



Operational Review of Peterborough's Homelessness Response System

Highlights

As a Built for Zero - Canada community, the City of Peterborough has committed itself to implementing evidence informed practices and approaches to prevent and end chronic homelessness throughout the region. As the Service Manager for Provincial housing and homelessness investments, the City has a responsibility to ensure that services are achieving intended results and that local planning and performance monitoring focuses on continual improvement.

During the fall of 2018, the City of Peterborough contracted with OrgCode Consulting, Inc. to complete an operational and fidelity review of funded homelessness and re-housing resources. The goal of identifying successes, challenges and opportunities for enhancement in the collective quest to prevent and end chronic homelessness in the City and County of Peterborough governed all activities completed in the operational review.

In recent years, much has been learned about methods and approaches that, when implemented, can achieve a functional end to chronic homelessness. Although it is understood that community members will continue to struggle with housing instability and homelessness throughout the City and County, the quest of the homeless serving sector and its community partners is to make homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring. Such a quest must include an acknowledgement that the only solution to homelessness must initially be tied to access to housing options and support services, when required to achieve housing stability. The adoption of a Housing First approach to address homelessness has been adopted by the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada and provides the framework for performance evaluation. A housing focused approach provided the foundation for the assessment of service orientation, service delivery, community collaboration and the achievement of key performance indicators examined throughout this operational review.

As is the scenario in most Canadian communities, the City and County of Peterborough struggle with a scarcity of appropriate and affordable housing options for its residents experiencing low income and/or economic poverty. Such access to housing is further complicated for households not only experiencing low income but also such issues as mental wellness and substance use concerns. As expected in such an intense housing market, the crisis response system in Peterborough –

emergency shelters, outreach activities, meal programs, drop-in centres, emergency response services, etc. - feels and absorbs the pressures of homelessness in the community. Fostering a highly effective crisis response system in Peterborough has demanded a huge proportion of Peterborough's finite housing and homelessness investment locally. For example, in comparing Peterborough's shelter funding with other sister cities, it is apparent that the number of shelter beds and the annual investment committed to this sector is much higher than other cities, when examined on a per capita basis. Shelter, outreach and drop-in centre operators were identified as committed to serving individuals, youth and families experiencing a housing crisis and demonstrating high vulnerabilities. Much has been learned over the last 2 years about the role of crisis responses in preventing and ending homelessness and so many revisions are currently being implemented. During the operational review, however, it was clear that *in examining the adoption of promising and best practices for shelter, outreach and drop-in services, it is evident that Peterborough is still in the early stages of becoming housing focused and aligning to the main currents of thought and practice related to preventing and ending homelessness.*

Coordinated Access has been identified as a primary process that assists communities in coordinating and optimizing the available finite resources to efficiently and effectively connect people to the most appropriate available interventions that will quickly end their chronic homelessness, with priority given to people that demonstrate the greatest levels of vulnerability. As a Built for Zero - Canada community, Peterborough's Coordinated Access process is transforming into a quality, real-time asset in the local work to prevent and end homelessness. Data collection and analysis is continuing to enhance efforts to better understand the inflow of people into homelessness and the outflow back to housing within the community.

Re-Housing programs that provide stabilization supports to people who need assistance in finding and maintaining housing are demonstrating professional practices and fidelity to practice in Peterborough. Many of the most vulnerable youth and adults have been assisted in their successful return to housing stability over the last 5 years and the alignment to best practice has improved tremendously. Limited access to affordable and appropriate housing options, however, continues to create challenges for participants and staff trying to navigate the private housing market. Access to rent geared to income and specifically built affordable units are extremely limited and the lack of permanent supportive housing options locally create immense challenges for the agencies and programs trying to provide the intensity and frequency of supports required for households living in scattered sites. Many of these households would benefit from dedicated Permanent Supportive Housing

programming and currently access to the limited available options is insufficient to meet demands. Centralized housing location activities and improved access to affordable and supportive housing options locally will be required in the very near future to support the goal of achieving functional zero in chronic homelessness.

As the identified Service Manager for Provincial investments, the City of Peterborough has done an admirable job in fostering an alignment to evidence informed practices while remaining responsive to the local realities and unique pressures impacting the homelessness system of care. As is the scenario for all Service Managers, however, the challenge of preventing and ending chronic homelessness by 2025 will continue to demand transformation, performance management and operational oversight within its administration of services but also in the programs and community partners that it funds and supports throughout the region. A continual improvement framework will enhance consistency in evidence informed approaches, quality reporting of outcomes and the provision of essential professional development opportunities.

The following recommendations are provided to assist the City and County of Peterborough in accelerating its work to prevent and end chronic homelessness for its most vulnerable community members, while also decreasing the economic, social and human costs of homelessness for all community members.

- 1) The City of Peterborough is encouraged to adopt and implement a performance management framework that will incorporate standard operating procedures, management supports, quality control and quality assurance strategies for itself and its funded programs/resources. The monitoring of key performance indicators for each investment will be essential in monitoring local progress. Such an impact driven framework will enhance transparency, accountability and collaboration while also improving stability and housing outcomes for residents.
- 2) The transformation to housing focused sheltering, outreach and drop-in services must continue locally to ensure that any services or initiatives that may inadvertently cause people to remain stuck in homelessness is removed. Operating as a connection to permanent housing solutions must be identified and activated as the work of all partners.
- 3) The Service Manager and its community partners must enhance the relationship between the homeless serving sector and the social/affordable housing sector. Without an improved relationship, which provides formalized access to available housing options, many

of your most vulnerable residents will continue to be caught in a cycle of homelessness and economic poverty. The distinction between eligibility and equity, within the realm of policy and legislation, continues to challenge all social housing authorities across the country. Modified chronological access to housing options and community priority rules have proven to be success in communities across Ontario and the country and can provide a blueprint for future partnerships in the future.

- 4) The availability of specialized housing location and navigation services will greatly enhance the movement of people experiencing homelessness to housing options and improved stability. A realignment of current counselling investments within the shelter system as well as the optimization of City Outreach staff will provide the resources required for this revision without the addition of new funds.
- 5) The identification of a central access point for housing supports was identified by multiple community partners as an essential mechanism in ensuring that homelessness prevention, discharge planning liaison services for systems such as corrections and health to reduce discharges to homelessness, shelter diversion and housing supports are accessed effectively and efficiently in the region. Such a mechanism would also enhance communication with the general public and community partners seeking assistance.
- 6) It is understood that ending chronic homelessness cannot be achieved by one department, agency or sector. To enhance the work being completed locally, it is also recommended that the City and its leadership committees strategically foster formalized partnerships with other sectors of services, private partners such as landlords and developers, Provincial Ministries and other levels of government as well as faith based partners to ensure that housing access and stability is understood as the foundation of health, public safety, social integration, productivity and prosperity. The goal of preventing and ending homelessness must be recognized as a pivotal component in our service to all community members.

OrgCode is confident in the capacity of the Peterborough housing and homelessness system of care to achieve its goal of achieving functional zero in chronic homelessness. With a deliberate and steadfast commitment to evidence informed and data-driven decision making and investment, the outcomes and impacts required to remove the trauma of chronic homelessness from the landscape of Peterborough -in the City and throughout the County - is entirely achievable.