

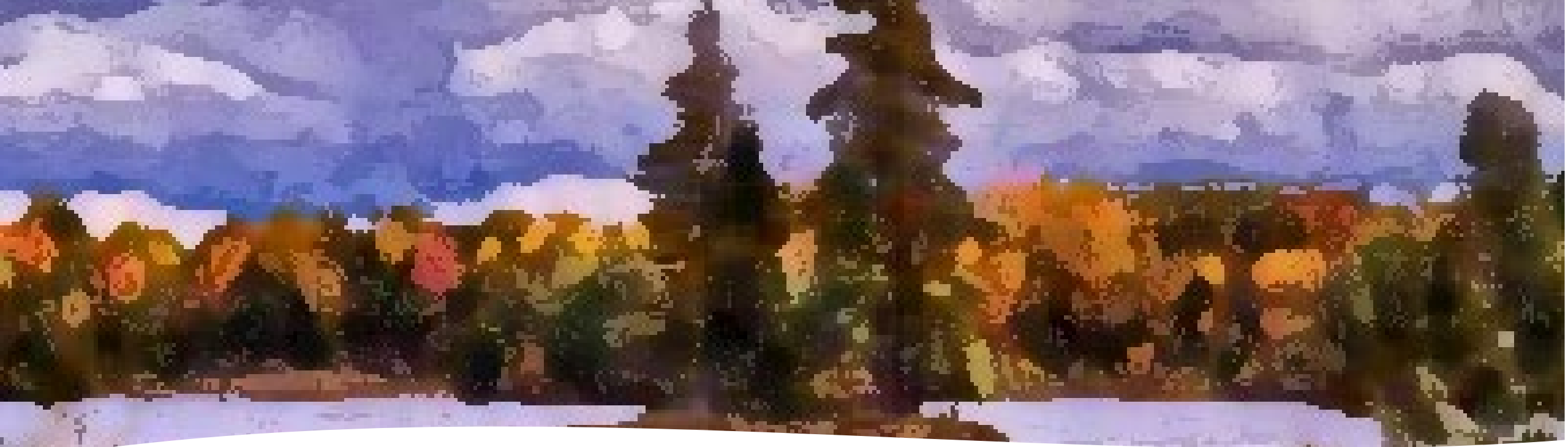
Three Models of Rural Emergency Shelters: Exploring the Participant Experience and Lessons Learned

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Objectives

- Illuminate how rural homelessness and the supports needed are unique
- Compare 3 models of emergency shelters attempted in one rural community of southern Ontario
- Share lessons learned and how to improve the shelter experience within a rural context

Context: Rural Ontario



- Largest town population 4000
- 1.5 hr. drive to any mid-sized city
- Mining and lumber industries shifted to tourism
- Low-income rate 25% and 1/3 children live in poverty (Statistics Canada, 2017)



Housing Crisis

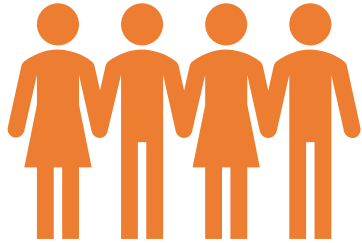
- Low stock, high rents, people moving in from city
- 48 individuals homeless during 2022 enumeration
- 500 people on waitlist for social housing
- Increasing awareness of individuals living in tents, sheds, trailers, small encampments



How is Rural Homelessness Unique?

- Few Services and Limited Transportation
- Lack of Privacy, Rural Reputations, Surveillance

