



CITY OF HAMILTON
COMMUNITY AND EMERGENCY SERVICES DEPARTMENT
Housing Services Division

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	May 12, 2014
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Pressure at Emergency Shelters Serving Single Homeless Women (CS13051(a)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Brian Kreps (905)-546-2424 ext. 4329 Gillian Hendry (905)-546-2424 ext. 4818
SUBMITTED BY:	Joe-Anne Priel General Manager Emergency & Community Services Department
SIGNATURE:	

RECOMMENDATION

That the General Manager of Community and Emergency Services be authorized and directed to provide \$152,150 from the Community and Emergency Services departmental surplus, the Social Services Initiative Reserve (#112214), or any combination thereof to Good Shepherd Centres to increase the number of emergency shelter beds from 20 to 30 at Mary's Place for the period of June 1, 2014 to May 31, 2015.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At the November 25, 2013 Emergency and Community Services Committee meeting, Report CS13051 – Pressure at Emergency Shelters Serving Single Homeless Women, described the challenges facing the women's emergency shelter system due to an inadequate number of shelter beds to serve single homeless women. The report highlighted that over the past three years, shelters serving single homeless women were frequently operating over capacity and turning women away.

In response, Council approved the recommendation to temporarily increase the number of emergency shelter beds from 20 to 30 beds at Mary's Place from December 1, 2013 to May 31, 2014 at a cost of \$99,075 from the Social Services Initiative Reserve (#112214). Also, funding was approved for two additional case managers and a housing worker for one-year through the Supporting Our Sisters (SOS) program at a cost of \$152,815 from the Social Services Initiative Reserve (#112214). SOS is a mobile case management team that supports women in their transition from emergency shelters to housing that meets their needs. The intention of this service is to reduce the need for shelter beds by helping single homeless women more quickly leave the shelter and support them in finding and maintaining permanent housing.

Mary's Place is the only shelter in Hamilton dedicated to serving single homeless women. It has 20 regular beds and up to five overflow beds. To address the shortage of beds, WomanKind, an addiction treatment program for women, has made six shelter beds and two overflow beds available for single homeless women. The City also purchases overflow beds from the Violence Against Women's (VAW) shelters when they are available. The VAW shelters are funded directly by the Province. If available, these beds may be occupied by single homeless women or by women fleeing violence and their children.

The ten additional shelter beds at Mary's Place have been in place since December 4, 2013 and soon began to fill up. Between December 2013 and March 2014 there were 3,700 nightly stays at Mary's Place, an increase of 44% over December 2012 to March 2014. Nightly stays refers to the number of nights in which people stay in an emergency shelter, not the number of people. Even with the additional 10 beds, the overflow beds were full at Mary's Place on most nights resulting in 216 nightly stays over capacity. The additional resources at Mary's Place provided a number of benefits beyond the additional beds. Mary's Place staff reported 220 fewer incidences of turning away women, a decrease of 23% over the previous winter. They were also able to assist 38 women to move into permanent housing during this period, an increase of 9 women over the same period the year prior.

The Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters and WomanKind provide overflow beds for single homeless women and they also experienced higher numbers from the previous winter. From December 2013 to March 2014 the VAW shelters billed for 660 nightly stays, a significant increase over the 167 nightly stays billed during the same period the previous year. From December 2013 to February 2014, WomanKind had 762 stays, a slight decrease of the same period a year earlier.

The temporary increase in the number of shelter beds for women increased the system's capacity to serve single women during an extraordinarily cold winter. It is difficult to determine whether the high usage was an escalation of the trend seen over the past two years and/or if the cold weather had an impact on the number of women seeking shelter.

The additional supports for homeless women through the SOS Program assisted six women to leave the shelter system and helped sixteen women to avoid shelter stays. The SOS program's work starts with building relationships with women who have been referred to the program. Many of these women are slow to trust service providers and it can take 30 to 60 days for women to agree to work with SOS. This means that it can take a while before the program's efforts result in women leaving the shelter. The additional SOS staff have been in place since January 2014 and, therefore, it is too early to judge their impact on the number of women and length of time that they stay at Mary's Place.

Given the continued high number of women requiring the services at Mary's Place, it is recommended that the 10 temporary beds be extended for 12 months for the period of June 1, 2014 to May 31, 2015 at a cost of \$152,150.

Extending the temporary beds for a year will provide time to monitor trends and to analyse the increase in demand that has been seen in the emergency shelters serving single homeless women and to allow for the development of strategies to respond to the trends. It will also allow time to assess the impact of the SOS program and the ability of that program to reduce the number of women who use the service and the length of time that they stay at Mary's Place. Staff will work with the Women's Housing Planning Collaborative (WHPC) to explore ways that existing resources can be used effectively and more efficiently and to develop options for a more permanent solution to the pressure at emergency shelters serving single homeless women.

