



Ending Family Homelessness in Waterloo Region



March 2014

Ending Family Homelessness in Waterloo Region



Region of Waterloo

SOCIAL SERVICES

Social Planning, Policy & Program Administration

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- Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region
- Lutherwood
- Marillac Place
- Monica Place
- Reception House Waterloo Region
- Region of Waterloo - Housing,
- Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region
- YWCA of Kitchener-Waterloo

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ending homelessness is a shared responsibility – all orders of government, businesses, not-for-profits, groups, landlords, and residents have a role to play. In Waterloo Region, stakeholders in the local housing stability system have adopted a leadership role in creating greater housing stability and community inclusion for people who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss. “All Roads Lead to Home: The Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy for Waterloo Region” (the Strategy) was developed by these local stakeholders as a response to the need for a collective voice, calling for a shift in thinking and doing to end homelessness in their community (Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2012a). In 2012, an updated Strategy was released that included 40 action areas designed to end homelessness. One of these action areas focussed on ending family homelessness. Specifically, there was a call for greater understanding of family homelessness and the development of a plan.

Identifying the need for further planning and action in the area of family homelessness through the local Strategy coincided with a significant increase in demand for emergency shelter from families in Waterloo Region. This trend placed unprecedented pressures on local emergency shelter programs, which led to considerable overflow into motels and increased housing stability system costs. Given these emerging challenges, the issue of family homelessness was prioritized and funding was acquired through the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo (the Region) to support local research in the area of ending family homelessness (referred to throughout this report as the Project). The current report is a summary of what was learned through this process and includes next steps to support moving from recommendations to action.

The Project was designed to meet several goals: 1) raise awareness of the issue of family homelessness; 2) support a shared vision of ending family homelessness among all local organizations and groups supporting families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss; and 3) build the momentum required to follow through on the recommendations outlined in this report. Five main methods were used to meet these goals throughout the Project timeframe (January 2013 to March 31, 2014): 1) Reference Group meetings; 2) stakeholder meetings; 3) interviews and focus groups with families with lived experience of homelessness; 4) a broad scan of the literature; and 5) and a local environmental scan of relevant programs, policies, resources (within the housing stability system as well as other community systems and organizations that serve families), data and trends.

EXTENT OF FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

Families, and the housing stability programs that serve them, are facing intense pressures. Trends in Waterloo Region mirror those noted in national studies, with an unprecedented increase in demand for emergency shelter over the past six years. Family data between 2008 and 2012, in particular, has increased dramatically. By the end of 2012:

- The number of families served more than tripled (from 65 to 214 families).
 - The number of children served quadrupled (105 to 420 children).
 - The average length of stay for families nearly doubled (from 28 to 42 days).
-

- The number of bed nights for families was almost six times higher (from 5,167 to 30,345 bed nights).

While local data from 2013 remained high compared to 2008, they were lower than what was experienced at the peak of system pressures in 2012. More specifically, between 2012 and 2013, the number of families served decreased by 13 per cent (to 186), the number of children served decreased by 15 per cent (to 357), and in the number of bed nights for families decreased by 12 per cent (to 26,762). Despite these improvements, average length of stay increased over the last year, to a record high of 45 days for each family served in 2013.

PROFILE OF FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

According to findings from the Project's literature review, families who experience homelessness are typically larger and younger than their housed counterparts with similar incomes, with the parents having lower levels of education and fewer employment skills. Single-parent families, particularly female-led, tend to be at a higher risk of housing instability. Single mothers that lose their housing are more likely to have suffered violence and abuse as children themselves, and have more physical and mental health issues (Rog and Buckner, 2007 as cited in the Project's literature review). The local Strategy also identifies additional risk factors for housing instability, of which three are applicable to families: Aboriginal status, immigrant/refugee status and disability status.

Local data builds on this understanding, identifying the following demographic characteristics of families that accessed an emergency shelter in 2013:

- **The majority of parents were between the ages of 25 and 49 years of age (78 per cent).** Sixteen per cent were between the ages of 16 and 24 years and only six per cent were between the ages of 50 and 64 years.
- **Most families were single-parent (69 per cent) and led by mothers (62 per cent).**
- **The average family had 1.74 dependents.** Emergency shelter staff further identified that families typically range in size from one to seven dependents.
- **The average age of dependents was 6.9 years old.** This is slightly higher than the national average of 6.5 years old (Segaert, 2012). However, the national average excludes dependents over the age of 15, while local data includes all dependents.
- **Few parents indicated they had a disability, generally less than five per cent for each type of disability.** According to the data, six parents had a mental health issue (three per cent), three parents had a substance use issue (two per cent), three parents had a physical disability (two per cent) and one parent had a concurrent disorder of mental health and substance use issues (one per cent).
- **Sixteen per cent of dependents were born outside of Canada.** It is likely that the dependents belonged to families who were new to Canada (having recently immigrated or claimed refugee status), although data is not available to confirm this assumption. In 2006, people who were born outside of Canada accounted for 22.3 per cent of the total population in Waterloo Region (Chief Administrator's Office, 2011).

- **Eleven per cent of dependents identified as Aboriginal, a much higher portion than the general population.** In the general population, it is estimated that 3 per cent of residents in Waterloo Region are Aboriginal (Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2006).

PATHWAYS INTO HOMELESSNESS

Families who are at-risk of housing loss have unstable living circumstances. They often face a series of issues, each building on the next and serving to intensify the risk. Families who have extended family members, friends, savings or other resources are often able to prevent housing loss by drawing from these personal assets. According to findings from the Project's literature review and other sources, in the event of housing loss, families will often seek support from their informal support network, where available, before accessing more formal services like emergency shelter. For example, they may temporarily stay with family or friends. Families that stayed with family or friends before accessing emergency shelter commonly describe depleting these options due to overcrowding or conflict (Nobel-Carr, 2006). Compared to individuals experiencing homelessness, it is less common for families experiencing homelessness to sleep or stay in unsheltered conditions for any period of time (Nobel-Carr, 2006).

The local Strategy describes crises that lead to housing loss as occurring typically through either trigger events or tipping points. With trigger events, families may lose their housing and experience homelessness following a sudden, catastrophic event like a house fire, relationship breakdown, illness or job loss. With tipping points, families may lose their housing and experience homelessness when the slow build-up of increasing debt, arrears and/or personal issues reaches a breaking point.

Having an inadequate income is almost always part of the pathway to homelessness. For families living with inadequate income, an illness, layoff, disaster or loss of childcare can lead to housing loss. They simply do not have enough resources to recover from these stresses (Gaetz et al., 2013). Locally, the increase in numbers of families accessing emergency shelters is thought to be attributable to the lingering impacts of the 2008 recession. Research shows that communities experience increased rates of homelessness two to three years after the beginning of a recession, due to the financial hardship caused by job loss and lack of jobs available post-recession (O'Flaherty, 2006; Falvo, 2009; Hinton and Cassel, 2012 as cited in the Project's literature review).

Relationship breakdown is another common issue faced by families experiencing housing instability. As explored further in the Project's literature review, sometimes relationship breakdown is the precursor to housing loss and, at other times, the housing loss itself may be the precursor to relationship breakdown. Domestic abuse may also play a role (Jones, Pleace & Quilgars, 2002; Krause and Dowling, 2003; Rog and Buckner, 2007; Pleace et al., 2008 as cited in the Project's literature review).

Local data supports the contributing factors identified in the literature. Three of the top five “contributing factors” to housing loss for families accessing emergency shelter in 2012 were directly linked to financial stresses (40 per cent of families). The other two factors were relationship breakdown (29 per cent of families) and being new to the area (25 per cent of families).

KEY THEMES

Three main themes surfaced through this report:

(1) Housing loss is traumatic. The experience of family homelessness has both immediate and long-term negative impacts on children and parents – emotionally, psychologically, socially, and physically.

(2) Focus on ending family homelessness. Promising practices are those that shorten emergency shelter stays or avoid them altogether. As such, recommendations focus on investments in housing retention, emergency shelter diversion, rapid re-housing, rent subsidies, and enhanced collaboration with other community systems to increase housing stability for families.

(3) Adopt a comprehensive approach for ending family homelessness. Initiatives to end family homelessness should not only reflect promising principles (summarized in Appendix B), but also include activities under the three main components of a national framework for ending family homelessness currently under development through Raising the Roof (Noble, 2014):

- **Primary Prevention:** Primary prevention activities are proactive, seeking to prevent housing loss well before a family is considered to be “at-risk”. According to Noble (2014), the purpose of primary prevention is to address any issues of poverty and discrimination that may impact a family’s ability to maintain housing stability over the long term. Activities that promote primary prevention of family homelessness serve not only to increase access to stable employment that pays a living wage, but also to a social safety net. Social safety nets both protect and enhance a family’s resilience, helping to keep them out of poverty.
- **Systems-Based Responses:** Systems-based responses are those that acknowledge the critical importance of adopting a common agenda and shared responsibility for ending homelessness, one that extends to every community system and organization that serves families. As Noble (2014) states, “while homelessness has been caused by a variety of structural, systemic and individual factors, our response has largely been addressed at the individual level, often by an overburdened homelessness sector” (p. 4). As such, under this second component of the draft national framework, the importance of a strategic, coordinated response to family homelessness is emphasized (Noble, 2014). Adopting a collective impact approach is one promising practice that strengthens a systems-based response.

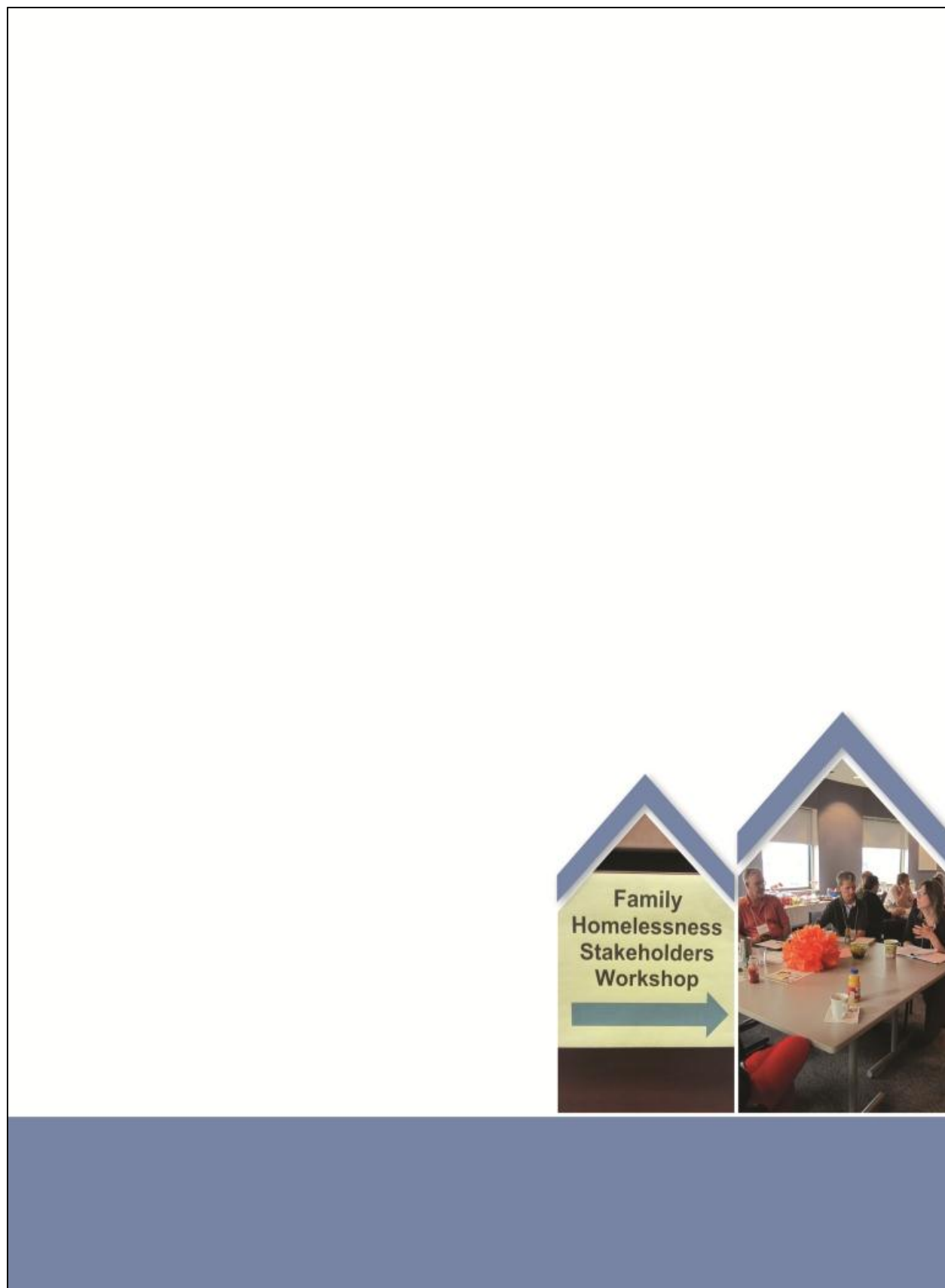
- **Early Intervention:** All housing stability services for families fall under this component, with the overarching goal of both shortening the experience of homelessness and preventing future housing loss. To support these goals, Noble (2014) identifies seven promising practices to support families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss with their housing stability issues. These practices were further synthesized into the following five sub-categories for the purposes of this report: 1) access 2) basic needs; 3) adequate housing; 4) adequate income; and 5) adequate support.

Finally, efforts at the local/municipal level to end family homelessness will have greater collective impact if supported by similar policies at the federal and provincial levels.

NEXT STEPS

The report provides clear direction for ending family homelessness through a series of 50 recommendations, which were informed by the literature as well as local sources of information. These recommendations are organized into the three components of the framework for ending family homelessness as explored in the body of the report: 1) primary prevention; 2) systems-based responses; and 3) early intervention. Monitoring implementation of the recommendations in this report will be part of the ongoing progress reporting processes for the Strategy over the next five years.

Overall, it is hoped that this report will be relevant to other mid-sized communities in Canada, assisting policy makers with funding decisions, service providers with implementing promising practices, and families either by reducing the length of time they experience homelessness or by supporting them to avoid housing loss altogether. In Waterloo Region, the Project more generally, and this report in particular, will provide the community with the necessary evidence to guide the changes required to end family homelessness.



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ending homelessness is a shared responsibility – all orders of government, businesses, not-for-profits, groups, landlords, and residents have a role to play. In Waterloo Region, stakeholders in the local housing stability system have adopted a leadership role in creating greater housing stability and community inclusion for people who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss. “All Roads Lead to Home: The Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy for Waterloo Region” (the Strategy) was developed by these local stakeholders as a response to the need for a collective voice, calling for a shift in thinking and doing to end homelessness in their community (Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2012a). In 2012, an updated Strategy was released that included 40 action areas designed to end homelessness. One of these action areas focussed on ending family homelessness. Specifically, there was a call for greater understanding of family homelessness and the development of a plan.

Identifying the need for further planning and action in the area of family homelessness through the local Strategy coincided with a significant increase in demand for emergency shelter from families in Waterloo Region. This trend placed unprecedented pressures on local emergency shelter programs, which led to considerable overflow into motels and increased housing stability system costs. Given these emerging challenges, the issue of family homelessness was prioritized and funding was acquired through the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy by the Regional Municipality of Waterloo (the Region) to support local research in the area of ending family homelessness (referred to throughout this report as the Project). The current report is a summary of what was learned through this process and includes next steps to support moving from recommendations to action.

Consistent with the Housing First approach endorsed by the local Strategy, this report focuses on ending – not managing – family homelessness in Waterloo Region. Shifting all community systems toward ending homelessness requires new thinking and doing in the community. Perhaps most significantly, this report does not recommend further investments in emergency shelter or time-limited residential options for families because they are not designed to end homelessness, and thus cannot be the focus of these efforts. In fact, this report clearly outlines how experiencing homelessness and staying in emergency shelters is traumatic for both children and parents. Promising practices are those that shorten emergency shelter stays or avoid them altogether. As such, recommendations instead focus on investments in housing retention, emergency shelter diversion, rapid re-housing, and enhanced collaboration with other community systems to increase housing stability for families.

One of the key strengths related to housing stability in Ontario currently, is the identification of municipalities as Service Managers for Housing and Homelessness. As the local Service Manager, the Region is responsible for system planning, service delivery, accountability/quality assurance, and resource allocation related to housing stability in the local community. As a backbone for the housing stability system, the Region ensures that local investments of time and resources are aligned to create the greatest possible impact.

Ending Family Homelessness in Waterloo Region

Recent shifts in provincial policy have given Service Managers (like the Region) additional flexibility in their role. On January 1, 2013, the five homelessness programs (previously funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services) were consolidated into a single, fixed funding envelope called the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) and transferred to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. The Region now has increased flexibility to fund programs in new ways and to shift funding between programs, as part of an overall housing stability investment plan designed to end homelessness.



Overview of Waterloo Region

The Region is located in south-western Ontario and includes seven area municipalities: the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo and the townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich. Waterloo Region is considered a mid-sized community, with a 2012 year-end population estimate of 559,000 people (Planning, Housing and Community Services, 2013a). With this population size, it ranks as the fourth largest urban area in Ontario

and the tenth largest in Canada. Waterloo Region is the sixth fastest growing municipality in Ontario and is estimated to reach a population of 729,000 by 2031 (Chief Administrator's Office, 2011).

Definition of Family

In the context of this Project, family has been defined as a parent(s) or guardian(s) with one or more children or youth dependent on the parent(s) or guardian(s) for care. The definition is intentionally broad, with the hope of capturing a wide range of family situations. While dependent children and youth are generally defined as under age 18, the definition includes families who care for adult dependents (e.g., families caring for an adult with a disability or families who have recently immigrated and are intact with adult children). Families may be headed by one or two parents or guardians of opposite or same gender. Parents who have custody arrangements and retain visitation rights with their children, as well as parents who have been separated from their children and are actively seeking reunification, are also considered a family. Finally, women who are pregnant are included in this definition.

The definition of family does not include individuals and couples without children or youth in their care. It also does not include youth experiencing homelessness who are seeking support to live independently (i.e., not under the care of their parent(s) or guardian(s)).

Methodology

The Project was designed to meet several goals: 1) raise awareness of the issue of family homelessness; 2) support a shared vision of ending family homelessness among all local organizations and groups supporting families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss; and 3) build the momentum required to follow through on the recommendations outlined in this report. Five main methods were used to meet these goals throughout the Project timeframe (January 2013 to March 31, 2014): 1) Reference Group meetings; 2) stakeholder meetings; 3) interviews and focus groups with families with lived experience of homelessness; 4) a broad scan of the literature; and 5) and a local environmental scan of relevant programs, policies, resources (within the housing stability system as well as other community systems and organizations that serve families), data and trends. Each method is further outlined below.

1. Reference Group Meetings

A Reference Group was struck to guide the Project. This group included representatives from organizations in Waterloo Region that directly serve families who are either experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss. Meetings were held monthly from January 2013 to March 2014. Two group members attended the US National Conference on Ending Family and Youth Homelessness in February 2013. Promising principles and practices shared at this conference helped to inform the work of the Reference Group.

Reference Group members were responsible for providing input on the methodology, providing program data, supporting families to complete Reflection Booklets (described further below), developing recommendations and editing drafts of the final report. The group was led by the Region (Social Planning) and included staff from the Cambridge Shelter Corporation, Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region, Lutherwood, Marillac Place, Monica Place, Reception House Waterloo Region, Region of Waterloo (Housing), Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region and YWCA of Kitchener-Waterloo.

2. Stakeholder Meetings

Two stakeholder meetings were held in the fall of 2013. Fifty people participated in these meetings, representing 30 different organizations and several community systems in Waterloo Region. Additional meetings were held over the winter of 2013/2014 with the Children's Planning Table (110 in attendance), Waterloo Region District School Board Education Council (eight in attendance), family outreach workers (30 in attendance), and home child care workers (25 in attendance). In total, over 200 community stakeholders were engaged in the Project. People who participated in at least one of these meetings were invited to provide feedback on the recommendations and/or final draft report.

Information gathered through the stakeholder meetings is cited in this report as: the Project's research with stakeholders.

3. Interviews and Focus Groups with Families

Interviews were conducted with families who were either currently experiencing homelessness or had experienced homelessness within the last year. To support the interview process, two different Reflection Booklets were created (one for adults and one for children/youth). The adult booklet contained 11 questions and the children/youth booklet contained seven questions.

Participation in the interviews was voluntary. Parents signed informed consent forms for themselves and their children (if applicable). A small honorarium was given to families to thank them for their time and insights. Thirty-one families participated in an interview: 32 adults and 27 children completed Reflection Booklets. Two thirds were single-parent families, which is representative of the families who accessed emergency shelter in Waterloo Region in 2013 (where 69 per cent were single-parent families). Ages of parents who participated ranged from 19 years to 50 years and ages of children who participated ranged from four to 18 years.

Focus groups were conducted with parents experiencing homelessness who were staying at the Cambridge Shelter, YWCA-Mary's Place or Marillac Place. A total of 14 parents participated in one of these focus groups. The purpose of these focus groups was largely to provide feedback on the draft report recommendations. Similar to the interviews, focus group participation was voluntary and small honorariums were provided.

Information gathered through the interviews and focus groups with families is cited in this report as: the Project's research with families.

4. Literature Review and Scan

Steve Pomeroy from Focus Consulting was hired as a consultant to write a literature review for the Project. The review was completed in June 2013 and titled "Approach to End Family Homelessness in Waterloo Region Report Project: A Literature Review" (Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2013a). The literature review provided a deeper understanding of trends related to family homelessness, including causes of and pathways into family homelessness, and the impact of housing loss on parents and children.

Information gathered through the literature review is cited in this report as: the Project's literature review. Other research articles were also reviewed (e.g., those published after the literature was completed); these sources are cited separately.

