A 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan
STRATFORD, PERTH COUNTY, AND ST. MARYS • 2014-2024
Acknowledgements

The successes in Year 3 of the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys could not have been achieved without the countless contributions of key stakeholders.

The City of Stratford gratefully acknowledges the many committed and passionate service providers, community members, Mayors and Municipal Councillors for their guidance, support, and dedication throughout the 2016-2017 implementation period.

In particular, we would like to thank the following community partners for their participation in our various committees and working groups:

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alicia Houston</td>
<td>Optimism Place</td>
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<td>Huron Perth Community Legal Clinic</td>
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<td>Betsy-Anne Barton</td>
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<td>Bev Hagedorn</td>
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<td>Brent Meyers</td>
<td>Canadian Mental Health Association Huron Perth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brittany Stewart</td>
<td>MCSS – Ontario Disability Support Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catherine Hardman</td>
<td>Choices for Change</td>
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<td>Chelsey Gordon-Edmonds</td>
<td>Habitat for Humanity, Heartland Ontario</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cynthia Miller</td>
<td>Canadian Mental Health Association Huron Perth</td>
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<td>Jamie Hildebrand</td>
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<td>Janette Lyoness</td>
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<td>Joanna Parker</td>
<td>Emily Murphy Centre</td>
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<td>Joanne Grimes</td>
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<td>John Robertson</td>
<td>Canadian Mental Health Association Huron Perth</td>
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<td>Juli McGrenere</td>
<td>John Howard Society of London &amp; District</td>
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<td>Kerry Lou Dickson</td>
<td>The Local Community Food Centre</td>
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<td>Lauren Gienow</td>
<td>Canadian Mental Health Association Huron Perth</td>
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<td>Lynda Bumstead</td>
<td>Ministry of Community &amp; Social Services</td>
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<td>Malibe Campantero</td>
<td>Community Living St. Marys</td>
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<td>Mark Gedcke</td>
<td>Knox Presbyterian Church</td>
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<td>Mirjam Schut</td>
<td>Facile Perth</td>
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<td>Monica Crowley</td>
<td>Stratford/Perth Shelterlink</td>
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<td>Nicole Martin</td>
<td>Choices for Change</td>
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<td>Pirie Mitchell</td>
<td>Former - Chaplain – Stratford Jail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebecca Price</td>
<td>YMCA of Stratford-Perth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ron Lathan</td>
<td>Community Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ryan Erb</td>
<td>United Way Perth-Huron</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Luckhardt</td>
<td>Town of St. Marys</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theresa McMurray</td>
<td>House of Blessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracy Allan-Koester</td>
<td>Perth District Health Unit</td>
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<td>Tracy Wallis-Best</td>
<td>Choices for Change</td>
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We are also grateful to a number of staff from the City of Stratford Social Services Department who dedicated their time and energy in 2016-2017:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Alex Burgess</td>
<td>Jody Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carole Desmeules</td>
<td>June Jacobs</td>
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<td>Colton Dodseley</td>
<td>Kelly Stone</td>
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<td>Grant Martin</td>
<td>Kim McElroy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jody Brown</td>
<td>Lindsay Van Gestel</td>
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<td>June Jacobs</td>
<td>Ramana Ganesaratnam</td>
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<td>Kelly Stone</td>
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<td>Kim McElroy</td>
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A Message from the Director of Social Services

A home is more than a roof and four walls. A home is a place where people feel safe and have a sense of belonging, a place where they can set down roots and at the same time grow the wings of possibility.

With this in mind, I am proud to share with you the 2016-2017 Annual Progress Report on the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys.

This third year of implementation saw us continuing to improve resource coordination to ensure people are aware of community supports and services and can get the help they need when they need it. Through the coordinated efforts of stakeholders across the county, we enhanced our capacity to gather data and share information. By doing so, we are better equipped to understand the scope and depth of our local housing and homelessness issues and are ready to respond accordingly.

Underpinning our commitment is the recognition that stable, affordable housing is one of the foundations of a strong and vibrant community. When people have housing that meets their needs—coupled with supports where necessary—everyone benefits. Individuals and families are more engaged with their communities and empowered to seek employment and educational opportunities. Demand for high-cost emergency services and short-term solutions also decreases, allowing for a shift in public investments toward activities that enable people to thrive.

This past year, we made strides in diverting individuals and families from emergency shelter and reduced time spent in emergency accommodation where diversion was not possible. Emergency bed nights were reduced substantially by over 25%. We also planned and implemented our first Homelessness Enumeration, or Registry Week, in partnership with the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and the 20,000 Homes Campaign. This process enhanced our understanding of local homelessness, the diversity of needs and it enriched our program planning and resource allocation. During 2016, we also initiated the Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit, thanks to new funding from the provincial government. Eight families were housed before the end of 2016 and another 12 households have been supported since the beginning of 2017.

