote services,

A community hub will be a place where individuals who are experiencing homelessness can stop in for a place to rest, feel safe, feel valued, and be provided with a connection to a HPOW. Called the “Open Window Hub”, this barrier-free program will promote inclusiveness of vulnerable youth and adults by providing equitable access to housing resources, computers, access to food security, a place to rest, and other support services. The program will act as an opportunity to build trust with a population that is housing resistant and requires more support to accept help and engage in the development of an individual plan for housing. It will create a safe space where the homeless population can meet with a HPOW and community partners who are engaged in the work of connecting them with ongoing support and working towards improving their current situation with a goal of stable housing. The program will also work to reduce the stigma of homelessness as library customers will see how the program integrates at-risk individuals and provides for a more understanding and compassionate city.

Current Progress and Context for Evaluation

In the past year, the City of Mississauga pilot project had a number of substantial project activity milestones, which included, hiring a Homelessness Prevention Outreach Worker (HPOW); providing training to staff on how to assist and direct individuals experiencing homelessness to appropriate support services; organizing a community safety model plan to develop a system of care approach; developing programming and create a program schedule for individuals experiencing homelessness accessing the library; and establishing a community hub within the Mississauga Library System (located at the Central Library), as well as promoting these services.

The purpose of this evaluation is to report on the project activities that occurred throughout the past year of the pilot project. Specifically, this evaluation provides information concerning the short-term outcomes identified in the logic model and measurement framework created by the City of Mississauga which outlined the project's goals, as well as to providing detailed feedback received from City of Mississauga employees, including front facing library staff, corporate security, transit enforcement and Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEOs), as well as the HPOW who was employed as a part of this pilot project.

The findings from this pilot project will assist the Mississauga Library System, and other Ontario and Canadian libraries, to establish best practices for improved inclusion of the city's homeless in the library system, as well as contextualizing the lessons learnt from the one-year pilot project for an "Open Window Hub."

Pilot Project Evaluation

Purpose and Specific Aims of Pilot Project Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness pilot project, to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the project throughout the past year, and to make recommendations to strengthen the project in the future.

The **specific aims** of this pilot project evaluation were:

1. To outline the strengths of the pilot project, including the addition of a Homelessness Prevention Outreach Worker to city staff, and the creation of the Open Windows Hub at the Central Library.
2. To identify opportunities to improve pilot project awareness and effectiveness in order to increase program success in the future.
3. To develop recommendations for future strategies to enhance the goal of creating operational solutions to homelessness in City libraries, as well as for a Citywide approach in the future.

Methods and Data Sources for Pilot Project Evaluation

Evaluation of the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness pilot project involved: (1) a quantitative analysis of data regarding the initiation and implementation of the project, and (2) a qualitative evaluation of the project among a sample of City of Mississauga library staff and municipal law enforcement officers. There were three sources of data used to inform this evaluation:

1. **Tracking data** provided by HPOW to track number of interactions with clients.
2. **Survey data** to evaluate library staff knowledge, skills, and awareness of project goals and homelessness needs and supports. An online survey was sent to all employees of the Mississauga Library System, as well as City of Mississauga employees who work with the Mississauga Library System, including City of Mississauga municipal law enforcement officers

Survey Sample Characteristics:

- 93 employees within the Mississauga Library System completed the survey
- *M* age = 41.68 years of age
- 72% female, 23.7% male, 4.3% non-conforming/prefer not to disclose
- Employees had worked within the Library between 1-7 years (*M* = 4.58 years)
- Among participants who indicated their library location, a range of locations were identified:

Library Location	Frequency	Percent
Central Library	5	6.1
Burnhamthorpe/Lakeview	23	28.0
Churchill Meadows/Meadowvale	7	8.5
Clarkson/Lorne Park/Sheridan	9	11.0
Cooksville/Port Credit	9	11.0
Courtneypark/Malton	5	6.1
Erin Meadows/Streetsville	10	12.2
Frank McKechnie/Mississauga Valley	10	12.2
South Commons/Woodlands	4	4.9
Total	82	100.0

3. **Qualitative data** consisting of focus groups with library staff and municipal law enforcement officers, as well as an individual interview with the HPOW to evaluate pilot project effectiveness and identify future strategies for addressing homelessness through City libraries. We also collected qualitative responses to open-ended questions on the online survey regarding participants' experiences and perspectives of the Open Window Hub pilot project.

Three focus group interviews were conducted with 13 front facing library staff and Municipal Law Enforcement Officers (MLEO). Nine libraries were represented within the focus groups. The pilot project steering committee was not informed of which staff members participated in the focus groups. Each focus group (3-6 people in each) was conducted in a private room provided by the Mississauga Library System, and all participants signed agreements to maintain anonymity and confidentiality regarding who participated in their respective focus group and what was discussed.

Pilot Project Evaluation Results

The results of the pilot project evaluation are structured to reflect the Short Term Outcomes identified in the Logic Model. The various data sources are used where appropriate to inform each of the Short Term Outcomes.

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 1

Increased agency/client awareness of homelessness supports available through libraries

Short Term Outcome 1: Evidence from Qualitative Data

The current evaluation did not assess the awareness of homeless clients regarding the Open Window Hub services; however, evidence from the HPOW interview provides information about clients' use of these services. The HPOW was able to provide specific examples of instances where the HPOW role and Open Window Hub in the library was successful in assisting people to improve their livelihood and find housing. These anecdotal stories provide evidence of increased agency/client awareness and use of homelessness supports provided through libraries:

*“Early on in the program there was referral for a woman who sleeping her van with her three cats which prohibited from entering a shelter. **She was a victim of intimate partner violence and fled the relationship**, self-identified as First Nations, though did not wish to access any culturally specific supports. She had an early retirement pension income which she is gaining control over. **She did not have money for first and last month's rent and struggled with looking for apartments and dealing with other issues as she had her cats to care for.** Met with her at the Mississauga Valley Branch as there was not parking costs, negotiated with Animal Services to temporarily foster her cats while she looked for apartments. Completed an application to the “December 6th fund”, which supports women fleeing abuse with obtaining funds related to housing costs. **She found housing and moved to St. Catharines.** I kept the following text on my phone from her as reminder. 'Good morning it's ***** I just wanted you to know everything has worked out fantastic thanks to your efforts. I have an apartment, it's nice, the landlord is a good landlord. I'm living in St. Catharines, it's a beautiful city. I'm sorry I didn't call you earlier, but I slept almost two days after I moved in. The landlord let me move in immediately since the apartment was vacant. Again, I cannot thank you enough. Have a great day.’”*

