

Report on Homelessness in Sudbury

Comparison of Findings
July 2000 to January 2002

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OF SUDBURY DE SUDBURY

TIME 4



People Helping People
Homelessness Initiative
Ouvrons nos coeurs
Projet d'aide des sans-abris
Enaadmaadjig
Wii-shki-daawaad Bemaadzijig

Community
Partners
Partenaires
communautaires
Ekwiining
Wiidookdaading

 **Sudbury**
Canada

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The fourth study of homelessness in Sudbury has confirmed a number of trends in the characteristics of people who are absolutely homeless:

- ▶ Females represent over a third of the homeless population.
- ▶ Aboriginal people are greatly over-represented among those who are absolutely without housing and those who are experiencing relative homelessness.
- ▶ Nearly a third of homeless people were reported to be absolutely without housing.
- ▶ Adults aged 20 to 59 represent two-thirds or more of the homeless population.
- ▶ The major causes of homelessness in Sudbury, as identified by homeless people, are unemployment, poverty, lack of affordable housing, and problems with social assistance. Domestic violence and mental illness are also significant causes of homelessness in Sudbury.
- ▶ Half of the absolutely homeless population in Sudbury was not receiving any financial support from government programs and a large proportion (over a third) of those who are at risk of homelessness were Ontario Works clients.

The study confirmed the importance of utilizing a broad definition of homelessness by taking into account those who are absolutely without housing as well as those who are precariously housed and at high risk of becoming homeless. The systemic problems of poverty, unemployment, and inadequate levels of social assistance jeopardize housing for substantial numbers of people. The Time 4 results reinforce the view we have expressed in prior reports that the homeless population is fluid, with particular individuals moving into and out of homelessness at any particular point in time. Those who become housed are replaced by others who become homeless.

Introduction and Background

The results of the study have been used for the purposes of community planning around the issue of homelessness. Through a partnership with faculty from the School of Social Work at Laurentian University, the Social Planning Council of Sudbury (SPC) has been working with The Task Force on Emergency Shelters and Homelessness in Sudbury, the City of Greater Sudbury, and other community partners. The research reports on homelessness have assisted in the preparation of funding requests to the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI) of the federal government. The study findings also have provided baseline information from the year 2000 against which community progress in addressing the problem can be measured.

Defining Homelessness

Like the Time 1 and Time 2 studies on homelessness in Sudbury, the current project adopted an inclusive definition of homelessness by taking into account people who were vulnerable to becoming homeless in addition to those who were absolutely homeless at the time of the study (i.e. the approach taken by the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force, Toronto). The definition used in the Toronto study was based on work by Daly (1996) and views homeless people as those who are absolutely, periodically, or temporarily without shelter, as well as those who are at substantial risk of being in the street in the immediate future. *However, since the Time 2 study in January 2001, our research has also identified and enumerated those who were absolutely without housing.*

Research Methodology

To enable comparisons with our earlier studies, (i.e. July 2000, January 2001, and July 2001) the same mixed-methods design was used in Time 4. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected in three phases that were ongoing simultaneously during the week of January 23rd to 29th, 2002. A survey of service providers conducted in Time 1 has not been repeated (this will occur in Time 5). However, each study has included a unique component; the Time 3 study included face-to-face interviews with homeless people while the Time 4 study included four focus groups with homeless people. The four phases in Time 4 included:

- A count of the homeless population using emergency shelters, social service agencies, and other services supporting this population in Sudbury including the identification of individuals who were absolutely homeless;
- A face-to-face survey of households in a random sample of neighbourhoods in the city of Sudbury;
- Qualitative field research in settings occupied by homeless people in the downtown core and;
- Focus groups with homeless people in order to understand better the issues for women, families, Aboriginal people, and Francophones.