5. Local Environmental Scan

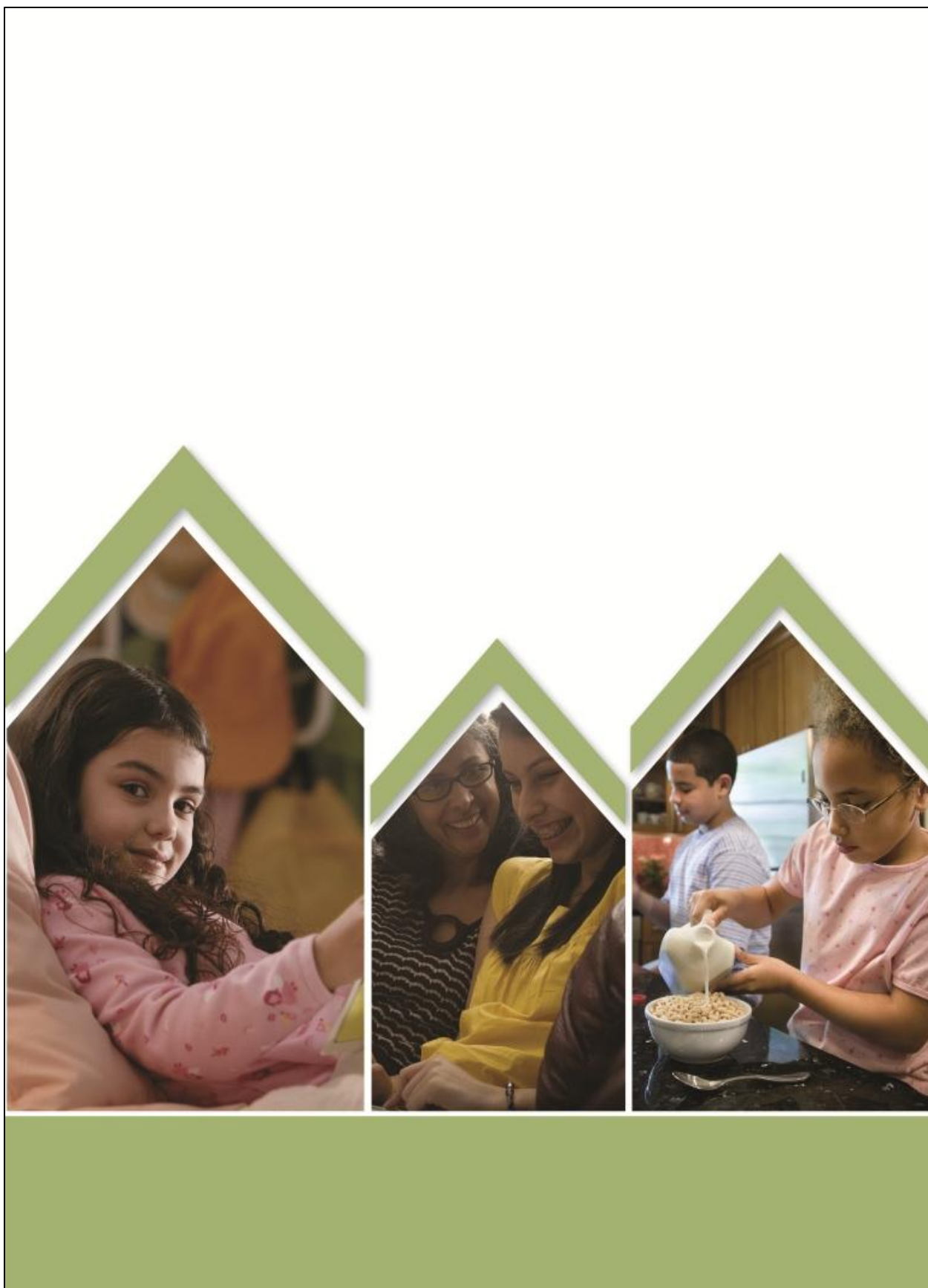
To gain a better understanding of the local context and scope of family homelessness, a review of relevant programs, policies, resources (within the housing stability system as well as other community systems and organizations that serve families), data and trends. Information about the 27 housing stability programs that serve families is summarized in a companion document called the "Inventory of Housing Stability Programs that Support Families in Waterloo Region" (Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2014). See Appendix A for an overview of these programs.

Report Overview and Chapter Outline

This report synthesizes all of the key findings gathered through the above methodologies and, where appropriate, considers them in relation to the local Strategy. The first three chapters provide the reader with an orientation to family homelessness. The fourth chapter reviews promising principles and practices as part of an overall framework for ending family homelessness. The final three chapters are based on the three components of this framework (primary prevention, systems-based responses, and early intervention). Analysis of the material is distributed throughout the report, with recommendations presented in the final chapter.

More specifically, this report is organized into eight chapters and three appendices, summarized below:

- Chapter 1 provides general background information for the report, including an overview of Waterloo Region, the definition of family used in the Project, and a review of the processes used to develop the report.
- Chapter 2 describes a number of key definitions and concepts referenced throughout the report. These definitions and concepts set the foundation for ending homelessness in the local community for all populations, including families. Readers may choose to skip this chapter initially, and refer back to the material when they come across these terms and concepts in the subsequent chapters of the report.
- Chapter 3 describes the extent of the problem, including prevalence, common characteristics of families experiencing homelessness, pathways to housing loss, and its impact on parents and children.
- Chapter 4 presents an overall framework for ending family homelessness, based on the general approach to ending homelessness as outlined in the local Strategy as well as promising principles and practices specific to families identified through the Project.
- Chapter 5 highlights key areas of focus for “primary prevention” of family homelessness (as described in Chapter 4). More specifically, it identifies key community trends linked to housing instability for local families in the areas of employment, income, and housing affordability.
- Chapter 6 provides important context for the “systems-based responses” that need to part of the work of ending family homelessness (as identified in Chapter 4), summarizing some of the opportunities and challenges related to housing stability that fall within the scope of community systems and organizations outside of the housing stability system.
- Chapter 7 focuses on “early intervention” activities for ending family homelessness that fall within the scope of the housing stability system (based on promising principles and practices from Chapter 4), summarizing strengths and limitations within the five program areas of the housing stability system.
- Chapter 8 provides clear direction for ending family homelessness through a series of 50 recommendations that will need to be implemented nationally, provincially and locally. These recommendations were informed by information contained in the previous chapters of the report. The chapter concludes with next steps, including processes for monitoring progress with ending family homelessness over the next five years.



CHAPTER 2: KEY DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

Over the last ten years, Waterloo Region has refined a set of local definitions and concepts related to housing stability through the development and implementation of the local Strategy. These definitions and concepts set the foundation for ending homelessness in the local community for all populations, including families. This chapter provides an overview of these key definitions and concepts. Readers may choose to skip this chapter initially, and refer back to the material when they come across these terms and concepts in the subsequent chapters of the report. For further details, please refer to the Policy Framework of the Strategy (Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2012b).

The key definitions and concepts referenced throughout the report include: the five essential elements for ending homelessness (housing, income, support, community inclusion and sense of home); homelessness; strength of “association with homelessness” (transitional and persistent homelessness); the housing stability system and its five program areas (1) emergency shelter; 2) street outreach; 3) housing retention and re-housing; 4) time-limited residence; 5) affordable housing and supportive housing); and Housing First.

Essential Elements for Ending Homelessness

The Strategy includes local definitions of the five essential elements for ending homelessness (as illustrated in Figure 1 below):

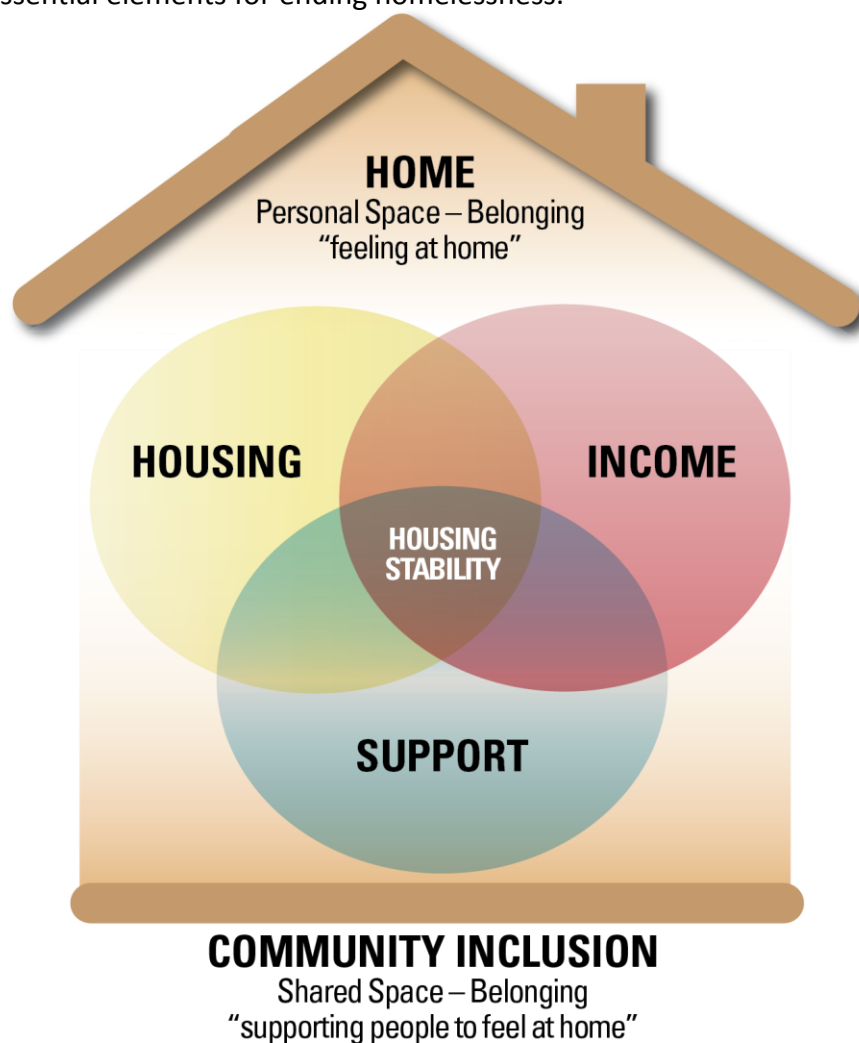
- Adequate housing: Housing with security of tenure that is desirable, affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and a suitable size.
- Adequate income: Enough financial resources to meet and sustain minimum standards for housing (rent or mortgage expenses and utilities) and other basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, child care, transportation, personal hygiene, health/medical expenses, recreation, communication and education).
- Adequate support: Enough personal support (informal and/or formal) for living independently and connecting with others, as desired.
- Inclusive community: A sense of belonging to a shared space. Participation in community life is accessible. The community is designed to support people in their efforts to be included.
- Home: A sense of belonging to a personal space. Home is personal and self-defined.

As further outlined in the Strategy, housing stability refers to having a fixed address that can be retained over the long term. Specifically, it refers to having adequate housing, income and support (the first three “essentials” described above). People tend to access these three resources through a mix of informal connections (e.g., family, friends, neighbours), private markets/businesses (e.g., rental market, employment market, support accessed through private funds) and formal community systems (e.g., housing stability, education, income assistance). There is a high level of interdependence between the three resources: what happens in one resource area often impacts the others. Like a three-legged stool, each is critical to overall

stability. What this means is that, while homelessness is always a housing problem, it may not be the only barrier preventing long term housing stability – income and support needs must also be considered.

In addition, community inclusion and sense of home (the final two “essentials”) have the power to amplify the positive impact of housing stability by creating a deeper sense of belonging – they must also be part of any approach to ending homelessness. For most people, having adequate housing is fundamental to creating both a sense of home and the stability necessary to support full participation in the community.

Figure 1. The essential elements for ending homelessness.



Homelessness

The Strategy also provides a local definition of homelessness. For the most part, this local definition aligns with the national definition of homelessness developed by the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2012).

Generally, as described in the Strategy, homelessness refers to living without a fixed address. People experiencing homelessness may rest, sleep or stay in a variety of temporary spaces, sometimes for only a few hours or one night before moving on. There are several different types of homelessness included in the local definition of homelessness:

- Unsheltered Homelessness: Staying in indoor or outdoor spaces not intended for living (e.g., parks, sidewalks, stairwells, under bridges, abandoned buildings, cars, and doorways).
- Sheltered through Informal or Private Resources: This includes shelter accessed on a short term basis through informal connections or the private market/businesses (e.g., staying with family, friends or acquaintances; staying at motels or campground sites).
- Sheltered by a Housing Stability Program: Staying at an emergency shelter or time-limited residence that includes support to find, establish and/or retain adequate housing.
- Sheltered by a Program Indirectly Related to Housing Stability: Staying at a time-limited residential program where the primary purpose of the program is not housing stability (e.g., hospital, post-incarceration, problematic substance use treatment).

Strength of “Association with Homelessness”

In Waterloo Region, it is well understood that people who have lost their housing at some point in their lives are not all the same. The Strategy explores these differences in detail, describing them in relation to people’s strength of “association with homelessness”. Two specific levels have been identified: transitional homelessness (less association with homelessness) and persistent homelessness (more association with homelessness). Each level is defined further below.

Transitional Homelessness

Most people who lose their housing are experiencing transitional homelessness. People experiencing transitional homelessness live without a fixed address for shorter periods of time and have more personal resources to draw from to support the re-housing process. A variety of scenarios indicate that a person may be experiencing transitional homelessness:

- When loss of housing is primarily related to a trigger event or a tipping point.
- When a person’s skills are oriented to living in more conventional housing rather than surviving on the streets.
- When the loss of housing is considered to be shorter term, relative to a person’s age. For youth, shorter term may be measured in days, not weeks or months.
- When regaining housing stability and living in more conventional housing is expected.
- When a person has more personal resources to draw from to support the re-housing process.

Persistent Homelessness

In Waterloo Region, persistent homelessness is the term used to refer to the much smaller number of people who are caught in the cycle of homelessness. The local definition of persistent homelessness aligns with the term chronic homelessness, which is commonly used in other communities as well as by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

With persistent homelessness, people regain housing, but it is often inadequate and they tend to lose it over and over again, sometimes living without fixed addresses for long periods of time. At some point in this cycle, people begin to accept the state of living without a fixed address as part of normal, everyday life. They may lose the hope for housing and develop a stronger association with the experience of homelessness. A variety of scenarios may indicate a person is approaching or experiencing persistent homelessness:

- When homelessness is considered to be part of “normal” life and skills are oriented to surviving on the streets rather than living in more conventional housing.
- When there is a longer term pattern of cycling between experiencing homelessness and being at-risk of housing loss, relative to the person’s age. For youth, longer term may be measured in weeks, not years.
- When a person may not be strongly connected to the idea of more conventional housing.
- When it would be challenging to find another suitable alternative if the current housing was lost.
- When a longer period of time may be needed to build a trusting relationship with another person.
- When the extent and/or complexity of a person’s health issues has exhausted all existing resources.
- When a person has either a large number of disconnections with community programs and/or extensive use of emergency services.

Housing Stability System

The housing stability system is one of a broad range of community systems that exist to support people in Waterloo Region. The Strategy defines a community system as a network of organizations (including various orders of government, businesses and not-for-profits), groups and individuals that share a common mandate related to supporting people in the community. All community systems are influenced by social, political, environmental, and economic factors, and by each other.

The housing stability system is described in detail in the local Strategy. It is defined as a network of organizations, groups, and individuals that share a common mandate to support people who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss. Programs within the system are dedicated to housing stability: they support people to find, establish, and/or retain adequate housing and/or to increase opportunities for people to fully participate in community life. “The Inventory of Housing Stability Programs in Waterloo Region” (Social Planning, Policy and

Program Administration, 2011) is a community resource that catalogues all of the housing stability programs in Waterloo Region into one of five program areas: 1) emergency shelter; 2) street outreach; 3) housing retention and re-housing; 4) time-limited residence; 5) affordable housing and supportive housing. When last updated in December 2011, this resource included 107 different programs. Definitions for each program area are outlined below; refer to the Strategy for further detail.

Emergency Shelter

Emergency shelter programs are shorter term residential programs designed for people with no fixed address. Unlike time-limited residence programs, people who access emergency shelter programs do not require a planned intake. Unlike affordable housing and supportive housing programs, emergency shelter programs do not offer permanent housing and are not covered under the “Residential Tenancies Act, 2006”.

Street Outreach

Street outreach programs are those designed to serve people who are street involved and are intended to increase access to community resources. People who are street involved spend a significant amount of their time on the street, in public spaces or outdoors for a variety of reasons. For example, they may:

- be experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss;
- be involved in street-based work; and/or
- have an informal support network that is largely street-involved.

The two main delivery models for street outreach programs are:

- **Fixed programs:** located at physical sites in the community at certain times, such as drop-ins and
- **Mobile programs:** not tied to a particular location or time frame, with flexibility to respond to people’s emerging needs (e.g., accompaniment during important appointments, crisis support).

Housing Retention and Re-housing

Housing retention and re-housing programs provide people with support and/or financial assistance to retain, find or establish adequate housing. Support provided by housing retention and re-housing programs is designated to the person so that, if a person moves, the support will follow (see the affordable housing and supportive housing program area below for information about programs where support is designated to a unit, building or neighbourhood).

Time Limited Residence

Time-limited residence programs are designed for people in transitional situations. These programs offer support that is tailored to specific transitional circumstances in order to increase capacity to maintain housing stability over the long term. For example, a family of immigrants may access a settlement program during their first few weeks or months in Canada, a pregnant youth without a fixed address may move into a maternity home until her baby is

born, or people with disabilities or health issues may access a respite program in situations of crisis or to allow for their caregivers to rest. Unlike emergency shelter programs, time-limited residence programs require a planned intake. Unlike supportive housing programs, time-limited residence programs generally expect people to transition from the program within a certain time frame and the programs are typically not covered under the “Residential Tenancies Act, 2006”.

Affordable Housing and Supportive Housing

Affordable housing and supportive housing programs create stability in people’s lives by providing adequate affordable housing and/or longer term support to maintain housing stability.

Affordable housing is permanent housing complemented with a program to make the housing affordable (i.e., rent supplement, rent subsidy or allowances; referred to locally as Community Housing). Supportive housing is permanent housing complemented with a support program designated to a unit, building or neighbourhood (may also include subsidy).

One benefit of affordable housing and supportive housing programs is that there is generally no time limit for how long people can access them. All programs are typically covered under the “Residential Tenancies Act, 2006”. People may choose to transition from these programs according to their own timelines, not those set by the program. People may access some of these programs with the intention that they will provide transitional support, as their goal is to live more independently at some point in the future. Others may seek and/or require life-long support.

Housing First

Housing First¹ is an approach to ending homelessness that involves supporting people experiencing homelessness to move into permanent housing as a first step – with no preconditions – and then providing or connecting them with additional support and services as needed and desired once they have secured housing. Housing First can be adopted in three main ways:

- **Philosophical:** Housing First is rooted in the belief that all people deserve permanent housing and are “housing ready”, and that any issues people may be living with are best addressed once they are housed. As such, people experiencing homelessness should not need to follow a continuum of programs from emergency shelter to time-limited residences to permanent housing, as housing is not a “reward” for programmatic success, adherence to treatment or advancement through a continuum of support. The core principles of Housing First include: permanent housing as a right; permanent

¹ The definition of Housing First is still under development in Waterloo Region. The draft definition for the Project was adapted from following sources: Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, 2014; Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014; Gaetz, S., 2013; Gaetz et al., 2013; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012; Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2013; and the Strategy.

housing as a key social determinant of health; choice; self-determination; individualized, person-centred support that adapts to meet the person “where they are at”; harm reduction; and community inclusion.

- **System:** Within the housing stability system, while programs may play different roles in the overall operationalization of Housing First, they should all support its core values. Communities that adopt Housing First at the level of the system prioritize investments in permanent housing and support for housing stability, not emergency shelter or time-limited residence. In addition, they coordinate entry to supportive housing programs, as it ensures that barriers are removed and also prioritizes the needs of people with complex needs (i.e., higher acuity, multiple barriers to housing stability).
- **Program:** Housing First programs are designed for people experiencing or approaching persistent homelessness (not transitional homelessness). As such, they provide more intensive support (through either Intensive Case Management or Assertive Community Treatment) and generally focus on one or more of the following: 1) assisting people experiencing homelessness to move directly into the permanent housing of their choice, as quickly as possible; 2) providing support for housing stability, and 3) connecting people with a variety of complementary support services (where participation in these services is voluntary).



CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

This chapter provides an overview of family homelessness, including data that demonstrates the prevalence of this issue both locally and across Canada, common characteristics of families experiencing homelessness, and pathways to housing loss. It also outlines why ending family homelessness is so important, with a focus on the negative impacts on both parents and children.

Extent of Family Homelessness

In 2012, the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy released the results of its first National Shelter Study, a project designed to establish a baseline count and description of the characteristics of the homeless population in Canada (Segaert, 2012). Data for this study spanned a five-year period of time (2005 through 2009) and were sourced largely from the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System. Results showed that families, and the housing stability programs that serve them, are facing intense pressures. Between 2005 and 2009, the number of dependent children (under age 16) who accessed emergency shelter across Canada increased by 50 per cent. Over the same time period, emergency shelter average lengths of stay for families increased by 67 per cent (from 30 to 50 nights). This increase was not replicated for other populations, where average lengths of stay increased by only two or three nights (Segaert, 2012). Longer stays have led to a disproportionate use of services: while families account for just 4 per cent of all emergency shelter stays, they account for 14 per cent of bed nights (Gaetz et al., 2013). Across Canada, programs are struggling to meet the demand for service. By 2009, the overall average occupancy rate for emergency shelters serving families was over 100 per cent (Segaert, 2012).

Nevertheless, despite these trends, most families across Canada (93 per cent) do not return for service within the year, suggesting that once families secure housing again, they are able to retain it for some time (Segaert, 2012); a trend indicative of transitional homelessness, not persistent homelessness (as previously defined in Chapter 2). As cautioned by Noble (2014), “While at first glance this appears to be a good thing, unless we begin to address the structural causes of homelessness, there will always be new homeless families to replace those who have been housed” (p. 8).

Trends in Waterloo Region mirror those noted in the national study above, with an unprecedented increase in demand for emergency shelter over the past six years. Family data between 2008 and 2012, in particular, has increased dramatically. By the end of 2012:

- The number of families served more than tripled (from 65 to 214 families) – see Figure 2.
- The number of children served quadrupled (105 to 420 children).
- The average length of stay for families nearly doubled (from 28 to 42 days) – see Figure 3.
- The number of bed nights for families was almost six times higher (from 5,167 to 30,345 bed nights).