*“Another client a 26-year-old male, Concurrent Disorder-Schizoaffective Disorder and Substance use, and, while connected to family, he could not reside at home based on presenting symptoms and behaviours in relation to his mental health. **No current supports, chronically homeless, staying in coffee shops at night and coming to the library and spending the day there sleeping. He appeared disheveled and unkempt, symptoms of mental health were prevalent and would present more acutely at times.** Engaged him and connected with his mother who was also a consistent support for him. Provided him with food and checked in with him daily. I began to notice an increase acuity with his mental health symptoms whereby he was being loud, laughing to himself and disruptive which was out of character for him. **Based on interactions and observations I made the determination that his condition was becoming increasingly unstable and contacted Peel Police and facilitated him being taken to hospital under Section 17 of MHA.** I coordinated with hospital and made them aware I was engaged with him, he was admitted for over 6 weeks, and I attended case conferences and was part of his discharge process. **Client left hospital to a crisis bed program and then to independent housing, he is adhering to medication treatment and supported by a Psychiatrist.** He is attending Adult Secondary School to update Math courses as he wants to apply for post-secondary studies for computer programming.”*

*“One person who accessed the hub was a 49-year-old male who uses a wheelchair and had been **chronically homeless, as he reported, for the past 9 years.** He reported that he would not access shelters based on historic issues of being victimized. He was sleeping outside in bus shelters and in bank ATM areas. I worked to build rapport with him and collaborated with Peel Outreach Team, which supported him being placed in a hotel over the holidays. This provided safety and stability during a cold period in the winter. **He was recently housed in his own apartment in Mississauga, which is the first one he has had in almost a decade through the support of rental subsidy from the Region of Peel.**”*

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 2

Reduced barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing

Short Term Outcome 2: Evidence from Qualitative Data

Evidence from the qualitative interview data suggests that the Open Window Hub helped to reduce barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing by operating as a central resource for homeless individuals in a location that was familiar and accessible to them. The HPOW hired during the pilot project was instrumental in providing supports to homeless individuals.

In one specific example, the HPOW provided an example of reducing barriers in order to offer people the opportunity to receive or replace their identification. Lack of identification (ID) is a significant barrier for persons who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, as ID is needed to obtain things such as credit checks, job positions, and library cards.

*“When I came here, I knew the mandate was homelessness and to address housing. Then I started thinking about barriers around housing, and ID was one. **And also looked at it as a way to engage, or something practical to give people, because sometimes you're just another social worker, like, "who are you, I've seen ten people like you, what are you going to offer me"?** So, I thought it was a way to at least offer a service that is practical, and a way to engage people, right, because ID is at least a way to get people in, and to talking. I contacted Street Health, and I got information about how to go about; I got the agreement through Service Ontario. Service Ontario gives an agreement where you fill out a form identifying that people don't have housing, and they can take it to a Service Ontario and get an ID, and it is good for one year, and then eventually it has to be renewed, but at least for one year they can get their cards sent here, get their health card number, or get their actual health card without an address.”*

The HPOW now offers an ID clinic through the Open Window Hub and he is able to help them fill out the required forms or set up an appointment time to take the forms to Service Ontario. For those without housing, Service Ontario will mail health cards to the Open Window Hub.

With regard to city and regional transit, the HPOW acknowledged that Mi-Way has been helpful in providing Presto cards for him to hand out people who were accessing the Open Window Hub in need of getting from one location in the city or region to another, stating the importance of homeless people to be able to move throughout the region for shelter.

*“Mi-Way has been good, they donated a bunch of Presto cards last year, maybe 30 or 40, and we filled them with ten dollars. Transit is huge that people really need to get around, and so Presto cards are a big thing. And the **Presto cards are good in some instances because they can help people get outside the city**, I mean, I know ten bucks isn't going to get you far, but it created those options, right?”*

Ongoing Barriers and Challenges to Obtaining and Maintaining Housing

However, the HPOW discussed some ongoing struggles and barriers he has encountered throughout the pilot project when trying to get persons into emergency shelters and housing. For example, there were times when the Mississauga shelters would all be full, as well as the Peel regional shelters. During these times he would make efforts to get individuals housed within other municipalities but did face barriers in getting people who are from Mississauga allowed into the shelter of another municipality. This highlights the need for greater communication between regional municipalities, specifically with regard to sheltering the homeless.

*"I can speak to the supervisor of the shelters at a regional level because my understanding is that, so the shelter is saying, "we don't have a bed", but the protocol is that you have to find somebody a bed, I shouldn't be calling around, like, I don't mind doing it, but what if someone is calling from the street? So, I start to ask those questions, so people have gone to Newmarket, Halton, but again, then it's a barrier because then it becomes, you know, if you are in Mississauga, you've got to find a shelter in Mississauga, you can't come to Halton, like it, and I'm trying to argue, **the person is homeless, so it doesn't matter, really, they are here, but they have no home, they aren't tied.** So, you can't create these boundaries of saying, 'you can't come to Halton because you don't live in Halton'."*

Beyond the challenges related to the Mississauga Library System and the pilot project, there was significant discussion of the current and persistent problem in Mississauga relating to a lack of affordable housing, and extremely low rental vacancy rates. The HPOW addressed that not only do people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness struggle to afford housing, they are also often stigmatized by landlords when trying to rent property:

*"I would say that **housing affordability is probably the biggest barrier for individuals.** The lack of housing, so a lack of affordable housing within Mississauga is another one, even to rent a room. There is more opportunity in Brampton, but that really is one of the biggest ones. **And, I guess the stigmatization of, if you have any kind of income, if you have any identifying mental health, if you're homeless, if you're on ODSP, again, those barriers, it creates more barriers that people don't want to rent to you.** So, those are sort of what I identify. I think, really, the housing affordability, people come and want to rent a room or something or are looking for housing."*

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 3

Increased client access to community supports

Evidence from all three data sources indicates that there was increased client access to community supports:

Short Term Outcome 3: Evidence from Tracking Data

Tracking data indicates that there was an increase in the number of clients accessing community supports through the Open Window Hub and the HPOW.

- There were 862 contacts/interactions with clients from Sept. 2017 to Aug. 2018.
- In total, 135 clients were served from Sept. 2017 to Aug. 2018.
- There was an increase in clients served and in the total number of interactions over the course of the project and during the summer months.