Alternatives for Consideration – Not Applicable

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial:

The cost of temporarily increasing the number of shelter beds at Mary's Place by ten beds for 12 months is \$152,150 for staffing and occupancy costs. It is recommended that the costs be covered from the Community and Emergency Services departmental surplus, the Social Services Initiative Reserve (#112214), or any combination thereof. There is currently \$110,000 in the SSIR Reserve. Should Council approve the expenditures, the SSIR Reserve will be depleted.

Staffing:

There are no staffing implications to Report CS13051(a).

Legal:

The additional funding would be provided to Good Shepherd Centres through a Service Agreement. Legal Services will review and draft any ancillary agreements, as may be required to deliver the additional services. Legal Services staff will also ensure that the security requirements, as required from the project proponents are fulfilled to protect the interests of the City, in accordance with the Service Agreement.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

At the November 25, 2013 Emergency and Community Services Committee meeting, Report CS13051 – Pressure at Emergency Shelters Serving Single Homeless Women described the challenges facing the women's emergency shelter system due to an inadequate number of shelter beds to serve single homeless women. The report highlighted that over the past three years, shelters serving single homeless women were frequently operating over capacity and turning women away.

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Mary's Place Stats	2011	2012	2013
# of Total Nightly Stays	7306	7418	8,231
# of Nightly Stays Over Capacity	72	132	939

The first recommendation was that 10 additional emergency shelter beds be funded temporarily at Mary's Place for the period of December 1, 2013 to May 31, 2014 at a cost of \$99,075 to be funded through the Social Services Initiative Reserve fund. This was an immediate response to high shelter utilization at all the emergency shelters serving single homeless women.

The second recommendation was that funding be provided so Good Shepherd Centres could increase the level of case management and housing supports provided to single homeless women through the Supporting Our Sisters (SOS) program for 2014. SOS is a collaborative project between Good Shepherd Centres, Native Women's Centre and the YWCA. The project is intended to help single homeless women quickly access appropriate housing and supports, thus reducing the length of shelter stay and decreasing the likelihood that they will return to shelter.

By December 4, 2013, the 10 additional beds were in place and Mary's Place was operating with 30 beds plus an additional 5 beds for overflow stays. In January 2014, Good Shepherd Centres hired two additional Case Workers and the additional Housing Support Worker for the SOS program.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

There are no policy implications associated with the recommendations in report CS13051(a).

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

Housing Services staff worked with the Women's Housing Planning Collaborative (WHPC) and Good Shepherd Centres in the development of this recommendation to extend the funding for the temporary emergency shelter beds at Mary's Place. The WHPC consists of Good Shepherd Centres, Mission Services, Native Women's Centre, St. Joseph's Health Care (WomanKind), the Social Planning and Research Council and the YWCA. This recommendation reflects WHPC's continued concern that adequate shelter space be available to serve single homeless women. WHPC still hopes that their efforts to assist homeless women to access housing more quickly will ultimately mean that the temporary beds will not be needed in the future.

Housing Services staff consulted with Finance and Administration staff to determine the availability of funds in the Social Services Initiative Reserve.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONAL FOR RECOMMENDATION

Even with the additional ten temporary shelter beds at Mary's Place, occupancy has been high across all shelters serving single homeless women. The additional resources that have been added to the Supporting our Sisters (SOS) program have assisted women to leave shelter for long term housing and has assisted other women in finding other housing solutions other than shelter. Too little time has passed to truly understand the impact of both of these efforts. Rather than put vulnerable women at risk by reducing the number of available shelter beds, it is recommended that the temporary beds be extended for a year.

It was originally expected that the additional 10 beds at Mary's Place would result in a reduction in the number of stays at the other shelters serving single homeless women. On the contrary, the number of stays increased for the period of December 2013 to February 2014. There were 587 nightly stays at the Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters which is a significant increase over the 59 nightly stays billed during the same period the previous year. From December 2013 to February 2014, WomanKind billed for 585 nightly stays, a slight increase of the same period a year earlier.

During the period of December 2013 to February 2014, emergency shelter use increased at an even higher rate. Forty more women were served as a result of the additional ten beds at Mary's Place which is consistent with the steady increase in emergency shelter use among single homeless women since 2011. It is difficult to determine whether the increase is a continuation of this earlier trend or whether this winter's extremely cold weather caused more women to seek shelter.

From January to March 2014, the additional resources allowed SOS to serve 24 additional women. The increase in staffing at SOS helped six women leave the shelter and obtain stable housing. Eight women were assisted to find safe, secure housing and eight women were supported to remain in their homes thus prevent all sixteen women from requiring shelter stays. The three months of service data from SOS reflected in this report did not show a noticeable difference in occupancy in the shelter. This is not unexpected as SOS often must work with a woman for one or two months before she will be open to working with them to find housing which means a reduction in shelter use would not become apparent until after several months of operation.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

There are no alternatives to Report CS13051(a)

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2012 – 2015 STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic Priority #2

Valued & Sustainable Services

WE deliver high quality services that meet citizen needs and expectations, in a cost effective and responsible manner.

Strategic Objective

2.3 Enhance customer service satisfaction.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None