Effectively responding to housing and homelessness issues requires the flexibility to create unique and innovative solutions. Moving forward, our long-term planning must draw on best practices from the field—yet be locally tailored—underpinned by investments from every level of government, with participation from the public, private and non-profit sectors.

Sincerely,

Carole Desmeules
Director of Social Services
CEO, Perth & Stratford Housing Corporation
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2016 at a Glance: Key Housing & Homelessness Facts

Emergency Housing

Nights in emergency accommodation:

- **2,340** nights for **378** households in 2015
- **1,637** nights for **370** households in 2016

This *decrease* in emergency bed nights translates into a *cost savings of over $55,000* locally, funds which can be directed to foster housing stability and permanent housing solutions.

Transitional Housing

- **12** householder households
  - 5 singles and 7 families with children were temporarily housed in City of Stratford transitional housing units

- **7** householder households
  - assisted to access temporary accommodations in transitional housing operated by other public and non-profit agencies

Financial Support

- Households assisted with funds to pay *Moving Costs* in order to relocate to more affordable and appropriate housing
- Households assisted with funds to pay *Last Month’s Rent Deposit* to secure housing
- Households assisted with funds from the rent bank to pay *Rent Arrears*
- Households assisted with funds to pay *Utility Arrears*
Rental Vacancy Rates*

From 2015 to 2016:
- In Ontario, a Decrease in vacancy rate
- FROM 2.4% TO 2.1%
- In Stratford, an Increase in vacancy rate
- 3.3% TO 2.9%

Vacancy rates in Stratford by unit size in 2016:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Size</th>
<th>Vacancy Rate</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Bedroom</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bedroom</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ Bedroom</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3% is estimated to be a healthy vacancy rate.

Rental Costs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stratford</th>
<th>North Perth</th>
<th>Provincial average</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Bedroom Apartment</td>
<td>$728</td>
<td>$674</td>
<td>$995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bedroom Apartment</td>
<td>$873</td>
<td>$752</td>
<td>$1,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Bedroom Apartment</td>
<td>$1,010</td>
<td>$842</td>
<td>$1,406</td>
</tr>
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Average hourly wage needed to afford rental housing in Stratford**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Size</th>
<th>Hourly Wage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Bedroom</td>
<td>$17.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bedooms</td>
<td>$20.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ Bedrooms</td>
<td>$24.02</td>
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**Assuming 35 hour work week (140 hours per month) and approximately 33% of gross income allocated for housing costs.

Income and affordability October 2016 figures:

- **$11.40/hour** — Ontario Minimum Wage
- **$706/month** — Ontario Works
  - Single person allowance
  - ($330 Basic allowance + $376 Shelter allowance)
- **$1,128/month** — Ontario Disability Support Program
  - Single person allowance
  - ($649 Basic allowance + $479 Shelter allowance)

*Columbia Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), “Rental Market Report Ontario Highlights” 2016 CMHC and Statistics Canada. Rental vacancy rate figures are for the primary rental market, from CMHC’s Rental Market Survey. The survey targets privately initiated structures with at least three rental units, which have been on the market for at least three months. Figures from 2016.*
2016 at a Glance: Key Housing & Homelessness Facts

Social Housing Wait List

Number of households on the wait list:

- Seniors up: 14% to 11% from 2015 to 2016
- Families down: 28% to 21% from 2015 to 2016
- Single Adults and Couples up: 65% to 61% from 2015 to 2016

175 183 227

2014 2015 2016

Average time spent on wait list decreased from 2015 to 2016:

- 2015: 7.20 months
- 2016: 5.25 months

New Affordable Rental Units

- 2 rental units created for persons with a developmental disability receiving support services to live independently in the community
- 4 rental units funded in 2016 with a completion date of Spring 2017 for persons of low-moderate income
- 8 households supported through a portable housing benefit to secure safe, suitable housing after fleeing domestic violence, with another 12 households expected to be supported in 2017
- 9 households with low-moderate incomes were able to access permanent affordable housing by purchasing their first home with the help of the Affordable Home Ownership Program

132 applicants housed from the wait list in 2016
Purpose of this Report

This annual report highlights the achievements made in Year 3 (2016) of the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan ("Plan") for Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys (2014-2024). It captures our progress to date, according to each of the strategic priorities of the Plan, and identifies key activities that are underway for Year 4 (2017), with the goal of strengthening our community’s approach to preventing homelessness, promoting housing stability, and fostering more housing solutions locally.