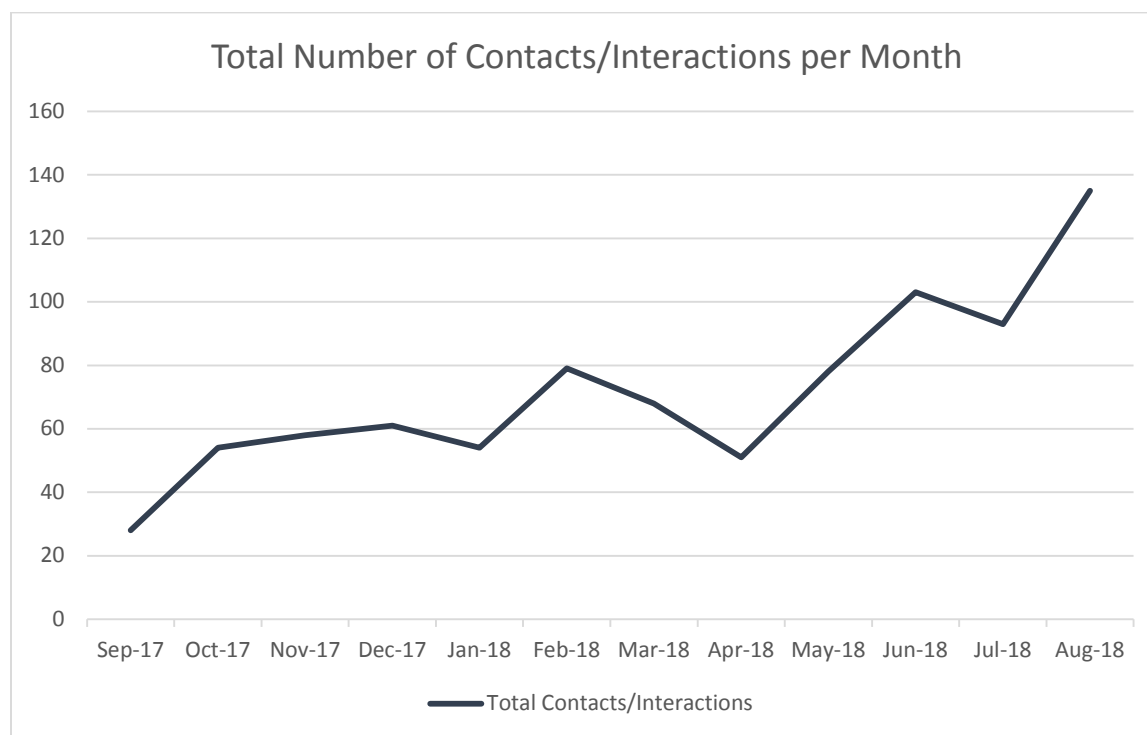


Figure 2. Number of HPOW contacts/interactions with clients per month.

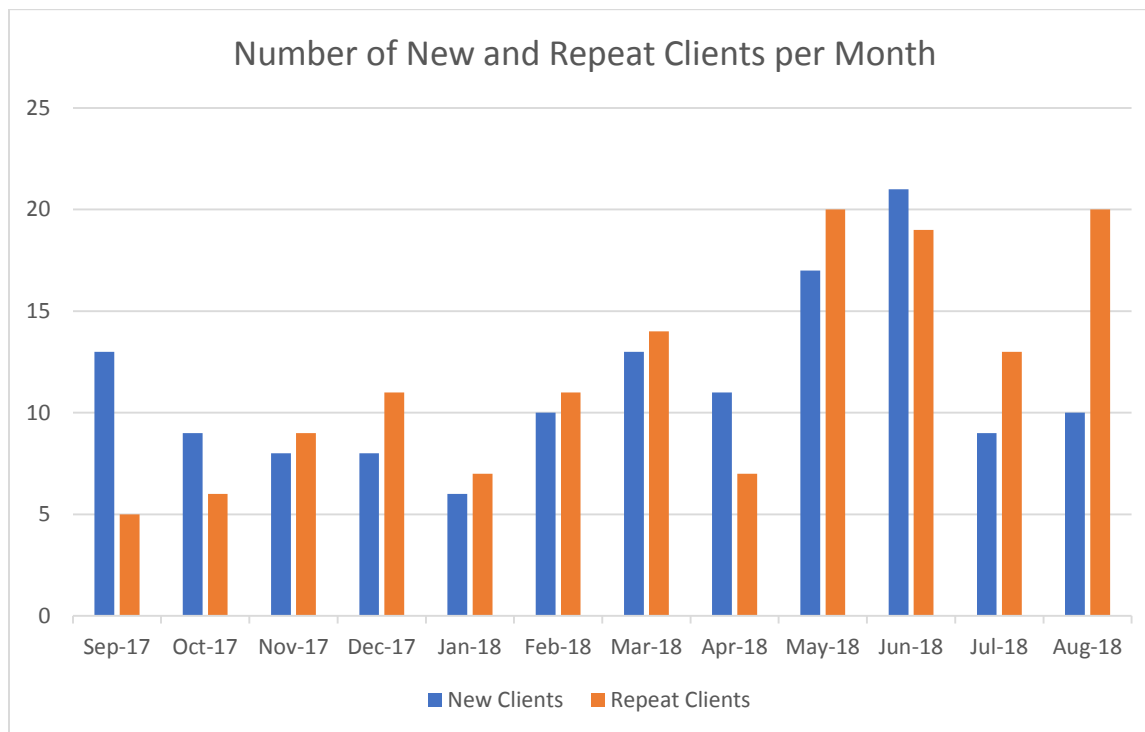


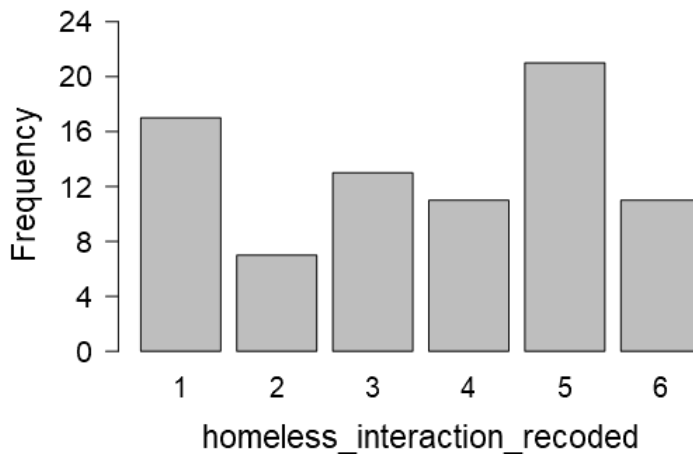
Figure 3. Number of new and repeat clients per month.

Short Term Outcome 3: Evidence from Survey Data

- Survey data indicates that City staff interact with homeless clients on a frequent basis, with most respondents reporting that they interact with the City’s homeless population multiple times per week.

How frequently do you interact with the city’s homeless population?

- 1 = less than once per month
- 2 = once per month
- 3 = 3-4 times per month
- 4 = 1-2 times per week
- 5 = Multiple times per week
- 6 = everyday



- Survey data also indicated that City staff provided a number of services and connections to community supports to homeless clients.

***What services have you provided to members of the city's homeless population to date?
(Ranked in order of frequency)***

1. Assistance with library resources/services (computer, photocopier, etc.)
2. Providing a First Step card or other library services
3. Connecting with the HPOW
4. Recommended shelters and housing resources
5. Food/food bank referrals
6. Helping with job searches
7. Assistance with printing and scanning government forms
8. Information on shower passes

Short Term Outcome 3: Evidence from Qualitative Data

Evidence from qualitative responses in the focus group interviews and open-ended questions on the online surveys indicated that participants reported providing increased client access to community supports as a result of the Open Window Hub and due to the HPOW.

