



Below The Waterline

A Review of the Efforts to Ameliorate Homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie from 2002-2006

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Executive Summary

Like most other cities in Canada, Sault Ste. Marie has citizens who do not have safe, affordable and decent housing. Some don't have enough money, others have problems in their lives that make it difficult for them to keep housing and for still others the low vacancy rate has made it difficult to find housing. To manage, they find temporary housing in local shelters and hostels, stay with family and friends or live in substandard accommodations while they wait for something better. On occasion we might see someone sleeping on a bench or in a park, if it's not too cold, but in Sault Ste. Marie the issue of homelessness is largely invisible...but it's there.

In 2006 there were close to 1000 people who slept in a shelter or hostel and another 18,000 who were considered to be living at or below the poverty line and therefore at risk of homelessness. Some might be shocked by the numbers and for good reason...but the numbers are there.

To understand homelessness it is necessary to move away from the stereotype of a homelessness person as someone living on the street. In this community for example, our population of people who are considered homeless and at risk of homelessness is largely invisible.

In the late 1990's two events occurred, one nationally and the other locally, that would eventually inspire a group of local organizations to begin to look at the problem of homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie in more detail with a view to developing programs and services that might reduce the problem.

In November 1998, the community undertook a comprehensive community-based planning process to establish a strategic plan for Sault Ste. Marie. Called "Building an Extraordinary Community", it involved some 4000 citizens in developing a vision and strategies for areas ranging from tourism to social services. One of the committees developed from that process, The Social Services Solution Council would grow to become a major player in the local battle against homelessness.

In 1999 the Government of Canada announced the National Homelessness Initiative, a three-year initiative designed to help ensure community access to programs, services and support for alleviating homelessness in communities located in all provinces and territories. With funding provided by this initiative and through the combined efforts of The City of Sault Ste. Marie and the Social Services Solution Council a commitment to eliminate homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie was made. That commitment continues to this day.

Since those early days a tremendous amount of work has been done to develop infrastructure and community plans, secure funding, build networks, design and implement programs and services, hire staff and conduct evaluations. As of the writing of this document there are numerous people and programs working to provide services to homelessness persons and those at risk of homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie...but is the problem solved? No.

The services currently in place; shelters, housing supports, financial assistance, soup kitchens, food banks, life skills training and coordination and information services are providing essential services of an emergency nature. They are part of a continuum of care that help people move from the streets to shelters, from shelters to housing and finally to long term housing maintenance. The long term solutions to homelessness will require continued economic development, an increase in the number and quality of affordable housing units, more services to those suffering from problems with addictions, mental health issues and low levels of education, support for families in crisis, services to women who are victims of domestic violence...in short...continued community development.

The community of Sault Ste. Marie has a long history of responding to the challenge of helping those in need. Eliminating homelessness is another challenge to be met...and a very strong start has been made.

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*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, **housing** and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

...United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

“Having a safe and secure place to live provides a base from which individuals and families can build healthy, engaged lives. But paying for that basic human need taxes the resources of many people”.

...Urban poverty Project, Canadian Council on Social Development, 2007

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to look back over the last 5 years and examine the homelessness related services and infrastructure that have been developed due to the funding that has been provided by the Federal and Provincial Governments and other sources. It is not an analysis of statistics, it does contain some, but instead is an attempt to look at trends, risk factors and other issues related to finding and maintaining housing on a limited income, what services have been developed, who and how many are using those services, how they are working, what needs more development and what new ideas have been offered to improve services for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

This document will be used primarily for educating the community about the issues related to housing for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

Defining homelessness

For many, the word “homelessness” brings to mind the image of someone sleeping on the street, on a park bench or in a doorway. If we use this definition, then it’s easy to say that we don’t have a “homelessness” problem in Sault Ste. Marie. To really understand the struggle to find and maintain safe affordable housing in Sault Ste. Marie we need to broaden the definition.

According to the 2002 Community Plan to Prevent and ameliorate Homelessness in Sault. Ste. Marie, the following definition of homelessness was developed:

Citizens who are homeless are individuals or families who don't have or are at risk of not having appropriate, safe, affordable and secure places to live.

This might be a different definition to homelessness than we're used to but it does a better job of describing the big picture, including what we don't see...below the water line.

Having appropriate, safe, affordable and secure places to live means:

- Appropriate housing means having enough space to avoid overcrowding or inappropriate sleeping arrangements.
- Safe housing means not being at risk of injury, illness or loss of possessions any more than normal. It also means having housing that meets minimum health and safety standards.
- Affordable housing means housing costs that don't take up more than 30% of someone's annual income.
- Secure housing means without threat of eviction as long as reasonable conditions of tenancy are maintained by the individual or family.

The Homelessness Iceberg...

We often think of a homeless person as someone who is living on the street or under a bridge...or in a cardboard box. We think this way because that's the image we see in the media. Homelessness though is a bit like an iceberg...most of it you don't see....and what you do see represents only a small portion of the whole.

The tip of the iceberg is:

- People living on the streets
- People who sleep in emergency shelters and transition homes

The rest of the iceberg is:

- Individuals or families who are in some other form of temporary or unstable housing
- People who are couch surfing for short stays with family or friends
- People or families who may have some form of permanent housing but are at risk of losing it because of unemployment, poverty and an inability to meet basic living expenses
- People who, because of an addiction, mental illness and/or poorly developed life/social skills have difficulty maintaining housing
- People who have other disabilities which make it difficult for them to maintain housing
- People who suffer the breakdown of marriages or families
- People who live in substandard, unsafe or crowded living conditions
- High accommodation costs – rent, heat and utilities

The Homelessness Iceberg

In Sault Ste. Marie the problem of homelessness is almost invisible...
Unless you're living it

What we see...

.006% of Sault Ste. Marie

Living on the street and in shelters

25% of Sault Ste. Marie

What we don't see...

The Homelessness Iceberg

Living in substandard housing

At risk of losing housing because of poverty...can't pay rent, utilities etc

Couch surfing or living in overcrowded conditions

Paying more than 30% of income for rent/mortgage

Living in an unsafe or unhealthy environment

Special needs which make it difficult to maintain housing

The risk of losing housing because of family breakdown

The risk of losing housing as a teen because of parent/child conflict

Extremely low vacancy rates

A growing number of working poor

Using food banks and other community supports to pay the rent

A single person whose gross annual income is at or below \$18,000

A family whose gross annual income is at or below \$32,000

Who does homelessness effect?

Anybody can be homeless or at risk of homelessness. In Sault Ste. Marie, as with many other communities, there are a number of groups who are at the greatest risk.

- People who are without permanent housing.
 - People living on the street, temporarily staying with others and with no fixed address
- Teen Shelter Users
 - 70% with family breakdown/conflict problems, low levels of education, many with drug, alcohol or mental health problems.
- Adult shelter users
 - 78% male, single, 70% non aboriginal, unemployed, on social assistance or having no income, at least half with alcohol abuse, drug abuse or mental health problems and a majority with low levels of education.
- The working Poor
 - Working at low paying jobs, two thirds are women or women with children, 50% have at least some education above a high school level.
- Women living in or fleeing from abusive situations
 - Including their children

“Like when I came, if I needed anything simple, all I had to do was go and ask. They’re [staff] very nice... Like if you needed a toothbrush, or if in school, or if um you needed a bus pass, or anything with Ontario Works, or getting your appointments set, if it’s with doctor’s appointments, anything like that. They help you with anything...At first it’s kind of overwhelming – just staying at a shelter itself is overwhelming. But the staff really helps. Like they make it so it’s a lot like home. You know, they make it as much as homey as they possibly can. So, staff really helps.”

...resident of Pauline’s Place Youth Shelter, from the document, “Evaluation of Homelessness Initiatives: Pauline’s Place Vincent Place and Mobile Support Worker Program”



Where were we last year?

A snapshot of 2006

A snapshot of 2006...

Estimate of those living in poverty	18,000
Local vacancy rate	1%
Waiting list for subsidized housing	580
Teens who stayed at Pauline's Place Youth Shelter	92
Adult men who stayed at Vincent Place Men's Shelter	521
Admissions to the Algonquin Hotel Hostel	335
Users of Community Mental Health Association rent subsidy units	130
Community Assistance Trust households assisted	734
Salvation Army Food Bank Households assisted	350
Community Soup Kitchen – average meals served per month	1442
Society of St. Vincent de Paul Food Bank households assisted	2,614
John Howard Society Social Skills program clients served	108
Individuals who used the Mobile Support Worker Program	414

Data Sources:

- Estimate of those living in poverty – Pauline's Place Outreach Worker –August 2006 OW Benefit Units, Sept 2006 ODSP Benefit Units, Profile of the Working Poor-Algoma University College, May 2006
- Vacancy Rate – CMHC
- Subsidized housing waiting lists – City of Sault Ste. Marie Social Housing Division

What does this mean?