Over the past year, Social Services staff and members of various stakeholder groups have been working and meeting regularly to implement and refine the recommendations of the Plan. Municipal investments from the Federal-Provincial Social Infrastructure Fund (SIF) and the provincial Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI), coupled with in-kind support from numerous community partners, have been essential to accomplishing many of the initiatives.

To better reflect the broader mandate and vision of the Plan, the Housing First Steering Committee underwent a renaming and rebranding exercise in late 2016 – early 2017. After many discussions, the group decided to adopt the new name of “The Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys Alliance to Prevent Homelessness and Enhance Housing Solutions,” ("the Alliance"), along with the new logo.
Background of the Plan

The City of Stratford is the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager ("Service Manager") for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys. As such, the City administers provincially mandated public and social housing, as well as programs to prevent and address homelessness.

In September 2013, Stratford City Council approved a 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan for the Service Manager area of Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys. In accordance with provincial requirements, this Plan:

- Identifies current and future housing needs;
- Sets out objectives and targets (goals) related to housing needs;
- Proposes actions to meet the goals; and
- Establishes a process to measure and report progress towards meeting the goals.

In addition, it is expected that the plan be reviewed every five years, with annual public reporting on the results.

View them online at www.stratfordcanada.ca/en/insidecityhall/housing.asp
Our Local Vision and Strategic Priorities

Reflecting the values and aspirations of diverse stakeholders from across the county, the 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan for Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys is guided by a common vision:

All people will have access to housing that is safe and suitable for their needs, and will have supports that enable them to remain stable in their homes. People may become homeless, or face the possibility of losing their homes, but supports will be in place to help them remain in their housing or to locate a permanent alternative as quickly as possible, in the community of their choice.

The plan identifies five strategic priority areas:

1. Systems reorientation to improve coordination and collaboration in the delivery of housing services and supports;
2. Enhance the capacity for gathering data and sharing information between service providers;
3. Increase access to affordable housing options;
4. Focus homelessness prevention on the individuals and families who are at greatest risk;
5. Transform the provision of emergency accommodation in Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys.
Alignment with Provincial Priorities and Principles

The Ontario Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy (LTAHS)

In March 2016, the Government of Ontario released an update to its Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy. With this update, the provincial government renewed its commitment to “support social and economic inclusion, end chronic homelessness, and meet the housing needs of all Ontarians.”¹ The updated Strategy included a revised vision rooted in a commitment “to building a fair society that puts people first—a society where everyone has a place to call home,” through adopting a “whole-of-government-approach” where the “focus is on people-centred housing programs and on increasing co-ordination between government services.”²

More specifically, the goals outlined in the updated strategy include:

- An appropriate and sustainable supply of housing
- An equitable, portable system of financial assistance
- People-centred, efficient housing programs
- Developing an Indigenous Housing Strategy
- Ending homelessness
- Achieving an evidence-informed system

Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI)

As part of the Province’s efforts to end homelessness, Ontario launched the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) in January 2013, with program guidelines updated in January 2017. The CHPI combines funding from former separate housing and homelessness programs into a single flexible program with the twin goals of 1) preventing homelessness among those at risk through eviction prevention and housing stabilization and 2) assisting those who experience homelessness to secure stable, appropriate housing, with supports as necessary. With the introduction of CHPI, funding can now be used by Consolidated Municipal Service Managers to address local priorities and better meet the needs of individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in their local communities.

¹ LTAHS March 2016 report http://www.Ontario.ca/housingstrategy
² LTAHS March 2016 report http://www.Ontario.ca/housingstrategy
The Province has set a vision for the implementation of CHPI programming, striving toward:

A coordinated and holistic service delivery system that is people-centered, evidence informed and outcomes-based, and reflects a Housing First approach that focuses on homelessness prevention and reduces reliance on emergency services. This vision reflects a shift towards a system that focuses on proactive and permanent housing solutions rather than reactive responses to homelessness.

Underpinning the CHPI program are key principles that are meant to guide decisions at the local level:

- **Housing First**
- **People Centered**
- **Partnership Based**
- **Locally Driven**
- **Inclusive**
- **Fiscally Responsible**
- **Outcome Focused**

As you make your way through this Annual Report you will see evidence of efforts to align our activities and initiatives with the priorities and principles articulated within the provincial LTAHS and CHPI frameworks, at the same time taking local needs, resources, and opportunities into consideration.

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3  See Glossary on page 31 for full definition of terms.
ACTIVITY 1A
Introduce a three-year implementation strategy that turns the goals of “The Plan” into concrete tasks with specific measurable outcomes.