*“There were **several homeless or in need customers that have directly been helped by the HPOW.** To be able to call on him in situations where we would otherwise struggle has been invaluable.” (focus group)*

*“Was able to call library homelessness worker and have him come to the branch and offer assistance. This was very helpful. The customer asked for him repeatedly. **This was an improvement over previous experiences trying to help somebody.**” (survey response)*

*“We had a situation where an elderly gentleman called, and **he said he was looking for housing because he can no longer stay where he is, but he desperately needs someone to fill out his forms,** he doesn't know how. So, we referred him to [the HPOW] and I followed up, and [the HPOW] was able to help him.” (focus group)*

*“There was a girl in the atrium who was having a mental health crisis. I was in the backroom, apparently, she was screaming at the top of her lungs and threw a few of the chairs around... Later on, I actually saw [the HPOW] talking to the girl in the atrium, **telling her about the services and things he might be able to offer to her,** so that was a good connection, and I was really glad he was there.” (focus group)*

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 4

Increased partnerships/collaboration with community agencies

- Evidence from all three data sources indicates that there was increased partnerships and collaboration with community agencies.
- However, increasing collaboration is necessary to improve the provision of service and efficient communication between community agencies.

Short Term Outcome 4: Evidence from Tracking Data

Evidence from the tracking data provides information about the source of referrals for homeless clients to the HPOW. Regarding the source of referral/contact with clients, the greatest number of contacts occurred due to referrals from Library Staff and due to HPOW-initiated contacts.

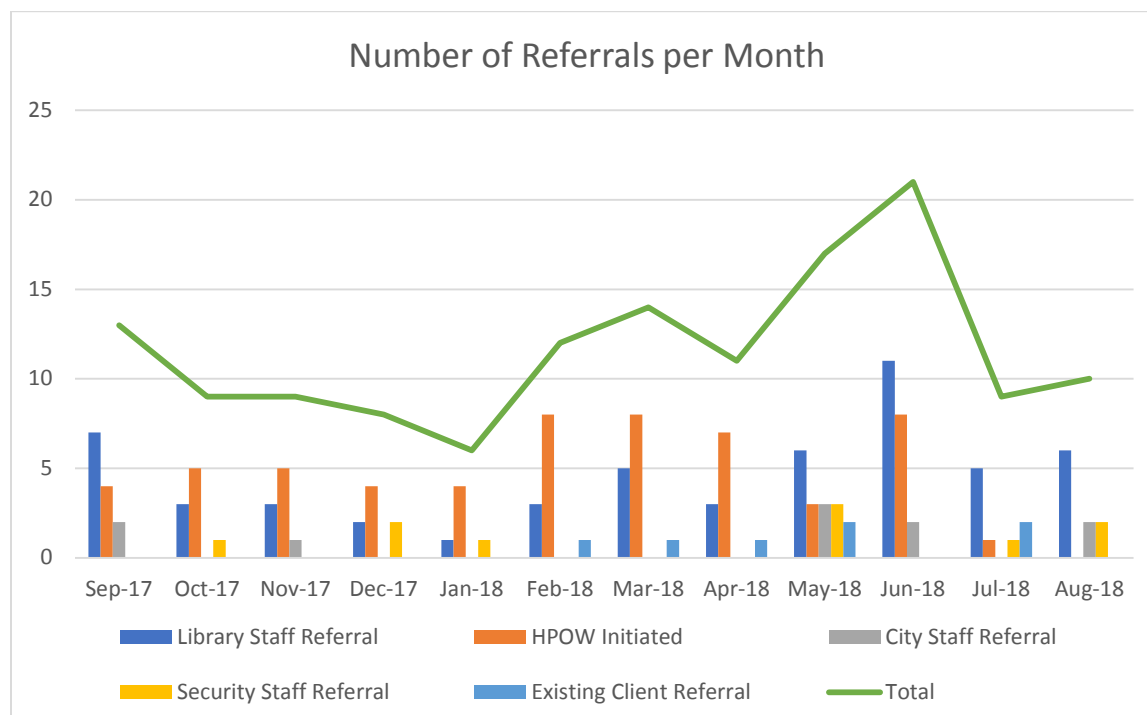


Figure 4. Number of referrals to HPOW per month. Graph illustrates the total number of referrals, as well as the source of the referral.

Short Term Outcome 4: Evidence from Survey Data

Evidence from the survey data indicates that City staff provided supports for homeless clients across a range of services.

What types of services are commonly requested or needed by members of the city's homeless population? (Ranked in order of frequency)

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Information about housing or shelters | 6. Employment |
| 2. Access to the phone or computer | 7. Mental health or addictions help |
| 3. Food | 8. Clothing |
| 4. Library card | 9. Medical help |
| 5. Showers, laundry, or other hygiene products | 10. Transportation |
| | 11. Request to contacting the HPOW |

Short Term Outcome 4: Evidence from Qualitative Data

The HPOW spoke about the connections that have been made between City departments and services, as well as with external organizations. The HPOW spoke both of the positive changes that he has witnessed, and areas where future improvement in collaboration would be beneficial:

*"I'm learning how homelessness and mental health, how it intersects with so many different services in the city, like I was saying, **animal services**, they are saying "help us". I spoke to **municipal by-law enforcement**, and they are saying help because they are having contact with people with hoarding and other issues like that. **Transit operators** are having contact with individuals. I think it is centralized, it is easy to really have an internal contact with someone who can, not that I can solve things, but at least they can call and say, "I have question", or "can you provide some support"? And then, for me, sometimes where it's possible, I can refer back, so I can provide that information to them. So, sometimes it's saying, like for example someone from **corporate security** refers me to Bob, and so Bob and I meet, and I say, "you know what, you're living outside, but I've got to make sure that security is aware, is it okay that I tell them that we've met, and we are working on a plan"? So, then it goes back to security, and they know, you know, at least if they see Bob again, at least they know there is a plan and he is meeting with me and there is a plan on getting him to move on then we can take this camp down. **Whereas, when you go to external agencies, I think sometimes it is the broken telephone, or things get lost.** So, sometimes it is referral, and then I'll take it on, and then I'll refer out. It just makes it an easier continuity of service, and it helps to highlight the issues of homelessness within the city. And I have seen the siloed systems, and you're not going to get somewhere."*

Another partnership that the HPOW has initiated throughout the pilot project was the creation of a Canadian and American library network between those library systems that have also started bringing social work into the library setting:

“When I started here I reached out to San Francisco, and I spoke to the social worker in San Francisco where this whole idea kind of social workers in libraries started. She spent some time talking to me. I reached out to Edmonton, which was the first Canadian program, and then Denver, because San Francisco put me onto Denver as another really good program. And, again, it was so basic, writing stats down on a piece of paper. Everyone started the same way. And then they put me on the network, so there is a network in the U.S. of all the social workers, it's all these different places across the U.S. So, they had a teleconference, and they invited me to be a part of it. Even though the issues are different, at least it brought me in and gave me ideas. Then I sort of thought, but can I do it in Canada? So, I've connected with Edmonton, Winnipeg, Hamilton, Thunder Bay, Brantford, Kitchener. And then I found other ones, like, Windsor is doing something different, like, it's a social worker but she is trying to do some community development. So, I connected with her, and I brought people in, and it's just emails, so people share ideas and issues come, you know, just about policy stuff... you know, if people are homeless and they can't pay a fine then it excludes them.”