- The number of people living at or below the poverty line is up from the 2002 total of 14, 987
- The vacancy rate is down to the lowest it has been in years
- The waiting list for subsidized housing remains high
- The demand for a youth shelter continues
- The demand for a men's shelter remains high
- The number of people requiring emergency shelter remains high
- The number of people living with a mental illness and needing supported housing continues to grow
- The demand for financial help with food, shelter, housing costs, utility payments, medical and other needs continues.
- The number of people needing help with food each month remains high

Why are people homeless or at risk of being homeless locally?

Well ... in a nutshell...

- A Lack of available housing
- Money...many people don't have enough to afford decent housing
- Not enough community supports for people who need help staying housed
- A growing number of working poor
- The deinstitutionalization of mental health patients

But it's different for everybody...

- For some it's because they can't afford decent housing
- For others it's because a crisis in their lives has temporarily caused them to be in a shelter or other kind of temporary housing
- Sault Ste. Marie is affected by the same economic and social events that communities all over the world are effected by. Changes in the global economy trickle down and effect national, provincial and local economic development strategies. Jobs come and go, employers grow and shrink and people are hired and laid off
- The changing nature of work and the growing number of contract and temporary jobs leave some with an unstable income
- Like all Canadian cities, in Sault Ste. Marie we live in an environment where many key decisions that affect us at the street level are out of our control. Political decisions at all levels of government effect social assistance rates, education, and funding for social service programs in the community...all affect an individual's ability to find and maintain safe affordable housing
- For others a combination of the above is too much to manage and they become overwhelmed with life. The resultant stress and anxiety causes them to shut down emotionally, psychologically, physically and spiritually. They begin to disconnect from the mainstream, develop unhealthy coping behaviours and mental health problems. Maintaining the lifestyle required to stay housed becomes too difficult.

Are we doing anything about this?

Yes! Like many others Canadian cities we have been doing lots of work over the last 5 years... and a lot has been accomplished. There are more resources in place than there used to be and people are working together. Solving the problem requires a total community effort and commitment from all levels of government. It won't happen overnight but...it can be done!

Homelessness is not forever

For some, being homeless or at risk of homelessness is a one time thing because of a job loss or other temporary condition. Sometimes it lasts longer or may involve several episodes. Mental illness, substance use problems or lack of life skills can also contribute to longer periods of homelessness.

There is no one single way to help everyone who is homeless find stable housing. Help must be targeted to the individual's specific needs and the emphasis must be on prevention and support.

Finding and maintaining safe affordable housing is difficult for many people. It involves overcoming many barriers, some of which the individual has control over and some and some of which they don't. For example, a person may be able to improve the way they manage money but it's unlikely they can increase the number of affordable housing units in the city.

Ensuring that all citizens of Sault Ste. Marie are able to find and maintain safe affordable housing requires a team effort involving the individual, the local community and levels of government.

"I live rent free because if it wasn't free I wouldn't eat. If it wasn't for my brother allowing me to live there rent free I honest to god don't know what I would do. I am on-site custodian for them. I look after their building in the sense that I lock the doors turn off the lights and make sure that nobody comes into it. If they were not there for me I would be living in my car because I have no place to go."

"I do not make enough money to buy a house. I live in an apartment that costs beyond my means because apartments that cost less are terrible. I moved here after the apartment building I had been living in was raided for drugs by the police a couple of times. I pay \$850 a month to live here and I make about \$1500 a month."

...participants comments from the document "Courageous Lives: A profile of the working poor in Sault Ste. Marie"

It takes a community to keep someone housed...
Everybody has a responsibility



Barriers to Safe, Affordable and Decent Housing



- Poverty
- Availability of Housing
- Maintaining Housing

Poverty...

It's hard to find decent housing if you can't afford it. Many who are at risk of homelessness work full time. For this group of "Working Poor", money is an issue. If an individual is receiving some form of social assistance, finding affordable housing is even more of a challenge.

The United Nations defines poverty as:

"a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights... Poverty is not only deprivation of economic or material resources but a violation of human dignity too."

Poverty is not just about having an income below a certain number. It's about not having:

- an acceptable quality of life
- security
- those material things that in the Canadian culture define our status in our community
- influence in the community
- access to higher level education
- access to opportunities

The term "social assistance" can refer to someone receiving Ontario Works benefits, Ontario Disability Support Plan benefits or some other form of Government Pension.

The term "working poor" refers to:

- A single person in Sault Ste. Marie who's gross annual income is \$18,000 or less
- A family of four who's gross annual income is \$32,000 or less

It's estimated that about 17% of people in Sault Ste. Marie who are employed live in poverty.

- Nearly two thirds of this group are women
- One third of the women are sole income earners
- Two thirds of low income families include children.

According to a recent article in the Sault Star, the average rent for:

- A bachelor apartment is \$433 per month
- A one bedroom apartment is \$538 per month
- A two bedroom apartment is \$644 per month
- A three bedroom apartment is \$706

What does this mean?


Based on average apartment rents in the current housing market...

For single people:

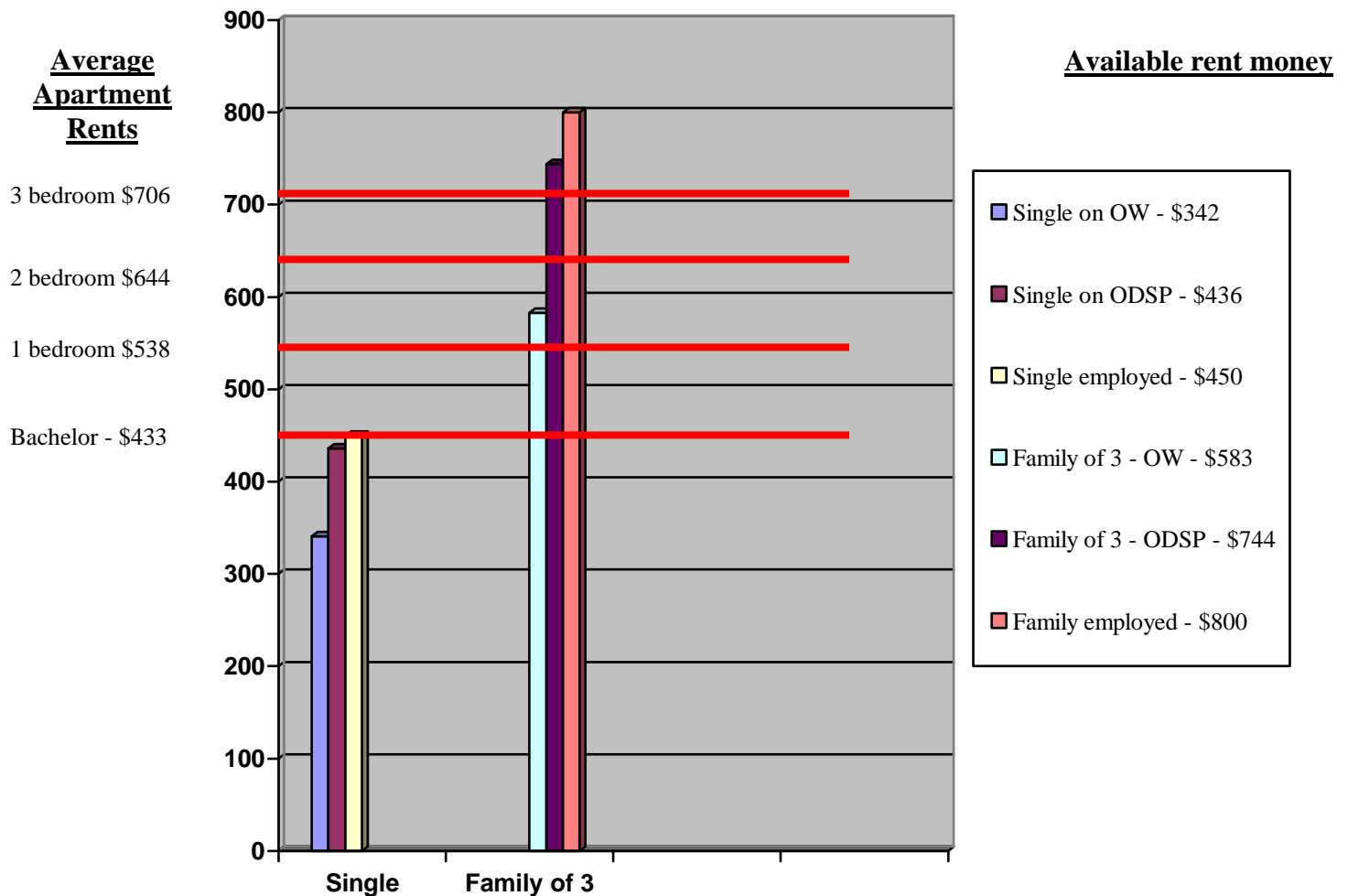
- **A single person receiving Ontario Works** benefits and renting a bachelor apartment will have to pay 98% of their total monthly income for rent. A 1 bedroom apartment is even further out of their reach based on their shelter allowance.
- **A single person receiving Ontario Disability Support Plan** benefits and renting a bachelor apartment will have to pay 55% of their total monthly income for rent. A 1 bedroom apartment is even further out of their reach based on their shelter allowance.
- **A single person earning an annual wage at or below \$18,000** and renting a 1 bedroom apartment will have to pay 50% of their total monthly allowed income for rent, based on the “30% of total income for rent” rule.