- Presented a draft three-year implementation strategy to the Housing First Steering Committee (now known as the “Alliance”) in November 2016 and received consent from Committee members to proceed. This strategy document will guide activities for the period of 2016-2018 and will be reviewed and revised regularly with agreement of Alliance members.

ACTIVITY 1B
Review and assess existing Common Intake and Assessment Tools to determine feasibility and appropriate use across community partners.

- Conducted a review of available intake and assessment tools and decided to adopt and promote the companion Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) pre-screen measure and the full Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) assessment measure. Both tools measure acuity, or the breadth and depth of barriers that impede housing stability and place people at risk of homelessness.\(^4\)

\(^4\) The former tool was created in partnership by Community Solutions in the US and Org Code Consulting of Canada and available free-of-charge to interested organizations, and the latter is a proprietary tool created and available with training through Org Code Consulting
• Coordinated and funded comprehensive training for Social Services staff and management, as well as staff from community partner organizations on the VI-SPDAT and SPDAT with a representative of Org Code Consulting (November 2016).

• Introduced the VI-SPDAT into City of Stratford’s Social Services intake, case management and outreach functions when serving individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Piloted the full SPDAT with select number of Outreach participants in order to inform referrals and case planning.

ACTIVITY 1C
Explore the feasibility of expanding points of access in Perth County through the creation of additional satellite sites and one point of entry for all Social Services Department programs.

• Data collection initiated to track reception and intake volume. Initial informal scan of public sites and facilities across the County, which may be appropriate for satellite service locations.

• Funding allocated in 2017 budget approval process to hire consultant to undertake process mapping as initial step in moving toward common point of entry for Social Service programs. Process mapping to occur in Summer-Fall 2017.

• Social Services Outreach worker co-located with Ontario Works specialized worker who focuses on clients experiencing homelessness in order to support collaborative case planning and capacity building.

ACTIVITY 1D
Working with the Housing First Committee [the “Alliance”], develop and implement the communication and advocacy strategy to support the activities of “The Plan”.

• Commissioned consultant to create initial communication plan and tools, along with draft content for different platforms (e.g., media releases, website content, print advertisements).
2 Data Gathering and Sharing
ACTIVITY 2A
Develop and implement a system for collecting and tracking housing and homelessness data for improved system planning, evaluation and reporting.

- Further refined in-house database tools and tracking systems, conducted scan of tools used in other communities in Southwestern Ontario (e.g., HIFIS and HARTT). With the support of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and Community Solutions, developed a database tool to track and analyze homelessness enumeration results and create a registry by-name list of people experiencing homelessness to assist with prioritization for service.

ACTIVITY 2B
Continue to actively collaborate with the Social Research and Planning Council on planning and data initiatives related to housing and homelessness.

- Participated in the Building Bridges Workshop through the University of Waterloo’s Community, Health, Environment, Communications (CHEC) Initiative. This multidisciplinary research entity is supported by the faculties of Arts, Environment, and Applied Health Sciences. The aim of the workshop was to deepen existing collaborative working relationships and identify new opportunities for collective problem solving to address local social issues.

ACTIVITY 2C
Review existing databases and create a new database with common indicators for Huron and Perth Counties.

- Acquired software custom-designed to track CHPI data and are investigating how it might be integrated into Social Services programs in 2017-2018.
ACTIVITY 3A
Hold an annual forum on affordable housing development with community representatives to review new incentives and initiatives that foster the development of affordable housing municipally.

- Two community forums were held in 2016; one in January focusing on understanding and addressing core housing needs and another in November focusing on municipal tools and incentives to foster affordable housing development. Each forum was well attended, with approximately 50 people at each event representing private, public, and non-profit sectors.

ACTIVITY 3B
Establish a new Working Group that will bring together private sector housing providers and developers for the expansion of new affordable housing options.

- Process to date has involved a review and compilation of best practices from other jurisdictions in Ontario, and three facilitated focus groups which took place in February/March of 2017:
  - North Perth; St. Marys/Stratford; Stratford & Area Builders’ Association.
  - 25 community participants total (not including City of Stratford Social Services staff):
    - 5 municipal representatives - building/planning and economic development;
    - 3 business representatives;
    - 1 charitable agency (Community Living);
    - 16 developers/landlords.
• Issues discussed:
  ▪ Types of planning and financial tools that are currently being used by local municipalities
  ▪ Impact the lack of affordable housing is having on economic development opportunities
  ▪ Challenges related to developing and being a landlord of affordable rental housing
  ▪ Opportunities to increase the development of affordable rental housing locally (e.g. surplus land, municipal incentives/tools, and community awareness)

• We are currently exploring opportunities to work with municipal partners on the development of a package of tools and incentives that could be used to increase community awareness and promote the development of affordable housing locally.