While local data from 2013 remained high compared to 2008, they were lower than what was experienced at the peak of system pressures in 2012. More specifically, between 2012 and

Ending Family Homelessness in Waterloo Region

2013, the number of families served decreased by 13 per cent (to 186), the number of children served decreased by 15 per cent (to 357), and in the number of bed nights for families decreased by 12 per cent (to 26,762). Despite these improvements, average length of stay increased over the last year, to a record high of 45 days for each family served in 2013.

Figure 2. Number of families accessing emergency shelter in Waterloo Region (2006-2013).

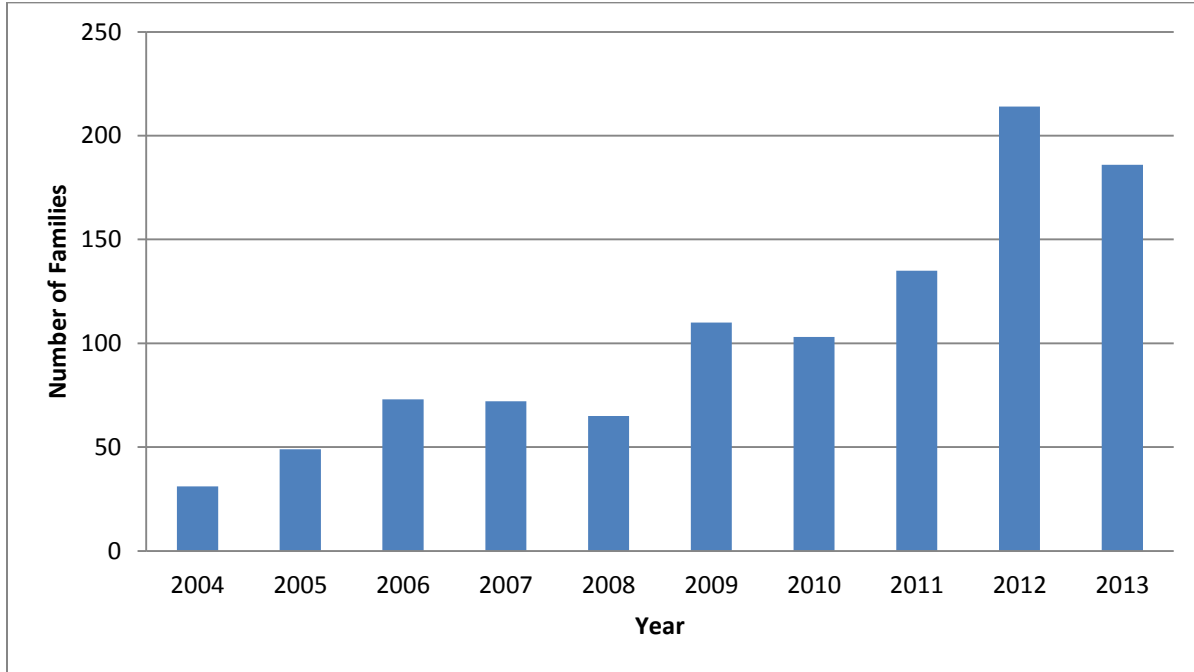
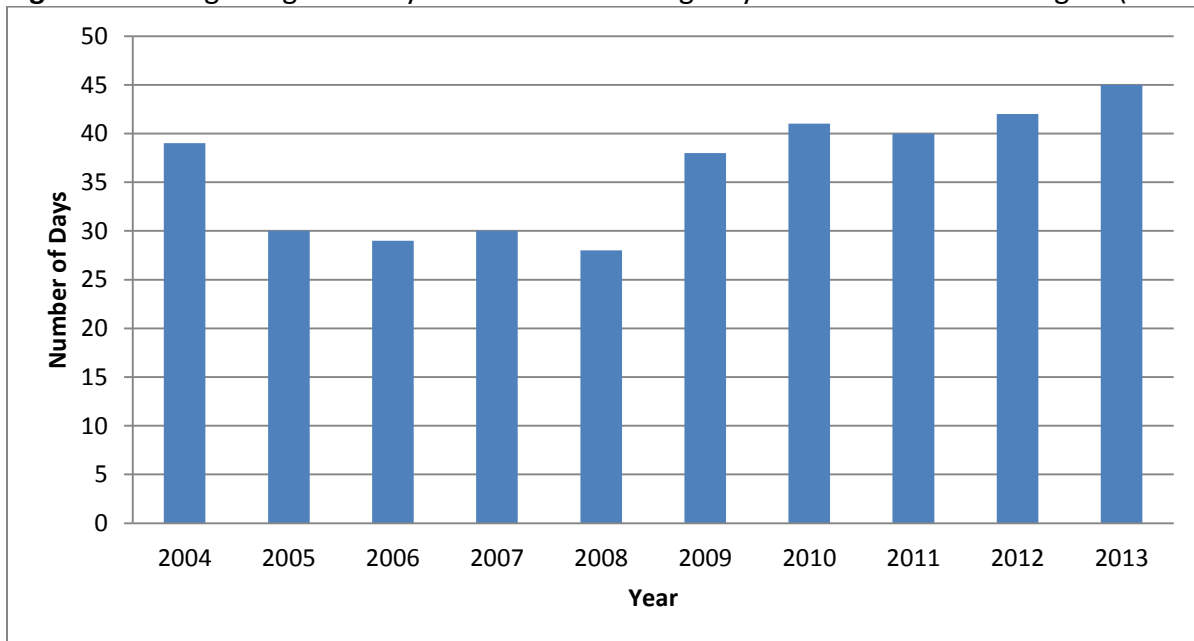


Figure 3. Average length of stay for families in emergency shelter in Waterloo Region (2006-2013).



Ending Family Homelessness in Waterloo Region

Similar to trends across Canada, families experiencing homelessness who access an emergency shelter in Waterloo Region do not tend to return for service within the year (91 per cent locally in 2013). Again, these data are indicative of transitional homelessness, not persistent homelessness.

Beginning mid-way through 2011, there were nights when the emergency shelter program area (sometimes also referred to as the local emergency shelter “system”) did not have the capacity within existing programs to accommodate all of the requests for service. To address this issue, emergency shelter programs began to overflow people into motels on an as-needed basis, under the direction of the Referral Protocol for Emergency Shelter Programs in Waterloo Region².

According to this protocol, once internal capacity has been reached across all emergency shelter programs in the region, residents are placed into motels. In this way, the emergency shelter program area can flex to meet demand and is never “full”. Families who need emergency shelter are always offered a space somewhere in Waterloo Region. Table 2 below shows the number of families who were overflowed into motels since the protocol began in 2011. All of these families would have otherwise been unsheltered had motel overflow not been available.

Table 1. Motel overflow for families in Waterloo Region (2011-2013).

Year	Families	Family Bed Nights	Average Number of Families Each Night
2011*	83	2,101	11
2012	133	3,688	10
2013	106	3,476	10

* Includes data from July (when the protocol began) to December

A more comprehensive picture of the prevalence of family housing instability in Waterloo Region considers data from all housing stability programs that serve families. As identified in Appendix A, a total of 3,642 families who were either experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss were estimated to be served by 27 programs in 2012.

Using this estimate of 3,642 families as a proxy for the total number of families experiencing housing instability, it represents just over four per cent of all families in Waterloo Region in 2012 (based on 2011 Census, as outlined in the Family Demographics in Waterloo Region box below). While the number may include some duplication across programs, it has been identified through the various stakeholder consultations that the actual number of families experiencing housing instability is likely much higher. Many families experiencing housing instability access

² Between 2003 and 2010, overflow into motels for families experiencing homelessness was coordinated by the Region (Employment and Income Support). While no data is available related to this process, it is understood that there were very few families that accessed motels during these years (sometimes none for a year or more).

shelter through informal or private resources over the year (e.g., staying with friends and family, campgrounds or motels) and/or may not access the programs identified in Appendix A.

Family Demographics in Waterloo Region

The current number of families (defined as households with at least one child and based on 2011 Census data) in Waterloo Region is just over 90,000. See Table 1 below for an overview of family composition (Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, 2013).

Table 2. Family composition in Waterloo Region (2011).

Family Composition Types	2011 Census
Married with children at home	61,540 (68%)
Common law with children at home	6,750 (8%)
Lone-female parent	17,445 (19%)
Lone-male parent	4,305 (5%)
TOTAL	90,040

One and two-person households are the fastest growing household size locally, largely attributed to increasing divorce and separation, lower fertility rates, later-life marriages, empty-nester households, and other lifestyle choices (Planning, Housing and Community Services, 2013b).

Characteristics of Families Experiencing Homelessness

According to findings from the Project's literature review, families who experience homelessness are typically larger and younger than their housed counterparts with similar incomes, with the parents having lower levels of education and fewer employment skills. Single-parent families, particularly female-led, tend to be at a higher risk of housing instability. Single mothers that lose their housing are more likely to have suffered violence and abuse as children themselves, and have more physical and mental health issues (Rog and Buckner, 2007 as cited in the Project's literature review). The local Strategy also identifies additional risk factors for housing instability, of which three are applicable to families: Aboriginal status, immigrant/refugee status and disability status.

Local data builds on this understanding, identifying the following demographic characteristics of families that accessed an emergency shelter in 2013³:

³ Several factors linked to housing instability for families cannot be assessed reliably in Waterloo Region, due to the limitations of current data collection and reporting systems. For example, data for disabilities is collected at emergency shelter intake as part of a question that explores residents' perceptions of the contributing factors to their current experience of homelessness. Due to the nature of self-reported data, these results are likely to be lower than the actual percentage of parents with disabilities that access emergency shelter in a year.

- **The majority of parents were between the ages of 25 and 49 years of age (78 per cent).** Sixteen per cent were between the ages of 16 and 24 years and only six per cent were between the ages of 50 and 64 years.
- **Most families were single-parent (69 per cent) and led by mothers (62 per cent).**
- **The average family had 1.74 dependents.** Emergency shelter staff further identified that families typically range in size from one to seven dependents.
- **The average age of dependents was 6.9 years old.** This is slightly higher than the national average of 6.5 years old (Segaert, 2012). However, the national average excludes dependents over the age of 15, while local data includes all dependents.
- **Few parents indicated they had a disability, generally less than five per cent for each type of disability.** According to the data, six parents had a mental health issue (three per cent), three parents had a substance use issue (two per cent), three parents had a physical disability (two per cent) and one parent had a concurrent disorder of mental health and substance use issues (one per cent).
- **Sixteen per cent of dependents were born outside of Canada.** It is likely that the dependents belonged to families who were new to Canada (having recently immigrated or claimed refugee status), although data is not available to confirm this assumption. In 2006, people who were born outside of Canada accounted for 22.3 per cent of the total population in Waterloo Region (Chief Administrator's Office, 2011).
- **Eleven per cent of dependents identified as Aboriginal, a much higher portion than the general population.** In the general population, it is estimated that 3 per cent of residents in Waterloo Region are Aboriginal (Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2006).

Pathways into Homelessness

In 2007, a report exploring the impact of economic hardship on housing stability was commissioned as part of the background research for the local Strategy. This report was entitled, "Assessing Risk of Economic-Based Homelessness: Background Report for Waterloo Region's Housing Stability System" (Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2007) and was written by Steve Pomeroy of Focus Consulting, the same author of the Project's literature review. Much of what is currently understood about transitional homelessness and included in the local Strategy is drawn from this research, as outlined further in this section unless otherwise cited.

Families who are at-risk of housing loss have unstable living circumstances. They often face a series of issues, each building on the next and serving to intensify the risk. Families who have extended family members, friends, savings or other resources are often able to prevent housing loss by drawing from these personal assets. According to findings from the Project's literature review and other sources, in the event of housing loss, families will often seek support from their informal support network, where available, before accessing more formal services like emergency shelter. For example, they may temporarily stay with family or friends. Families that stayed with family or friends before accessing emergency shelter commonly describe depleting these options due to overcrowding or conflict (Nobel-Carr, 2006). Compared to individuals

experiencing homelessness, it is less common for families experiencing homelessness to sleep or stay in unsheltered conditions for any period of time (Nobel-Carr, 2006).

The local Strategy describes crises that lead to housing loss as occurring typically through either trigger events or tipping points. With trigger events, families may lose their housing and experience homelessness following a sudden, catastrophic event like a house fire, relationship breakdown, illness or job loss. With tipping points, families may lose their housing and experience homelessness when the slow build-up of increasing debt, arrears and/or personal issues reaches a breaking point.

Having an inadequate income is almost always part of the pathway to homelessness. For families living with inadequate income, an illness, layoff, disaster or loss of childcare can lead to housing loss. They simply do not have enough resources to recover from these stresses (Gaetz et al., 2013). Locally, the increase in numbers of families accessing emergency shelters is thought to be attributable to the lingering impacts of the 2008 recession. Research shows that communities experience increased rates of homelessness two to three years after the beginning of a recession, due to the financial hardship caused by job loss and lack of jobs available post-recession (O’Flaherty, 2006; Falvo, 2009; Hinton and Cassel, 2012 as cited in the Project’s literature review).

Relationship breakdown is another common issue faced by families experiencing housing instability. As explored further in the Project’s literature review, sometimes relationship breakdown is the precursor to housing loss and, at other times, the housing loss itself may be the precursor to relationship breakdown. Domestic abuse may also play a role (Jones, Pleace & Quilgars, 2002; Krause and Dowling, 2003; Rog and Buckner, 2007; Pleace et al., 2008 as cited in the Project’s literature review).

Local data supports the contributing factors identified in the literature. As shown in Table 3, three of the top five “contributing factors” to housing loss for families accessing emergency shelter in 2012 were directly linked to financial stresses (noted by about 40 per cent of families). The other two factors – relationship breakdown and being new to the area – were not surprising, given the literature on common pathways to homelessness for families (as noted above) and the prevalence of dependents born outside of Canada (as noted in the previous section).

Table 3. Top five contributing factors⁴ to housing loss for families accessing emergency shelter in Waterloo Region in 2012.

Ranking	Factor	Percentage of Families
1	Lack of Housing	64%
2	Financial Crisis	42%
3	Family/Relationship Breakdown	29%
4	New Arrival to the Area	25%
5	Housing – Eviction by Landlord	24%

Impacts of Homelessness on Family Well-Being

There are a variety of negative social, emotional, physical, and psychological Impacts of homelessness on families. These impacts are explored from the perspective of both children and parents.

Impacts on Child Well-Being

As summarized in the Project's literature review, the experience of homelessness can be quite traumatic for children and have both immediate and long-term negative effects (Walsh, 2003; Burt, 2005; Rog and Buckner, 2007; Tischler, Rademeyer and Vostanis, 2007; Huntington, Buckner and Bassuk, 2008 as cited in the Project's literature review). Children experiencing homelessness, especially children staying in emergency shelter, have more emotional and psychological challenges including anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, embarrassment, and depression compared to children living in stable housing (Efron et al., 1996; Walsh, 2003; Shelter, 2006; Piper, 2010; Kirkman et al., 2010; Hinton and Cassel, 2012 as cited by the Project's literature review). Children living without permanent housing often worry about what might happen next and where they will stay because they lack the sense of security that comes with stable housing.

⁴ Families may identify more than one factor at the point of intake. The factors are defined as: 1) Lack of Housing refers to being unable to find affordable housing that meets their needs; 2) Financial Crisis refers to a sudden loss of income and not being able to pay rent; 3) Family/Relationship Breakdown refers to a breakdown of the family structure, including formal or informal separation, but not abuse. It also includes youth and caregiver breakdowns (e.g., with guardians, foster parents, group homes) and breakdowns between roommates or other types of relationships; 4) New Arrival to the Area refers to recent arrival in the city from another city, province or country; and 5) Housing – Eviction by Landlord refers to being forced to leave previous housing by their landlord.

The Project's literature review also documents the negative social impacts of staying in emergency shelter on children, citing issues such as poor interaction with peers, inappropriate social interaction with adults, self-isolation and disruptive behaviors (Efron et al., 1996; Decter, 2007 as cited in the Project's literature review). In addition, Nobel-Carr (2006) documented similar impacts, stating that the instability of their housing situation may make children experiencing homelessness reluctant to form new friendships. Any social networks and relationships they may have formed prior to the loss of housing may be broken, including ties to extended family. Nobel-Carr (2006) also highlighted that children experiencing homelessness may feel excluded from their peers and any activities considered part of a "normal" childhood.

Children experiencing homelessness feel excluded from the activities considered a normal part of childhood and from their peers.

In the Reflection Booklets, children shared what they missed most about having a home.

Common examples included missing their toys and belongings; having sleepovers; being able to take what they want to eat, and watching the shows they want to watch.

One child shared their worries of teasing and judgment by their peers, "I don't talk to anyone about what happened. I didn't tell them because I thought they would be judging".

There are equally distressing physical impacts to consider, as summarized in the Project's literature review. Physically, children experiencing homelessness are much more likely to experience hunger and poor nutrition compared to children with stable housing. They experience higher rates of infectious disease (e.g., viral or bacterial, intestinal or respiratory), higher rates of health conditions (e.g., asthma) and higher rates of developmental delays (e.g., speech delays, hyperactivity) (Efron et al., 1996; Bartholomew, 1999; Shelter, 2006; Kirkman et al., 2010 as cited in the Project's literature review). Not surprisingly, children experiencing homelessness tend to experience high levels of stress and sleep disruptions. Coping with these negative impacts can be extremely difficult for children, often resulting in behaviours perceived as "acting out", including higher levels of aggression, disengagement or complete withdrawal. In older children, such behaviours can also include activities considered higher risk, like becoming sexually active or drinking at a young age (Walsh, 2003 as cited in the Project's literature review).

Children experiencing homelessness face difficulties with school.

In the Reflection Booklets, children identified that they found it hard to adjust to new schools. They did not enjoy school and did not want to attend.

One child shared that "[It was] hard to concentrate at school when we didn't have a home. I worried about where we would stay".

A child's ability to succeed in school is threatened by the negative impacts described above (Kolar, 2004; Decter, 2007; Kirkman et al., 2010; Cutuli et al., 2012; Hinton, 2012 as cited in the Project's literature review). In particular, these include issues that interfere with concentration (such as emotional/physiological impacts), issues related to poor health (which may lead to missed

classes and absent days and an inability to keep up with schoolwork) and social exclusion factors (often triggered by repeated changes in schools). With these challenges, the Project's literature review cites the risk of academic failure as common reality, which serves only to further disengage these vulnerable students from the education system and its resources.

Nobel-Carr (2006) paints a very dismal picture of the potential long term impacts of homelessness on children. Children who live without stable housing for extended periods of time and/or experience housing loss repeatedly may become traumatized by these events, meaning that the negative impacts are more intense and persistent. In these situations, children may simply never develop to their fullest potential. Poor health and nutrition may extend into adulthood, creating risks for a range of chronic conditions. Disruption in school limits both skill development and self esteem, two key assets that help people prepare for successful entry into the employment market. Higher risk behaviours may also create barriers that prevent full participation in community life (e.g., problematic substance use, early pregnancy, criminal activity). Considering these longer term impacts, it is easy to see how homelessness can become an intergenerational experience (Nobel-Carr, 2006). In the Project's research with families, 23 per cent of parents, who were either currently experiencing homelessness or had lost their housing in the last year, also experienced homelessness as a child.

Impacts of Homelessness on Parent Well-Being

The experience of homelessness is also quite traumatic for parents, as their negative experiences are compounded by seeing how housing loss has impacted their children. The Project's literature review noted many emotional and psychological challenges faced by parents experiencing homelessness, including: anxiety, insomnia, stress, guilt, depression, anger, embarrassment, feeling powerless, loss and grief (Efron et al., 1996; Walsh, 2003; Cookson, Cumins and Associates, 2005; Tischler, Rademeyer and Vostanis, 2007 as cited in the Project's literature review). They often fear that their ability to parent is being judged and worry about the potential for intervention by child protection services. In addition, relationships and social networks are often broken alongside the loss of housing, leading to increased feelings of isolation (Nobel-Carr, 2006).

Parents experiencing homelessness are traumatized by seeing their children suffer because of their housing loss.

In the Reflection Booklets, parents identified overwhelming amounts of stress caused by their homelessness, particularly with reference to worrying about their children when they saw the stress and sadness their children were feeling. Parents felt embarrassed and felt they had let their children down.

Parenting in a shared space can be difficult in the best of times, particularly when there is little opportunity to influence or control the environment (as with emergency shelter stays). As noted in the Project's literature review, the pressure they feel to "manage" their children, and any issues they may be dealing with, creates an intense amount of parental stress.

At the same time, parents feel responsible for resolving the housing crisis, a task that requires a significant amount of time and energy. Ultimately these pressures threaten their capacity to support their children with any needs and desires that may emerge (Nobel-Carr, 2006). While some families have shared that the experience of homelessness brought them closer together, the risk of increased levels of family conflict, possible separation, and even violence, is very real (Nobel-Carr, 2006). The Project's literature review identified many ways in which parents try to cope with these challenges. Some of these strategies include higher risk behaviours like substance use, which may exacerbate any issues they are facing (Wienreb, Goldberg and Perloff, 1998 as cited in the Project's literature review).

This chapter explored the prevalence, pathways and impacts of family homelessness. The next chapter builds on this understanding of family homelessness by describing an overall framework to end it.

Parenting while experiencing homelessness is extremely challenging.

In the Reflection Booklets, parents identified great struggles with parenting in the circumstances they were in. They shared the difficulties of managing so many changes, related to family routines, the behavior of their children and an overall lack of control (such as increased contact with strangers). Changes in food routines were noted often: they no longer shared their regular meals, had new restricted timelines and amounts, had no choices and were not able to cook for themselves.

One parent shared, "It's been difficult to follow our routine and keeping a normal bedtime. The children have experienced some behaviour and they normally wouldn't... It's really hard to explain to the kids that sometimes they can't have the food they want".