For a family of three:

- **A family of 3 receiving Ontario Works** benefits and wanting to rent a 2 bedroom apartment would have to pay over 100% of their monthly shelter allowance for rent.
- **A family of 3 receiving Ontario Disability Support Plan** benefits and wanting to rent a 2 bedroom apartment would have to pay 91% of their monthly shelter allowance for rent.
- **A family earning an annual income at or below \$32,000** and wanting to rent a 2 bedroom apartment would have to pay 80% of their monthly allowed income for rent, based on the “30% of total income for rent” rule.

 *Experts recommend paying no more than 30% of your income for shelter costs*

Average rents and ability to afford them



- Figures for OW (Ontario Works) and ODSP (Ontario Disability Supports Program) are based on allowed shelter costs
- Figures for single employed are based on 30% of LICO (low income cut off) for annual income of \$18,000
- Figures for family employed are based on 30% of LICO (low income cut off) for annual income of \$32,000
- Average apartment rents are based on figures from Sault Ste. Marie article "Apartment hunters beware: space scarce in city", January 25, 2007
- Single people have a harder time than families affording housing.
- The rents in the above chart are averages. Individuals may be able to find apartments for less than the above amounts...but all too often as the rent goes down, so does the quality of the rental unit.
- Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program shelter rates have not kept up with the increase in rental costs.

- Individuals and families living at the poverty line are able to afford apartments for rents that keep them within the 30% rule...but as individuals and families move down from the poverty line the portion of their income that they must pay for rent goes up.

Following the “no more than 30% of income should be spent on shelter” rule:

- A single person earning \$18,000 per year could afford \$450 per month for rent
- A family earning \$32,000 per year could afford \$800 per month for rent
- A single person receiving Ontario Works could afford \$164 per month for rent
- A single person receiving Ontario Disability Support Program could afford \$296 per month for rent

But that’s not the whole story...

Low wage earners often don’t have access to health care benefits that help with prescription drug costs, dental and vision care, paid sick leave and employee assistance plans. As a result, many are forced to turn community programs such as Community Assistance Trust to meet these needs.

77% of the working poor have little job security or union representation. There are barriers to employment and many don’t have access to decent day care, transportation and affordable housing.

Housing costs shouldn’t be any higher than 30% of our income however for those in this group; the percentage of income that they spend on housing can be a lot higher than 30%. The more that’s spent on housing, the less there is left over for food, utilities, other bills, child care, transportation and other living costs.

Availability of housing...

It’s hard to find housing if there’s none out there

Some estimate the vacancy rate in Sault Ste. Marie to be as low as 1% in 2006, down from 11% in 2001. Why the low vacancy rate, two possible reasons. First, many suggest that the call centre industry has allowed some to move out into their own apartments and second, people have been moving into town for work. While those two things are good for the local economy, it makes it even more difficult for the working poor and those on social assistance to find decent housing.

While the 2002 Community Plan to prevent and Ameliorate homeless in Sault Ste. Marie identified that there was a surplus of private rental units locally, the 2004 updated plan identified that there was lack of safe affordable housing (not enough private landlords), especially one bedroom units. In the 2006 refreshed plan, due to the low vacancy rate for apartments, the priority became keeping tenants housed in their present accommodations.

But that’s not the whole story...

A housing shortage for those living on social assistance or having an income that places them at or below the poverty line means:

- The risk of using more than 30% of your income for rent
- The risk of having to rent substandard housing because that's all you can afford
- The risk of increased heating and maintenance costs because of the substandard condition of the apartment or home
- The risk of compromised health and safety because of the condition or location of the apartment or home
- The risk of having less money left over for food, furniture, household items, moving costs, transportation costs and childcare costs
- An increased likelihood of having to move because of all the above reasons

For many, subsidized housing is an excellent alternative to renting or owning their own apartment or home. Rent is determined through the use of a calculation based on gross monthly earnings. Rent increases or decreases according to wages. As good as it is, subsidized housing has some hoops to jump through. There is an application process, there is a waiting list, there are rules about what you can and can't do to your unit in terms of changes/renovations etc, if you live in a co-op unit there are expectations to participate in the running of the co-op and most social housing complexes are high density areas.

Maintaining Housing...

Finding a place to live is only the first step...keeping it is the key

For those without an income, on social assistance or earning a wage that places them below the poverty line, maintaining housing can be a daily struggle. Paying utilities, buying food, affording transportation, and buying clothes are things that are hard to do if a large portion of your income goes to rent.

But that's not the whole story....

For many, staying housed means:

- Using a food bank
- Eating some meals at a soup kitchen
- Getting food vouchers
- Using clothing vouchers from social service agencies to buy clothing
- Getting behind in utilities payments...and risking having utilities cut off

The struggle to maintain housing is even more difficult for those with special needs. For people who are managing mental illness, a developmental disability, substance abuse or any other special need, maintaining housing requires special supports.

For many, staying housed and managing a special need means:

- Dealing with the lack of specialized support services
- Coping with landlords who don't understand your special need
- Being unable to find appropriate emergency shelter when needed

- The lack of local treatment
- The lack of transition housing
- Managing with non accessible housing
- Loneliness and isolation
- Frustration
- Living in a non supervised/non supportive environment

“...If we could get a house that would provide kind of a transition place between here [Vincent Place] and somebody going into their own apartment like a boarding house. Where somebody can move in and stay 2 or 3 months, get used to paying rent, doing their own cooking. Hopefully be one room, one person kind of situation. Say a house with four, five, bedrooms.”

...research participant comments from the document: “Evaluation of Homelessness Initiatives: Pauline’s Place Vincent Place and Mobile Support Worker Program

“I was so stressed out when apartment hunting on my own and dealing with what I had to deal with, which was racism or whatever. It is because I’m native and I had to deal with all of that. On the phone it was a different story. If I could have recorded my phone calls and then gone to that house I could have proved racism but word of mouth doesn’t prove nothing. I was at my wits end. I was so stressed out. I was homeless. I was in a crisis.

.....research participant comments from the document: “Evaluation of Homelessness Initiatives: Pauline’s Place Vincent Place and Mobile Support Worker Program”

Discussions Points



- + The effects of homelessness and living below the poverty line on children
- + Teens
- + Seniors and being older
- + Being female
- + Being aboriginal
- + Education
- + Quality of life
- + A shelter is not housing
- + The revolving door
- + Navigating the system
- + Homelessness and crime
- + Mental Health
- + Substance Abuse
- + The transient population

The issues affecting the homeless and those at risk of homelessness are complex. Aside from the risk factors of poverty, the lack of available housing and the struggle to maintain housing there are other things to consider.

The effects of homelessness and living below the poverty line on Children...

There is much evidence that being homeless can affect children's mental health, cause emotional and behavioral problems, lead to educational and learning difficulties and effect physical health. Children living in poverty have less access to material goods than rich or middle-class children, are less involved in community activities (especially sports) and are more likely to experience poor health. Many studies suggest that the greatest indicator of a child's success in school is the social economic status of the child's family. With 2005 estimates putting the number of children living in poverty in Ontario at 1 child in 6, it's an issue we need to look at closer in Sault Ste. Marie.

Teens...

Being between the ages of 16 and 18 and needing housing presents a special set of problems. Adolescence is a time of transition...moving from childhood to adulthood. A teenager is in the process of learning the skills of independence but few have enough skills to maintain successful independence by themselves. Being a homeless teenager means:


- Not having essential healthy family support
- Having little or no experience with the skills needed to live independently
- Dealing with landlords who won't rent to you because of your age
- Living in poverty
- Being at risk of not achieving at least a high school level of education
- Fear, uncertainty, loneliness, stress and confusion

In 2006, approximately 70% of new admissions to Pauline's Place Youth Shelter were for family breakdown, family conflict or abuse.

Seniors and Being Older...

Sault Ste. Marie has an aging population. Statistics from the Stats Canada census show that the percentage of citizens over 65 rose from 13.84% in 1996 to 16.25% in 2001. Statistics for the most recent 2006 census are not yet available but it can be expected that the percentage of people over 65 will continue to go up.

One of the most hidden of the homelessness and at risk groups are seniors. Statistics reveal that in 2006 about 16% of residents (82 individuals) at Vincent Place Men's Shelter and about 8% (28 individuals) at the Algonquin Hotel were over 50. What is not counted however is the number of seniors living in hotels, room and board situations, or other forms of housing that may be less than ideal. The issues confronting seniors struggling with housing are complex, some are personal and some are system related.