ACTIVITY 3C
Leverage new investments from upper levels of government to create new, affordable housing options and address major structural repairs and renovations to existing social housing stock.

• The 2016 federal budget announced the government’s Social Infrastructure Fund (SIF) with provincial funding for the City of Stratford in the amount of $724,565, which was used to create two affordable rental units for people with disabilities, four affordable rental units for people with low-moderate incomes; plus three housing allowance spots funded for eight years.
Spotlight

Social Infrastructure Fund – Investment in Affordable Housing (SIF-IAH, Ministry of Housing)

Projects or properties approved for funding under the Rental Housing component of SIF-IAH must remain affordable for a minimum period of 20 years. Affordability is defined as setting rents for the units in a given project that are at or below 80% of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Average Market Rent (AMR) at the time of occupancy. Average rent is calculated using actual rents paid by tenants, combined with any rent supplements provided by the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (i.e., the Housing Division of Municipal Social Services). In order to address the housing needs of people with low to moderate incomes, eligibility criteria regarding maximum income levels according to household composition and unit size are set at the time of initial tenancy. In 2016, SIF-IAH funds were used to create four affordable units within the City of Stratford for people with low to moderate incomes.

Four affordable units were created within the City of Stratford in 2016.
$892,335 was used to repair existing social housing units, which had a positive impact on the lives of 388 tenants within the Perth & Stratford Housing Corporation.

- Under the SIF - Social Housing Improvement Program, (SHIP) the City of Stratford received $892,335 towards capital repair and to preserve the quality of existing social housing units. This funding was used to complete major and outstanding capital work for the Perth & Stratford Housing Corporation (PSHC). This funding had a positive impact on the lives of 388 tenants within the PSHC who benefited from the capital improvements.

ACTIVITY 3D
Review opportunities to expand efforts to add accessibility modifications to the existing social housing stock, such as walk-in showers and ramps, and continue to meet the standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

- A review of the accessible modifications required for the PSHC was completed by a professional engineer. The scope of work needed to implement these changes was identified for the majority of the multi-unit properties. Major renovations to some existing PSHC housing stock were also completed, taking into consideration tenants’ accessibility needs, with more walk-in showers replacing existing tubs.
ACTIVITY 4A
Work with the Wraparound Supports and Services Working Group to improve eviction prevention strategies, and address housing outreach and support needs of vulnerable tenants.

- As noted elsewhere, offered training to community partners on the VI-SPDAT and SPDAT screening and assessment tools, along with follow-up training on Homelessness/Shelter Diversion and Housing-Based Case Management with the support of Org Code Consulting. Continued to meet regularly—typically monthly—to explore common frameworks and approaches.

ACTIVITY 4B
Evaluate the Eviction Prevention Initiative pilot, and continue to meet and identify effective strategies to improve housing retention.

- Continued to meet regularly as an interdivisional team to collaboratively problem solve and explore ways of maximizing various resources, including CHPI funds and the support of the Social Services Outreach Worker, to prevent eviction and build housing stability.
- Documented a reduction in evictions from Public Housing properties from 15 in 2015 to 10 in 2016 (representing a 33% decrease).
Spotlight

Social Service Outreach for Eviction Prevention and Rapid Rehousing

Introduced as a permanent member of the City’s Social Service team in 2015, the Social Service Outreach Worker, who plays a vital role in preventing eviction, fostering housing stability, and assisting to rapidly rehouse individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Using skills in grief counselling, interpersonal problem solving, advocacy, and mentoring, the Social Service Outreach Worker strives to provide person-centred, flexible, and responsive service to vulnerable households in our community.

ACTIVITY 4C

Applied for the Provincial Portable Housing Benefit Pilot Project to assist survivors of domestic violence find safe and affordable housing beyond traditional rent-geared-to-income (RGI) social housing assistance.

- In 2016, eight households received funding and secured safe, appropriate housing under this program. Another 12 households are expected to benefit from the program in early 2017.

The total number of households served by the Social Service Outreach Worker in 2016

- 27 public housing tenants
- 61 experienced homelessness and accessed emergency accommodation
- 3 were referred for housing stability support from community partners

91 new referrals

31 ongoing from 2015
Spotlight

Survivors of Domestic Violence – Portable Housing Benefit Case Study

In the Fall of 2016, after ending a long-term relationship marked by emotional, physical, and financial abuse, Sarah* approached the Social Services Department for help with housing. Sarah, now a single mother of two young children, had remained in the family home after her ex-partner was removed from the household by police. But with only one income she was finding it difficult to cover housing costs on her own. Given her recent history of abuse, Sarah was granted Special Priority Status for the Coordinated Access Waiting List, which made her eligible for the Survivors of Domestic Violence Portable Housing Benefit.