This quote highlights the innovative nature of this pilot project and the instrumental role that the HPOW has played in advancing the idea of providing service to homeless individuals within the library setting across Canada.

Challenges to Collaborations and Partnerships

Although there appears to be increased collaborations and partnerships as a result of the pilot project, in the focus group interviews participants stated that there has been a lack of communication between the various areas within the City of Mississauga and City employees regarding what specifically the pilot project was, and what it entailed. This limited communication led City staff to be unaware of who specifically to contact when situations arose, when they should handle situations themselves or bring in security or the HPOW, and how to navigate the HPOW and other resources that may have been available during the pilot project:

“We don't know where to contact for support, we don't know what is available. We're in the dark... we are a very essential service, we are the only place where someone can go in and sleep for a few hours or come in and use a computer. Yet, as essential as we are, we have zero tools on how to help someone. We don't know where to send them to. When we started to deal with this gentleman, I think it really hit us all when we realized that it is a health concern. And we didn't know how to help him. We had no idea what to do, and we felt bad, we felt guilty for calling security and not being able to help him if all he wanted to do was use the computer, and we kicked him out, like, where is he going to go? If the safest place to go has kicked him out and created a negative experience, how do we repair that?” (focus group)

“Across the city, so the parks and rec are very separate, and library is very separate, and even how security communicates with us can be separate. When someone is given a ban, they are supposed to be banned from not just the library, or not just the community centre, but the entire facility. But, there have been several cases where people would be banned on the community centre side, and we don't know it, so they come in, and we don't think anything of it. And then our security guard will come in later and be like, “oh, that kid is banned”... we can't be very consistent about anything if we don't even hear that this person has been banned.” (focus group)

“All of the front line staff seem to be in complete dark of who to talk to.” (focus group)

Logic Model Short Term Outcome 5

Increased knowledge and skills for staff on homelessness needs/supports

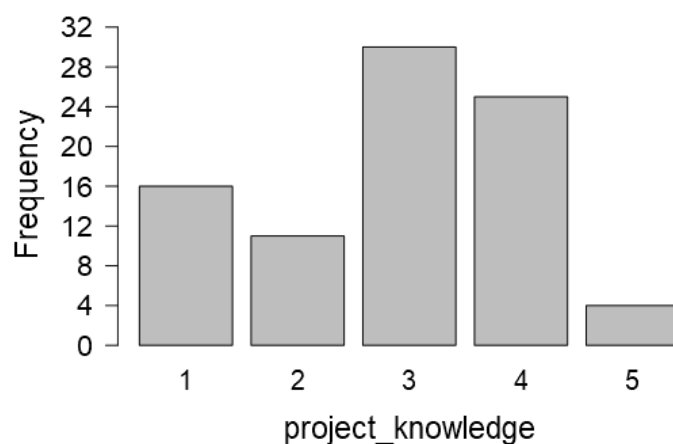
Evidence from the survey data and the qualitative interview data indicates that there was increased knowledge and skills for staff on homelessness needs/supports. Evidence of this outcome also relates to the Logic Model Output: Staff Engagement/Capacity Building.

Short Term Outcome 5: Evidence from Survey Data

- Survey data indicates that City staff reported they were moderately to highly informed about the Pilot Project.

How informed are you about the "Innovative Solutions to Homelessness" pilot project currently ongoing in Mississauga Library System?

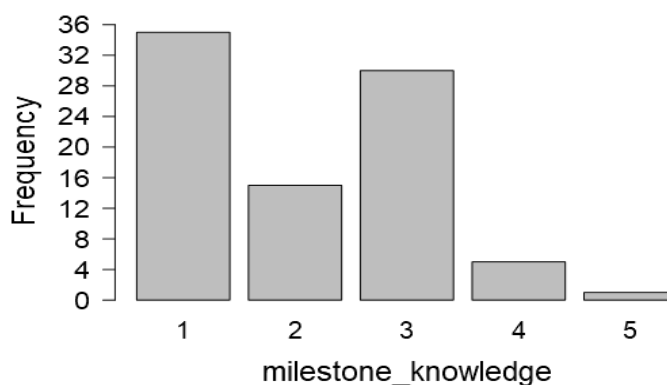
1 = uninformed
5 = extremely informed



- Survey data indicates that City staff reported they were somewhat informed about the Pilot Project goals and milestones, although a large number of people were not informed about the project goals and milestones

Are you aware of the goals and milestones projected within this pilot project?

1 = not aware of the goals and milestones
5 = very aware of the goals and milestones



Knowledge, Comfort, and Frequency of Interactions with Homeless Individuals are Associated with Employee Age and Length of Employment

- Employee age was significantly negatively associated with frequency of interactions ($r = -.33, p < .01$); thus, **younger employees reported more frequent interactions with homeless individuals.**
- Employee age was significantly negatively associated with individuals feeling of being knowledgeable when interacting with homeless individuals ($r = -.28, p < .01$); thus, **older employees felt less knowledgeable** when interacting with homeless individuals.
- Employees' length of time working in the library system was significantly negatively associated with reported comfort in interacting with homeless individuals ($r = -.26, p < .05$); thus, **employees who had worked at the library longer felt less comfortable** interacting with homeless individuals.

Implication:

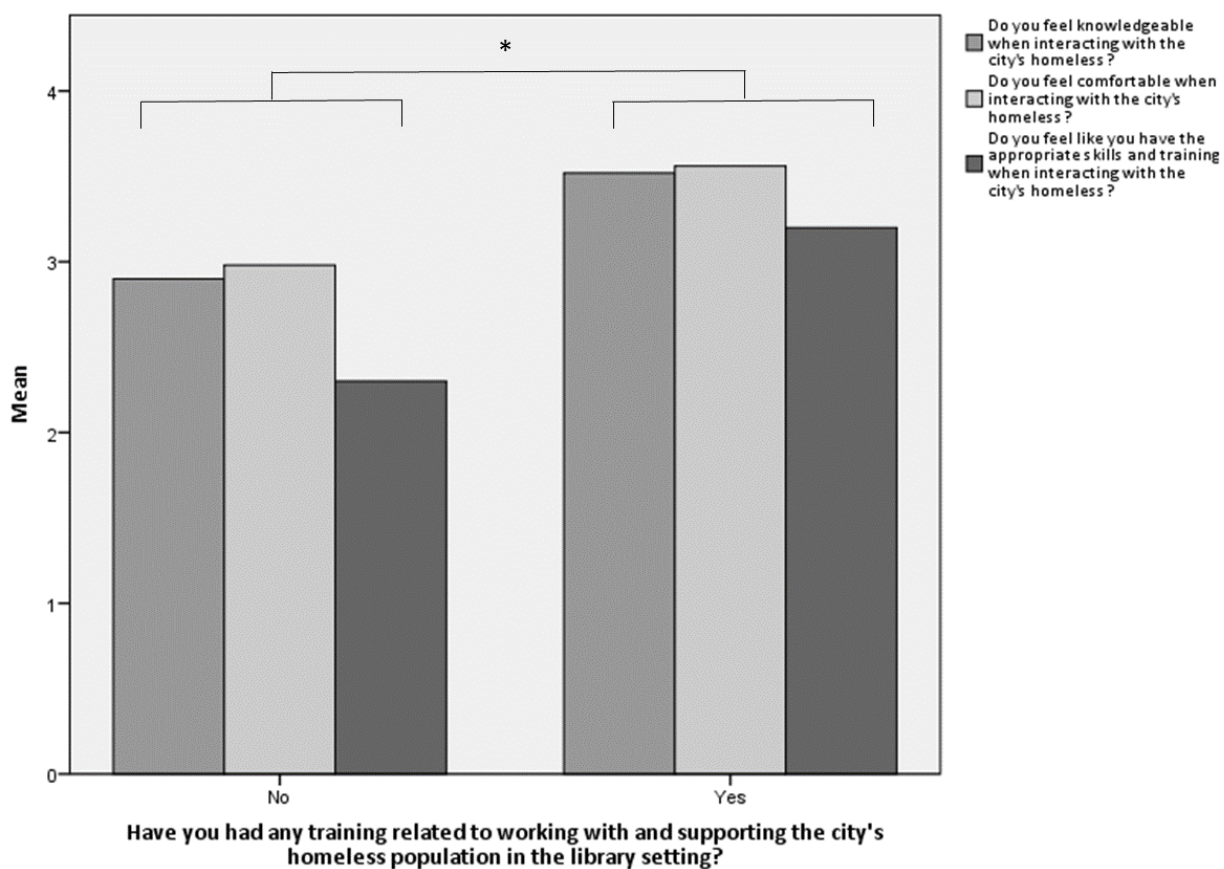
- These finding suggests that providing training for employees who are more likely to interact with homeless clients may be useful, as well as providing training to older employees who feel less knowledgeable and less comfortable interacting with homeless clients.

Knowledge, Comfort, and Skills/Training when Interacting with Homeless Individuals are Higher Among Employees who Received Training

- Employees who had received training **were significantly more likely to report feeling knowledgeable and comfortable** interacting with homeless clients compared to employees who did not receive training.
- Employees who had received training were also **significantly more likely to report feeling that they had more appropriate skills** when interacting with homeless clients compared to employees who did not receive training.

Implication:

- These findings provide direct support that training employees is effective in increasing knowledge and skills for staff on homelessness needs/supports.

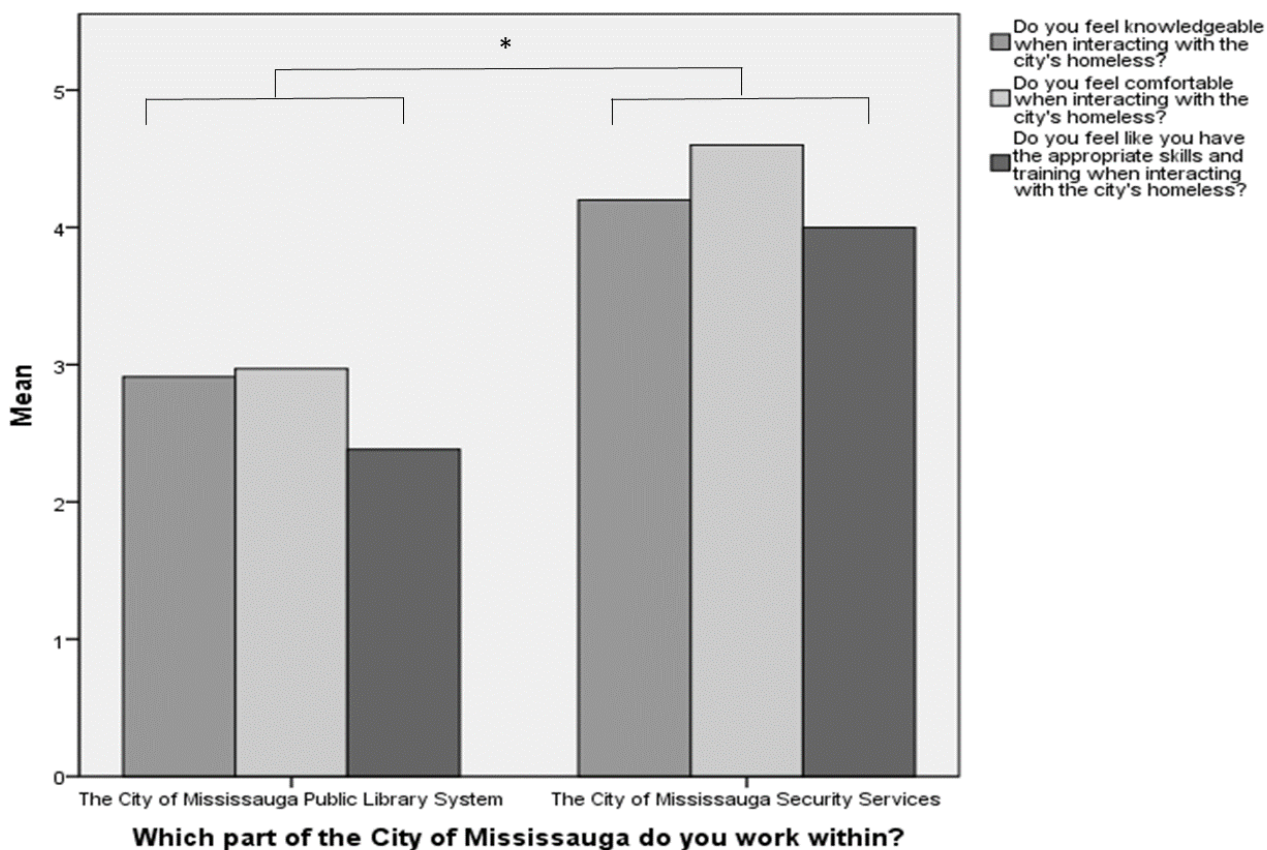


Knowledge, Comfort, and Skills/Training when Interacting with Homeless Individuals are Higher Among Municipal Law Enforcement Officers

- **Municipal Law Enforcement Officers** were significantly more likely to report feeling **more knowledgeable, more comfortable**, and they reported that they had **more appropriate skills** when interacting with homeless individuals, compared to other City employees.
- We speculate that this difference is likely due to the more frequent interactions with homeless clients among Municipal Law Enforcement Officers, and the additional training provided as a function of their job.

Implication:

- Municipal Law Enforcement Officers appear to be well-equipped to interact with homeless clients; providing training to other city employees would be valuable.