- Personal:
 - Asking for help is difficult...especially for men. While it may sound like a cultural stereotype, many men are raised with the belief that asking for help is a sign of weakness. Rather than risk losing their dignity and self esteem they stay in substandard and inappropriate housing.
 - The embarrassment of having to ask for help keeps some from getting the help they need.
 - Accessing services means being able to get around...and for those whose health is declining, getting to the services they need is difficult.
 - Family supports...that aren't there. With more people leaving the community to find work, extended family support networks are smaller than they once were.
 - A reduced income...means less money available for appropriate housing.
 - Lack of information about where to get help. There are many services available for seniors locally but those who are isolated often don't get the information or don't think they qualify or are eligible for some services.
 - Making sense out of a complex service delivery network is difficult for many. There are many services out there but knowing who does what and where to get it can be a challenge.
 - System:
 - Many services use technology more than in the past. Automated phone systems and voice mail systems can prove too confusing to navigate for some.
 - Services can use complicated forms that seniors have to fill out on their own. The complexity of forms can be intimidating for seniors with low levels of education, vision problems or other conditions that impair their cognitive abilities.
 - The age difference between the service provider and the senior can make it difficult for both to relate to each other.
-  A concentrated effort needs to be made to make sure that seniors who are disconnected from the local social services network get information about what is available to them in the community.

Being Female...

Often homelessness is seen as a man's issue...but it's not.

An accurate count of the number of homeless women in Sault Ste. Marie is difficult to determine. We do know that:

- Two thirds of the "Working Poor" population is either single women or women with children
- The Algonquin Hotel provided temporary shelter to 102 women in 2006
- Pauline's Place Youth Shelter provided shelter to 51 teenage women in 2006

- Women residing at Women in Crisis are there because they have nowhere safe to go. Temporarily they are without housing...and can be considered homeless.

Women can become homeless or have difficulty finding and maintaining housing for the same reasons as men; unemployment, poverty, mental health problems, poor social skills, addictions, or other personal reasons. There are however other factors that can affect women more than men:

- Domestic violence. Local experts from Women in Crisis point out that even women who identify homelessness rather than abuse as a reason for admission have, at some time in their past, suffered abuse either as a child, teenager or adult.
- Having children. Looking for housing as a single person is difficult enough, but having to take into account the needs of children makes it even more difficult. Issues like neighborhood safety, distance to schools and day care, unit size and available space, cleanliness, the behaviour of other tenants, cost and the general condition of the unit are all important considerations.
- The attitudes of some professionals and landlords about being female and aboriginal. At least one professional who works with aboriginal women stated that some clients have made comments about the poor treatment they have received when looking for housing or accessing community support services.
- The hesitancy of some landlords to rent to women who show up for a viewing accompanied by a support worker.

✚ At this time there is no infrastructure and process in place to accurately track the number of homeless women over the ages of 21 in Sault Ste. Marie.

Being Aboriginal

Aboriginal people face the same barriers as non aboriginal people when looking for safe, affordable and decent housing. For those moving from remote reserves however there are additional circumstances that can act as further barriers to getting and maintaining housing.

- *Making the adjustment from remote reserves to the city.* Many who come from remote reserves have unrealistic expectations about what the city has to offer and become discouraged and lonely when they are unable to find work or housing. While some make the adjustment in a healthy way, others may not. Without the supports of family and the familiarity of their own reserve some may cope with their discouragement and loneliness by turning to drugs, alcohol or other harmful behaviours.
- *The culture shock of moving from a small community to a large community.* In many small reserves the pace of life is less formal and structured than it is in a larger city. Appointment times are flexible, paying rent is done more informally and people come and go from housing. In the city a missed appointment might mean a loss of a service, paying rent late might mean eviction and being away from your apartment for an extended period of time might mean the landlord rents it to someone else.

- *The victimization of aboriginal women.* According to one local service provider, there have been instances of aboriginal single women who have housing being preyed on by non aboriginal men. The men initiate a relationship with the women, move in with them and then over a period of time force them out of their own apartment through the use of intimidation or violence.
- *Loss of Band financial supports.* When someone leaves their reserve they lose the financial supports of their band. The result is that they arrive in town without money and must rely on local social services.

Education...

While at first glance the link between finding and maintaining housing and education may not appear obvious...it is a strong one. Statistics from both Pauline's Place Youth Shelter and Vincent Place Men's Shelter show that a majority of residents have a low level of education...and a troubled school history. The report "Courageous Lives: A profile of the working poor in Sault Ste. Marie" points out that 40% of respondents had a post secondary degree and a further 36% had some post secondary education, which are good numbers, however those numbers make it clear that a sizable number of respondents are competing for jobs with a high school or less education.

Securing housing requires that an individual be able to pay rent. Paying rent requires one to have a steady income and the better the income, the better the housing. Low levels of education make it difficult to get good paying jobs...and decent housing. The higher level of education one has, the more able they are to compete economically.

- ✚ For people with low levels of education, continuing to develop resources to keep kids in school, improve access to special education programs and bring adults back to upgrading programs will be important long term priorities.

Mental Health Issues

For some, managing and maintaining housing while struggling with a mental health problem becomes overwhelming. Coping with the effects of the particular illness as well as dealing with landlords and tenants who may not understand the nature of the illness, managing medications, maintaining the discipline required to pay bills, buy groceries, stay employed, do laundry etc are too much for some. Individuals suffering from some form of moderate to severe mental illness are more likely to be living on a limited income and less able to afford decent housing.

In 2006,

- The average percentage of residents from Pauline's Place Youth Shelter and Vincent Place Men's Shelter who identified that they had a mental health problem was 17% (21% for Pauline's Place and 13% for Vincent Place)

- The average percentage of clients from the Mobile Support Worker Program and the John Howard Society Social Skills Program was 25% (33% for Social Skills and 18% for the Mobile Support Worker)
- The number of rental supplement apartments available through Algoma Public Health's Community Mental Health Services was 130, up from 100 in 2004 and 80 in 2002.

✚ Individuals who are trying to find or maintain housing and are suffering from some form of mental illness may require some form of housing supports. This might be supported "live in" housing or caseworker support.

Substance Abuse

Like mental illness, substance abuse is a problem that for some is a big obstacle to overcome when finding and maintaining housing however substance abuse doesn't cause homelessness. Being dependant on alcohol or addicted to drugs does however make it difficult to find and maintain employment, focus on education, carry out the tasks of maintaining housing (buying groceries, paying bills etc) save money, develop life goals, manage stress, make decisions and solve problems...all things that are required to find and maintain housing.

In 2006,

- Over 50% of youth at Pauline's Place Youth Shelter identified that substance abuse was a problem
- At Vincent Place Men's Shelter 32% of men identified they had an alcohol problem and 24% identified they had a drug problem
- The Mobile Support Worker Program statistics revealed that 34% of clients identified that they had a substance abuse problem
- The John Howard Society Social Skills Program statistics revealed that 47% of clients identified that they had a substance abuse problem.

✚ Continuing to develop a strong network of treatment and support options for those with substance abuse problems will be essential in the fight to end homeless in Sault Ste. Marie

The transient population

Sault Ste. Marie is unique in that it is located on the Trans Canada Highway, and because of that there has always been a large population of people passing through the community. A percentage of that population ends up staying in local shelters/hostels either overnight or for a day or two. Current shelter and hostel statistics don't identify the specific reasons why these individuals decide to stay but conversations with local shelter staff indicate that some don't have money for food so they stay at a shelter to get fed and others are just looking for a place to stay until their next bus.

In 2006,

- Of the 321 residents of Vincent Place Men's Shelter, 43% (224 individuals) identified themselves as transient
- Of the 362 residents of the Algonquin Hotel/Hostel, 38% (137 individuals) identified themselves as transient
- Of the 92 residents of Pauline's Place Youth Shelter, 3% (3 individuals) identified themselves as transient.

The numbers are important to consider because people who are just passing through and use a shelter for an overnight stay require far fewer resources than those local people who stay at a shelter because they are homeless.

- ✚ Given the large transient population using local shelters and the need to target resources to the local homeless population who are most in need, finding ways to provide a less intensive and cheaper service for transients might be worth considering.

Quality of Life...

Homelessness is more than just not having housing

Defining the term "quality of life" is difficult because it means different things to different people. In the report "Quality of Life Index 1998 Report" developed by the Algoma Social Planning Council, quality of life was defined as:

"The product of the interplay among social, health, economic and environmental conditions which affect human and social development"

Generally speaking, quality of life in our North American culture can refer to:

- The degree to which a person is able to meet their basic need for food, shelter and clothing
- The degree to which a person is connected to their community in terms of access to social networks, healthcare, employment, social programs, education, recreation, a degree of personal safety, security and income
- The degree to which a person believes they can achieve the above things
- The degree to which a person has some control over and is able to make decisions about those things that effect their lives

If a person has decent food, shelter, clothing, at least a moderate level of income, social supports such as friends and family, a level of education that allows them to compete for employment, access to decent health care, recreation and social programs and a degree of personal safety then we might say that they have some quality of life. Being housed is the first step in achieving an acceptable quality of life.

Being housed means having an address, a community identity, a place to go to get out of the weather, personal space, a feeling of belonging...a home. It means being able to fill out an application for a job, open a bank account, qualify for social assistance, get proper identification. Not having stable housing means being unsettled, anxious, unsure, wondering where you might stay next, living in unsafe surroundings and disconnected from the community.

✚ Not having safe, affordable housing means an unacceptably low quality of life.

A Shelter is not housing...