Sarah decided to accept the Portable Housing Benefit, which allowed her to remain in her home while she looked for permanent accommodations that would be more affordable, thereby avoiding the disruption and related stress of having to use temporary shelter. This support allowed her to return to work and to ensure stability and consistency for her two young children. In time, Sarah was able to locate a suitable private market rental in her neighbourhood of choice. She was able to apply the Portable Housing Benefit to this new unit, as well as receive financial assistance for first and last month’s rent.

With safe, affordable, and appropriate housing, Sarah and her children can now move forward in their lives and continue on their healing journey.

* A pseudonym to protect her identity.
5 Homelessness Reduction

ACTIVITY 5A
Participate in the 20,000 Homes Campaign, a national advocacy movement involving over 30 communities across Canada, for a county-wide Registry Week (homeless enumeration).

• Registered with 20,000 Homes and received regular mentorship from the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (a publicly funded non-profit organization) and from Community Solutions (an American non-profit central to the 100,000 Homes Campaign in the U.S.). Also consulted with a representative from the federal government’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy on enumeration tools and methodology.
Spotlight

Homelessness in Stratford, Perth County, and St. Marys – What we Learned from the 20,000 Homes Campaign Registry Week

During the period of April 10-12, 2017, after many months of planning and preparation, the Social Services Department and community partners undertook an enumeration of the local homeless population. We were guided by the national 20,000 Homes Campaign and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness. As part of the new requirements funded under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) of the Ministry of Housing, an enumeration of the local homeless population will be mandated as of 2018 and every two years thereafter. Our 2017 homelessness enumeration week served as an early learning opportunity to pilot registry methods and data collection tools to ensure a more seamless implementation once the enumeration becomes mandatory.

In order to gather relevant information about people experiencing homelessness, the 2017 enumeration pilot used a combination of two survey tools. It combined the Point-in-Time (PIT) Questionnaire from the Government of Canada’s Homelessness Partnering Strategy with the Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT). The PIT Questionnaire collects demographic information, primarily used to help surveyors better understand the characteristics of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The VI-SPDAT is a widely used tool within the housing and homelessness sector across North America, designed to screen for common risk factors or barriers that can contribute to homelessness and jeopardize housing stability.

A high acuity score on the VI-SPDAT suggests the need for long-term intensive case management support to find and maintain housing.

The higher one’s score on the VI-SPDAT the greater one’s “acuity”. In other words, the more risk factors and barriers a person experiences the more likely they will need support to find and maintain housing. More specifically, a score in the high acuity range indicates the need for longer-term intensive case management support of at least one year to find and maintain stable housing. A score in the moderate acuity range indicates
the need for short- to medium-term case management support, usually between three and nine months to find and secure stable housing. And a low acuity score indicates the individual or family will likely be able to resolve their homelessness independently, or with only minimal support.

Through the collaboration of a designated multi-stakeholder working group, a number of survey sites were identified throughout the service area and community partners were engaged to facilitate implementation. Survey sites included, but were not limited to, community meal programs, emergency shelters and transitional housing programs, provincial correctional services, social services drop-in sites, and outdoor public spaces known to be frequented by those experiencing homelessness. The confidential enumeration surveys were conducted by trained human service professionals, including The City of Stratford’s Ontario Works and Housing staff, as well as staff from the partnering agencies and organizations. All participants signed a two-part consent. Part one covered the sharing of aggregate, non-identifying data and part two focused on the release of identifying information to local partners for assistance with housing and housing stability. All those completing surveys with participants signed an oath of confidentiality and were also bound by their own agencies’ policies on privacy and confidentiality.

Although the findings are likely an underrepresentation of local homelessness, as it is not typically possible to reach all those who might be eligible to participate, they do shed light on the issue.
Key demographic characteristics of survey respondents

Characteristics of survey respondents:

57 COMPLETED SURVEYS:

29 Single Adults
14 Youth (16-24)
14 Families

Sleeping locations:

- Couch surfing with family/friends: 40%
- Transitional/Provisional Accommodations: 40%
- Emergency Shelter: 15%
- Outdoors: 3%

Age:
Adults 25-49 years of age were the largest demographic group.

Sex:
Men outnumbered women 2 to 1.

