



INFORMATION REPORT

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| TO: | Chair and Members Expanding Housing and Support Services for Women and Transgender Community Sub-Committee |
| COMMITTEE DATE: | March 18, 2021 |
| SUBJECT/REPORT NO: | Winter 2020 Housing and Emergency Shelter Supports (HSC21007) (City Wide) |
| WARD(S) AFFECTED: | City Wide |
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| SIGNATURE: | |

COUNCIL DIRECTION

On December 4, 2020, the Expanding Housing and Support Services for Women and Transgender Community Sub-Committee directed that:

“Staff report back to the next meeting of the Expanding Housing and Support Services for Women, Non-Binary, and Transgender Community Sub-Committee with a status update on the use of existing housing and emergency shelter supports for women, non-binary and transgender people during the 2020 winter season, with particular focus on investments that have been made, outcomes that have been achieved, and further existing strains, including measures that could be taken alleviate those strains.”

INFORMATION

Background

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

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On January 16, 2020, Council approved the funding recommendations outlined in Report HSC20004 Recommended Projects from Coming Together to End Homelessness: Call for Applications 2019. The collection of homelessness interventions that were approved for funding constructed the foundation of Hamilton's homeless-serving system of care, aligning with the vision articulated in Coming Together to End Homelessness: Hamilton's Systems Planning Framework. The report outlines a summary of funding allocations, including programs providing gender-specific prevention, shelter diversion and in-home housing support services.

On June 19, 2020, Council approved the recommendations in Report HSC20020 Adaptation and Transformation of Services for People Experiencing Homelessness. Gender-specific drop-in programs at the YWCA and Mission Services received funding to extend services until June 30, 2021.

On July 13, 2020, Council approved recommendations outlined in Report HSC20020(a) Adaptation and Transformation of Services Update 1. Housing Services Division purchased services of rental hotel rooms and associated services, such as cleaning, security and food provision to meet the needs of homeless individuals, couples and families. Women's emergency shelters and other emergency shelter providers received additional financial support to increase staffing capacity.

On September 10, 2020, Council received Report HSC20037 Emergency Shelter Services for Single Homeless Women. The report confirmed the closure of Native Women's Centre Mountainview Shelter and the commencement of a request for proposals process for additional women's emergency shelter beds.

On December 4, 2020, the Expanding Housing and Support Services for Women and Transgender Community Sub-Committee approved Report HSC20061 Women's Shelter and Support Investment Options. Recommendations included an additional, annual \$950 K levy investment to fund the successful Request for Proposal proponent and/or create a municipally-funded Portable Housing Benefit Program for women, trans-feminine, trans-masculine and non-binary adults from Hamilton's By-Name List.

On December 10, 2020, Council received Report HSC20062 Women's Emergency Shelter Request for Proposals, notifying Council of Good Shepherd Centres' successful application.

Use of Existing Housing and Emergency Shelter Supports During Winter 2020

For the purpose of this Report, Winter 2020 is defined as November to December 2020 for program outcomes, and November 2020 to March 2021 for financial investments. The additional funding received, and investment decisions made in Spring and Summer 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in expanded emergency shelter services

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for the promotion of social distancing and mitigation of program outbreaks and general community spread.

Of the total funds allocated and distributed through Housing Services, \$8.2 M was designated to programs and support services for women, gender-diverse individuals, couples and families during winter months. This investment increased shelter beds from 46 core-funded shelter beds up to 168 beds, by phasing in additional hotel rooms. Women’s drop-in centre services were extended, and city-funded homelessness programs were financially supported to implement infection prevention and control plans and increase staffing teams.

| Table 1: Additional Investments in Shelter and Housing | | | | |
|---|---|--------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Project Name | Target Population | Funding Commitment | Timeframe | Purpose |
| Hotels | Families, Women, Gender-Diverse Adults, Couples | \$5,000,816 | November 2020 to March 2021 | Overflow Shelter Beds, COVID Response 55 Rooms for Women and Gender-Diverse Adults 110 Rooms accessible for couples, overflow beds for Women / Gender-Diverse Adults Rooms as needed for Families (no limit) |
| Hotel Case Management | Women, Gender-Diverse Adults, Couples | \$1,581,203 | November 2020 to March 2021 | Additional Staffing |
| Hotel Support Costs | | \$158,366 | November 2020 to March 2021 | Security Environmental Cleaning Food Costs |
| Drop-in Program Operations | Women, Gender-Diverse Adults | \$1,471,897 | November 2020 to March 2021 | |
| Total: \$8,218,282 * Pending Negotiation in some categories | | | | |