It's easy to say to ourselves; "We have shelters therefore people aren't homeless anymore". If we do this we run the risk of believing that a shelter is housing. It's not. A shelter is a place to stay for a short term to get fed and supported until you find housing. People who are in a shelter are still homeless. As comfortable and supportive as local shelters may be, staying in a shelter means: sharing a bedroom and bathroom with a group of strangers, perhaps having to go to bed and get up at times decided by the shelter staff, losing privacy, putting up with the odd behaviour of people who may have mental health, anger management or other problems, risking having personal items "lost" and having limits on when you can come and go from the shelter.

✚ Shelters are not a solution to the problem of the homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie.

Where there is no vision, there is no hope.
...George Washington Carver...BrainyQuote.com

One's dignity may be assaulted, vandalized and cruelly mocked, but cannot be taken away unless it is surrendered.
...Michael J. Fox...BrainyQuote.com

The Revolving Door...

According to statistics provided by Vincent Place Men's Shelter and Pauline's Place Youth Shelter, many residents who leave the shelters come back. For Vincent Place, the return rate is 70% but over 80% if you're aboriginal and for Pauline's Place the return rate is 50%. This is the revolving door of homelessness. Some, for a variety of reasons, are not able to maintain housing. It could be that they don't have the skills to budget money, cook or look after themselves, maybe it's due to an alcohol or drug problem that either renders them incapable or uses up all their money, perhaps it's because of an eviction, or a shared living arrangement with a friend or family members that brakes down; whatever the reason, it happens often enough that it's a problem.

✚ Unless shelters are funded at the level that allows them to:

- House residents longer term
- Increase individual in depth programming
- Provide outreach support services to teach the skills of independence to help maintain housing
- Ultimately reduce recidivism

Navigating the System

Having supportive community agencies that can help you out is a good thing but it means having to learn the social services system...and then learn how to navigate through that system.

For clients this means; knowing what services different agencies provide, knowing who to call, leaving messages because workers aren't available, making callbacks, having appointments here and there, filling out forms, intakes, questionnaires, assessments, convincing someone that even though you were just there just last week you need help again, disclosing personal or embarrassing information to a total stranger so you can get food or a clothing voucher, having to listen to someone tell you that you need to get better at budgeting your money, and controlling your temper when you're refused a service or risk having the police called and knowing what to say and how to say it.

But it can be frustrating for service providers too...

For service providers, stressors include; dealing with limitations on how and when their service can be provided, working within the boundaries and limits of rules and regulations, trying to do the most with limited financial resources, dealing with violent or abusive behavior on the part of clients, the stresses and demands of caseloads as well as other organizational responsibilities etc

✚ For both clients and service providers it's called working the system...and it's an essential survival skill.

Homelessness and crime...

The belief that people living on the street commit high levels of crime is untrue. Often people who are living on the streets or are transient risk victimization at a rate higher than the general population. Because many who live that lifestyle suffer from mental illness or addictions problems they are easily taken advantage of. Being robbed of your money, being conned out of your money or being beaten by someone trying to take your money happens more often if you're transient or on the street.

What are we doing about the problem?



- ✚ Building the foundation
- ✚ A Timeline of Important Events
- ✚ The Continuum of Care
- ✚ Programs and Services
- ✚ A Report Card

What have we been doing in Sault Ste. Marie about homelessness?

In the late 1990's two events laid the foundation for the work that has been done since 1998.

1998: The Building Extraordinary Communities Initiative

In November 1998, the community undertook a comprehensive community-based planning process to establish a strategic plan for Sault Ste. Marie. Called "Building an Extraordinary Community", it involved some 4000 citizens in developing a vision and strategies for areas ranging from tourism to social services.

1999: The National Homeless Initiative

A three-year initiative designed to help ensure community access to programs, services and support for alleviating homelessness in communities across Canada.

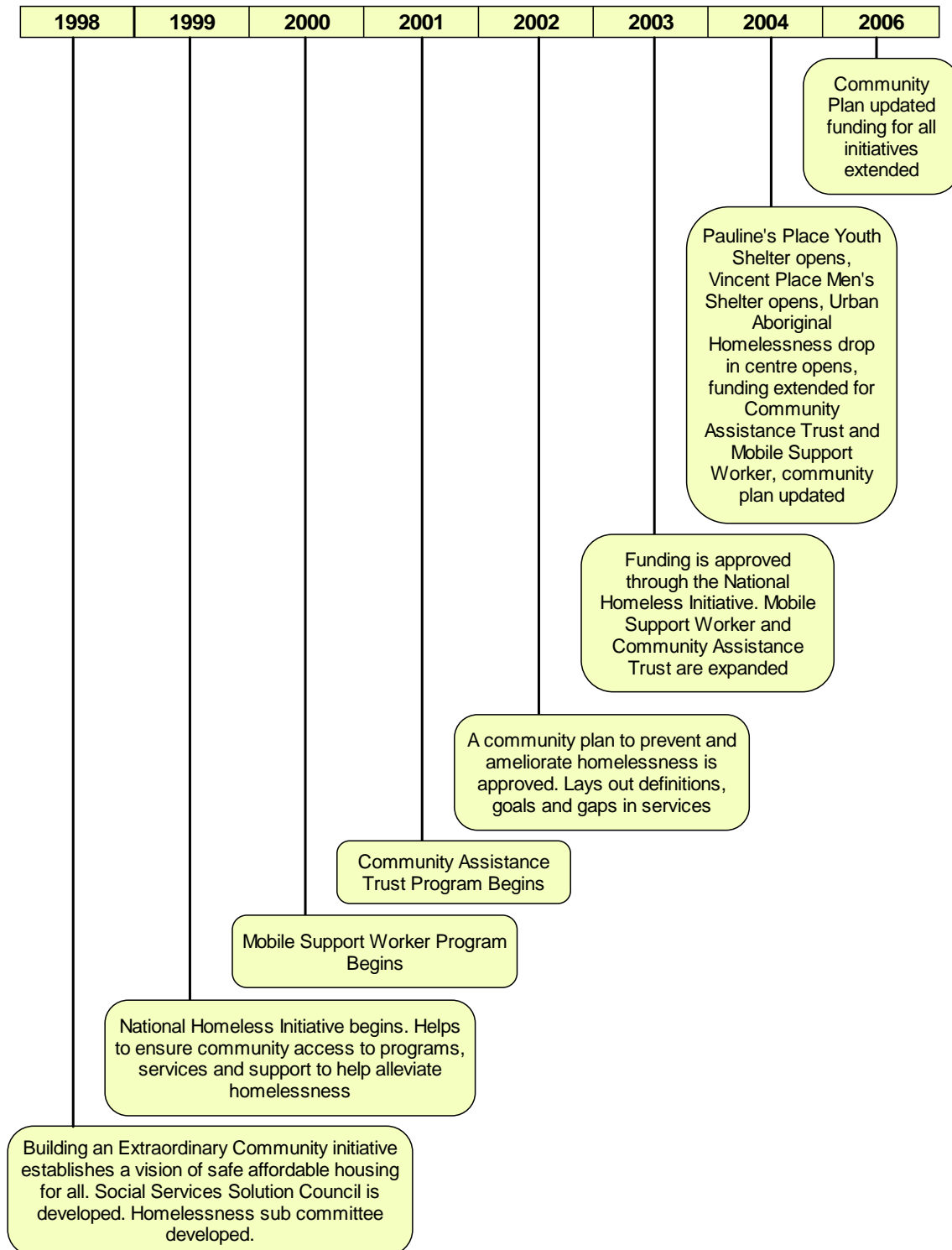
1998: Building an Extraordinary Community helped establish:

- A community infrastructure and a series of councils, set up to address community issues
- The Social Services Solutions Council which identified homelessness as top priority. The Social Services Solutions Council later became the Social Development Council. Due to the various representatives on the SDC, it became the "Community Advisory Board" for the purpose of the Federal Homelessness Initiative.