Ethnicity:
21% (12 respondents) identified as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis or other indigenous identity. This is proportionally higher than the general population locally.

Chronicity, acuity and presenting risk factors:

Average periods of homelessness:

- More than 50% experienced chronic homelessness of 6 months or more
- 21 months: Youth
- 19 months: Single adults
- 40 months: Families
Taken as a whole, these findings confirm anecdotal evidence suggesting a significant proportion of individuals and families experiencing homelessness locally face complex barriers to finding and securing a home. Moreover, the findings provide some basis on which existing programs and services might be refined or tailored, and new programs created and implemented, to better meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness in Stratford, Perth County and St. Marys.
Moving Our Strategic Priorities Forward in 2017-2018

1. Coordination and Collaboration
   a. Expand and strengthen membership in the Alliance to include other services and sectors with specific expertise in priority populations (e.g., correctional services, health sector, public education sector and youth serving agencies, etc.)
   b. Continue to participate in inter-agency Situation Table and advocate for coordinated and collaborative approaches to addressing complex situations
   c. Continue to foster the adoption of the VI-SPDAT and SPDAT screening and assessment tools, both within Social Services programs and services and across partnering community agencies
   d. Create and implement a central registry and prioritization process for providing housing and related supports to priority populations experiencing homelessness.

2. Data Gathering and Sharing
   a. Continue to foster the adoption of the Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) and Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) screening and assessment tools both within Social Services programs and services but also across partnering community agencies
   b. Continue to define common outcome measures and indicators that can be tracked by service providers across Perth County
   c. Explore protocols for sharing information in ways that are consistent with relevant privacy legislation and reflective of the values of person-centred, inclusive, and trauma-informed practice.
3. Affordable Housing Options
   a. Continue to monitor existing public and social housing programs, with goal of continuous improvement
   b. Initiate first phase of Stratford Fairground redevelopment for affordable housing
   c. Roll out additional Social Infrastructure Fund (SIF) portable housing benefits for priority populations experiencing homelessness
   d. Through the application of Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) funds, initiate new fixed-site Housing with Supports program for 10 to 15 participants identified as experiencing higher acuity, or greater barriers to housing stability
   e. Apply for provincial Home for Good funding, and if awarded initiate new fixed-site and scattered site Housing with Supports for an additional 40-60 individuals and families, with focus on, youth, people leaving provincial institutions, those experiencing chronic homelessness of greater than six months, and Indigenous people.

4. Eviction and Homelessness Prevention
   a. Through a combination of federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy for Rural and Remote Communities and provincial CHPI funds, create and pilot a Housing Help and Voluntary Trusteeship program with the primary location in Stratford and outreach/satellite services throughout Perth County
   b. Continue to offer professional development opportunities to Social Services staff and partnering agency and organization staff to enhance capacity to navigate systems and foster positive behavioural change
   c. Strengthen community development and tenant education activities for those living in public and social housing through partnerships with other human service providers.

5. Homelessness Reduction and Rapid Rehousing
   a. Continue to enhance community capacity to divert individuals and families at risk of homelessness from shelters and to rapidly rehouse within 30 days
   b. Develop print and online tools and resources that can be used by service providers and community agencies to raise awareness and enhance capacity.
Glossary of Key Terms

20,000 HOMES CAMPAIGN: A national movement of communities working together to permanently house 20,000 of Canada’s most vulnerable homeless people by July 1, 2018.

ACCESSIBILITY FOR ONTARIANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (AODA): Provincial legislation that develops mandatory accessibility standards which identify, remove, and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

AFFORDABLE HOME OWNERSHIP PROGRAM: The Affordable Home Ownership program aims to assist low-to-moderate-income renter households to purchase affordable homes by providing down payment assistance in the form of a forgivable loan.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Dwelling costs that do not exceed 30% of total before-tax household income.

COMMUNITY HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION INITIATIVE (CHPI): Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI) is a consolidation of former provincial housing and homelessness programs into a single funding envelope under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH). Funding can now be used by Service Managers to address local priorities to meet the needs of individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in their communities.

CONSOLIDATED MUNICIPAL SERVICE MANAGER (CMSM): A municipal government responsible for carrying out the funding and administrative responsibilities of the Housing Services Act. A CMSM could be a regional government, a county or separated city, depending on the local circumstances.

CORE HOUSING NEED: Housing that does not meet one or more of the following standards: adequacy, suitability, affordability.

DATA CONSORTIUM: A gateway to data for municipalities and community sector organizations. Members access customized tables from Statistics Canada and other sources to get the evidence that supports sound decisions and social development programs.