CHAPTER 4: OVERALL FRAMEWORK FOR ENDING FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

Moving beyond describing family homelessness and considering how to end it is the focus of this chapter. The current chapter presents strategies to end family homelessness largely organized around the three components of a Canadian, national framework for ending family homelessness⁵ (currently under development by Raising the Roof, a national organization that provides leadership on long-term solutions to homelessness). The three components of the framework are: primary prevention, systems-based responses, and early intervention. Promising practices under each of the three components of the framework are discussed, as identified by Noble (2014), the Project's literature review, the Project's research with families and stakeholders, the local Strategy and/or other sources. The chapter concludes with a review of the role that policy can play in the process of ending family homelessness.

Primary Prevention

Primary prevention activities are proactive, seeking to prevent housing loss well before a family is considered to be "at-risk". According to Noble (2014), the purpose of primary prevention is to address any issues of poverty and discrimination that may impact a family's ability to maintain housing stability over the long term. Discrimination is broadly defined and can be based on a number of factors including age, gender, race, ability, sexuality, and immigration status. Essentially, to strengthen primary prevention, all community systems must work to address the following issues:

- The need for universal access to quality, affordable early learning and licensed child care opportunities.
- The need for universal access to post-secondary education.
- The trend toward precarious employment (e.g., low wages, part-time hours, no benefits).
- The need for adequate income supports (e.g., social assistance, disability insurance, employment insurance, child benefits).
- The need for affordable housing.
- The need to prevent domestic violence.
- The need to recognize and address the impact of trauma.

Addressing poverty and discrimination through these areas of focus serves not only to increase access to stable employment that pays a living wage, but also to a social safety net. A social safety net provides a level of support that promotes resilience, helping to keep people out of poverty. Resilience is defined as a "protective factor" that promotes the ability to "cope with stress and trauma in healthy ways, acquire problem solving and planning skills, increase self-esteem, become engaged in school and recreational activities, and develop and maintain positive relationships with peers and family" (Noble, 2014, p. 9). Noble (2014) further identifies how communities can strengthen primary prevention. In general, it is suggested that families

⁵ The framework is outlined in the report, "Child and Family Homelessness: Building a Comprehensive Framework to Address Child and Family Homelessness in Canada – Phase 1, An Environmental Scan" (Noble, 2014).

have greater access to resources in the areas of: parenting, anger management, conflict resolution, early childhood education/programming, recreational activities, and nutrition.

Systems-Based Responses

Systems-based responses are those that acknowledge the critical importance of adopting a common agenda and shared responsibility for ending homelessness, one that extends to every community system and organization that serves families. As Noble (2014) states, “while homelessness has been caused by a variety of structural, systemic and individual factors, our response has largely been addressed at the individual level, often by an overburdened homelessness sector” (p.4). As such, under this second component of the draft national framework, the importance of a strategic, coordinated response to family homelessness is emphasized (Noble, 2014).

Successful coordinated and strategic approaches share common characteristics. Collective impact, a term coined by Kania and Kramer (2011), is an approach that includes the “commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (p. 36). Successful collective impact initiatives share five key conditions, as outlined in Kania and Kramer (2011):

1. **Common Agenda:** All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
2. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
3. **Shared Measurement:** Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
4. **Continuous Communication:** Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and appreciate common motivation.
5. **Backbone Support:** Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies. Five key roles that backbone organizations play include: guiding vision and strategy; supporting aligned activities; establishing shared measurement practices; building public will; advancing policy; and mobilizing funding.

A common agenda to end family homelessness has more power to create social change than the efforts of any person, group or organization alone. Communities that invest in systems-based responses are well positioned to achieve greater collective impact on family homelessness.

Early Intervention

The third component of the national framework under development is early intervention. All housing stability services for families fall under this component, with the overarching goal of both shortening the experience of homelessness and preventing future housing loss. To support these goals, Noble (2014) identifies seven promising practices to support families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss with their housing stability issues. These practices were further synthesized for the purposes of this report into the following five categories: 1) access; 2) basic needs; 3) adequate housing; 4) adequate income; and 5) adequate support. Each category is discussed further below.

1. **ACCESS**

Access includes the promising practices of both coordinated entry and emergency shelter diversion.

Coordinated Entry

Coordinated entry is a promising practice broadly endorsed in the literature (Homeless Hub, 2014). With coordinated entry, families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss are assessed for the resources they require to find, establish and/or retain adequate housing, by trained staff positioned at well-defined access points in the community. Whether coordinated entry is centralized or decentralized, the use of common forms and processes is critical, as it ensures consistency and efficiency with making and receiving referrals both within and between community systems. The goal is to match families with appropriate interventions as quickly as possible, serving to both reduce the length of time that families are in transition and also freeing up staff time in other community programs, so that they may focus more specifically on meeting their own unique service delivery goals (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2014).

To complement coordinated entry, investments need to be made to ensure that everyone – families and the stakeholders they come into contact with from various community systems – know how to navigate the coordinated entry process and what resources are available. The Project’s research with families reaffirmed this. When asked what helps when things were tough, many mentioned that knowing help was available made a big difference. They needed to know they were not alone. Having information centralized in one place as much as possible was identified as a key asset. Having information shared consistently across the system and with other systems was also highlighted as essential for ensuring timely access to resources.

Emergency Shelter Diversion

Given the detrimental impacts of emergency shelter stays on families and the proven benefits of a Housing First approach, adding more emergency shelter beds for families or investing in ways to mitigate the negative impacts of accessing emergency shelter more generally, do not represent promising practices. Rather, both the literature and experience in Waterloo Region suggest that investments should focus on emergency shelter diversion strategies instead (i.e., focusing on housing retention and rapid re-housing), with the goal of reducing or avoiding

emergency shelter stays altogether (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2011; National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2012; Social Planning, Policy and Program Administration, 2013b).

Emergency shelter diversion can be a component of coordinated entry. Diversion is a policy that identifies when, how and under what circumstances families may access emergency shelters. With a diversion policy in place, access to emergency shelter is permitted only after attempts to support housing retention or rapid re-housing have failed. The priority is to support families to retain their existing adequate housing or, when that is not possible, to support them with moving immediately to more adequate housing. Assessment plays an important role in determining which strategy may be most effective.

In order to determine whether or not a family has the potential to benefit from diversion, their housing needs are assessed and immediate alternative housing arrangements are explored. If it is determined that the family is an appropriate candidate for diversion, a housing stability plan is developed that focuses primarily on crisis intervention and also includes information about short term immediate housing arrangements (e.g., where the family will sleep tonight, tomorrow night, and in the short term). Housing stability plans may include personal support to assist with a variety of situations (e.g., conflict mediation with landlords or neighbours, budgeting assistance, accompaniment to appointments, help with accessing identification, housing search, referrals to other programs). In some circumstances, diversion efforts may include assisting a family to stay with extended family members or friends on a time-limited basis, as part of their housing stability plan that includes securing permanent housing.

Resources required to support successful diversion include access to financial assistance (e.g., for rental and energy arrears, first month's rent, rental/condo deposits) and subsidies (e.g., Community Housing, child care). The importance of having access to flex funds was emphasized locally through the implementation of the Family Shelter Diversion pilot (see Chapter 7 for more information about this local initiative). Without these funds, many families would have had no option but to access emergency shelter, as they had no other source of funding to draw from before they could move forward in their lives. On average, housing has been retained or secured for approximately \$1,200⁶ per family. In comparison, data from YWCA-Mary's Place⁷ showed that the average total operating cost to shelter a household was \$4,150 in 2012.

In summary, diversion is not saying "no" to sheltering families that have exhausted all of their safe, alternative housing options. Rather, diversion works to prevent families from experiencing the stress and trauma that may be associated with accessing an emergency shelter where other housing options are available. It ensures that emergency shelter beds are accessed only when

⁶ This is an average per family and includes \$480 for staff time (based on a conservative estimate of 14 hours per family) and \$720 flex fund (for food vouchers, rent or energy assistance, household goods, etc.).

⁷ YWCA-Mary's Place was used as a proxy as their data represents 79 per cent of the families who accessed emergency shelter.

absolutely necessary. Diversion reduces demand on the emergency shelter system by delaying entry or preventing shelter stays altogether in a safe and effective way.

2. BASIC NEEDS

The two items highlighted under basic needs include safety and access to nutritional food.

Safety was identified in the literature as a basic need that must be addressed through early intervention. For example, when women and children seek emergency shelter and report that they have experienced domestic violence, special considerations need to be in place. Novac (2007) has documented the increasing trend of women and children who are victims of domestic violence using emergency shelters designed to manage homelessness, rather than those designed for victims of domestic violence specifically. Reasons for this were varied: the women may not see themselves as victims, they may fear the associated stigma of accessing a domestic violence program, they may fear being reported to child welfare authorities, they may seek programs with greater flexibility/fewer rules or they may want to avoid separation from older male adolescent children who are generally excluded from domestic violence shelters.

Regardless, Novac (2007) emphasizes that women and children who are victims of domestic violence require the services offered through specialized resources – including the higher level of security provided at domestic violence shelters and the personal counselling they (and their children) need to deal with their traumatic experiences. She writes that, “This is critical, as the likelihood of partner abuse and escalated violence increases for some women who leave their partner. This risk must be seriously considered in safety planning and service provision. It is not mitigated by the fact that for many women, becoming homeless is a safer option than remaining in an abusive relationship” (p. 5).

In Noble (2014), the importance of providing nutritional food to families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss is highlighted, emphasizing that “an adequate diet rich in nutrients and minerals is crucial for family members to function, to maintain their health, and for developing children” (p. 15).

3. ADEQUATE HOUSING

Ensuring that families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss have adequate

Focus interventions on supporting long term housing stability.

When asked what advice they had for service providers, one parent noted in their Reflection Booklet that “it’s really hard not to have a place to call home... help people secure their housing for long term.”

housing is a fundamental promising practice, widely endorsed not only by Noble (2014) but also in the Project’s literature review, in the local Strategy, and by the Project’s research with families. Simply put, ending family homelessness requires connecting families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss with adequate housing – housing with security of tenure that is desirable, affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible, and a suitable size.

A large body of evidence has shown that community programs in general are more effective when provided to families with adequate housing; this approach is generally referred to as Housing First (see Chapter 2). As such, families experiencing homelessness should have immediate access to permanent affordable or supportive housing, and additional resources for housing retention as needed and desired (Noble, 2014). Canadian research in the area of best practices for providing supportive housing for families experiencing persistent homelessness is underway in Calgary through a partnership between the Calgary Homeless Foundation and the University of Calgary. The report is expected to be released in 2014.

To support families living without a fixed address to find and/or establish adequate housing as quickly as possible, programs designed to facilitate rapid re-housing are recommended in the literature (in the Project's literature review as well as Noble, 2014; Novac, 2007). The first goal of rapid re-housing programs is to meet emergency crisis needs by connecting families to appropriate levels of support. This may include emergency services and specialized resources to address issues of domestic violence. The most important goal during this process is to support families to stay together wherever possible (Noble, 2014). Once emergency crisis needs have been met, the goal is to identify and remove immediate barriers to accessing adequate housing.

Housing affordability is an essential component of adequate housing. A recent and important 30 month longitudinal study on the effectiveness of different housing and service models for families called "SHIFT" (Service and Housing Interventions for Families in Transition) found that the largest factor in residential stability for families was attributable to providing rental subsidies (Hayes, Zonneville and Bassuk, 2013). This report provides further evidence that families are most likely to stay housed over the long term when they have affordable housing secured either through rental subsidies and/or adequate income.

For women experiencing domestic violence that prefer to stay with their children in their existing family home, efforts may focus on how to support them to do so safely with specialized housing retention resources. In these circumstances, safeguards need to be implemented based on a comprehensive risk assessment of the property and potential for danger posed by the perpetrator, in order to ensure protection for the women and children. These assessments should be carried out in collaboration between domestic violence specialists and police services. When safe to do so, staying in the family home serves to minimize disruptions to the family during a very stressful period. Family members can avoid accessing emergency shelter, the possibility of being re-housed in a less desirable area or property, and the loss of important social networks in their existing communities (including schools). This approach, referred to as the "Sanctuary Scheme" in the literature, has been adopted in the United Kingdom. For more information, see Jones, Bretherton and Bowles (2010) as cited in the Project's Literature Review.

4. ADEQUATE INCOME

As outlined in Chapter 3, a main contributing factor to housing loss for families is related to inadequate income. Therefore, supporting families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss to secure more adequate income is widely recommended in the literature. This

support may be directed toward increasing access to employment that pays a living wage and offers benefits. Or it may include financial assistance and subsidies, including child care or rent subsidies, benefits based on the number of dependents in a household, or grants for energy and rental arrears (Noble, 2014).

5. **ADEQUATE SUPPORT**

As discussed further below, there are a variety of general and family-specific activities that may need to be part of a family's housing stability plan. Through the Project's research with families, it was identified that ensuring families have supportive people to talk to and connect with regarding their various housing stability issues was a key promising practice. Regardless of the type of support provided, the approach should be non-judgemental and trauma-informed.

Supportive relationships make a difference.

When asked what helped, one parent identified in their Reflection Booklet that it "helped to talk to other moms who were going through the same thing... basically talking about it and knowing you are not alone."

General Support for Housing Stability

The local Strategy outlines three main intended outcomes of support provided through housing stability programs, which are broadly applicable to all populations of people experiencing homelessness (not just families):

- **To Find and/or Establish Adequate Housing.** For example, support with negotiating with landlords, setting-up utility accounts, and securing furniture and other household items.
- **To Increase Housing Retention.** For example, crisis intervention, accompaniment to various appointments, and support with advocacy, mediation, problem-solving, goal planning, transportation, practical skills (e.g., in the areas of personal finances, meal preparation, household responsibilities, medication, laundry) and personal care (e.g., support with hygiene, eating, showering/bathing, personal grooming such as shaving, toileting/incontinence care, rising and retiring).
- **To Promote Community Inclusion.** For example, support with opening a bank account, building a strong social support network, increasing recreational opportunities, increasing involvement in social policy initiatives and accessing various community resources (e.g., health care, identification, employment support, income assistance, education, counselling, legal services).

In addition, some rapid re-housing programs offer time-limited rent supplements (e.g., for time periods ranging from one month to a year). The goal for these types of programs would be to support people to access the additional ongoing sources of income they need to make up the difference between rent and the supplement before time runs out. At the same time, people may be supported to increase feelings of inclusion, quality of life and health outcomes, all of which are linked to greater long term housing stability.

Family-Specific Support for Housing Stability

Based on the findings of the Project’s literature review, research with families and consultation with stakeholders, a wide variety of support options are recommended for families in particular. For example, specific supports that may need to be part of a family’s housing stability plan include: counselling for relationship breakdown (e.g., between the parents, parents and children, siblings and/or among extended family members), counselling for parenting stress (e.g., coping with the worry for their children, to manage the distress of fearing child welfare involvement), parenting skill development (e.g., to support healthy child development, to navigate child behaviour issues), licensed child care, peer support and specialized domestic violence support. Much of this support would be provided through referrals to other community systems and resources.

In addition, a variety of child-specific, child-friendly and developmentally appropriate support options may also be required. For example, specific supports that may need to be part of a family’s housing stability plan for children include: counselling to recover from the trauma of housing instability or homelessness, special needs resourcing (e.g., related to developmental delays, behavioural issues, learning disabilities), access to health care and nutritional support, as well as play-based/recreational programs. Similar to parent-specific support, it is expected that much of this support would be provided through referrals to other community systems and resources. For example, Noble (2014) note the important role that teachers, in particular, can play with respect to not only recognizing which students may be exposed to risks associated with housing loss (e.g., poverty, trauma, educational disengagement), but also providing access to the resources required to mediate these risks. Several sources (Noble, 2014; Decter, 2007) recommend that community-based organizations work very closely with schools to provide specialized supports for “highly mobile” students. For example, “school liaison workers” were recommended as a way to bridge gaps between families experiencing homelessness and schools. School liaison workers support families during times of transition; protect and promote the education and emotional health of students; and assist with problem-solving for any issues that may arise.

Students experiencing homelessness need extra support

When asked how things were at school, one child shared in their Reflection Booklet:

“I was more sad at school. More sad around my friends. I told one friend.”

Based on the findings of the Project’s literature review, research with families and consultation with stakeholders, other quality features related to providing support for families related to housing stability have been identified. These include: recruitment/retention of high quality staff; having dedicated, family-specific direct support workers that work intensively with families and have fewer families to support in total; adopting a “whole-family” approach that considers the needs and desires of each family member throughout the supportive relationship; staying involved with a family for as long as necessary; and promoting effective multi-agency/ collaborative approaches to draw on resources from as many community systems as needed and desired.

Supportive Approach

Supportive approaches focus on trauma informed care, creating an environment of mutual respect, and including program elements that help families retain some measure of choice, control, and normalcy.

The importance of trauma informed care was highlighted the SHIFT Study (described previously under Adequate Housing). This longitudinal study found that the only predictors of residential instability were low self-esteem and trauma (Hayes, Zonneville and Bassuk, 2013). Approaches in housing stability programs that support self-esteem and provide trauma informed care are essential for family long term housing stability. Trauma-informed care is one that is highly supportive, intentionally preventing the inadvertent triggering of trauma symptoms that often leads to disruptive patterns of behaviour in families. Trauma-informed care includes processes to identify and address trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression as well as any related problematic substance use (Prescott et al., 2008).

Parents reported increasing levels of depression following housing loss.

In the Reflection Booklets, parents identified the impact that housing loss has had on their ability to function. One parent shared, "I am unable to work or go to school because of my depression. My depression has gotten worse since I moved to the shelter with my daughter".

Paradis et al. (2012) emphasized the importance of creating an environment of mutual respect between participants and support providers, one in which power is “recognized and restored” through inclusive practices that include directly involving people in designing and delivering policies and programs; promoting strengths, skills, self-reliance, and mutual support; and reflecting and responding to diverse needs” (p. 8). The local Strategy likewise promotes nurturing supportive relationships that have qualities of a friendship (e.g., emphasizing strengths, treating people with dignity, being curious about people’s lived experiences, listening to people’s stories and actively engage people in their housing stability plans). And, finally, the Project’s research with families validated this promising practice: When asked how they would like to be treated, most parents shared that they wanted to feel welcomed, listened to, accepted, supported and – above all – not judged.

Provide person-centred care.

When asked what advice they would give to service providers, one parent said, “Don’t treat us with disrespect. We are human. We make mistakes. Listen to me and hear what I’m not saying. There are things about my life that you don’t know. Sometimes a smile hides a lot of pain. Get to know the person.”

The Project’s research with families also identified several other program elements that should be considered in early intervention activities, including the need for parents to be able to control daily activities and routines for their children while staying in residential programs. Providing greater control was identified as a way to mitigate some of the stresses associated with housing loss and the resulting disruptions in their normal lives (e.g., meal and bed time

routines). Families noted the need to increase food choice (e.g., halal, vegetarian) and offer opportunities for families to prepare their own meals in residential programs.

When asked what helped when things were tough, many families mentioned doing “normal” activities again – like going for a walk or to the park as a family, playing video games, watching TV, and cuddling with their kids. Parents shared that these activities helped them to forget about their problems for a while.

Support families to find ways to enjoy being together.

One parent identified in their Reflection Booklet that “going somewhere that we can feel normal again and having family time” was helpful.

Early Intervention Policy

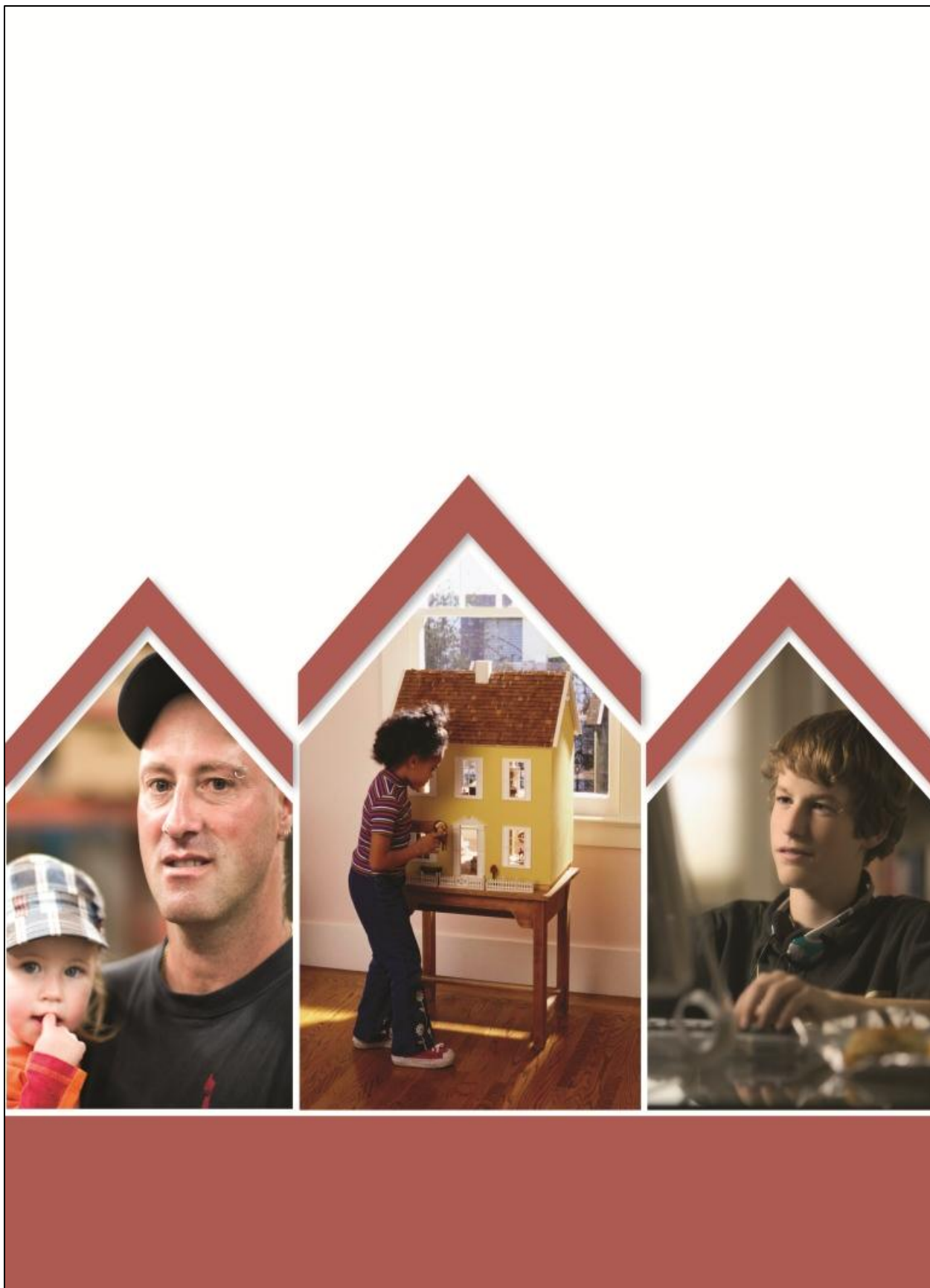
In the United States, federal policy plays a key role in ending family homelessness. Having similar policies at the federal and provincial levels in Canada would serve to strengthen any efforts at the local/municipal level to end family homelessness.