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From November 1 to December 31, 2020, shelter bed and hotel room occupancy was high, with a range of near-full to over-capacity occupancy rates among women’s emergency shelter beds and women-specific hotels rooms. The Men and Couples’ Hotel is designed to function as an overflow shelter option to the women’s system. During this same timeframe, it operated at an average occupancy rate of 75% capacity, with approximately 25% room capacity consistently open and available (see Table 2). As of January 4, 2021, hotel capacity was expanded further by an additional 22 rooms.

Notre Dame Youth Shelter had the lowest average occupancy rate over November and December at 48%, with up to six beds consistently available to homeless youth. Family Shelter Services operated at near-full occupancy and supported an equivalent volume of families in the hotel system in November. Hotel usage by families decreased in December, a reduction that historically occurs around the holiday season.

| Table 2: Shelter and Hotel Usage November 1 to December 31, 2020 | | | | |
|---|--|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Program | Target Population | Max Beds/Rooms | November average occupancy | December average occupancy |
| Good Shepherd Mary’s Place | Single women | 20 beds | 105% | 96% |
| St. Joseph’s Healthcare—WomanKind | Single women | 6 beds | 127% | 84% |
| Good Shepherd Family Centre | Families | 20 rooms/80 beds | 95% | 92% |
| Good Shepherd Notre Dame | Youth, all genders | 13 beds | 49% | 46% |
| Men and Couples Hotel | Adults all Genders, Women’s System overflow, Couples | November: 57 rooms/114 beds December: 67 rooms/134 beds | 77% | 72% |
| Family Hotel | Families | 20 rooms/80 beds* | 90% | 54% |
| Single Women Hotel | Single women | 55 rooms/55 beds | 94% | 93% |
| *No predetermined upper limit of rooms at the family hotel. Used as needed. | | | | |

From November 1 to December 31, 2020, a total of 437 unique individuals accessed women's emergency shelters or women-specific hotel accommodations, with an average length of stay of 45 days. There is an increase in time clients are staying within hotel programs, with more individuals staying in place for 3 months or longer. Longer stays impact shelter bed turnover frequency, thus reducing the capacity of the program to serve a higher volume of individuals. If these trends continue, the average length of stay will rise and a person's experience of homelessness on average will extend.

An analysis of the YWCA Transitional Living Program demonstrates an average occupancy rate of 75%, with 10 to 15 private rooms available per month. Unit repairs, unit turnover schedules and a multistep intake process provide explanations for the consistent 25% underutilization of private rooms and program spaces. Anecdotally, the program reports difficulty in recruiting participants to Transitional Housing in part due to clients preferring hotel accommodations. These reports do align with length of stay averages for hotels programs, cited earlier. To address these concerns, the YWCA received temporary funding to provide meals to residents. In December 2020, the program experienced a fire resulting in 15 beds temporarily offline while restoration work occurred.

City-funded drop-in programs served a high volume of adult women and gender diverse persons seeking assistance. The YWCA Carol Anne's Place had an average monthly occupancy rate of 109%, a calculation based on 20 program spaces per night. Mission Services Willow's Place reported serving 65 unique women and gender-diverse persons from November 1 to December 31, 2021. Willow's Place provides services to both individuals experiencing homelessness and those who are precariously housed.

Housing Outcomes achieved in Winter 2020

The City of Hamilton funds three gender-specific housing programs: Good Shepherd Intensive Case Management (ICM), Good Shepherd Rapid Rehousing and YWCA Transitional Living Program. Combined, these programs have achieved 34% of their annual housing placements targets, nine months into their funding contracts. From November 1 to December 31, 2020, emergency shelter and hotels directly housed an additional four women/gender-diverse clients, and men's ICM programs housed an additional eight women/gender-diverse adults.