1999: The National Homeless Initiative funding allowed us to:

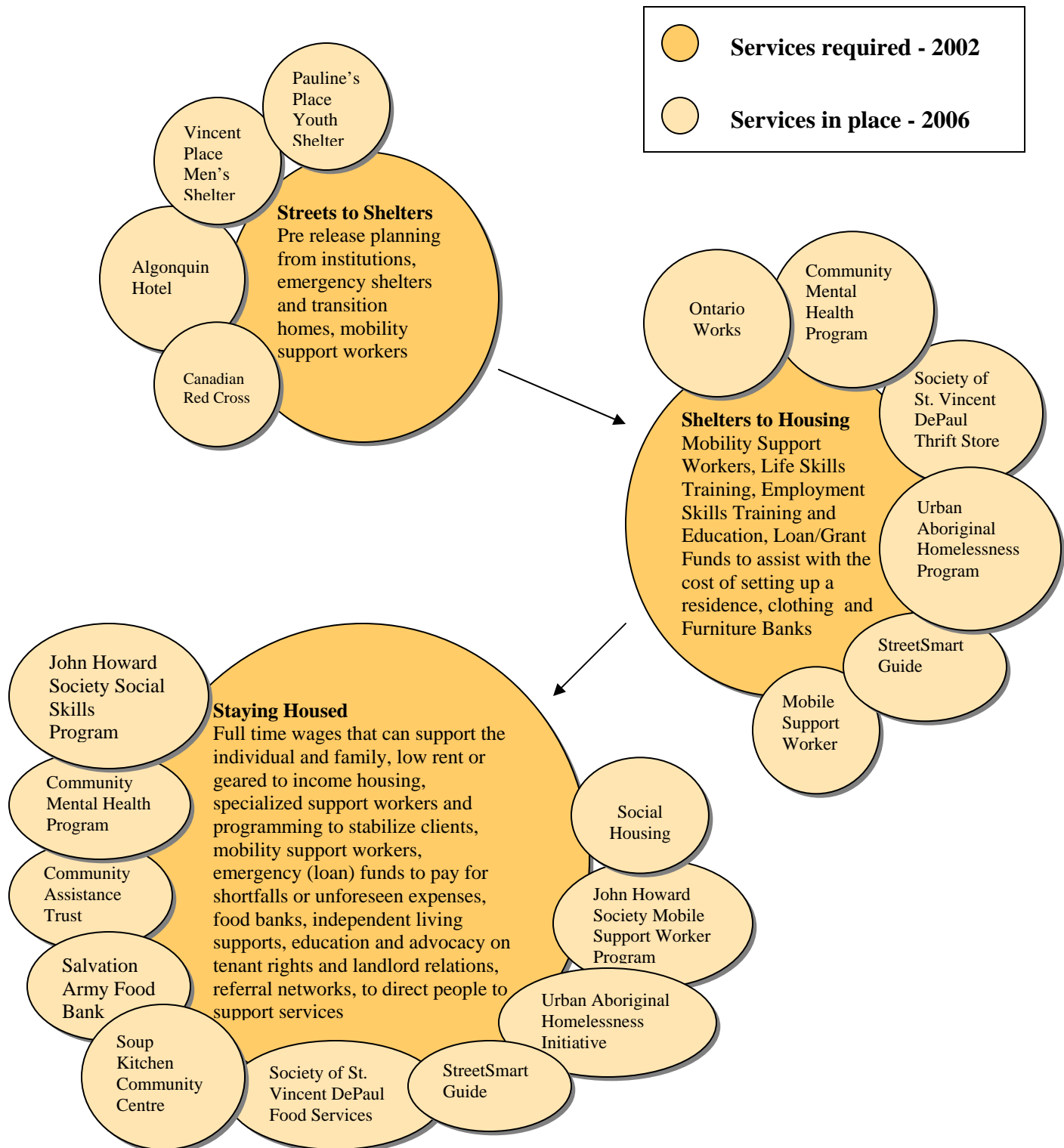
- As a community, to identify that homelessness is an issue that we want to address, identify priorities, develop new partnerships, improve our capacity as a community to solve problems, develop a community plan in 2002, updated in 2004 and refreshed in 2006
- Develop an infrastructure, create a community entity and a community coordinator position, develop the Sault Ste. Marie Homelessness Coalition and advisory committees
- Develop programs such as Vincent Place Men's Shelter, Pauline's Place Youth Shelter, expand existing Programs such as the Mobile Support Worker program, Community Assistance Trust, and the Street Smart Guide, as well as complete research and evaluations
- Deliver services such as emergency housing, help finding housing, skills training, supportive counseling, referral services, financial aid, food and clothing.

Timeline of Important Events



Continuum of Care – 2002 to 2006

In 2002 the original community plan laid out a continuum of care approach for citizens who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The goal of this approach was to create a seamless network of supports in 3 areas: streets to shelters, shelters to housing and staying housed.



The Infrastructure, People and Programs

Working to prevent homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie

The Infrastructure...



The Community Coordinator...working under the City of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Department, is responsible for administering the Federal Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, Federal Regional Homelessness Funds , Provincial Consolidated Homelessness Prevention Program, Provincial Rent Bank and Provincial Emergency Energy Fund for the purposes of addressing the issue of Homelessness within our community. The Community Coordinator has engaged agencies, organizations and business in developing a Community Plan to address homelessness and administers these funding envelopes to programs that address the needs identified in the Plan and the updated plan. For more information on this initiative, contact Dree Pauzé, d.pauze@cityssm.on.ca, or phone 759-5420.



The Sault Ste. Marie Homelessness Coalition...is a group of representatives from ALL homelessness initiatives who meet to strategize, develop and implement awareness and education on homelessness issues in Sault Ste. Marie. For more information contact Dree Pauze at 759-5240 or Theresa at 541-7327.



The Social Development Council...is a group of 50 local organizations who meet regularly to share information about social issues affecting the community. The United Way of Sault Ste. Marie and District is the lead agency in this initiative. For more information contact the Social Development Council at 949-6565.



Pauline's Place Youth Shelter..... Opened in May of 2004, the mandate of Pauline's Place Non-Profit Homes Inc., an eight bed facility, provides temporary housing for youth 16-20 who are experiencing crisis and find themselves homeless. 92 youth stayed at Pauline's Place in 2006. For more information contact Pauline's Place at 759-4663.



Vincent Place Men's Shelter...run by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Vincent Place Men's Shelter provides temporary housing and support services to adult men. 521 men stayed at Vincent Place in 2006. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul also runs a thrift store that provides low cost clothing, furniture and other items. As well, The Society runs a food services program. For more information contact Vincent Place at 253-2770



The Algonquin Hotel...this private hotel acts as an emergency shelter for males, females, and families needing temporary housing. It also has International Hostel status. For more information contact 253-2311.



Personal Disaster Assistance Program...providing individuals and families experiencing a personal disaster with emergency shelter, food, clothing and referrals. It also acts as a referral agent for homelessness individuals and families not able to access the Algonquin Hotel, Pauline's Place Youth Shelter and Vincent Place Men's Shelter. Call 759-4547 or the Emergency Service Hotline at 1 (866) 579-4357.



Ontario Works... provides financial assistance to individuals who are in financial need as well as a range of programs and services that help people move towards self-sufficiency and employment. For more information contact 759-5266



Canadian Mental Health Association Street Smart Guide... a source for current reliable information on more than two dozen topics for daily living. Provides updates on new programs and important changes along with upcoming community and professional development events. The guide is available online and in print. For more information contact the Canadian Mental Health Association at 759-0458 or go to www.getstreetsmart.org.



District of Sault Ste. Marie
Social Services Administration Board

Social Housing... is subsidized housing provided in a variety of locations throughout Sault Ste. Marie. The Social Housing Operations Division of the City of Sault Ste. Marie manages all aspects of the Sault Ste. Marie Housing Corporation portfolio including the Commercial Rent Supplement program. For more information contact 946-2077.

The Housing Programs Division of the City of Sault Ste. Marie manages applications for subsidized housing-for information contact 759-7748. The Housing Programs Division also administers contracts with Social Housing Providers in the community. For general information contact 541-7326.



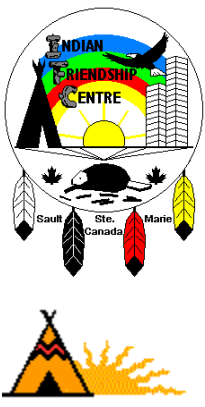
The Mobile Support Worker Program... provided a range of services to assist individuals who are homeless or at risk of being homeless to find and maintain housing. 414 people used this service in 2006. This program is presently under revision.

Social Skills Training Program... provides problem solving, decision making and coping skills training in a group or 1-1 setting. From April 1 to December 31 of 2006, 83 people used this service. For more information contact 759-3389.



Community Mental Health Services

Community Mental Health Program ...along with Psychiatric Case Managers, rent subsidy and support services are provided by Community Rehabilitation Workers to support consumers to live in accommodations of their choice. 130 people received support from this service in 2006. For more information contact the Community Mental Health Program at 759-3935.



Urban Aboriginal Homelessness Program...a Federal Homelessness program hosted by the Indian Friendship Centre of Sault Ste. Marie, supports individuals and families while helping them to establish and maintain permanent and stable living environments. Services include an outreach coordinator, emergency housing services, intake referrals, a drop-in centre open on Tuesdays and Thursdays, healthy living skills workshops and donation of furniture. For more information contact the Urban Aboriginal Homelessness Coordinator at 256-5634.



Community Assistance Trust...operated by The United Way of Sault Ste. Marie and District, CAT provides assistance or referrals in Sault Ste Marie with items or services that are an emergency or extraordinary in nature. 734 people used this service in 2006. For more information contact Community Assistance Trust at 541-7327



Salvation Army Community & Family Services Food Bank...provides emergency food to individuals and families in need. Call 759-4143 to schedule an appointment. Appointments are available between 10:00 a.m. & 12:00 noon and 2:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m



Soup Kitchen Community Centre...provides meals, an after school program for children, a youth program, help with food supplies and access to computers. For more information contact 942-2694

“My buddy drove me here and that’s how I met the staff upstairs and this one staff person is the one that actually – that’s why I remain staying here...I just talked with this person and you know, tried to level out a plan. That’s pretty much it. Did what I had to do. A lot of it – it’s private stuff. This person helped me do everything I had to do, get it all done...I spend an hour or two talking with this person, you know what I mean. This person is pretty much like a therapist to me now, you know. I get my guidance from this person, you know what I mean. This person’s cool; helps everybody out here; really goes a long way; and will go out to bat for everybody here.”