Key Findings

Phase I: Count of Homeless People

- ▶ 459 homeless individuals used the services of one or more of the agencies during the week of January 23rd to 29th or were staying temporarily less than five nights per week in the homes of participants of the neighbourhood survey.
- ▶ Whereas there were 100 absolutely homeless people identified in the Time 2 study and 144 in the Time 3 study, the current study determined that there were 132 people who were absolutely without housing in January 2002.
- ▶ As in our previous studies, half of those who were absolutely homeless indicated that they had no source of income. Among those who had income, the main source was Ontario Works, which was received by similar proportions in the Time 3 and Time 4 studies (20% vs. 24%) of those in the study. Less than five percent of the absolutely homeless people in the last two studies were receiving any employment income.
- ▶ The 459 people identified in the homeless count (i.e. total count) included 60 infants and children under age 13 (compared to 32 in T3), 46 adolescents aged 13 to 19 (vs. 37 in T3), and four seniors over the age of 65 (the same number as in T3).
- ▶ The proportion of women among homeless people (about 40%) was the same as in the last two counts. The average age of homeless women was 30 compared to 32 for homeless men.
- ▶ Just over half of homeless women were single/unattached compared to nearly three-quarters of the men.
- ▶ As in all prior studies, nearly three-quarters (72.1%) of homeless people in the Time 4 study had European backgrounds (72.5% in T1, 75.6 in T2, and 74.4% in T3). The proportion of Francophones has varied greatly in our studies; in Time 4, only 10% of homeless people were Francophones (T1-11; T2-24.2; T3-18). In contrast, the proportion of Aboriginal people among the homeless has been consistent—one-quarter—in all four studies.
- ▶ While the relative importance of the reasons given for homelessness has differed slightly in the Time 1 to Time 4 studies, the main reasons have been the same: unemployment, problems with social assistance, and housing problems are cited by most homeless people as the factors leading to homelessness. More people were experiencing these problems in January 2002 than has been found in the three previous studies.

- ▶ The number of people reporting, in January 2002, that they were having problems with social assistance payments was 34% higher than in July 2001. Eleven individuals stated that they had been cut off from social assistance (compared to 15 in July 2001) and 29 stated that they had been deemed ineligible for benefits (compared to 13 in July 2001).
- ▶ Domestic violence/family issues, transience or relocation, mental illness, and substance abuse were other reasons cited as causes of homelessness.

Phase II: Neighbourhood Survey

The survey gathered information on public opinions regarding the reasons for homelessness in Sudbury, factors related to homelessness, personal experiences with homelessness and perceived solutions to the problem. In total, 184 residents participated in the survey in January 2002. As in prior studies, the participants were, on average, 43 years of age (the age range was 17 to 88). Key findings were as follows:

- 84% believed that homelessness is a problem in Sudbury and 67% stated that they had been hearing about it.
- Residents of Sudbury have identified the same factors as being the primary causes of homelessness at all data collection points — unemployment and reductions in social spending and welfare policies were identified as the most important causes of homelessness in all four studies. Approximately twice as many residents mentioned mental illness in Time 4 compared to all previous studies.
- In Time 4, a set of questions was added to the questionnaire in order to enable a comparison of local opinions on homelessness with those of a national sample of Canadians based on a study conducted by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation with Environics. Over 60% of the local sample expressed strong agreement with the view that governments should spend more on preventing homelessness compared to only 28% of the national sample.
- Approximately a third of the residents reported that they, a family member, or a friend had been homeless in the past (in this sub-sample, about a quarter of the residents themselves had been homeless).
- The primary reason for homelessness was unhealthy family relationships. In Time 4, the second reason most often given was that there was nowhere for the person to go; relocation or transience was often the result. Other key reasons cited for the residents' homelessness or that of family members or friends were substance abuse, mental illness, lack of affordable housing, or unemployment.
- The primary solution to homelessness identified by the residents at all four data collection points was to provide more government funding for welfare, social services and programs to support homeless people. In Time 4, a second priority was to establish more shelters and outreach services. Addressing the structural problems pertaining to the lack of affordable housing and unemployment was another priority.

Phase III: Field Observations

L'association des jeunes de la rue, the Youth Action Centre Intravenous Drug Unit (IDU), and the Sudbury Regional Police Service assisted with the study by serving as key informants and enabling members of the research team to accompany front-line workers or officers on regular evening/night shifts during the week of the Time 3 study. The main themes emerging from the field observations in July, 2000, January, 2001, and July, 2001 were very similar. Ten themes were identified through the field work, including mental illness, substance abuse, the routinization of homelessness, supportive relationships among homeless people, accessing services, health issues, daily hassles and stressors, finding a place to sleep, homeless adolescents, and prostitution.