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| Good Shepherd Rapid Rehousing, ICM and YWCA Transitional Living Program Housing Placement Actuals and Targets for 2020-2021 | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|---|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------|---|
| Month | Rapid Rehousing Women | Rapid Rehousing Families *households | ICM Women | ICM Families *households | ICM Youth | YWCA Transitional Living Program |
| April | 2 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| May | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| June | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| July | 5 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| August | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| September | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| October | 1 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| November | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| December | 3 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 2 |
| Totals | 19 | 29 | 9 | 20 | 13 | 20 |
| Program Targets for 2020-2021 | 87 | 86 | 77 | 35 | 34 | N/A |
| Total Clients Housed | 61 individuals and 49 households | | | | | |

Existing Strains

The overall strain on the homeless-serving system is a combination of: increase individual women and gender diverse adults seeking shelter, utilizing drop-ins and sleeping rough; growing average lengths of stays, most notably in hotel programs; and low housing placement outcomes. These factors combined place clients at risk of remaining homeless for extended periods of time. The increase in hotel usage also represents financial sustainability risks, as renewed funding is dependent on other levels of government. Despite the continual availability of overflow hotel space, some women and gender-diverse individuals are still utilizing overnight drop-in spaces or staying in encampments.

External factors have contributed to the high occupancy and low housing outcomes evident in the women’s homelessness sector. COVID-19 is a significant health risk to the homeless population, specifically to those who have with underlying medical conditions and challenges adhering to social distance measures. Across the entire shelter system, congregate living designs of physical infrastructures placed additional

pressures on systems to reduce crowding. Even in single room shelters and hotels, overall outbreak risks remain high due to the bio-burden of all individuals present onsite. Hamilton's housing market remains competitive, with rental costs outpacing income earnings of most homeless clients. The roll out of the Canada-Ontario Housing benefit in April 2020 did receive significant uptake by families, and moderate uptake by single adults. As additional housing units and supportive housing programs become available, an equity, diversity and inclusion analysis is applied to resource allocation, with a 25% women and gender-diverse individual allotment. When factoring youth, families and Indigenous singles and families, the total overall percentage of women and gender-diverse individuals accessing resources increases.

City-funded homelessness programs have been required to redeploy staff in order to ensure critical 24/7 staffing is maintained at all emergency shelter operations and hotel expansions. Staff recruitment and retention at all programs have been exasperated by the pandemic. This has resulted in difficulty consistently staffing Intensive Case Management and Rapid Rehousing programs, thereby decreasing overall caseload capacity.

Efforts Underway

1. The City of Hamilton, St Joseph's Healthcare and the Canadian Mental Health Association, Hamilton Branch have initiated a pilot project to support chronically homeless individuals with mental health and active addiction obtain permanent housing with in-home supports to promote housing and health stabilization.
2. Through the Request for Proposals, Good Shepherd's successful application aims to bring online additional gender-specific shelter beds and Single-Room Occupancy permanent housing units. This investment through various funding streams will prioritize affordable, permanent housing options for homeless women and gender-diverse persons with limited incomes.

Mitigation Strategy Options

1. Review city-funded programs' staff contingency plans, with a focus on strategies to achieve full staff complements in housing programs. This could include a review of new flexibilities built into Federal and Provincial homelessness funding streams.
2. Support city-funded gender-specific housing programs to develop a strategic plan to increase the monthly housing placement rates for homeless women and gender-diverse individuals. These efforts could be broadened to include input from additional city-funded Landlord Liaison roles and the Housing Help Centre.

Testing innovative housing options for women on limited incomes may be required.

3. Review hotel referral procedures to ensure that available overflow hotel spaces are accessible to women and gender-diverse individuals currently using overnight drop-ins or sleeping rough.
4. Explore potential for process efficiencies with the YWCA Transitional Living Program, including shortening unit turnover timeframes and expediting intake process.
5. Cross reference Access to Housing applications with women and gender-diverse adults to ensure all eligible clients are positioned to have up to date applications for subsidized housing.
6. Plan for the strategic use of housing affordability benefits to further opportunities for housing placements through City-funded Rapid Rehousing and Intensive Case Management programs.
7. Continued onboarding on to the the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) database program. As gender-specific programs progress towards consistent and accurate data entry into HIFIS, there are future opportunities to utilize sector-specific data for planning and problem-solving purposes. The database is developed to report on a wide range of data points, including occupancy levels, service restrictions, and housing placements. Custom reports could eventually be created to capture other specific business needs in the sector.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None