

Family Homelessness in Ottawa

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Canadian Alliance to End
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Family Homelessness in Ottawa (ATEH-Ottawa, 2016)



- In 2015, an increase in the number of homeless families
 - 782 family units.
- 1,479 dependents 17 years of age and under.
 - 56% of all clients in family shelters
 - 21.7% of all emergency shelter clients
- These counts do not include families from the violence against women sector



Family Homelessness in Ottawa (2015)



- Average length of stay – 92 nights
 - A decrease from 2014 – 105 nights
- Stays are long because families cannot afford private market housing
 - Families wait for social housing units
 - Larger families wait longer for appropriate sized units



Findings from a study of 75 families, 2013-2014



- About 73% of participants were women and 65.3% of these families were single parent families.
- Most participants were unemployed (84%), but over a third (34.7%) had completed post-secondary education, and another 28% had completed high school.
- About half of the participants were Canadian citizens. A quarter of participants were permanent residents and immigrants, and another quarter were refugees. Overall, about two thirds were born outside of Canada.



Findings: Most Common Housing Barriers



Barrier	Big Problem (%)	Small Problem (%)	Not a Problem (%)	Missing(%)
Insufficient income to pay rent	61 (81.3)	5 (6.7)	9 (12.0)	0 (0)
Inability to pay a security deposit or first/last month's rent	46 (61.3)	8 (10.7)	18 (24.0)	3 (4.0)
Lack of transportation to look for housing	26 (34.7)	11 (14.7)	35 (46.7)	3 (4.0)
Poor credit history	26 (34.7)	12 (16.0)	33 (44.0)	4 (5.3)
Not being currently employed	44 (58.7)	11 (14.7)	18 (24.0)	2 (2.7)
No rent history at all	14 (18.7)	10 (13.3)	45 (60.0)	6 (8.0)
Recently moved to community and No local rent history	15 (20.0)	4 (5.3)	49 (65.3)	7(9.3)
No reference from past landlords	13 (17.3)	13 (17.3)	42 (56.0)	7 (9.3)
Past eviction(s)	13 (17.3)	1 (1.3)	58 (77.3)	3 (4.0)





Findings: Mental Health

- Heads of Families reported their mental health to be poorer than that of the general population
 - Subscale of the SF-12 measuring mental health (MCS): mean 44.66 (SD = 11.78; n = 68); approximately half a standard deviation below the norm for the general population.
 - low levels of problematic substance and alcohol use noted





Impacts of Shelter Life

- Adults – n = 18
- Perceptions of Shelters
 - Institutional nature of the shelter system, including rules
 - Small bedrooms/motel rooms
 - Communal living: share spaces, noise, and lack of privacy





Impacts - Adults

- Negative Shelter Impacts
 - Parenting practices –
 - Relationships with friends/family not in shelter
 - Health and well-being
 - Isolation
- Positive Shelter Impacts
 - Families gained access to services and resources/Helpful and friendly staff
 - Increased stability
 - Improved family relationships





Impacts of Shelter Life

- Youth (n = 16; 6 males, 10 females, 17.1 yrs of age)
- Perceptions of shelters:

Positive

- Cleanliness
- Size
- Feelings of safety
- Access to food and resources
- Social Activities
- Shelter staff
- Youth Coordinators

Negative

- Small room sizes
- Noisy environment
- Limited space
- Lack of privacy
- In-shelter programming
- Internet/Cable
- Issues with heating & air conditioning





Impacts: Youth

- Negative
 - Boredom
 - Worries regarding the length of shelter stay
 - Increased family conflict
 - Increased family responsibilities
- Positive:
 - Family bonding and communication
 - Improvements in general well-being
 - Financial improvements
 - Growth



Taking Action: Families First



- Program began in August 2011
- Developed and implemented by the Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre and our Community Partners
- Funded by the City of Ottawa under the Housing and Homelessness Investment Plan and the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy
- In response to the number of families accessing the Ottawa family shelter system, length of stay and recidivism rates
- The importance of following families during transitions



Vision and Goal



- Vision:
 - Provide a short term bridging service to integrate families from the Ottawa Family Shelter system into their communities and assist with retention of housing with the result of reduced recidivism.
- Goals:
 - Help families to retain and maintain their housing.
 - Integrate into their communities and promote social inclusion.
 - Increase their autonomy and support self sufficiency.





Families First

Coordinator

8 Case
Workers

2 Housing Search
and Stabilization

4 Child and Youth
liaison

PSYCHIATRIST

.5 Multicultural

Admin
Assistant

1 Mental Health
and Addictions

Intensive Case Management Approach

- Supports families for a 9 to 12 month period
- Employs client-centred and holistic approach
- The intensity of support provided from intake to discharge is based on the family's needs
- Provide strengths-based, culturally competent, trauma-informed services
- Clients participates actively in the service plan. ISP per client.
- Support the client to integrate into their community.
- Discharge plan includes a comprehensive review of accomplishments, including plans to address health and mental health needs and referrals and resources to assist with retention of housing .

Successes

- 99% of families referred into our Program have remained housed.
- More than 3,000 individuals including children have been referred to the program.
- More than 900 households have been referred to from August 2011 to May 2016.
- Develop strong partnerships. Work with 7 community partner agencies
- Referrals to more than 80 services
- Over 6,000 clients 'contacts per year

For more information

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