...research participant comments about Vincent Place Men’s Shelter, from the document: “Evaluation of Homelessness Initiatives: Pauline’s Place Vincent Place and Mobile Support Worker Program

“...We were able to actually physically go with some people to look at apartments. People that don’t have cars or transportation of any kind. You know, if there’s an apartment available way up in the west end and they don’t get out there, they’re going to lose it. The mobile part of the Mobile Support Worker is a big plus too although that’s been almost eliminated since there’s been cutbacks in funding. So we’re not very “Mobile” Support Workers now”

...Mobile Support Worker program staff from the document: “Evaluation of Homelessness Initiatives: Pauline’s Place Vincent Place and Mobile Support Worker Program”

I'm glad the Mobile Support Worker helped me out. It was, I felt relieved. I needed it. I got more than what I expected... I didn't think that I was going to get a place... It's a nice place too... It made me feel good about myself. I didn't look down at myself. My self esteem was up more. And um, smile more... I didn't have to be, especially in the morning, so groggy in the morning. I was up in the morning. Sometimes I was up earlier before the alarm went off. I was smiling, smiling more than usual – like I was 'in love' or something... That I got my own place. That my children could come and see me, and that I was taking the life skills and I can learn about that.

...research participant comments about The Mobile Support Worker Program, from the document: "Evaluation of Homelessness Initiatives: Pauline's Place Vincent Place and Mobile Support Worker Program"

"When you need to supplement your income with social assistance you feel ashamed because you wanted to do it yourself. And when it isn't there for you, you are ashamed because you start to feel that you should have been able to do it on your own but you can't."

"My self-esteem is so low. I don't care about myself and then I get depressed. That makes it harder for you to try to do better or to try to change your situation until you can snap out of it. But how do you snap out of it? When I first graduated from college I had all these dreams. I tried to find a great job and never found one. And it seems each time I'm brought down it gets harder and harder to get back up."

...research participants comments from the document: "Courageous Lives: A Profile of the Working Poor in Sault Ste. Marie"

"Well, the big gap is sustained funding. You know, every three or four months, a service that provides so much for its clients [youth], is at risk of closing. And every time we apply for funding there doesn't seem to be any process to apply to sustain the programming we already have. It's always new programming and new projects. Really, what we need is just the money to stay open to do what we're already doing, which is what the community needs. And stop wasting time trying to come up with some new way of saying the same thing so that you'll get the money you need to do what you need to do."

...Pauline's Place staff comments from the document: "Evaluation of Homelessness Initiatives: Pauline's Place Vincent Place and Mobile Support Worker Program"

“It’s always a struggle, especially being a non-profit. I wish the guys upstairs [staff] were making a decent wage but they’re not. And that goes across the board. I mean, um, sometimes it’s a struggle – every month I look at the budget and I know what we have to hit a month to say we’re dead even – some months we do really well. Some months we do really bad.”

“Usually what it always boils down to is having the financial flexibility to do things. There are things I want to do here [Vincent Place] but we simply cannot because there is just a lack of – you know, the financial backing. I have been to other shelters but I think there is so much more that we could do. I would love to have a full-time person that could do recreation with these guys.”

“If the case manager position comes to an end, in all honesty...It’s going to kill the people at Vincent Place. Yeah it is. It’s going to just crush them all.”

... Vincent Place Men’s Shelter staff comments from the document: “Evaluation of Homelessness Initiatives: Pauline’s Place Vincent Place and Mobile Support Worker Program”

The Numbers and the Trends



Local statistics

Local Statistics...

Notes about collecting “The Numbers”...

Collecting statistics is difficult. The process requires agreed upon definitions of the kinds of data to be collected, people who have the interest and ability to work with data, a consistent process for collecting the data, a reliable tool for collecting data (software, forms, databases etc) and an agreed upon method for interpreting the data. Changes in staffing, the kinds of services offered, the way those services are offered, the addition or deletion of services, a change in an organizations location or even a change in funding to an organization can effect the reliability of the data.

The difficulty in collecting data from some organizations that provide services to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness is that the bulk of the resources and energy that the organization has is directed towards providing direct service. As a result, less time and energy is devoted towards data collection and the resulting data can be suspect. In spite of the challenges of collecting reliable data, local organizations have made great improvements in this area and data is becoming more reliable.

Statistics and numbers don’t tell the whole story of homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie but they do give us a glimpse of what’s going on here. The following statistics represent the most accurate data available at this time.

Source of Income	Ontario Works	Ontario Disability Supports Program	Working Poor
Monthly Disposable income for a single person	\$547	\$987	\$1,094
Average cost of a one bedroom apartment	\$538	\$538	\$538
% of income spent on rent	98%	55%	50%

Many people are paying a lot more than the recommended 30% of their income towards rent

	2002	2007
Hardcore homeless – Living on the streets	20	2
Number of people who sleep in emergency shelters and hostels per night	112	See community supports below
Waiting list for social/subsidized housing	645	580
Estimates of the number of people living in poverty in Sault Ste. Marie	14,987	18,000

There are still a few people who sleep, at least some of the time, on the street.

There are still many people who stay in emergency shelters each night.

There are still long waiting lists for subsidized housing

The number of people living at or below the poverty line is growing

Community Supports			
	2004	2005	2006
Pauline's Place Youth Shelter Residents	84	90	92
Vincent Place Men's Shelter Residents	286	555	521
Algonquin Hotel Emergency Hostel Status Residents	301	335	362
Vincent Place Food Bank – Households Assisted	2276	3173	2614
Salvation Army Food Bank – clients assisted	330-350	330-350	350
Soup Kitchen – average meals served per month	1952	1474	1442
Community Assistance Trust			
• Households Assisted	627	756	734
• # referrals	167	1008	1264
• # phone calls	9175	10,810	9421
Mobile Support Worker Program - Clients Served	406	239	414
John Howard Society Social Skills Program – Clients Served	NA	102	108
Algoma Public Health – Community Mental Health Rent Subsidies	80	100	130

The demand for emergency shelter continues.

The demand for help with food and emergency financial help continues

The demand for housing support services remains high

The demand for supported housing for those with a mental illness continues to grow.

Where do we go from here?



- ✚ What's working and what needs more development
- ✚ Ideas and opportunities
- ✚ Where do we go from here?

Where do we go from here?

What's working?

- The infrastructure that supports the local homelessness initiative
 - It's brought people together, created new networks, gotten people in the community talking about the issue and generally improved the community's capacity to deal with the issue.
- The programs
 - The Mobile Support Worker, Community Assistance Trust, Pauline's Place, Vincent Place, The John Howard Society Social Skills Program, and The Urban Aboriginal Homelessness programs have been providing emergency and other housing support services to individuals who fall into the homelessness and at risk of homelessness group. The StreetSmart Guide has also proven to be a valuable community resource.
- The people
 - The greatest resource the community has is the people who work at keeping the initiative alive. Program staff, the Community Coordinator, volunteer board members and people who attend meetings and sit on committees are all to be commended. Working in an environment that is characterized by instability, uncertainty, low wages, and stress is difficult. In spite of all this, they continue to show dedication, commitment and enthusiasm. They are the heroes and deserve more recognition for the work they do.

What needs continued development?

- Sustainability.
 - In spite of the efforts of many people to secure stable funding and generate revenue, all of the local initiatives are continuously in danger of being lost. A new approach to sustainability may have to be developed.
- Resolving system issues
 - There continue to be policies and procedures that, while meeting the needs of governments, make it difficult for individuals and sometimes organizations. Examples are policies that support the continuation of long waiting lists for geared to income housing, policies around people waiting for employment insurance who apply for Ontario Works and practices that support a vacancy rate of less than 1%.
- Improving the quality of private market housing
 - In spite of government programs that give money to landlords to improve and renovate their rental units, there are still too many private rental units that are substandard. More work needs to be done to get landlords to take

advantage of opportunities and more work needs to be done by the City of Sault Ste. Marie and others to ensure that these units are brought up to health and building code standards

- Economic development
 - There are too many people who work at jobs that keep them at or below the poverty line. For example, the recent influx of call centre and retail jobs has allowed some to move up the income ladder but unfortunately not far enough.
- Increasing the amount of affordable housing
 - There isn't enough decent housing available. More needs to be built.
- Community Involvement
 - The citizens of Sault Ste. Marie have a history of helping those less fortunate. Finding ways to involve more of the community might lead to more community support for the initiative.
- Prevention
 - Emergency housing and community supports currently in place are only the first steps in reducing homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie. Intervention and prevention involves all that this document has outlined and much more.
 - More supports for families in trouble might help keep teens in their homes
 - Keeping kids in school might increase the employability and opportunities for economic independence that a low level of education doesn't allow
 - Continuing to develop ways to help adults with low levels of education to improve their level of education might help them find employment or better paying jobs
 - Continuing to develop substance abuse and mental health services that allow people dealing with those issues to become more economically independent and less reliant on social assistance.
- More outreach for at risk seniors.
 - Are there seniors who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or living in substandard housing who are not aware of community supports?
- A mobile support function that helps people find and maintain housing
 - Increased supports to tenants and landlords. This is the largest gap in services to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness...and it may be the most essential component in the continuum of care.