The housing stability policies in the United States have been informed and inspired by the demonstrated success of rapid re-housing interventions designed to help families experiencing homelessness reconnect to housing quickly and successfully. They promote the strategic use of federal resources to end homelessness and provide local communities with the tools they require to implement rapid re-housing programs. For example:

- **The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act.** The HEARTH Act restructured the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Programs and established a federal goal of high performing communities, whereby people experiencing homelessness return to permanent housing within 30 days. Communities are expected to demonstrate that they are using federal resources to make progress in reducing homelessness. This includes reducing the number of people who lose their housing, the length of time people remain without housing, and the rate at which people who exit homelessness later return to emergency shelter.
- **Opening Doors: The Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness.** This plan was presented to the President and Congress by the Interagency Council on Homelessness in June 2010. It provides the Administration’s vision for how homelessness will be ended. Among the 10 objectives is re-tooling the system to more effectively prevent homelessness and rapidly return people who experience homelessness back into stable housing.
- **Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP).** The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided \$1.5 billion to local communities for HPRP. The one-time funding was designed to equip communities with the tools they needed to serve rising numbers of people impacted by the recession.

- **The McKinney Vento Act.** This Act provides “highly mobile” students and students experiencing homelessness with certain rights so they have access to opportunities that will help them meet the same high academic standards expected of all students.

Appendix B includes a summary of emerging and promising principles and practices for programs that serve families experiencing housing instability, as outlined in this chapter. The next three chapters further explore the key components of the framework for ending family homelessness as they relate to Waterloo Region. Recommendations resulting from these chapters are included in Chapter 8.



CHAPTER 5: PRIMARY PREVENTION – COMMUNITY TRENDS LINKED TO FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

Waterloo Region is known internationally for its leading-edge technology, advanced manufacturing industries, innovative educational institutions, vibrant agricultural communities and historically significant Grand River. Similarly, it is often characterized as a wealthy area of the province. Nevertheless, Waterloo Region has faced significant challenges since the most recent recession of mid-2008. While these challenges have lessened somewhat in recent years, the increased vulnerability for local families has largely persisted six years later.

This chapter highlights some of the key areas of focus for “primary prevention”, as described in the previous chapter as part of the overall framework for ending family homelessness. More specifically, it identifies three key community trends linked to housing instability for local families 1) employment; 2) income; and 3) housing affordability. These community trends were first introduced in Chapter 3, where economic hardship was identified as one of the primary factors leading to family homelessness.

1. Employment

In recent history, the local labour market has weakened in the area of manufacturing and processing jobs. For example, there are 10,000 fewer manufacturing and processing jobs today than in 1987, despite significant job growth in the last two decades (Chief Administrator’s Office, 2011). Jobs in the areas of finance, administration, education and service are taking the place of manufacturing and processing jobs (Chief Administrator’s Office, 2011). Service jobs significantly outnumber the others in this group, and also tend to have lower wages, fewer benefits and less full-time employment opportunities (Chief Administrator’s Office, 2011). Precarious employment in particular has increased by nearly 50 per cent in the last 20 years, with one study noting that only half of the Southern Ontario workforce has permanent full-time employment with benefits (PEPSO, 2013). Another recent study by the Wellesley Institute found that the number of people in Ontario working for minimum wage has more than doubled since 2003 (Block, 2013).

During the recent recession, Waterloo Region moved from having one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country to one of the highest (Chief Administrator’s Office, 2011). As illustrated in Figure 4 below, at its highest, the unemployment rate reached 10.5 per cent (in August 2009). While local unemployment rates are now more in-line with Provincial and national levels, rates still remain slightly above pre-recession levels (Statistics Canada, 2014). During previous recessions (1980-1982 and 1991-1992) lost manufacturing jobs were eventually recovered. Following the 2008 recession however, these jobs are not being replaced or renewed within the sector (Chief Administrator’s Office, 2011).

People who are unemployed and have exhausted their assets and any Employment Insurance for which they are entitled, may seek access to Ontario Works. Prior to the recession in late 2008, the number of households accessing Ontario Works in Waterloo Region remained fairly stable at an average of just over 6,000. As shown in Figure 5 below, the number of households

Ending Family Homelessness in Waterloo Region

accessing Ontario Works increased sharply in the fall of 2008. The new average is approximately 8,500, representing a 35 per cent increase (data sourced from the Waterloo Region, Ontario Works database). A recent Ontario Works Caseload Profile (Employment and Income Support, 2012) reported that families represent 40 per cent of the households in receipt of Ontario Works (32 per cent single-parent families and 8 per cent two-parent families).

Figure 4. Unemployment rates (2008-2014).

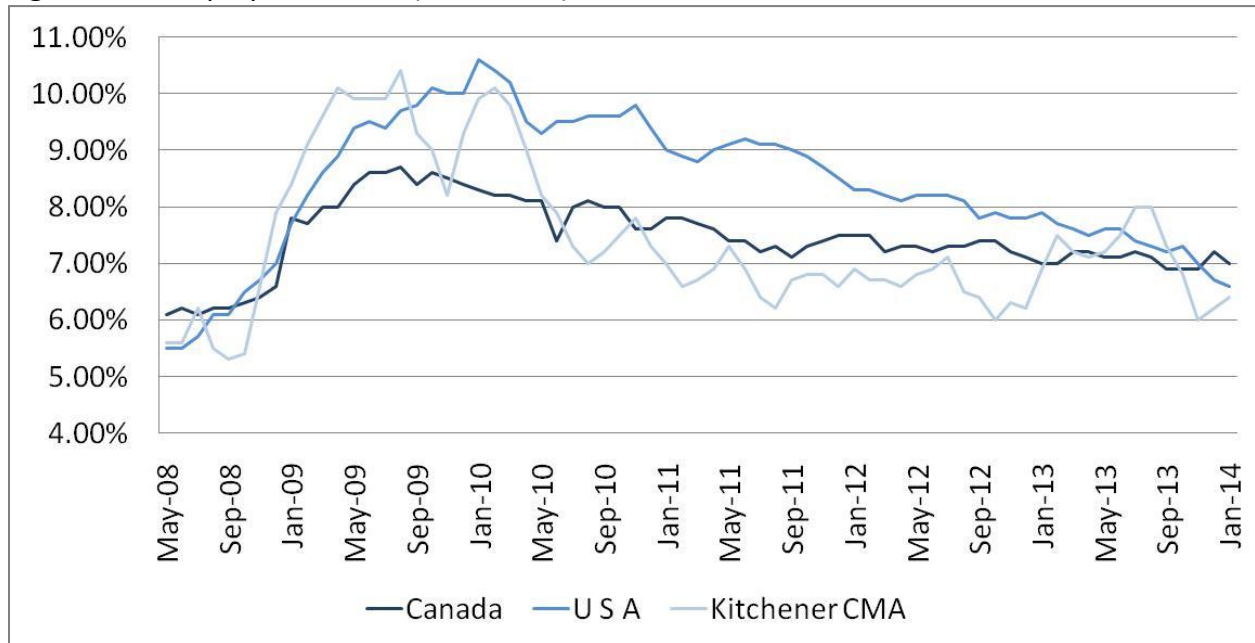
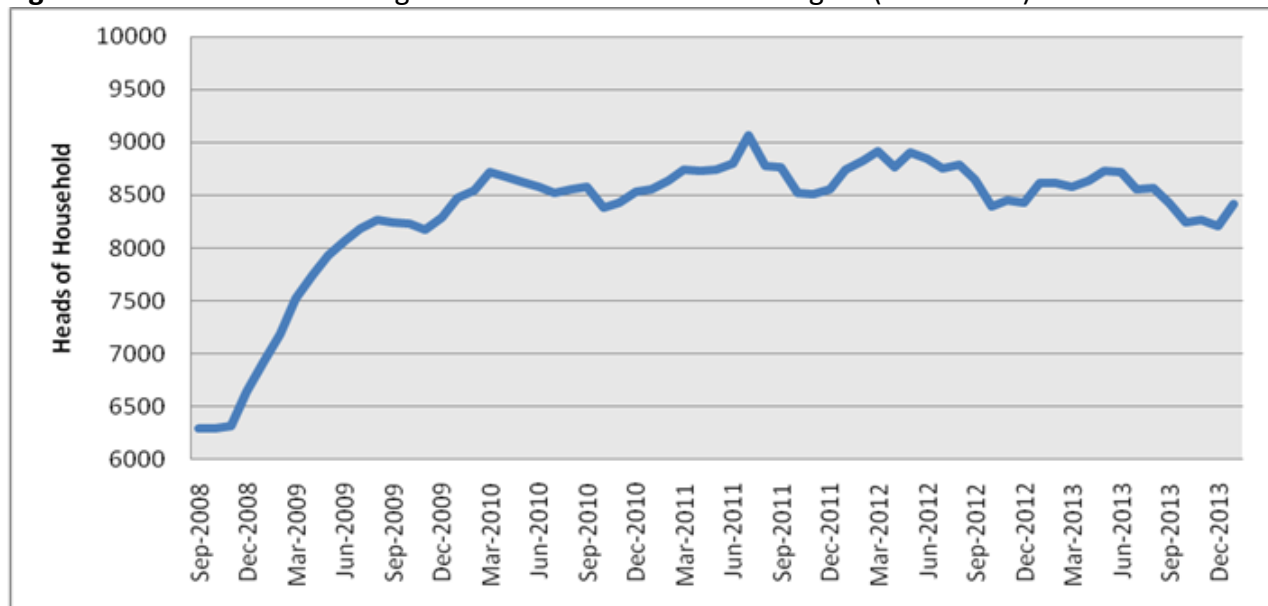


Figure 5. Households accessing Ontario Works in Waterloo Region (2008-2013).



2. Income

According to the 2006 Census (the last Census for which there is comparable income data), the median total income for households in Waterloo Region was \$65,522 (\$55,168 after tax). Median household incomes vary considerably across the region. For example, a single person household had a median total income of \$31,474, compared to \$76,149 for a family household (Planning, Housing and Community Services, n.d.).

Although not the only measure of poverty, Statistics Canada's Low Income Cutoffs (LICOs) are commonly used throughout Canada as a measure of income status. LICOs attempt to convey the income level at which people may be in difficult financial circumstances. People who are living with "low income" according to the LICO are expected to spend at least 20 per cent more of their gross (i.e., before tax) income on essentials such as food, clothing and shelter than the average person. LICOs account for seven different sizes of families and five different community sizes, and are adjusted annually for inflation. In Waterloo Region, 48,000 residents fell below the local LICO in 2006, representing 10.2 per cent of the total population.

The trends below are based on local LICO data for 2005 (Public Health, 2010).

- **Some population groups live with low-income more often than others.** For example, the following population groups had higher percentages of people with low income compared to all residents in Waterloo Region: people with disabilities, urban residents, children, youth, Aboriginal people and recent immigrants. Similarly, the percentage of single-parent families with low income was higher than the percentage of two-parent families with low income (by 24.9 per cent).
- **There is a large income gap in Waterloo Region.** In 2006, the average total annual income of all individuals was nearly four times that of individuals with low income (\$38,512 versus \$9,698). The trend for families was similar: the total annual income of all families was over five times that of families with low income (\$90,764 versus \$16,709).
- **This income gap is widening over time.** In 1996, the average total annual income of all individuals was \$18,901 higher than the average total annual income of individuals with low income and, ten years later, this income gap grew to \$28,814. The trend for families was similar: the average total annual income for all families was \$48,036 higher than the average total annual income of families with low income in 1996 and ten years later, this income gap grew to \$74,099.

Not surprisingly given these trends, in a local study, 45 per cent of parents reported consistently lacking disposable income after providing for basic needs (Romagnoli, 2010). Families living without adequate income also report that they are often not able to enroll their children in recreational activities like sports or music programs (PEPSO, 2013). The inability to save for possible emergencies (job loss, health crisis, etc.) creates a precarious living situation for a significant number of families in Waterloo Region, putting them at an increased risk housing instability.

3. Housing Affordability

A significant portion of the population cannot afford to rent or own a home in Waterloo Region, putting families at increased risk of housing instability. Waterloo Region on the whole has experienced relatively low vacancy rates over the years, averaging 2.4 per cent for two bedroom apartments in the past two decades. Vacancy rates lower than the “healthy rate” of three per cent indicates higher demand for rental units, which can lead to increased rents (Planning, Housing and Community Services, 2013b). Although no data is available to confirm the exact vacancy rates for less expensive market rent units, consultations with local stakeholders for this Project frequently emphasized how difficult it is to find adequate housing at lower rental rates.

Housing affordability is also challenging for home owners, as housing prices have continued to rise over the years. Between 2002 and 2011 alone, new home prices increased by 72 per cent (Planning, Housing and Community Services, 2013b). Similar, resale prices have continued to climb – 78 per cent in Kitchener-Waterloo and 52 per cent in Cambridge during this same period (Planning, Housing and Community Services, 2013b). In 2011, the average cost of a new single detached home in Kitchener-Waterloo reached \$394,169, with average resale prices ranging from \$271,586 in Cambridge to \$353,888 in Kitchener-Waterloo (Planning, Housing and Community Services, 2013b). Given these trends, for many families in Waterloo Region, home ownership is simply unattainable.

In general, there are two main ways to measure “housing affordability”: setting a “threshold” that defines the maximum percentage of income to be used for housing costs or calculating a minimum “housing wage” a person needs to earn. Each is described further below.

Threshold for Housing Costs. The threshold for determining affordability in housing is often set at 30 per cent of gross income toward housing costs. Housing costs greater than 50 per cent of income creates a severe affordability problem, leaving limited discretionary budget to meet basic needs or respond to short term emergencies. For renters, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation considers housing costs to include: rent and payments for electricity, fuel, water and other municipal services. Likewise, for owners, the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation considers housing costs to include: mortgage payments (principal and interest), property taxes, and any condominium fees, along with payments for electricity, fuel, water and other municipal services.

According to the National Household Survey (2011), 40 per cent of all renting households and 17.5 per cent of home owners spent 30 per cent or more of their income on housing in the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge Census Metropolitan Area. Similarly, 18.7 per cent of renting households and six per cent of home owners spent of more than 50 per cent of their income on housing.

Housing Wage. To assess the cost of market rent housing, a housing wage is often used. Housing wage refers to the amount a person working full-time must earn to afford the average

market rent without paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent. While minimum wage in Ontario has increased 15 per cent from \$8.75 per hour in 2008 to \$10.25 per hour in 2010 (with a further increase to \$11.00 per hour planned for June 2014 [Office of the Premier, 2014]), it still falls short of the hourly housing wage. Table 4 below illustrates average market rents and housing wages in 2013 for various housing unit sizes.

Table 4. Comparisons between average market rent, housing wage, and minimum wage.

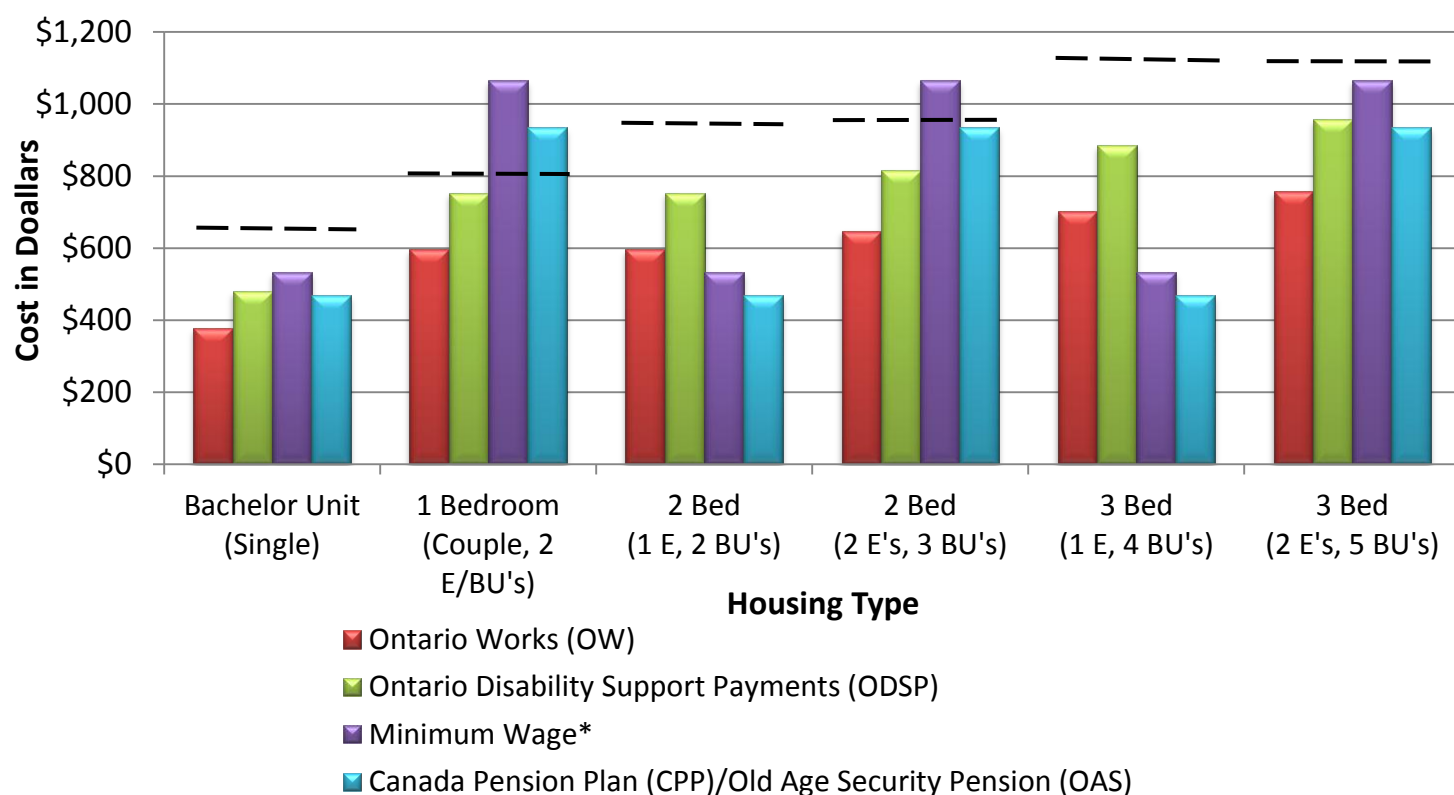
Housing Unit Size	Average Market Rent (2013)	Housing Wage (2013)	Gap Between Minimum Wage (\$10.25) and Housing Wage	
			\$	%
Bachelor	\$660	\$12.69	\$2.44/hour	24%
One-Bedroom	\$810	\$15.58	\$5.33/hour	52%
Two-Bedroom	\$952	\$18.31	\$8.06/hour	79%
Three-Bedroom	\$1,127	\$21.67	\$11.42/hour	111%

Households that earn less than \$30,000 a year can afford a rental rate up to \$750 per month, which corresponds to the average market rent of a bachelor unit (Planning, Housing and Community Services, 2013b). To afford the average market rents of one, two and three-bedroom apartments, which ranged between \$810 and \$1,127 per month in 2013, households must earn between \$30,000 and \$44,999 a year (Planning, Housing and Community Services, 2013b).

Figure 6 below illustrates the housing cost challenges faced by many households, particularly those with the lowest incomes (people accessing Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program, those earning minimum wage, and seniors on fixed incomes). Households in only five out of 18 scenarios presented are able to afford average market rent in Waterloo Region. Single parent families requiring two and three bedroom units fair the worst.

Affordable Housing Demand. Currently, there are over 3,000 households waiting to access affordable housing through the Community Housing program. As illustrated in Table 5 below, the number of households who have entered Community Housing from the waiting list has decreased significantly since 2008, when the recession began. This trend is linked to reduced turnover of units.

Waiting times can be quite long (ranging from a few months to several years) and are determined based on a number of factors, including: the number of buildings selected on the application; the popularity, location and unit availability of the buildings selected on the application; and whether or not a person has been granted a priority status (either Special Priority or Urgent Priority status, as described below). On average, households who need two and three bedroom units will wait two or more years. Larger families looking for four or five bedroom units may wait three or more years (data sourced from Region of Waterloo, Coordinated Access Waitlist).

Figure 6. Average market rent affordability for lowest income households (2013).

* Minimum wage is calculated at the current rate of \$10.25/hour

E = Earner (if making minimum wage)

BU = Benefit Unit

Table 5. Community Housing waiting list data (2008-2012).

Year	Households on Waiting List		New Applications	Housed from Waiting List	
	Total	Families		Total	Special Priority Status
2008	3,100	47%	2,681	1,034	15%
2009	3,015	50%	2,640	871	17%
2010	2,737	64%	2,149	884	13%
2011	3,280	54%	2,282	733	22%
2012	3,162	44%	2,039	726	21%
2013	3,287	40%	1,931	649	25%

There are two types of waitlist priorities through the Community Housing Coordinated Waitlist. The Province requires Special Priority status for victims of domestic violence meaning that someone in the household: a) is experiencing or at-risk of abuse by someone they currently live with in a familial relationship OR b) experienced abuse or was at-risk of abuse by someone they have separated from within the last three months.

People qualify for the locally developed Urgent Priority status if they have severe housing affordability issues (i.e., 50 per cent or more of their total gross monthly income would be required to access the size of housing required, at the current average market rent) and if one of the following scenarios is also applicable:

- They are unsheltered OR are accessing emergency shelter as their primary residence.
- The only reason a child protection agency will not return dependents to their care is because they do not have suitable housing.
- Their home was destroyed by fire or natural disaster within the last 3 months.
- They are waiting to be discharged from the hospital or treatment facility, cannot return to their previous residence, and will not be released until they find suitable housing.
- They live in a place where the physical condition is a serious and immediate threat to safety, and this housing cannot be repaired in a reasonable amount of time.
- They must move because they have been physically threatened or harmed.