Phase IV: Focus Groups with Homeless People

Focus groups were conducted with homeless women, families, Aboriginal people, and Francophones. The focus group discussions provided information on the needs of homeless people in these groups, indicated issues related to the provision of services to them, and indicated the ways in which services are not responsive to the needs of this population. The results showed the following trends:

- ▶ Too many clients experience fear, humiliation, and rejection when they attempt to access local services.
- ▶ The structure of the service system and the disconnect between various types of services are exacerbating the problems of homeless people. For example, women who have lost custody of their children but are attempting to reconstruct their lives and rebuild their families experience barriers due to inadequacies in the level of social assistance benefits.
- ▶ Students relying on OSAP funding do not have enough income to support themselves.
- ▶ Men and women who have been in conflict with the law and who are attempting to reintegrate into the community are not being assisted effectively in making the transition.
- ▶ Aboriginal people and Francophones are not being supported in culturally appropriate ways.
- ▶ People suffering from serious mental illness are living on the streets in Sudbury, even in the dead of winter.
- ▶ Sudbury appears to serve as a destination for northern residents from smaller communities who are seeking opportunities, whether through work or improved access to services.

Recommendations

A community forum (Priority Setting Meeting) was held on April 25, 2002 to present the results of the Time 4 study to the community and to seek input on and prioritize recommendations. Thirteen recommendations for local action and 10 recommendations for provincial and federal action were developed and prioritized, as follows:

Local Level

1. Ensure that services established under the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative continue to operate.
2. Provide funding support to ensure that local service providers are employing best practice models in working with homeless people. Offer training workshops locally in order to provide continuing education opportunities to local service providers so that homeless people can be supported effectively.
3. Address the gaps in the service system for homeless adolescents, most of whom do not have any source of income. Programs must be developed/enhanced to ensure that adolescents fleeing abusive situations do not become homeless.
4. Establish culturally appropriate shelters and related services for homeless Aboriginal people in Sudbury.
5. Work with the Canadian Mental Health Association in Sudbury to address the specific housing needs and housing support for chronically homeless people who are suffering from mental illness. In addition, public education regarding the mental health issues related to homelessness is required in order to reduce the pervasive negative stigma that persists in our community.
6. Examine homeless people's access to food/ food banks and change policies/practices that prevent homeless people from receiving food.
7. Enhance outreach programs targeting homeless young people in order to provide early intervention services to reduce the length of time spent on the streets. Such programs can prevent young people from becoming socialized into the street culture.

8. Enhance outreach services to identify and serve absolutely homeless people who do not utilize the shelter system. Providing additional funding support to employ “natural helpers” (i.e. formerly homeless people) in performing outreach activities may be an effective strategy for supporting absolutely homeless people who are isolated and detached from service providers.
9. Examine the systemic problems for women who are rebuilding their lives to regain custody of their children and ensure that they are supported effectively by the Children’s Aid Society and the income security programs (e.g. Ontario Works). Hold joint planning sessions to ensure that strategies are developed to support women and their families in making a successful transition from homelessness into stable housing and community life.
10. Ensure that culturally and linguistically appropriate services for homeless Francophones continue to operate (i.e. Clinique du coin) and examine how other service providers can offer services in French.
11. Establish transition housing to support homeless people in making the shift towards reintegration into the community. Work with financial institutions such as Sudbury Regional Credit Union, Copper Cliff, in order to establish transitional housing in the downtown core.
12. Provide funding support to enable current service providers to add staffing that is culturally sensitive (e.g. to Aboriginal people and Francophones).
13. Develop a planning process to address the need for a community health centre.

Provincial and Federal Levels

14. Change the system for funding shelters by dropping the procedures for paying per diem rates for shelter beds. Implement a formula that incorporates a more comprehensive model of funding for shelters.
15. Increase the shelter component of social assistance to reflect local market conditions.
16. Increase the per diem rates for shelters and provide additional funding for program supports.
17. Create a new shelter allowance program for the working poor.
18. Implement the recommendations of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Quality of Life Infrastructure Budget Proposal related to housing.
19. Expedite the process to make federal lands available for affordable housing development.
20. Provide additional support for new affordable rental housing development in the next federal budget.
21. Make provincial land available for affordable housing development.
22. Create 14,000 new supportive housing units in the province.
23. Ensure that definitions of special need and eligibility for supportive housing are broad enough to include "hard-to-house" homeless people.