Ideas and opportunities!

Based on conversations with local service providers...here are some ideas!

- A process or information sharing system to share housing related information...quickly and community wide
...can people get the information they need...when they need it...from one place
- Better education and sensitization for professional staff...more awareness of what it's like...what client is experiencing at the moment
...is service being provided with dignity and respect?
- A landlord approval rating system..."recommended list"... "best buy"... "seal of approval"... "approved by city" some way to encourage landlords to fix things up...approved landlords get special media attention
...a landlord motivator
- Can we have a facility with no staff?
...are there non traditional approaches that can be used?
- A homeless person is not a collection of problems but a reservoir of strengths...rather than eliminate problems...build on strengths to get to where they want to go
...strength based approach
- Get away from the sickness model/the medical model
...who's telling who what the problem is?
- Change the words that we use...homeless to something else...the word homeless drags up old stereotypes for everyone, including us, that have to be overcome...do the words/the language act as barriers
...rethinking the problem
- Is there a conflict of interest between the client and the service provider...is the service provider far more dependent on the client than they think?
...have we built a housing industry where people's jobs and salaries are dependant on there being a steady supply of homeless and at risk of homeless individuals?
- Build a research library of what other people are doing...what works and what doesn't
...are there other things that we can be doing?
- Get connected to similar networks in other towns/provinces/countries
...can we learn from the experience of other communities?
- Are there non-traditional ways to provide service to this group?
...sometimes stepping outside of the box is a good idea

➡ The most intensive service should go to highest risk individuals, be delivered in a way that the individual is able to receive it, be specific to that individual and be tailored to meet their specific needs

...given our limited resources, are we serving the people who need it the most in a way that works for them...or are we using a cookie cutter approach?

➡ A senior's outreach worker

...taking information and services to those not connected to local services

➡ A study on homeless issues specific to seniors

...find out more about the hidden population of seniors who are homeless and at risk of homelessness.

Where do we go from here?

A lot of work has been done in the past few years to begin to tackle the problem of homelessness in Sault Ste. Marie but it's just a beginning. The infrastructure, programs and services currently in place are like a finger in the dike...they're preventing the flood...but haven't fixed the problem. The number of local people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness is a reflection of the overall health of this community and we're healthier in some areas than we are in others areas. How do we become healthier? Continued economic and social development is the key.

Continuing to attack the problems of addictions, family dysfunction, low levels of education, poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing and people struggling with mental health problems will be essential in the coming years if we are to eliminate homeless in Sault Ste. Marie. It will require a coordinated effort between Federal, Provincial and Municipal Governments, local business, education, social services, the faith community and the general community at large. It might mean doing some things differently, changing the rules, creating new networks and partnerships and sharing the belief that nobody wins unless everybody wins.

It's a big job...but we've made a good start!

Information Sources



- Documents
- Interviews
- Web resources

Documents...

The following documents were used as reference material in the preparation of this document:

- The Possibilities Group. (2002). *A Community Plan to Prevent and Ameliorate Homelessness in the City of Sault Ste. Marie*
- Pauze, Dree., Community Coordinator. (2004). *Our Community Plan to Prevent and Ameliorate Homelessness in the City of Sault Ste. Marie Update*
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- Broad, Gayle., & Date, Stephanie.(2006). *Courageous Lives: A Profile of the Working Poor in Sault Ste. Marie*, Community and Economic Development, Algoma University College.
- Broad, Gayle & Boston, Meghan. (May 2006). *Evaluation of Homelessness Initiatives: Pauline's Place Vincent Place and Mobile Support Worker Program*, Community Economic and Social Development, Algoma University College
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- The Alliance to End Homeless in Ottawa, Research and Evaluation Working Group. (2005). *Experiencing Homelessness, The First Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa 2005* Retrived February 20, 2007, from <http://www.unitedwayottawa.ca/downloads/ateh.pdf>
- Wingard, Jeff., Neigh, Scott., Williams, Mark., Hathiramani, Raj. (April 2002). *Report Card on Homelessness in Hamilton*, Retrieved January 31, 2007, from <http://www.sprc.hamilton.on.ca/Homelessness/Homelessness.php>
- Region of Peel Task Force on Homelessness. (2002). *Second Annual Report Card on Housing and Homeless Initiatives*, Retrieved January 31, 2007, from <http://www.peelregion.ca/housing/initiatives-resources/reports/homelessness/pdf/secondannualreportcard1.pdf>

Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness. (February 2006). *Homelessness in Burnaby*. Retrieved January 31, 2007, from <http://www.sharedlearnings.org/resources/burnaby/Task%20Force%20Report-%20Final.pdf>

Algoma Social Planning Council. (1998). *Quality of Life Index 1998 Report*

Algoma Social Planning Council. (1999). *The City of Sault Ste. Marie Quality of Life Index Preliminary Report*

Communities Quality Initiative. (2003). *Sault Ste. Marie and area Community Performance Framework Report*

Communities Quality Initiative. (2004). *Community Performance Framework Reports (Draft)*

Communities Quality Initiative. (2005). *Quality of life in Sault Ste. Marie and area: An overview of 2005*

Hart-Shegos, Ellen & Associates. Inc. (1999). *Homelessness and Its effects on children, Family Housing Fund*. Retrieved March 12, 2007, from http://www.fhfund.org/_dnld/reports/SupportiveChildren.pdf

Campaign 2000. (2005). *Putting Children First, 2005 Report Card on Child Poverty in Ontario*. Retrieved February 21, 2007, from http://campaign2000.ca/rc/pdf/ON_C2000_RC05_EN.pdf

Interviews...

The following individuals were interviewed:

Gary Vipond, Executive Director, United Way of Sault Ste. Marie

Dree Pauze, Community Coordinator, Social Services Department, City of Sault Ste. Marie

Annette Katajamaki, Executive Director, Canadian Mental Health Association

Calna McGoldrick, Soup Kitchen Community Centre

Harold Thompson, Shelter Manager, Vincent Place Men's Shelter

Lesley McCubbin, Executive Director, Pauline's Place Youth Shelter

Theresa Sharp, Coordinator Community Assistance Trust

Lori Huston, Information and Referral, Community Assistance Trust

Ken McLean, Coordinator, Urban Aboriginal Homeless Initiative

Jim Traveson, Executive Director, Community Mental Health Services

Jackie Martin and Connie Myers....., Mobile Support Worker Program

Mildred Brodie....., Salvation Army Family Services Food Bank

Rick Cobean, Manager Social Housing Division, City of Sault Ste. Marie

Wendy Hamilton, Bail Program Coordinator, John Howard Society of Sault Ste. Marie and District

Dr. Gayle Broad, Assistant Professor Department of Community Economic and Social Development, Political Science, Social Welfare, Sociology and Law and Justice, Algoma University College

Stephanie Date, Researcher, Algoma University College

Diane Lajambe, District Branch Manager, Canadian Red Cross (Sault Ste. Marie and District)

Dale Kenney, Director Community Relations and Finance, Women In Crisis

Natasha McMillan, Transitional Housing Support Worker, Women in Crisis

Cathy Johnson, Supervisor of Seniors Services, Senior Citizens Drop in Centre

Betty Lou Kidder, Aboriginal Support Worker, Indian Friendship Centre

Web Resources...

The following Websites were reviewed in the preparation of this document:

National Homelessness Initiative http://www.homelessness.gc.ca/home/index_e.asp

Shelter, the Housing and Homeless Charity <http://england.shelter.org.uk/home/index.cfm>

Shared Learnings on Homelessness <http://www.sharedlearnings.org/>

Ministry of Community and Social Services
<http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/news/backgrounders/050208A.htm>

Ontario Association of Food Banks <http://www.oafb.ca/>

Government of Canada, Parliamentary Research Branch
<http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/modules/prb99-1-homelessness/definition-e.htm>

Government of Canada, HRDC – Evaluation of National Homelessness Initiative
http://www11.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/pls/edd/SPAH203_03_343004.htm

Community Care Resources, Homes and Communities, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/library/coc/>

Canadian Policy research Network – “Quality of Life Indicators Ready for Testing”
<http://www.cprn.com/en/doc.cfm?doc=975>

Notes on “Quality of Life” <http://www.gdrc.org/uem/qol-define.html>

COL Concepts, The Quality of Life Model <http://www.utoronto.ca/qol/concepts.htm>

Homewords <http://facstaff.uww.edu/homewords/Index.html>

Canadian Council on Social Development, Income and Child Well-being:
A new perspective on the poverty debate by David P. Ross and Paul Roberts
<http://www.ccsd.ca/pubs/inckids/1.htm>

National Resource and Training Center on homelessness and mental illness
http://www.nrchmi.samhsa.gov/facts/facts_question_5.asp

Poverty and Exclusion, Poverty and Inner-City Education, Government of Canada
http://policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=v7n2_art_08