As illustrated in Table 6, people who have been granted Urgent Priority status represent a small percentage of households on the waiting list for Community Housing (about four per cent), with families experiencing homelessness (see “Households with Dependents”) representing an even smaller portion (less than one per cent).

Table 6. Urgent Priority status Community Housing coordinated waiting list data (2011-2013).

Year	Senior Households		Households Without Dependents		Households with Dependents		Totals		
	NFA	Other	NFA	Other	NFA	Other	NFA	Other	All
2011	0	1	91	26	41	26	132	53	185
2012	4	6	89	23	20	22	113	51	164
2013	8	4	87	14	12	11	107	29	136
Averages	4	4	89	21	24	20	117	44	162

* Data as at December 31 for the respective year. “NFA” stands for No Fixed Address where the household is unsheltered or accessing emergency shelter as their primary residence. “Other” includes the remaining Urgent Priority status scenarios identified above.

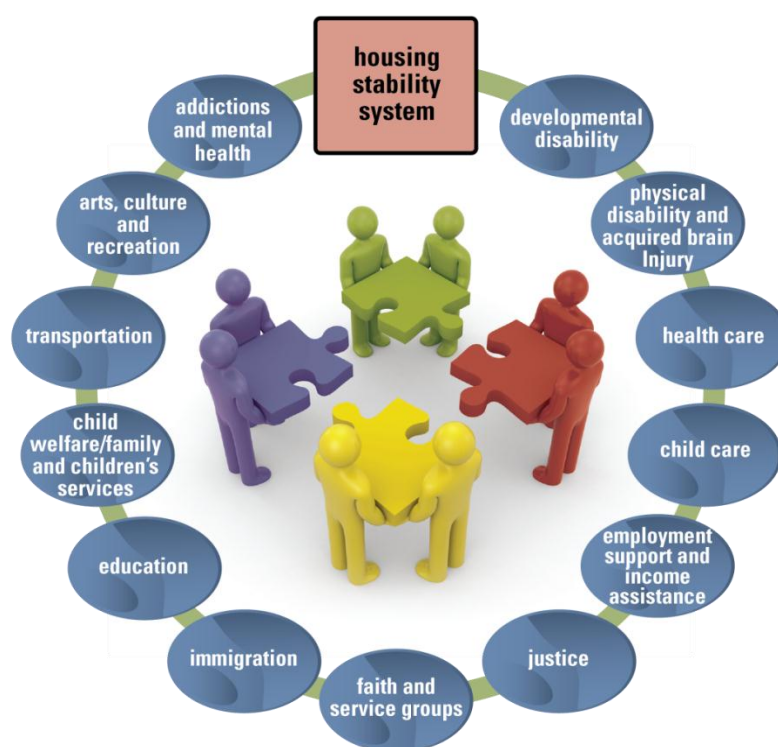
In summary, this chapter reviewed primary prevention strengths and challenges in Waterloo Region related to employment, income, and housing affordability. Recommendations arising from this chapter are included in Chapter 8. The next chapter reviews systems-based responses, the second component of the framework for ending family homelessness.



CHAPTER 6: SYSTEMS-BASED RESPONSES – OTHER COMMUNITY SYSTEMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

As identified in Chapter 4, “systems-based responses” are a core component of the framework for ending family homelessness. Ending family homelessness requires the dedicated, collaborative effort of many local systems and organizations. As such, the main goal of this chapter is to identify the opportunities and challenges related to housing stability that fall within the scope of community systems and organizations outside of the housing stability system⁸, some of which are illustrated in Figure 7. Recommendations arising from the opportunities and challenges presented in this chapter are included in Chapter 8.

Figure 7. Examples of community systems that may serve families experiencing housing instability.



While the housing stability system is the only one designed specifically to support people who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss, most community systems at least indirectly support greater housing stability and all have the capacity to promote community inclusion. For example, all community systems should commit to removing system-level barriers to participation in their programs for people living without a fixed address. In addition, community systems that support people from groups that are known to be at a higher risk of housing loss have a responsibility to strengthen their programs and policies with the intention of preventing participants from experiencing housing loss in the future.

⁸ Note that Appendix C provides an overview of some of the community resources for families (organizations, groups) outside of the housing stability system.

Collaboration with the Children’s Planning Table

The Children’s Planning Table is a group of service providers, planning bodies and funders who have come together to plan how services can be better coordinated for children in Waterloo Region. The mandate of the Children’s Planning Table is to serve as an integrated planning table for children’s services from pre-birth to 12 years of age in Waterloo Region. As a community-led initiative, all organizations providing support services to children (pre-birth to 12 years of age) are considered stakeholders at the planning table and are invited to participate in their work.

The Children’s Planning Table’s vision is that all children in Waterloo Region live in a community that supports their developmental health through a system of coordinated and effective services. They use the Ontario “Best Start On Track” definition of developmental health to guide their work, which recognizes that many factors influence children’s future health and well-being such as “income, education, health, culture, parenting, neighbourhood and social status”. There are some key linkages between the work of the Children’s Planning Table and family homelessness that make for potential collaboration with the housing stability system.

Challenges Related to Ending Family Homelessness

The remainder of this chapter presents an overview of the challenges faced by families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss that fall within the mandates of other community systems, as identified through various stakeholder consultations. Challenges are organized by the following nine areas: a) child care; b) child welfare; c) community-based programs; d) education; e) health care; f) immigrants and refugees; g) justice; h) legal; and i) tenancy.

A) CHILD CARE – Lack of access to affordable, quality child care.

Child care subsidy is funded by the province and administered locally by municipal Service Managers. Parents who are experiencing homelessness can often be ineligible according to the criteria set by the province which requires parents/guardians to be working, in school or a training program, or are parenting a child with special or social needs, or have medical needs of their own. In general, there are not enough licensed spaced to meet the demand in the region.

“One participant was not able to accept a job offer because she didn’t have child care set up for the date the employer requested she begin work.”

Local stakeholder

B) CHILD WELFARE – Fear of losing custody.

Parents’ fear of losing their children through apprehension from child welfare is a significant barrier to disclosing any housing stability issues they might be facing. Although consultations with Family and Children’s Service of Waterloo Region identified that families experiencing housing instability do not face immediate intervention based on their housing instability alone, policies related to intervention by child welfare agencies (and plans for reunification) under these circumstances are often unclear for both parents and service providers.

For example, if children are apprehended by a child welfare agency, their return to the parent(s) may be contingent on securing adequate housing. Yet, additional income sources (such as the child tax benefit or Ontario Works benefits tied to dependents) may not be available to parents until they have custody of their children, making it extremely difficult to move forward with any housing stability plans that include children.

C) COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS – Lack of access to affordable, quality programming.

Service providers noted that even though Ontario Early Years Centres offer some free programming for parents with young children (as well as other programs for a fee), parents living with low income may be hesitant to access these programs because of a fear of experiencing class discrimination.

D) EDUCATION

The elementary and secondary school system is the only community system that connects with virtually every child in the community. As such, its partnership in ending family homelessness is critical. However, many other community systems and sectors seek to collaborate with the education system on a number of issues already, which means that their time and resources are in high demand. For this reason, adopting a coordinated approach to connecting with the school boards is important.

Four key challenges related to the education system were noted through the Project, as outlined in more detail below.

Teachers and other staff at school can make a difference.

When asked how things were at school when they were experiencing homelessness, one child shared in their Reflection Booklet:

“A woman helped me at school. She told me that I am a good kid and that I can get through this and I can get better and everything will be OK.”

1) Provincial policies do not allocate special resources to students who are experiencing homelessness or highly mobile.

Unlike in the United States where federal legislation enforces rights for students who are experiencing homelessness or highly mobile⁹, there is no such Canadian federal or Ontario provincial legislation in this regard. The United States federal government provides direct funding to schools for the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program and also funds resources such as the National Centre for Homeless Education to support research, resources and information (National Centre for Homeless Education, 2014). No such comparable resources exist either nationally or provincially in Ontario.

⁹ Subtitle VII-B of The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act authorizes the federal Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program and is the primary piece of federal legislation dealing with the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. It was reauthorized in 2001 by Title X, Part C, of the “No Child Left Behind Act” (US Department of Education, 2014).

Neither school board in Waterloo Region identified that they had a mandate or specific policy to provide support to students who are experiencing homelessness or highly mobile.

Any special resources for students in these

circumstances are largely directed as

determined by the principal and staff at

individual schools. Some schools, such as

Suddaby Public Elementary School in Kitchener,

have made concerted efforts to support their

students in these vulnerable circumstances, due to the staff interest in doing so and the large

numbers of their students staying at YWCA-Mary's Place. The following statement by one

school board administrator provides a good summary of their current position on this matter,

"We are here to support students and families in their attempt to learn. It is recognized that

homelessness and its accompanying issues frequently hinder or prevent students from learning.

We seek to provide resources and connections to community supports".

Students experiencing homelessness feel embarrassed by their circumstances.

One parent shared in their

Reflection Booklet:

"Kids asked me if we had to tell other kids that we are at a shelter when we go to school. They are ashamed."

The only specialized support funding for Ontario students is the Learning Opportunity Grant, which is provided to school boards in addition to its regular funding. This grant was described further in a Social Planning Council of Toronto brief entitled, "Make Equity in Education a Priority in Ontario's Next Poverty Reduction Strategy" (2013). In that brief, it explained that the Learning Opportunity Grant is made up of eight smaller grants directed to specific areas (homelessness or high mobility were not identified), with the exception of the Demographic Allocation (the largest portion), where use may be determined locally¹⁰.

The Toronto Social Planning Council identified that chronic underfunding of school boards by the Province often leads school boards to use the Learning Opportunity Grant (and other discretionary benefits) to cover budget shortfalls. In the brief, a recommendation was made to the Province to provide adequate funding for education in order to reduce the pressure on school boards to underfund supports that may otherwise be allocated to students living in poverty. Local consultations on this issue identified that unless the Province specifically identifies and provides funding for students who are experiencing homelessness or highly mobile, it would be unlikely for school boards to allocate funding for this particular purpose, given the other demands that they are currently managing.

2) Provincial policies align school registration processes with fixed addresses.

Local families shared that it was difficult to register their children for school without a fixed address. Likewise, schools identified that their funding relies on students having an address.

They also noted that the Keeping Our Kids Safe at School Act, 2010 requires students to register for school in advance, to ensure that schools have the information they need (about potential safety risks, etc.) before a student joins a classroom.

¹⁰ Further details are included in the Ministry of Education's Education Funding Technical Paper 2013-14 available at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1314/Technical13_14.pdf.

3) Challenges with identifying housing instability risk factors and transferring information between schools.

While teachers may notice students wearing inadequate clothing for the weather, not bringing a lunch to school consistently or not being able to afford school trip fees, there is no formal process in place to assess for housing instability. As such, staff do not have access to any information that may help them to be more intentional with supporting students experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss. They may not be aware of the stresses that these students may be managing in their personal lives and, consequently, miss opportunities to provide the additional resources necessary (such as extra time or tutoring support) to help them to not only achieve academic success alongside their peers, but also to help them feel like they belong.

Similarly, a student's "home school" is the one they attended first, based on their previous address. Home schools are responsible for keeping official records for each student. While there is a formal process of requesting school records (the Ontario Student Record) when students move from one school to another, this process takes time and often delays the registration process. The impact for students with higher support needs is particularly concerning. If teacher observations of possible delays or other issues do not follow students to their new schools as part of their records in a timely manner, the students may experience unnecessary delays in accessing the tests or assessments needed to secure additional support.

Having to change schools creates additional stress for families experiencing homelessness.

One parent noted in their Reflection Booklet:
"Didn't change schools, so school went really well. From talking to other parents, I know that they had trouble with changing schools."

4) Challenges with transportation to remain with their home school.

Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region has a transportation protocol with local school boards whereby they pay for transportation when safety is a concern. Likewise, students

Transportation is a challenge.

One parent emphasized in their Reflection Booklet that:
"Getting to and from school was tough."

experiencing homelessness should be supported to continue attending their home school, whether they are staying in emergency shelter or with their friends or other family members. Maintaining this connection would reduce some of the trauma associated with homelessness. However, this Project's consultations with the school board identified that their transportation budget is very limited.

E) HEALTH CARE – The need for continuity of health care.

Local stakeholders identified that families experiencing homelessness can lose access to health care. To work toward addressing this need, the mobile street outreach ID program in Kitchener-Waterloo can roster families with the Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre.

F) IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES – Language barriers.

Local stakeholders identified that the ability to access service in their preferred language is a barrier for many immigrants and refugees. As such, the dissemination of information through brochures and posters may not reach immigrants or refugees if these materials are only printed in English or French. Stakeholders also noted that some community organizations may not have a high degree of cultural competency, sometimes leading to experiences of exclusion by immigrants or refugees. While there are generally some common barriers to housing stability shared with all families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss, there are also some unique barriers faced by immigrants and refugees. These issues are being explored further through the Immigration Partnership Settling Steering Group.

G) JUSTICE – Parents exiting correctional facilities face multiple barriers.

The scenario on the next page was documented at one of the community forums and shows system-level barriers that cause ongoing housing instability.

H) LEGAL – Families are not aware of the resources available to assist with legal issues.

Consultations through the Project highlighted that families are not always aware of community resources available to support with legal issues. In addition, stakeholders identified that family court/legal issues have been particularly challenging over the last few years due to changes in the legal aid system (fewer people are now eligible for a certificate that gives them access to their own lawyer). In general, Legal Aid does not pay the lawyers very much, which limits the number of lawyers who may be willing to offer their services.

I) TENANCY – Families are not aware of the resources available to assist with tenancy issues.

Consultations through the Project highlighted that families and their landlords are often unaware of all their rights and obligations. Families may not be accessing resources that could help them to fight illegal evictions or to encourage their landlords to uphold their responsibilities.

In summary, this chapter reviewed systems-based responses, the second component of the framework for ending family homelessness, in relation to opportunities and challenges in Waterloo Region. Recommendations arising from this chapter are included in Chapter 8. The next chapter reviews early intervention strategies, the third and final component of the framework for ending family homelessness.

CASE SCENARIO OF A FEMALE-LED FAMILY INVOLVED WITH THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

A mother enters jail. If there are no other family members available to care for her children, she may lose custody of her children. Upon release:

- ✓ She needs to apply for **custody of her children**. Custody decisions are dependent on whether or not she is able to provide a safe, supportive environment for her child(ren) – which includes adequate housing, income and support. A judge makes decisions regarding reconnecting families.
- ✓ If she has **no fixed address**, she needs access to adequate housing. If she does not have an adequate source of income upon release, she needs access to a housing subsidy. If she doesn't have custody of her children yet, she can't apply to the Community Housing waiting list for affordable housing that would be needed to accommodate them (e.g., with enough bedrooms). However, once custody has been granted, she may change her application and maintain her initial date of application. But if lack of adequate housing is the only barrier preventing the return of her children from Family and Children's Services, she may immediately apply for the appropriate sized unit.
- ✓ If she does not have an **adequate source of income** upon release, she needs access to Ontario Works. She can't apply for Ontario Works until she is released. However, paperwork may be organized for her in advance to assist with the application process. Alternatively, she may be eligible for the Ontario Disability Support Program. She faces employment barriers if she isn't bondable. Note: Although people may apply for a "pardon" to become bondable again, not many know about this process.
- ✓ If she has no **ID**, she must get ID in order to apply for Ontario Works and possibly to get a job.
- ✓ If she has **no child care**, she needs access to child care providers. If she does not have an adequate source of income upon release, she needs access to a child care subsidy. She can't apply for a child care subsidy until she is released and has employment or education options lined up (which is difficult to do before release). However, paperwork may be organized for her in advance to assist with the application process.
- ✓ If she has **no support**, she needs to access it from a community system. Or, she may need support to break free from unhealthy informal supports.

OTHER FACTORS THAT CREATE HOUSING INSTABILITY

- Upon release, most women go to a "halfway house" where there is some support for reintegration. But the reality is that when these women are finally on their own in the community, they often discover that their skills are not completely transferable and/or that they need more specialized supports that are not available to them outside of the prison system (like mental health supports). This creates increased vulnerability and risk of housing loss.
- If housing is not secured before the released date, women may be discharged directly to an Emergency Shelter program.
- The frustration from systems not connecting is so high it often leads to breach of parole conditions upon release. People are not set up to succeed.
- If the woman also has challenges with substance use issues, language barriers, etc. this would create additional complexities. It would be very difficult to navigate all of the community systems required to meet her, and her family's, needs.



CHAPTER 7: EARLY INTERVENTION – THE HOUSING STABILITY SYSTEM

This chapter focuses on early intervention, the third and final component of the overall framework for ending family homelessness outlined in Chapter 4. Early intervention aligns with the housing stability system and as such, the chapter is organized by the five housing stability system program areas: 1) emergency shelter; 2) street outreach; 3) housing retention and re-housing; 4) time-limited residence; 5) affordable housing and supportive housing. Each section provides a brief description of the programs available for families in each program area and analyzes strengths and limitations for each area as a whole.

For definitions of each program area, readers should refer to Chapter 2. A summary of the 27 programs serving families in Waterloo Region is included in Appendix A. More detailed information about the housing stability programs that serve families is available in a companion document called the “Inventory of Housing Stability Programs that Support Families in Waterloo Region” (2014) (the Family Inventory).

Emergency Shelter

There are three emergency shelter programs in Waterloo Region that serve families. Two programs have an Agreement with the Region and serve people experiencing homelessness: YWCA-Mary’s Place (located in Kitchener) and the Cambridge Shelter (located in Cambridge). The other is Women’s Crisis Services of Waterloo Region with Anselma House (located in Kitchener) and Haven House (located in Cambridge). These programs are not under Agreement with the Region, as they are funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services and provide emergency shelter for women and their children fleeing abuse.

Given the negative impact of homelessness and emergency shelter stays described earlier in Chapter 3, it is worth questioning whether emergency shelter programs for families should exist at all. The reality is that, even if Waterloo Region had enough adequate housing and services to meet everyone’s needs, housing crises that lead to homelessness may still arise. As a result, the need for a safe place to stay for a short time will most likely continue. The challenge is to prevent housing loss for families and accompanying emergency shelter stays wherever possible and, failing that, to reduce lengths of stay in emergency shelter and the need to overflow into motels. As progress with ending family homelessness is realized, there will also be a need to consider how existing resources currently directed toward supporting emergency shelter stays for families can be redeployed.

Families experiencing homelessness appreciated the support they received.

When asked what worked well, parents reflected on the support they received in their Reflection Booklets.

"The family worker at Bridges was very helpful with helping us get our papers all figured out. She helped us get back in school and find a place."

"Amy's program – crafts, playing."
[YWCA-Mary’s Place Child and Parent Program]

Emergency shelter programs that serve families within Waterloo Region have several strengths. Families may access emergency shelter in both major urban centers (Cambridge and Kitchener). Furthermore, through the Referral Protocol for Emergency Shelter Programs in Waterloo Region, no family in need is ever turned away, family members are sheltered together and children are provided transportation to remain at their home school if desired. Emergency shelter programs also have strong working relationships with the schools that surround them. Finally, in terms of the services provided through the existing emergency shelter programs, feedback from the families indicated that staff were very supportive and helpful.

The main limitations regarding emergency shelter identified through the Project were related to the disadvantages of overflowing families into motels, the need for additional child minding services connected with the programs, and the need to strengthen relationships with Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region. Each is discussed further below.

Originally, it was believed that when a family seeking emergency shelter was overflowed into motels, that this was a better option for them, compared to a shelter environment (as motels offer more privacy and a quieter atmosphere, for example). However, through consultation with families and service providers, it was identified that this was often not the case for a number of reasons. For example, travelling between the emergency shelter and motel for food and support has proven to be very challenging. In addition, families in motels do not always feel safe, and children often have nowhere to play. Furthermore, schools identified that once children were placed in motels, their schoolwork began to suffer due to reduced food security, increased crowding and the constant access to TV.

Parents need more accompaniment and child care.

When asked what support is missing, one parent shared:

"Coordinator that could take you out to see places and possible babysitting."

Lack of "child minding" services connected with the programs was noted by many parents accessing emergency shelter as a barrier to finding adequate housing and employment. If adequate child minding services were available, parents would have the flexibility to view apartments or apply for work without also needing to care for the children at the same time. One service provider shared that a mother's meeting with a landlord did not go well because she had to focus her attention on caring for

her three young children during the interview process. Even if a parent had previous supports in this regard while they were housed, they may have become disconnected to these resources (e.g., in cases where a neighbour had provided child minding support in the past but now is no longer accessible, or where a parent does not want to let others know that they are currently accessing an emergency shelter).

Currently, there is not a strong overall connection between Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region (serving women and their children fleeing abuse) and the local emergency shelter programs that serve families experiencing homelessness. The organizations that offer these different programs in the community do not meet regularly, as they have different

fundors and generally identify with different community systems. For example, Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region may identify more closely with the Family Violence Project of Waterloo Region (<http://fvpwaterloo.ca/en/>) than the local Strategy for ending homelessness. In addition, while YWCA-Mary's Place has a referral protocol with Women's Crisis Services, Cambridge Shelter does not.

Street Outreach

While there are no family-specific street outreach programs (fixed or mobile) in Waterloo Region, families may access street outreach services offered at family serving agencies (such as YWCA-Mary's Place emergency shelter) or through fixed (drop-in) street outreach sites. There are 7 fixed street outreach programs and 1 mobile street outreach program that provide service to families in Waterloo Region. As families tend not to be as "street involved" as other populations experiencing homelessness, additional street outreach programs are not recommended in this report.

Housing Retention and Re-Housing

There are currently six housing retention and re-housing programs that serve families in Waterloo Region. Three of these programs are delivered through Lutherwood (Housing Counselling, Families in Transition, and the Rent Bank and Eviction Prevention Program), two are delivered through the Region (Waterloo Region Energy Assistance Program and Ontario Renovates), and the final one is Women's Crisis Services Outreach. Despite the fact that most of these programs have operated in the community for many years, the Project's research with families and other stakeholders indicated that people are still not always fully aware of these programs and that they are not always accessible.