Short Term Outcome 5: Evidence from Qualitative Data

Improved Comfort and Knowledge

In the qualitative data, participants indicated that their comfort levels have increased due to the hiring of a Homelessness Prevention Outreach Worker. For example, one person said:

*"I have had frightening experiences in the past with a particular homeless customer that left me slightly wary and scared. But I have overcome that fear and **it helps to have [the HPOW] in the library as a go-to person who is skilled and qualified to handle these situations as they arise.**" (focus group)*

When asked how their interactions with the city's homeless population have changed since the implementation of this pilot project, participants repeatedly discussed the value of the HPOW position:

*"Because there is a specific person on staff dedicated to supporting people who are homeless or precariously housed, **I feel more comfortable approaching people or being approached by people in relation to these issues.** That is, I don't feel like I'm going to come up short in regard to the first question I'm asked." (survey response)*

Evidence from the qualitative interviews and survey responses with city staff also indicated that they felt the program had increased their own awareness of the resources available for homeless individuals, which gave them a sense of satisfaction in being able to provide support to these clients:

*"It's great to have the HPOW as a resource to the system. **I no longer feel that we're failing the homeless** but have a strategy to work with them and improve their lives. I no longer feel I leave these issues hanging because I don't have a next level of response." (survey response)*

Lack of Awareness about Project

Lack of communication about the pilot project was discussed repeatedly as a substantial challenge, as it led to a lack of staff awareness about the project. Participants also expressed concern that not all staff had had the opportunity to meet the HPOW and learn about his role in the library system due to the volume of work required for his role:

*"I remember hearing sort of, some buzz that the library was going to hire a social worker in 2017, which seemed like a very positive development. But then when the project started, I think I heard about **[the HPOW getting hired, but I didn't actually meet him until a few months...** I think there was probably less awareness further away from Central." (focus group)*

Recommendations from Stakeholders

Recommendations for improvements to the Open Window Hub Pilot Project were sought from participants in the online survey data, as well as in the qualitative interviews.

1. Additional Open Window Hubs and Increased Security Presence

Multiple participants stated that the project, as well as staff comfort, could be improved by hiring additional security personnel, and moving away from a one-hub response model. Participants stated that when security has in the past been called to their respective libraries, there is never a guaranteed window of time within which staff can expect the security team to arrive. Because of this, there have been situations where staff feel unsafe.

*“[The HPOW] is one person, and even from a security perspective, **it would help to have someone at each centre...** you need to have, you know, there is a sympathetic approach to things and an empathetic approach, and you need to be an empathetic person to even begin with a homeless person.” (focus group; participant works in corporate security/transit enforcement)*

*“**We're a really big city for so little resources,** such essential resources.” (focus group)*

*“There have been times that I've called, and **they say that they have somebody on the way** and then I have to call back when things either escalate or things de-escalate. And **more often than not when I call, they are not there.**” (focus group)*

Additionally, participants believe that having only one security hub in the City to respond to all needs stretches thin the capacity of the security guard to do their job in a timely, effective, and thorough manner.

*“It would also be good...**security hubs,** something like that, so that there would be more resources to go around the city. So, it's not just one person trying to get to 18 branches, and so many other community centres and whatever. **So, having that support out there would be really good.**” (focus group)*

2. Work With People Where They Are

The HPOW spoke to the importance of meeting individuals “where they are.” As a worker trying to help those living homeless and poverty, there is a need to be flexible and understand that at times meetings or appointments are missed for a variety of legitimate reasons. Moreover, if individuals do not explicitly fit within the definition of “homeless”, but are living in a state of

precarity, it is best to work with them where they are currently in life, in attempts to avoid homelessness, rather than to wait for them to fit within an agency's defined criteria of "homeless." He spoke to this approach as currently lacking in other areas of social services, and because of this he makes an effort to work with people when and in the manner that is best for their specific needs:

*"You have to work with people where they are at. **If people don't show up, I don't take it personally, because you can't really understand the whole concept of homelessness and then expect people to be somewhere, do you know what I mean? Because what if they don't have bus fare, or how are they going to get there, what if they have been arrested?** Interestingly enough, part of the challenge I'm finding too, with other services, even with outreach, the criteria are that they have to be homeless, right? So, an individual came who is 30 thousand dollars in arrears, or more with taxes. So, he is trying to keep his house, he has no heat, and without heat, the pipes burst. And I understand the state of his house is in a poor state of repair and upkeep, but when I tried to refer him to outreach they were saying no, because he is not homeless. So, the understanding is like, "well, outreach is there, why do we need any other services"? Because there are all of these gaps, right? Or, even I get referrals from the landlord tenant board, I get calls from there because they have been referring people who are there facing eviction, and things like that. Again, they are housed, so a lot of services say, "well, you don't fit that criteria of homeless", **but if you interject when people have housing and do it, then you prevent homelessness.**"*

3. Provide Additional Staff Training

Many participants reported that they would benefit from additional on-the-job training to assist them in feeling adequately comfortable, safe, and prepared to work with the city's homeless population. Participants discussed the need for training provided to staff who were most likely to interact with homeless clients. From staff responses, they felt they would particularly benefit from training concerning:

- How to safely and effectively use language that is comforting and non-offensive
- Training with regard to mental health and addictions
- De-escalation and non-violent crisis intervention training
- Information about resources available for people in the community
- Specific examples and training about how to approach and engage with Mississauga's homeless population in the library setting
- Information on how to refer people to the HPOW or services that they are looking for – this includes understanding the systems and resources that currently exist
- Training surrounding how to converse with non-homeless individuals who might have questions about the homeless who are also accessing the library
- Training on personal security for situations when incidents escalate

*“It's nice to be able, I know this sounds silly, **to talk from a script**. Because in the moment it can be difficult to remember everything that you have to mention. Like, **have the opportunity to role-play, to talk about it beforehand** so that whether you are the person talking or the person supporting, you are comfortable in the situation. Because personal comfort when you are confronting someone, literally, about something that they may or may not have control of makes a big difference I find.” (focus group)*

*“**Training on what is expected of me as a staff member**. While I may be comfortable approaching people, knowing what to do as a staff member is important. How I approach things on my own time can be different from how I approach things at work (i.e. policy, training, expectations).” (survey response)*

*“Library assistants do a variety of different tasks. They are also most typically most often on the desks, and so are a major contact point with the staff and with the people in the space. And supervisors, they are also library assistants sometimes, but they are more often in the back room working on other things. But it is the supervisor, who is responsible for dealing with conflict situations. So, **as much as the supervisor needs the training in order to be able to do this, everyone else needs to be on the same page in terms of required for the situation**. But, it's kind of like a flip, supervisors are the most responsible, but they have the least amount of interaction.” (focus group)*

4. Improve Staff Resources

- Continue hosting the Open Window Hub and HPOW in the library
- Greater security presence in libraries
- Consistent access to HPOW or social workers
- Providing resource and referral information in multiple languages