FISCALLY RESPONSIBLE: Local initiatives funded under CHPI will meet the intended purpose and outcomes of the program with due regard for economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Local strategies will reflect fiscal conditions as they evolve to promote the goals of the program and will provide value for money.
HOMELESSNESS: An individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. Homelessness is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination.

HOUSING FIRST: A Housing First approach is based on the principle that people are better able to move forward with their lives if they are first housed. As such, this approach aims to assist people who are homeless obtain and maintain permanent, affordable housing and help those at risk of homelessness remain housed. Housing is linked to flexible, appropriate support services using a people-centred approach according to people’s needs.

HOUSING HELP SERVICES: Services that help people who do not have a place to live or who are at risk of becoming homeless. Services include support with housing searches, landlord mediation, tenant conflict resolution, and referrals to other programs and services to address barriers to housing stability (health care, children’s services, etc.) in an effort to support independent living.

INCLUSIVE: All people have the right to equal treatment and protection from discriminatory practices that limit their housing opportunities. Local services, programs, initiatives and decision making will reflect the voices, knowledge and input of people who have experienced homelessness or risk of homelessness.

IN-SITU PROGRAMS: A housing allowance program that allows households to remain in their present accommodation, providing certain eligibility requirements are met. This is most commonly used for people experiencing physical or mental health challenges where moving or changing residence would compromise their ongoing stability and well being.

INVESTMENT IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING (IAH) FOR ONTARIO PROGRAMS: A program funded by the provincial and federal governments that supports new rental construction, home repair, housing allowances, rent supplements or home ownership.

LOCALLY DRIVEN: Homelessness-related services, programs and housing must be locally relevant and based on people’s needs. This approach provides opportunities to access affordable and safe housing, as well as employment, support services and other community resources.
OUTCOME-FOCUSED: All initiatives designed under this program are created with the outcomes of the person in need in mind. It is informed by the principles of Housing First, people-centred, and inclusive, while being monitored, evaluated and continuously improved to prevent, address and end homelessness.

PARTNERSHIP BASED: Housing and homelessness related services in Ontario require strong partnerships. Co-operation among all levels of government, non-profit and co-operative housing providers, community support services, and the people who require housing and homelessness-related supports, builds healthy, sustainable and inclusive neighbourhoods.

PEOPLE-CENTERED: A people-centred approach focuses on positive results for individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Housing programs, services and supports should be based on this approach. It is important for planning, program development and implementation to include consultations with people with lived experience of homelessness or who have been at risk of homelessness. This may include conducting service user satisfaction surveys/interviews, having people with lived experience of homelessness on volunteer boards of directors and as staff members, and providing service in a manner that is respectful and directed by the needs and wishes of those accessing services.

PUBLIC HOUSING: Housing developed predominantly by the Ontario Housing Corporation (OHC) in the 1960s after the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation’s mandate broadened to include housing for low-income families. Downloaded from the Province to Municipal Service Managers in 2001, these are now called Ontario’s Local Housing Corporations.

RENT BANK: Community-based organizations providing assistance to individuals and families who cannot afford to pay their rent. The type and range of assistance varies from organization to organization.

RENT-GEARED-TO-INCOME (RGI) RENT SUBSIDY: A subsidy paid to a social housing provider and guaranteed for the life of the mortgage. In Ontario, the RGI Rent Subsidy equals the difference between the actual rent paid by a low-income tenant and the government approved market rent of a unit.

SITUATION TABLES: A situation table is a strategic alliance of human services (including police, and various health and social services) guided by common principles and processes in order to mitigate risk situations in a timely manner, usually within 24-48 hours.
SOCIAL HOUSING: Housing built with the financial assistance of governments to provide assistance to low and moderate income households. It includes public housing, non-profit and co-operative housing and rent supplements.

SOCIAL RESEARCH AND PLANNING COUNCIL: A division of United Way Huron-Perth comprised of community representatives who are dedicated to the collection, analysis, and distribution of information relating to social trends and issues in Perth and Huron counties.

SUBSIDIZED RENTAL HOUSING: Financial subsidies provided to offset rental rates in market rental units for low-income households (e.g. rent supplements, housing allowances, etc.).

VOLUNTARY TRUSTEESHIP PROGRAM: Financial management supports and budgeting assistance to ensure rent and other expenses are paid on time. This may involve advocating with creditors, negotiating service agreements, mediating with landlords, etc.
A 10-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan
STRATFORD, PERTH COUNTY, AND ST. MARYS • 2014-2024

Please visit our website at www.stratfordcanada.ca/en/insidecityhall/housing.asp to review or download these reports:


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