A notable challenge in the housing retention and re-housing program area has been the Province's decision to eliminate the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB) for people accessing Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program as of January 1, 2013. A local report prepared by OrgCode (2012) showed that the former CSUMB had assisted with a range of supports to secure, establish and retain housing (e.g., rent arrears, last month's rent deposits, utility arrears, moving, storage, furniture and household goods, and bed bug treatment support). While the gaps created in the community by this change are still in the process of being fully understood, a few specific issues are evident. Perhaps the greatest concern is the limited funding for rent and utility arrears as well as rent deposits (particularly last month's rent) to support housing retention. Another clear gap is the need for greater access to a truck and assistance with moving. And, finally, families are often unable to acquire the range of furniture and household goods they need to establish their new residences, including mattresses.

In addition to the challenges associated with the loss of CSUMB, a review of program data shows pressures within the Families in Transition program in particular, with staff noting that demand generally exceeds staff capacity to provide support. As part of an overall redesign of the housing retention and re-housing program area, three pilots were initiated in 2013 at

Lutherwood: 1) expanded capacity to serve in Cambridge; 2) an expanded and consolidated approach to assisting with rent arrears and deposits; and 3) emergency shelter diversion for families. The diversion component, as a key promising practice for ending family homelessness as described in Chapter 4, is of particular interest to this discussion.

While both YWCA-Mary's Place and the Cambridge Shelter currently use emergency shelter diversion strategies to some degree, these programs were neither resourced nor well-positioned to support full diversion programming. However, with the shifts in policy through provincial Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) (as outlined in the Introduction on page 2), the Region had an opportunity to allocate funding to a small "Family Shelter Diversion" pilot within Lutherwood's Families in Transition program, in partnership with the Cambridge Shelter.

One outcome of the initial successes of the "Family Shelter Diversion" pilot in Cambridge has been a significantly lower occupancy rate for families accessing emergency shelter. As soon as the pilot began, the Cambridge Shelter stopped overflowing families into motels, and rooms within the program that had previously been full with families were often empty. Through the pilot process, two key learnings were identified, both related to adapting to serving families in innovative ways (as with diversion). The first was the need to discuss change management strategies for emergency shelter staff that may find they now have smaller numbers of residents to support. The second was the need to ensure that support is not duplicated in both the emergency shelter and diversion programs.

Time-Limited Residence

There are five time-limited residence programs available for families in Waterloo Region. Lutherwood's Families in Transition houses are specifically for families experiencing homelessness. There are also two programs for refugees and two programs for young women who are pregnant or parenting.

As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, within a Housing First approach, there are only very specific situations in which time-limited residences may be appropriate. These include situations that are truly transitional in nature (e.g., exiting an institution, pregnancy). Offering time-limited residences to families who are actually in need of permanent housing serves only to prolong the experience and trauma of being unsettled. The Families in Transition houses were originally meant to serve as an alternative to emergency shelter, with resources leveraged provincially through the per diem funding model. With the shift to a single, fixed funding envelope under the CHPI, this approach no longer makes sense. While the Families in Transition houses have had a positive impact on families over the years, resources currently used to support a time-limited residence can be better utilized to support families with moving into permanent housing.

Affordable Housing and Supportive Housing

There are three affordable housing programs and two supportive housing programs that serve families in Waterloo Region, as outlined below.

Affordable Housing

There are three affordable housing programs serving families in Waterloo Region. The Region administers Community Housing (affordable rental housing) as well as the Affordable Home Ownership program. Habitat for Humanity also supports families with affordable home ownership.

Through the Project, all sources identified that increasing housing affordability (some combination of affordable housing and/or adequate income) is the single most effective and efficient way to end family homelessness. While families may be experiencing multiple barriers to housing stability, financial crises (such as the loss of income) tend to be the most significant. Increasing housing affordability can be achieved through the provision of some form of rental subsidy (e.g., rent-geared to income housing programs, rent supplements, housing allowances). Unfortunately, despite creating the most new affordable housing units per capita of mid to large Service Managers for Housing in Ontario (those with populations over 200,000 people), the Region has not seen an overall decrease in the number of households on the Community Housing waiting list for affordable housing or wait times (Jeff Schumacher, personal communication March 22, 2014).

In the local Strategy, it has been identified that larger families (requiring four bedroom units or more) face particular challenges regarding accessing adequate housing – housing that is large enough, adequately maintained, affordable and in the area of their choice. It was noted through the consultations that two Community Housing providers work specifically with families and have larger units. MennoHomes is a group that has worked specifically on building affordable housing for larger families in rural areas. K-W Urban Native Wigwam Project provides affordable housing to the Aboriginal population and their families through 38 units that are three to four bedrooms in size.

Through the consultations, concerns were raised regarding the local designation of Urgent Priority status (previously discussed in Chapter 5) within the existing Community Housing program. Some service providers have speculated that the shorter wait times for Community Housing that result from having this status may be motivating families with low income to access emergency shelter, creating a disincentive to search for market rent units. While Urgent Priority status can be retained after leaving an emergency shelter (as long as they have not secured a rental agreement elsewhere), there is still a perception that housing may be accessed more quickly from emergency shelter (as Community Housing providers may select emergency shelter residents based on their ability to move into a unit immediately).

Stakeholders also expressed interest in exploring options for families to have greater opportunities to request transfers within Community Housing. Supporting internal transfers

would recognize the roles that choice and desirability play in promoting longer term housing stability. It would also provide more options for tenants who are experiencing conflict related to their specific tenancy, perhaps with the landlord and/or with their neighbours. Currently, a household living in Waterloo Region Housing, Non-Profit Housing and Co-op Housing may request an internal transfer, where transfer policies are in place. The transfer would be within their current provider's portfolio and/or they may apply to the Community Housing Access Centre to facilitate a move to another unit in a different provider's portfolio. Applicants requesting a transfer through the Community Housing Access Centre are placed on the waiting list as at the date of their completed transfer application, meaning that they are placed on the bottom of the waiting list.

Through the Project's research with families it was also identified that a number of women who were staying in local emergency shelter programs with their children, had to leave their housing (including Community Housing) due to relationship breakdown and that their ex-partners were still living there. Ensuring that the parent with primary custody of the children remains in the housing, when safe to do so, minimize transitions as discussed in Chapter 4. Finally, stakeholders expressed the need for a better understanding of current eviction prevention strategies used within Community Housing, and interest in exploring opportunities to enhance these efforts.

Actions related to many of these issues are included in the local housing plan, "Waterloo Region's Housing Action Plan for Households with Low to Moderate Incomes" (2014). Specifically, the Plan identifies actions to review the Community Housing Coordinated Waitlist policies and to work with community partners to create housing solutions that meet the diverse needs of the community, including the needs of larger families and victims of domestic violence (Region of Waterloo, 2014).

Supportive Housing

There are currently two supportive housing programs serving families that are specifically funded as supportive housing. YWCA Lincoln Road Apartments provides rent-geared to income units in a designated building in Waterloo for both single women and women-led families, offering low-level on-site support (partners are able to visit and stay overnight for a period of up to 7 days). Monica Place Housing in Cambridge provides 15 two-bedroom rent-geared to income units for single mothers ages 16-24 with programming and 24/7 on-call support.

However a number of affordable housing programs have also identified offering some level of support to families towards their housing stability.

- Habitat for Humanity offers home ownership opportunities for families and provides some level of on-going support to ensure they can retain their housing.
- MennoHomes (a program within Region Community Housing) discussed above, offers some limited supports through a partnership with the local community centre.
- K-W Urban Native Wigwam Project (a program within Region Community Housing) has funding through the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy to provide limited part-time support for tenants (largely families) to support housing stability and inclusion.

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The need for additional supportive housing for families was identified through the consultations. A variety of models were recommended, including rental and ownership, support designated to the housing or a detached model where support follows the family wherever they may live. The full extent of these gaps in the community is not well understood.

Overall, there is incredible interest and commitment within the local housing stability system to work together to end family homelessness. Recommendations arising from this and previous chapters are included in Chapter 8 along with next steps.



CHAPTER 8: RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This report has a total of 50 recommendations, which were informed by promising principles and practices in the literature (including the Project's literature review and the local Strategy), the Project's research with families and stakeholder consultations, and the review of local resources for families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss in Waterloo Region.

The recommendations are organized by the three components of the framework for ending family homelessness as described in Chapter 4: 1) primary prevention; 2) systems-based responses; and 3) early intervention.

PRIMARY PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

There are five primary prevention priorities and recommendations organized into two sections below: a) priorities for governments and b) recommendations that require collaborative leadership at the local level.

A) Priorities for Government

The Project's research with local families and stakeholders highlighted that adequate housing, income and support were critical for ending family homelessness. The following three priorities recognize that all orders of government have a role to play in ending family homelessness.

Priority 1: Ensure families have access to adequate housing.

Priority 2: Ensure families have access to adequate income.

Priority 3: Ensure families have access to adequate support. For example:

- Increased access to high quality, affordable, and licensed early learning and child care services for children (0-12 years of age).
- Increased access to post-secondary education and training.
- Dedicate support to students who are experiencing homelessness or highly mobile.
- Dedicate efforts to violence prevention and support.

B) Recommendations that Require Collaborative Leadership at the Local Level

The following four recommendations are beyond the scope or mandate of any one community system or organization and, as such, require collaborative leadership to move forward.

Recommendation 4: Continue local advocacy efforts related to Recommendations 1-3.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen the five conditions of collective impact for ending family homelessness:

1. Common Vision:

- Create an overarching community vision for family well-being that considers vision statements from the following local sources: Children's Planning Table, Community

Outreach Program, “All Roads Lead to Home: The Homelessness to Housing Stability Strategy”, “Waterloo Region’s Housing Action Plan for Households with Low to Moderate Incomes” and the Comprehensive Approach to Poverty Reduction.

2. Shared Measurement:

- Develop indicators for ending family homelessness.
- Develop processes to collect data for and report on the indicators for ending family homelessness.
- Explore opportunities to incorporate these measures into existing and relevant shared measurement initiatives (e.g., the Children’s Planning Table, the Comprehensive Approach to Poverty Reduction).

3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities:

- Support organizations to implement the recommendations from this report that fall within their respective mandates, in support of the overall vision of ending family homelessness in Waterloo Region.

4. Continuous Communication:

- Build collaborative relationships within and across community systems, in support of the overall vision of ending family homelessness in Waterloo Region.
- Problem-solve and share progress related to ending family homelessness.

5. Backbone Organization:

- Identify further backbone support for ending family homelessness in Waterloo Region.

SYSTEMS-BASED RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS

There are 16 systems-based response recommendations organized into three sections below:

a) recommendations that require collaboration across a number of systems, b) recommendations applicable to all organizations that serve families, and c) recommendations applicable to a specific organization or community system.

A) Recommendations Requiring Collaboration Across Systems

Recommendation 6: Create a working group to identify and remove barriers for parents experiencing housing instability who want to maintain or regain custody of their children, and need to secure key resources to support this process (e.g., housing, subsidies, formal support).

Membership should include:

- the Region (Children’s Services, Employment and Income Support, Housing) and
- Family and Children’s Services of Waterloo Region.

Recommendation 7: Create a working group to identify and remove barriers for parents exiting custodial/correctional institutions who want to maintain or regain custody of their children, and need to secure key resources to support this process (e.g., housing, subsidies, formal support). Membership should include:

- the Region (Children’s Services, Employment and Income Support, Housing),
- Family and Children’s Services of Waterloo Region, and
- representation from corrections.

B) Recommendations Applicable to All Organizations that Serve Families

All organizations that serve families should consider implementation of the following four recommendations.

Recommendation 8: Assess program policies to ensure that families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss do not become ineligible for community resources because of their housing instability.

Recommendation 9: Screen for housing stability issues as part of intake and assessment processes.

Recommendation 10: Consider opportunities to incorporate the broader definition of family as outlined in this report within their services.

Recommendation 11: Increase awareness of resources available for families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss to facilitate referrals to appropriate agencies.

C) Recommendations Applicable to Specific Organization or Community System

The following 10 systems-based response recommendations are organized into seven specific areas: a) addictions and mental health; b) child welfare; c) community-based programs; d) education; e) foundations; f) community legal services; and g) family violence project.

A. Addictions and Mental Health

Recommendation 12: Provide expertise to the housing stability system with respect to adopting trauma-informed practices.

B. Child Welfare

Recommendation 13: Increase awareness about how housing instability may impact a family’s involvement with Family and Children’s Services of Waterloo Region.

Recommendation 14: Where possible, collaborate with the housing stability system when creating support plans with families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss.

C. Community-Based Programs

Recommendation 15: Explore opportunities to collaborate with the housing stability system to increase access to “child minding” and child and parenting programming opportunities, either on or off-site of residential programs, including providing time and space for constructive play.

D. Education

Recommendation 16: Consider school, classroom and teaching strategies that intentionally accommodate students who are experiencing homelessness or are highly mobile. Activities may include:

- Accessing information and resources available at:
 - The National Centre for Homeless Education (<http://center.serve.org/nche/>) – for example, “Teaching and Classroom Strategies for Homeless and Highly Mobile Students” (Moore, 2013)
 - National Centre for Family Homelessness (<http://www.familyhomelessness.org/>)
- Providing teachers with information to support community referrals (e.g., 211 Ontario).
- Increasing opportunities for students who are experiencing homelessness or highly mobile to meet their basic needs (e.g., access to breakfast and lunch programs, support for personal hygiene, space to keep belongings safe) and to participate in school activities (e.g., access to books, school supplies, technology, sports equipment, field trips).
- Exploring opportunities to enhance transportation options for students travelling between temporary residences and their home schools.
- Exploring opportunities to support the emotional and social needs of students who have to change schools due to housing instability. For example, if desired, support students to return to their former schools to collect their belongings and say goodbye to their teacher and classmates.
- Exploring opportunities to develop and/or improve existing processes that facilitate school registration for students living without a fixed address and timely transfers of school records, including information about supports that were being provided at previous schools (e.g., by Educational Assistants for students with special needs).
- Developing and/or implementing tools to create circles of support for students and their families, such as consent forms that allow staff from various community agencies (e.g., emergency shelters) to speak directly with schools.
- Exploring opportunities to partner with community agencies to develop “school liaison workers” to bridge gaps between families experiencing homelessness and schools. Refer to the report, “Lost in the Shuffle: The Impact of Homelessness on Children’s Education in Toronto” (Decter, 2007).

Recommendation 17: Explore opportunities to incorporate awareness raising activities related to housing stability into the existing curriculum.

- See information and resources available at:
 - Homeless Hub (<http://homelesshub.ca>) – for example, “Together We Can: An Integrated Unit on Homelessness for Elementary Schools” (Steffensen, 2013)

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- The National Centre for Homeless Education (<http://center.serve.org/nche/>)
- National Centre for Family Homelessness (<http://www.familyhomelessness.org/>)

Recommendation 18: Explore opportunities to inform parents about community services and supports (e.g., 211 Ontario).

E. Foundations

Recommendation 19: Consider further investments in initiatives designed to end family homelessness.

F. Community Legal Services

Recommendation 20: Increase awareness of legal rights related to the “Residential Tenancies Act, 2006”.

G. Family Violence Project of Waterloo Region

Recommendation 21: Explore opportunities to increase local capacity to support children to stay in their housing with their parent/guardian, when safe to do so. Refer to the literature on Sanctuary Schemes designed to support women experiencing domestic violence to stay in their homes with their children.

EARLY INTERVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

There are 34 early intervention recommendations that fall within the scope of the local housing stability system, organized by the following ten areas: a) access; b) adequate housing; c) adequate income; d) adequate support; e) establishing housing; f) community inclusion; g) collaboration; h) quality; i) emerging promising principles and practices; and j) data-informed practice.

a) Access

Recommendation 22: Improve access to information about what community resources are available for families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss and how to access them.

- Update the “Inventory of Housing Stability Programs in Waterloo Region”.
- Create a brochure of family-specific housing stability resources. Distribute this resource widely, within formal community systems and also among informal/private connections in the community (e.g., campgrounds, motels).
- Provide up-to-date and consistent information to 211 Ontario (a provincial help line and on-line database of Ontario’s community and social services), thehealthline.ca (provincial on-line directory of health and social services) and the Region of Waterloo Service First Call Centre.
- Build the capacity of Lutherwood to serve as the central point of access for information and referrals in the Housing Stability system.

- Ensure information is accessible (e.g., meets Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act standards, translated into different languages, written at various literacy levels).

Recommendation 23: Explore opportunities to increase access to computers with internet and phones for housing and employment searches (including after regular business hours).

Recommendation 24: Housing stability programs that serve families should consider how to incorporate the broader definition of family outlined in this report within their services.

Recommendation 25: Consider opportunities to support the development of tools to identify risk of housing stability, and for appropriate and timely referrals to housing stability programs from organizations and groups that serve families in the community. Prioritize the development of tools for the following organizations:

- Community Outreach Program,
- schools,
- Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region, and
- settlement services.

b) Adequate Housing

Recommendation 26: Support plans to implement the Region's "Waterloo Region's Housing Action Plan for Households with Low to Moderate Incomes", with particular focus on the following actions relevant to families:

- Explore opportunities to increase access to rental subsidies (e.g., rent-geared-to-income housing, rent supplements, housing allowances) for families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss.
- Enhance eviction prevention strategies.
- Revisit Community Housing Coordinated Waitlist policies, including transfers and Urgent Priority status.
- Fund affordable housing projects that can accommodate large families within the Region's Affordable Housing Strategy.
- Continue to pilot the Temporary Housing Assistance With Supports (THAWS) program and evaluate its impact on housing stability for families.

Recommendation 27: Assess the extent to which the housing stability system has adopted a Housing First approach with supporting families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss. Identify recommendations to increase fidelity where appropriate.

Recommendation 28: End the Families in Transition time-limited residence program as of April 1, 2014 and reallocate funding to the "Family Shelter Diversion" pilot.

c) Adequate Income

Recommendation 29: Increase financial inclusion among families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss. Increase awareness of local resources in this area, including information about how to resolve payday loan issues and complete income tax returns.

d) Adequate Support

Recommendation 30: Increase opportunities for families at-risk of housing loss to receive housing retention support in the community, particularly families that have experienced homelessness in the past.

Recommendation 31: Continue to engage volunteers and members of families' natural/informal supports, to complement formal support offered through existing housing stability programs, as appropriate. For example, expand the Circle of Friends program across the region. Or volunteers could assist with transporting families to housing viewings or children to and from school. Families' natural/informal supports could assist parents with child care and include children in activities that help them to feel part of the community.

Recommendation 32: Explore the adoption of trauma-informed practices for working with families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss.

Recommendation 33: Expand and evaluate the "Family Shelter Diversion" pilot.

e) Establishing Housing

Recommendation 34: Improve access to resources that help people to transition into and/or establish housing, including:

- low-cost or free truck rental,
- moving support, and
- donated furniture, household items and mattresses.

Recommendation 35: Create a community resource guide to support people to find free and low cost furniture, household goods, and housing retention services (e.g., hoarding and bed bug support).

f) Community Inclusion

Recommendation 36: Continue to engage families with lived experience of homelessness in housing stability planning, policy and program design.

Recommendation 37: Explore the development of peer programs and/or peer support groups for families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss and opportunities, to assist them with accessing the resources they need and also provide emotional support.

g) Collaboration

Recommendation 38: Expand Lutherwood’s Whatever It Takes – Service Resolution program mandate to include families experiencing housing instability who are facing complex system barriers.

Recommendation 39: Explore strategies to improve integration between local emergency shelter programs and Women’s Crisis Service of Waterloo Region:

- Develop a referral protocol between Women’s Crisis Services of Waterloo Region and the emergency shelter program that serve women.
- Explore opportunities to increase networking about existing programs, share information about anticipated policy and program changes, discuss emerging trends and improve service delivery for women and children who access both systems.
- Consider offering outreach from Women’s Crisis Services of Waterloo Region into YWCA-Mary’s Place and the Cambridge Shelter.
- Consider recommendations endorsed by the National Centre on Family Homelessness to support collaboration between the housing stability and family violence systems (see, for example, the toolkit authored by DeCandia, Beach and Clervil released in 2013) and in Novac (2007).

Recommendation 40: Review current processes and protocols that exist between Women’s Crisis Services of Waterloo Region and other organizations in the community (e.g., Family and Children Services of Waterloo Region, humane societies, school boards). Explore opportunities to expand these processes and/or protocols to include other housing stability programs.

h) Quality

Recommendation 41: Explore adopting existing and/or consider developing new quality assurance tools for housing stability programs that serve families. Refer to Appendix B for a summary of promising practices identified through this report.

Recommendation 42: Housing stability programs should assess their services for inclusivity and remove any barriers to participation, with particular attention to supporting diversity (e.g., removing language barriers, providing culturally-specific or sensitive practices). Prioritize ensuring that services meet the needs of:

- Aboriginal families and
- Immigrant and refugee families.

Recommendation 43: Develop and/or provide access to affordable training opportunities for housing stability program staff that serve families, either through the Homelessness to Housing Umbrella Group Housing Stability Training Centre or other training centres. Training should focus on supporting programs to develop key competencies necessary to serve families as identified in Appendix B.

i) Emerging Promising Principles and Practices

Recommendation 44: Housing stability programs that serve families should monitor the following sites for information about emerging promising principles and practices for ending family homelessness, and implement them locally, where appropriate:

- Homeless Hub: <http://www.homelesshub.ca>
- Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness: <http://www.icphusa.org/>
- National Alliance to End Homelessness: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/>
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth: <http://www.naehcy.org/>
- National Centre for Family Homelessness: <http://www.familyhomelessness.org/>
- National Centre for Homeless Education: <http://center.serve.org/nche/>

Recommendation 45: Housing stability programs that serve families should monitor and/or contribute to the progress and outcomes of the Raising the Roof Child and Family Homelessness Project (2013-2016). Emerging promising principles and practices for ending family homelessness should be implemented locally, where appropriate.

