

HIGHLIGHTS FROM

Experiencing Homelessness

The First Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa 2005

Risk Factors for homelessness are at an unsatisfactory level in Ottawa where homelessness occurs for any number of reasons. In 2004, the homeless people who stayed in a shelter included 1,092 children in 631 different families (with 997 adults or children over 18 years), 509 youth (under 18), 1,221 single women, and 4,845 single men. The high cost of housing, low incomes for a significant number of people and the lack of sufficient funding for supports to maintain housing continue to contribute to the number who experience homelessness.

- ☛ Housing costs are not coming down. Higher vacancy rates have not meant lower rents. The cost of renting in Ottawa has not decreased over the past five years, even though the vacancy rate has increased from 0.2% to 3.9%.
- ☛ Income support programs have not kept up with the cost of living. The income needed for a “place to call home” is very difficult for minimum wage earners, seniors living on OAS, GIS and CPP, people living on Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program, or even someone getting by on EI benefits from a \$30,000/year job. (Pages 4-7)
- ☛ A single person working 40 hours a week at minimum wage would have to pay 50% of that salary for an average bachelor apartment in Ottawa.
- ☛ The rent for an average bachelor unit in Ottawa is 116% of the total monthly benefit paid under Ontario Works to a single person.

Ottawa has done a satisfactory job at responding to the immediate needs of those who are homeless. A committed network of agencies offer shelter, day programs, health services and supported housing.

- ☛ In 2004, shelter beds in Ottawa were used 323, 612 times, an average of 932 people per night. The average length of stay in Ottawa shelters in 2004 was 45 days for families, 31 days for youth, 31 days for single women, and 40 days for single men (Page 8).
- ☛ Day programs or drop-in centres provided 375,000 services to individuals over the course of a year. (Page 9).
- ☛ The Housing Loss Prevention Program helps 3,000 households each year, but in Eastern Ontario there were 5,000 applications by landlords for non-payment of rent in 2004. (Pages 12-13)

The amount of affordable and suitable housing in Ottawa is unsatisfactory and more needs to be done – particularly by the senior government levels. Both the working poor and those dependent on OW/ODSP, CPP/GIS/OAS and EI are not able to access affordable and suitable housing.

- ☛ Among the 416 participants in the *Panel Study on Homelessness in Ottawa* (2002-2003), 56% were homeless for mainly economic reasons and the most commonly cited reasons for homelessness were: eviction (29%), inability to pay the rent (23%), and conflict with family, spouse, partner, or roommates (21%). (Pages 3 & 13)
- ☛ Ottawa has 500 units of supportive housing where people are helped to live independently but the waiting list has 2000 people on it.
- ☛ 10,500 households with low incomes are currently on the Social Housing Waiting List for subsidized housing and most wait 7-8 years for a unit. (Pages 14-15)

THE SURPRISING FACES OF HOMELESSNESS

The definition of being homeless includes people living on the street, staying overnight in temporary shelters, staying in places not meant for human habitation (including cars), or moving continuously among temporary housing arrangements provided by friends, family or strangers (“couch surfing”).

For more information: Please contact Lynne Browne, Coordinator, Alliance to End Homelessness, 147 Besserer Street, Ottawa ON K1N 6A7, (613) 241-7913 ext 205, lbrowne@ysb.on.ca. PDF versions of the *Report Card on Homelessness in Ottawa 2005* are available in English and French at www.unitedwayottawa.ca.