*“Sometimes we just make random connections, like, I reached out the YMCA employment centre down the street and got a handle on exactly what they offer, who they offer it to, how their services work. I put that together and shared it with our staff. **I added it to a reference desk binder that I update yearly**. There is the Community Environmental Alliance Organization through Services Peel where they give people refurbished electronics, laptops and things like that. Recognizing that is a necessary requirement for gainful employment in 2018. The Newcomer Information Centre down the street, we had their representative who stays at Central Library come to one of our staff meetings and talk about their services and what they can offer in their employment services. So, these are really good things, but **it is staff randomly on the ground trying to put it together and doing the best we can**. I want higher level city leadership to care enough about this to develop a strategy that makes sense and communicate it with us.” (focus group)*

5. Improve Communications about Expectations and Guidelines

Additional measures were indicated that would improve staff safety and comfort levels included:

- Provide guidelines and best practices about how to engage with the HPOW when interacting with homeless clients.
- Providing all library staff with a list of resources for commonly asked questions and requests for services
- A framework for assisting people; clearer communication from the employer on how to properly assist homeless persons
- Open communication and expectations between the City of Mississauga and library and security employees.

*“Provide **better awareness of the new staff member's role, responsibilities, resources and any additional relevant information. Set guidelines for how best to interact and approach a patron who we believe may be homeless.**” (survey response)*

*“Keep the HPOW on site! - **have more training sessions on how to handle homeless customers** - update us with more pertinent information regarding ways we can help our homeless customers.” (survey response)*

One participant did state that it was difficult to get homeless users in contact with the HPOW, because they would leave if library staff said that they were calling in someone to come talk to them. However, the participant stated that, after discussion with the HPOW, they determined the best course of action was to call the HPOW in to the library prior to informing the homeless client:

“That was the trick they found in Clarkson when they were calling [the HPOW], the customer would leave. And so, no matter how fast he could drive, if the customer, if they say, approach the customer and said, “hey, do you want to talk”, and they called [him], or if [he] is busy, by the time they get there, they would leave... he was really good though to say, “okay, I'm free these days next week, if that customer comes in, just call me immediately and I will make my way over there”. So, he was really flexible, and did end up meeting with the customer, I think twice. So, that was good.” (focus group)

6. Advertising Open Window Hub Program and Educate the Public

- The program had no advertising in the Central Library for the first 5 months, after which banners were placed in the Atrium and 2nd floor to advertise the program.
- Beginning in October 2017, the HPOW began attending staff meetings across city libraries to speak about the Open Window Hub program. Additionally, bookmarks and small posters were created and distributed to all branches with information about the Open Window Hub in February 2018. By July 2018 a digital presence began to advertise the program, via the library computer screen savers.
- The number of clients that the HPOW interacted with has been consistent and increasing throughout the year, even prior to the publicity of the Open Windows Hub rolling out (beginning in February 2018 large banners were placed in the main atrium of the Central Library).

Focus group participants felt the pilot project has the potential to be beneficial for non-homeless library users as well, in creating a sense of community through education:

*"I'd say the library could be a place to educate, not just the people who are at-risk of homelessness, or who are homeless, **but to educate the public more about it. Could be a place for community gathering.** For both sides, for people who are seeking to learn about it, and for people who have experienced in the past, or who are experiencing homelessness. **So, I think it could be a safe space to facilitate communication between all groups to help empower both to know how to reach out, and then for people who are homeless to know who they can connect with.** Like, social inclusion. And I guess also it can be a place to facilitate education for people and homelessness, since, I think we've heard a lot that what contributes to homelessness is lack of education sometimes, so it could be the place for that." (focus group)*

Pilot Project Evaluation: Recommendations from the Research

- The Innovative Solutions to Homelessness program should be continued and its programming and city-reach should be increased. The role of the Homelessness Prevention Outreach Worker and Open Window Hub is having the intended impact for those who have been able to access the service.
- We recommend that library and security staff be provided with additional and repeated training on interacting with homeless individuals and individuals with mental health issues, as training was significantly associated with improved knowledge, skills, and comfort for staff interacting with homeless individuals.
- We recommend improvements to the dissemination of information within the Library System regarding resources for homeless individuals to streamline the information that is available to staff and clients. Resources should be made available in multiple languages where possible.
- We recommend continued communication among library and security staff at all levels about the goals of the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness project, in order to improve awareness of the project among staff members. Improvements in staff awareness of the program would be valuable in improving staff members' ability to provide individuals with information about the program and services available within the Library Systems and Open Window Hub.

Evaluation Study Limitations

- The focus of this evaluation was to examine the extent to which the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Project has made progress on its Short Term Outcomes. The evaluation did not assess other aspects of the logic model, including the number of partnerships developed with service providers and organizations, the number of agencies implementing programs within the Library System, or the number of staff trained on homelessness supports. The evaluation did not assess the training that was developed or implemented, and we did not assess the resources that were developed to support homeless clients.
- We were not able to seek feedback from homeless individuals within the current project evaluation due to safety and ethical concerns related to confidentiality/anonymity. Despite this limitation, we were able to gather evidence from other key stakeholders regarding the progress of the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness Project. Future research and evaluation of the project may seek to specifically solicit feedback from homeless clients.

- Not all 18 library branches were represented within the focus groups; and only two employees who work for security and transit enforcement participated in the focus groups.
- Participants in all of the focus groups identified that they wanted this pilot project to be successful, and that they were participating because they were eager for the city to engage in meaningful solutions to fighting homelessness in their city. There were some (although very few) survey responses that indicated it was not the responsibility of the library staff to deal with homeless individuals. However, the people who voiced these opinions did not participate in the focus groups, and so the voices and opinions of the library staff and MLEOs in this study may not reflect the opinions of all Library or City of Mississauga employees.

Conclusions and Future Directions

- Obtaining and maintaining housing is a long-term, ongoing process of providing supports and resources to individuals, and the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness appears to be contributing to the reduction of barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing for individuals who accessed the resources offered by the HPOW throughout the past year. While no specific number is available, the HPOW was able to provide examples of clients who were able to achieve housing (both temporary shelter, as well as longer term housing solutions) throughout the duration of the pilot project. Several examples were provided by Library employees of services and support that were provided to homeless individuals.
- The evaluation demonstrated increased knowledge and skills for staff on homelessness needs/supports; staff who reported receiving training felt significantly more comfortable, knowledgeable, and were more likely to report that they had the appropriate skills and training for interacting with homeless individuals.
- The role of the HPOW appeared to be instrumental in the implementation of the project. Additional resources would appear necessary to maintain and augment the current level of support provided within the pilot project.
- Future directions may include assessing the awareness of resources and supports provided within the Open Window Hub among homeless individuals.
- Future directions may also include assessing other outputs identified in the logic model, as well as assessing the resources and information provided to homeless individuals. These may be areas for future evaluation to further assess ways to improve program delivery and effectiveness. One long-term outcome that also remains to be addressed in the future is social connectedness among homeless individuals, and whether the Open Window Hub contributes to increased social connectedness.

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