Recommendation 46: Housing stability programs that serve families should review Calgary Homeless Foundation’s final report on supportive housing for families (developed in partnership with the University of Calgary). Emerging promising principles and practices for ending family homelessness should be implemented locally, where appropriate.

j) Data-Informed Practice

Recommendation 47: Increase local capacity to collect and report housing stability data specific to families in a coordinated way. Activities may include:

- Revise processes for the next update of the “Inventory of Housing Stability Programs in Waterloo Region” and Housing Stability Program Data Templates to ensure that all housing stability programs are collecting and reporting on the same basic family data.
- Establish indicators of ending family homelessness with interim goals to assist with monitoring progress.
- Provide feedback to the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy about any changes required to the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) to collect and report family data of interest at the national level.
- Ensure that local data summary reports capture family data of local interest through the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS).

Recommendation 48: Pilot an evidence-based housing stability-specific common assessment tool tailored to families (i.e., the Family Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool).

Recommendation 49: Ensure local conceptual definition of transitional homelessness reflects insights gained through the Project about common characteristics of families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss, and pathways into homelessness for families.

Recommendation 50: Disseminate this report widely to support data informed efforts to end family homelessness in Waterloo Region.

NEXT STEPS

Overall, it is hoped that the this report will be relevant to other mid-sized communities in Canada, assisting policy makers with funding decisions, service providers with implementing promising practices, and families either by reducing the length of time they experience homelessness or by supporting them to avoid housing loss altogether. In Waterloo Region, the Project more generally, and this report in particular, will provide the community with the necessary evidence to guide the changes required to end family homelessness.

As noted at the beginning of this report, ending family homelessness requires a dedicated, collaborative effort among all community systems and organizations that engage in issues of poverty and/or support families with maintaining housing stability over the long term. Progress depends on strategic investments, as outlined throughout this report. While implementation of some recommendations falls within the scope of work already underway, many are contingent on additional funding to move forward. As this report was identified as an activity of the local Strategy, its recommendations will be monitored as part of ongoing Strategy progress reporting processes planned for the next five years.



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Appendix A: Housing Stability Programs Serving Families and Estimated Prevalence of Housing Instability in Waterloo Region

Program Area	Program	Population Served	Family Data 2012
Street Outreach	Cambridge Shelter Welcome Aboard Drop-In	people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss (including families)	22 ¹¹
	Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre Outreach Programs (3)	people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss (including families)	No Data ¹²
	Ray of Hope Community Centre	people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss	516 ¹³
	ROOF Drop-In and Mobile Outreach (2)	youth ages 16-25 experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss	140 ¹⁴
	The Working Centre Psychiatric Outreach Project	people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss with mental health issues	No Data ¹⁵
Emergency Shelter	Cambridge Shelter	people experiencing homelessness (includes 3 family units)	46
	YWCA-Mary's Place	women, transgender and families experiencing homelessness	168
	Women's Crisis Services (Anselma and Haven House)	single women and women with children fleeing abuse	113
Time-Limited Residence	Families in Transition – Houses	families experiencing homelessness	0 ¹⁶
	Marillac Place	female youth ages 16-24 who are pregnant/parenting	32

¹¹ A total of 55 families were served through the Welcome Aboard Drop-In in 2011 (data not available for 2012); however, 33 families would have been the same as those served by the Cambridge Shelter in 2011 so have only counted 22 families within Welcome Aboard Drop-In data.

¹² Data for families was not available through the Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre street outreach programs (Identification Clinic, Medical, and Peer Health Outreach); data however, would be largely captured in other programs listed in the table.

¹³ Families with children typically comprise approximately 25% of the people who access the Ray of Hope Community Centre program. Data was not available for 2012. In 2013, of the 1,627 people supported, 516 were families with children.

¹⁴ ROOF Drop-In served 68 youth with children in 2013 (year for which data was available) and 72 youth through their mobile outreach program in 2011 (year for which data was available). Family data from these two Street Outreach programs is combined for a total of 140 families served.

¹⁵ While family specific data was not available through this program, they support families at YWCA-Mary's Place, where data is captured under Emergency Shelter.

¹⁶ A total of 17 families were served through Families in Transition – Houses program in 2012; data is captured within Families in Transition – Support program.

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Program Area	Program	Population Served	Family Data 2012
	Monica Place Residence + other programs	female youth ages 12-24 who are pregnant/parenting	234
	Reception House	government sponsored refugees	216
	Welcome Home	newly arrived refugees	4
Housing Retention and Re-Housing	Families in Transition – Support	families experiencing homelessness	103
	Housing Counselling	people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss	98
	Ontario Renovates	households in need of home repairs	14 ¹⁷
	Rent Bank	households in need of support with rental arrears	191
	Women’s Crisis Services	single women and women with children fleeing abuse	No Data ¹⁸
	Waterloo Region Energy Assistance Program (WREAP)	households in need of support for energy arrears	354
Affordable Housing and Supportive Housing ¹⁹	Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region	affordable home ownership program for families	0 ²⁰
	Monica Place Housing – Cambridge	female youth ages 16-24 who are parenting	0 ²¹
	YWCA Lincoln Road Apartments	single women/ women with children	0 ²²
	Region of Waterloo Community Housing (Waitlist Data)	affordable rental housing for eligible households	1,391
	Region of Waterloo Home Ownership	affordable home ownership program	0 ²³
TOTAL			3,642²⁴

¹⁷ Ontario Renovates began in late 2012. In its first full year (2013), the program served 14 families.

¹⁸ While Women’s Crisis Services supports families as follow-out from their shelters and others not staying in shelter, family specific data is not available.

¹⁹ Only Community Housing Waitlist data for families has been included in the chart for this program area as the other programs ensure that families have housing stability (without these programs, however, these families would likely be experiencing homelessness or be at-risk of housing loss).

²⁰ Habitat for Humanity Waterloo Region moved three families into homeownership in 2012. Data not included in chart for reasons outlined in footnote 20.

²¹ Monica Place Housing provides 15 units of supportive housing. Data is not included in the chart for reasons outlined in footnote 20.

²² Lincoln Road provides supportive housing and served 21 single parents in 2012. Data not included in chart for reasons outlined in footnote 20.

²³ The Affordable Home Ownership program serves primary families with 18 successful applications in 2013. Data not included in chart for reasons outlined in footnote 20.

²⁴ This number is an estimate, based on available data, of the number of families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss that accessed housing stability programs in 2012. While data has been unduplicated where possible, it is expected that some families may have accessed more than one program at some point during the year, which means that the total number of different families that accessed programs is likely fewer than 3,642.

Appendix B: Emerging and Promising Principles and Practices for Supporting Families Experiencing Housing Instability

The following 10 principles and practices were synthesized from Noble (2014), the SHIFT Study (Hayes, Zonneville and Bassuk, 2013), Paquette and Sassuk (2009), and local knowledge developed through the Strategy and the Project's research with families and stakeholders. They are separated into two lists: all programs and residential programs.

All Programs Serving Families:

1. **Alleviate poverty** by addressing barriers to employment and promoting lifelong educational engagement (along the full continuum: early childhood education, mainstream elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary education, and programs for adults).
2. **Support long term housing stability.** For example:
 - Increase housing retention.
 - Reduce the length of time families live without a fixed address.
 - End persistent homelessness.
 - Increase community inclusion.
3. **Maintain existing community connections** (e.g., with friends, family, neighbours, home schools) and/or **support engagement with new community connections** (e.g., through participation in new activities).
4. Adopt the following approaches:
 - **Housing First,**
 - **trauma-informed,**
 - **anti-oppressive,**
 - **harm reduction,**
 - **inclusive** (e.g., tailor approaches to meet diverse needs, offer pregnant women family-specific resources),
 - **motivational interviewing,**
 - **value-informed** (from the Strategy: collaboration, accessibility, respect, and excellence),
 - **“whole family”** (consider all family members in housing stability planning, including extended family), and
 - **data-informed,**
5. **Prioritize safety and well being.**
6. **Keep families together.**
7. Ensure families are **connected to the following community resources** (as appropriate), including but not limited to:
 - health care;
 - substance use assessment and treatment (with opportunities for children to participate);
 - violence assessment and intervention services;
 - child-specific health, behavioural and school supports, particularly for children with special needs;

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- parenting skill development and support (with special consideration for fathers in gender-specific programs);
- child and parent programming opportunities (including time and space for constructive play);
- family planning services for young mothers; and
- family reunification support.

Residential Programs Serving Families:

8. **Support parental control** over daily routines (particularly around food/meals) and activities that involve their children.
9. **Explore options to support families with pets** (e.g., engaging in fostering arrangements while the family is in transition).
10. **Provide discharge planning** that ensures families have the ongoing support they need to maintain housing stability over the long term.

Appendix C: Other Community Resources for Families in Waterloo Region

This appendix includes some preliminary background information about other community resources for families (not including housing stability programs); it is not meant to provide an exhaustive review of all resources. It is organized under the following nine headings: 1) early learning and child care; 2) child welfare; 3) community-based support and other programming; 4) education; 5) foundations; 6) immigration; 7) justice; 8) public health; and 9) social assistance.

1. EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

The Region (Children's Services) is designated by the Province as the local Service Manager for Child Care. As the Service Manager, the Region has the responsibility for service and system management for licensed early learning and child care services for children from birth to 12 years of age. The Region directly operates five child care centres, a home child care program, the Infant and Child Development program. The Region also administers the Child Care Subsidy program.

There are three types of licensed early learning and child care (ELCC) programs:

- **Centre-Based Early Learning Child Care** – includes child care centres, day care programs, nursery schools, and preschools (licensed under the Ministry of Education, Child Care Quality Assurance and licensing branch). There are 120 licensed centre-based ELCC programs in the region with approximately 7,100 spaces.
- **Home-Based** – caregivers provide care for up to five children in their own homes under contract with a licensed agency (licensed under Ministry of Education, Child Care Quality Assurance and licensing branch). There are four licensed home child care agencies (three Wee Watch and one Region) that oversee up to 665 caregivers. The majority of home child caregivers are with the Region program. In total, there are approximately 2,000 home child care spaces.
- **School-Based** – extended day programs are offered for children attending full day kindergarten schools (regulated by Ministry of Education).

2. CHILD WELFARE

Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region

The mandate of Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region is to protect the best interests of children. Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region provides a range of services, including investigation of abuse and neglect, crisis intervention, counselling and referrals to appropriate community agencies, as well as ongoing support for families experiencing challenges.

3. COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT AND OTHER PROGRAMMING

Community Centres

Community centres exist across Waterloo Region, providing access to a wide variety of recreational services and programming to families in their local neighbourhoods.

Community Outreach Program

The Community Outreach Program provides services to families living with low income with children in 26 neighbourhoods and communities of interest throughout Waterloo Region. It is a partnership between the Region and 14 community-based organizations. Family Outreach Workers, employed through the program, work to assist families and children to access a wide variety of community resources related to: employment/education; recreation; basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, subsidies); child care and children's needs; counselling and transportation.

Counselling Collaborative

The Counselling Collaborative offers accessible counselling services for people accessing Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. Eligible people can access eight sessions (or more depending on the situation) at no cost from one of seven community based counselling agencies located across the region.

Front Door: Access to Child and Youth Mental Health Services

Front Door, operated by Lutherwood, provides crisis, walk-in and ongoing services to families with children up to 18 years old.

Ontario Early Years Centres

There are three Early Years Centres in the region, one located in each of the cities (Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge). Early Years Centres offer informal programs for children and parenting support programs. Early Years Centres also act as a resource for families with young children, facilitating connections to public health and assessments (for example, access to eye and hearing exams). Early Years Centres do not provide licensed child care.

4. EDUCATION

The largest boards and the ones most involved in various stakeholder meetings were the Waterloo Region District School Board and the Waterloo Catholic District School Board.

Waterloo Region District School Board

The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) is one of the larger school boards in Ontario, serving approximately 63,000 students in 120 schools in the Waterloo Region. The WRDSB 2012-15 Strategic Plan includes the following six Strategic Directions that currently guide the work of the Board: Engage students, families, staff and communities; Foster wellness and well being; Pursue student achievement and success for all; Embrace diversity and inclusion; Champion quality public education; Promote forward thinking (WRDSB, 2014).

Through consultations, it was identified that Suddaby has a strong working relationship with YWCA-Mary's Place. For example, special processes have been developed to facilitate support for students experiencing homelessness, such as a consent form which allows exchange of information between Suddaby and YWCA-Mary's Place. In addition, it was shared that other basic need resources are offered to students as needed (e.g., food if they are hungry, clothing)

Waterloo Catholic District School Board

The Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB) includes approximately 30 per cent of local schools (with 45 elementary, six secondary schools and five adult education facilities) (WCDSB, 2014). Educating students about issues related to social justice, including homelessness, is encouraged. Through consultations, it was identified that families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss were served in a variety of ways through the WCDSB, including providing information and resources directly (e.g., food, clothing, counselling through a school social worker) and also making connections with other resources in the community.

5. FOUNDATIONS

While there are a number of foundations with a focus in Waterloo Region, the following three local funders have identified a specific mandate in the area of children, families and/or housing stability.

Astley Family Foundation

The Astley Family Foundation supports innovative projects, primarily in Waterloo Region, that encourage personal development of troubled youth and aid in prevention of destructive behaviors. They accept proposals for funding from organizations that work with youth and/or provide programming designed for youth ages 12 to 18 years.

Community Foundations

The two Community Foundations in Waterloo Region include the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation and the Cambridge and North Dumfries Community Foundation. Community Foundations are charitable organizations dedicated to improving communities in specific geographical areas. They do this by pooling the charitable gifts of donors to create endowment funds and using the investment income to make grants (KWCF, 2014). At this point in time, it does not appear that either foundation has a particular granting focus on children and families related to housing stability.

The Lyle S. Hallman Foundation

The Lyle S. Hallman Foundation provides grants to organizations in Waterloo Region that support health, education and children's initiatives that inspire and grow individual and community potential. Priority is given to prevention and early intervention initiatives. Applicable funding programs include funding streams for activities that support children's development, especially for children and youth living with low income. Registered charities located in Waterloo Region are eligible to apply. The Lyle S. Hallman Foundation recently supported the building of a play center at YWCA-Mary's Place in an effort to facilitate increased

health outcomes for children staying at the emergency shelter through play in a safe and stimulating space.

United Ways

The two United Ways within Waterloo Region include the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries and the United Way of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area. United Ways seek to improve lives and build community by engaging individuals and mobilizing collective action. United Ways throughout Canada have identified three focus areas for investments including: From Poverty to Possibility; Healthy People, Strong Communities; and All That Kids Can Be. Both United Ways fund emergency shelters serving families through the From Poverty to Possibility focus area.

6. IMMIGRATION

Immigration Partnership

The Immigration Partnership helps facilitate successful settlement, integration and community involvement of immigrants and refugees in Waterloo Region. For the purposes of the partnership the definition of “immigrants” includes people who immigrated a long time ago or more recently, refugees and refugee claimants, immigrants who are and are not Canadian citizens and all newcomers to Canada who are living in Waterloo Region. The work of the partnership is divided into three pillar domains: Settle, Work and Belong. The Settle pillar focuses on the transitional issues faced by newcomers as they arrive in Waterloo Region and has identified a strategic priority in the area of housing stability. The Work pillar focuses on the employment of all immigrants in Waterloo Region. The Belong pillar focuses on making Waterloo Region a more inclusive community.

7. JUSTICE

Family Law Information Services (FLIC)

FLIC services are available in family courts across Ontario. In Waterloo Region FLIC services are available at the Waterloo Region Courthouse in Kitchener. At FLIC, information is available about separation and divorce and related family law issues, family justice services, alternative forms of dispute resolution, local community resources and court processes.

Information and Referral Coordinators (IRCs) are available at designated times to provide information and support and to make referrals to appropriate services. Each family court location has the following resources and services available:

- pamphlets and other publications on issues related to separation and divorce and child protection matters, including What You Should Know About Family Law in Ontario (available in 9 languages)
- the Ministry's Guide to Family Procedures
- information about legal services, the court process and court forms
- at designated times, an Advice Lawyer from Legal Aid Ontario who can provide summary legal advice (e.g., 1/2 hour free consultation)

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- at certain times an Information and Referral Coordinator who will provide information on alternative dispute resolution options, issues related to separation and divorce and community resources
- referrals to family mediation services connected with the court
- information about and scheduling for the Mandatory Information Program.

Grand Valley Institute for Women

Grand Valley Institution for Women is a federal security facility located in Kitchener, one of five regional facilities for women across Canada. The institution is based on a residential women's multi-level design model where offender accommodations include residential houses, a residential-style living unit, and a direct observation living unit. The Institution provides a positive and supportive environment focused mainly on women's timely and safe reintegration.

Grand Valley Institute for Women identified in consultations that, as part of reintegration, release plans are developed to assist women with securing housing as “a woman who will continue to be supervised in the community must have appropriate housing available prior to being conditionally released”. They indicated that, “In many cases, securing safe housing is the first step in having children be returning to their custody”. One of the issues they identified was “finding assistance for women to effectively navigate the systems of housing, social assistance and child welfare”.

Legal Aid Ontario

Through the Legal Aid Services Act, legal assistance (both family and criminal) is provided through Legal Aid Ontario to people with low-income, including people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss. Clients must meet income eligibility criteria in order to qualify for services. Legal Aid Ontario funds seventeen community legal clinics including Waterloo Region Community Legal Services. The Legal Aid Ontario Certificate Program provides funding for legal services for other matters, mainly concerning criminal, family and immigration law for eligible families and individuals. A certificate guarantees payment to a private lawyer from Legal Aid Ontario, and increases access to legal assistance for people living in low income. Where Legal Aid Ontario is unable to assist directly or through community legal clinics, they seek to provide referrals to other community organizations.

Legal Aid Ontario identified through consultations that they may become aware of a client's housing instability during the process of providing legal assistance. However, it was noted that although “information provided by clients is subject to confidentiality and, as applicable, solicitor-client confidentiality, some clients may not be forthcoming with this information if they are fearful that information regarding housing instability may prejudice their legal position”.

Waterloo Region Community Legal Services

Waterloo Region Community Legal Services provides legal assistance to people with low income, including people experiencing homelessness or at-risk of housing loss. Waterloo Region Community Legal Services directly provides services under the Clinic Program which include:

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Landlord and Tenant – Residential Tenancies Act, Landlord and Tenant Board; Social Assistance including Ontario Works and Ontario Disability; Canada Pension; Worker's Compensation; Criminal Injuries Compensation; Debtor-Creditor; Employment Insurance; and Consumer law. They provide referrals to other community organizations and resources (e.g., Lutherwood, Ontario Works, and Ontario Disability Support Program).

Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council

The Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council (CPC) encourages and supports community efforts that reduce and prevent crime, victimization and fear of crime. Council members represent the community-at-large, social service agencies, schools, public health, municipal planning, justice, corrections, police, media, community and neighbourhood support agencies and political representatives. The council includes nearly 40 representatives from these sectors (including the Housing Stability system) and works to address known risk factors associated with crime through research, local action, policy development, advocacy and public education. The CPC is hosted by the Region of Waterloo.

The CPC indicated through consultations that they “help raise awareness about homelessness, its causes and its relationship to crime”. They also “work to change the way systems operate” in order to reduce risks of housing loss (e.g., women and the correctional system, access to identification).

8. PUBLIC HEALTH

Region of Waterloo Public Health administers many universal health programs. Some of these programs prioritize families living in low-income or who may be vulnerable to housing instability for other reasons. Below are some programs that are most applicable to families.

Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (Growing Healthy Two-gether)

This reproductive health program, delivered jointly by Carizon Family and Community Services and Region of Waterloo Public Health, is designed for pregnant women who may have greater needs for support with their pregnancy and transition to parenthood. Supports include nutrition counselling, prenatal vitamins, food vouchers, health counselling, information (including determinants of health, such as housing instability) and referrals to community services. It is a free drop-in program that is available at four geographically distributed community sites in Waterloo Region.

Child and Family Health Call Response Line

Public Health Nurses offer same-day telephone response to families with concerns related to child and family health. For example, a parent may call the Region's Service First Call Centre (519-575-4400) about a parenting issue and the Public Health Nurse would call the parent back to address that request. During the telephone interaction, the nurse may learn of other needs the family may have (for example, housing instability or food insecurity). The nurse would then do the appropriate assessment, screening, education and referral to help the family meet their needs, possibly referring to the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program, the Prenatal Nutrition Program or to other community agencies.

Dental Programs (Government Funded)

Healthy Smiles Ontario is a program that offers no-cost dental care to children and youth under 17 years of age whose families meet the eligibility criteria, which includes not having access to any form of dental coverage and having an Adjusted Family Net Income of \$20,000 per year or less. Public health dental staff assist parents to access dental care for their children through a screening process for these programs. Children in Need of Treatment provides no-cost dental care to eligible children who have an urgent dental problem whose families declare financial hardship and have no access to dental insurance. Dependent children of parents accessing Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program are also eligible for dental care.

Harm Reduction Program

The screening practices through the harm reduction program include assessing for housing instability, food security, social environment and supports. Substance dependence problems are increased when individuals lack the basics for health and, similarly, substance dependence directly affects the social determinants of health. The Needle Syringe Program offered at Public Health identifies people that are at-risk so that appropriate referrals and support can be given.

Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program

The Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program offers assessment, education, support and community referrals for prenatal and parenting families who have been screened by a health care provider for various risk factors including housing instability. Families may also have needs with regard to breastfeeding, parenting, growth and development concerns, mental health concerns, poverty and/or isolation. Public health staff work with parents to set and work toward goals that will lead to better outcomes for themselves and their children, including increased housing stability. Families can self-refer to be screened for eligibility for the program by calling the Service First Call Centre at 519-575-4400.

Youth Prenatal Programs

Youth prenatal programs are offered to young pregnant women in a supportive environment at various community locations at no cost to participants. Health information including determinants of health, counselling and referrals to a broad range of community services take place in the program.

9. SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Ontario Works

The Region (Social Services, Employment and Income Support) administers financial assistance to people temporarily in need through Ontario Works, including Drug Benefits, Temporary Care Benefits, and Emergency Assistance. In addition, they assist people with finding sustainable employment and to become self-reliant through employment services and supports such as: Career Planning, Counselling Series, Employment Coaching, Employment Ontario, Employment Resource Centres, General Equivalency Diploma Program, Staying Employed, and Placement Services.