Strengths of Rural Communities

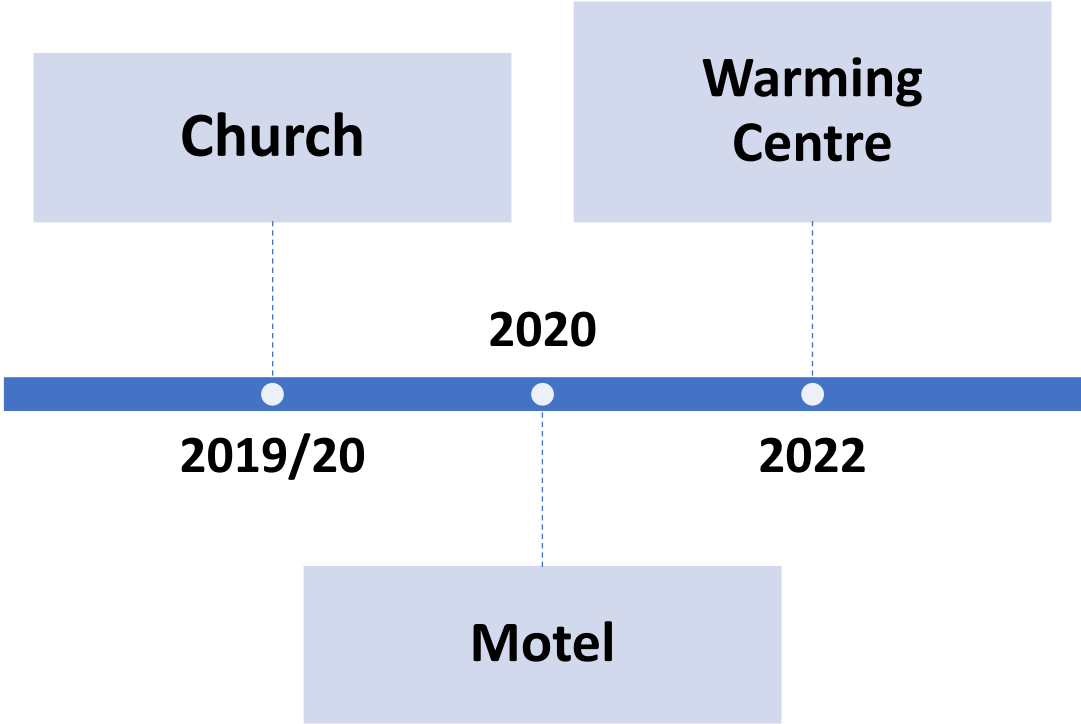


People know and help one another



Community rallies to address issues

3 EMERGENCY SHELTERS IN 3 YEARS



Shelter Models

Church

- Volunteer run
- Community donations
- Hot meals
- Up to 20 guests/night

Closed after 3 wks.

Motel

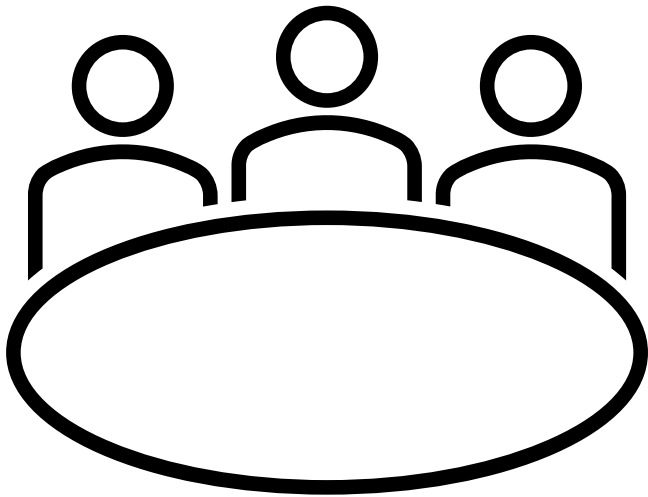
- Reaching Home COVID funding
- Private rooms with bathroom
- Non-profit staff visited daily
- 17 individuals

Closed after 6 wks.

Warming Centre

- Funded by county
- Staffed by 2 security guards
- Chairs and tables
- Drop-in by 0-13 individuals/night (average 4)

Open 64 nights



Qualitative Study

Findings from interviews with 16 participants:

- 11 shelter users and 5 service providers

Strengths and Challenges of Church Model

“...**food galore**. And they would actually ask us in the mornings what we wanted that night.”
(#5)

“They were just completely doing it as volunteers, and **it became pretty overwhelming.**” (#1SP)

“...fewer and **fewer people were willing to volunteer**. The food kept coming, the clothes and the blankets kept coming...” (#16SP)

Strengths and Challenges of Church Model

“I thought it was great, but the ladies there were **too nice** ... they got walked on.” (#5)

“It was just elderly people trying to do a kind thing and they **didn't know what they were getting themselves into.**” (#4)

“...**we were totally ignorant** of the fact that people would bring drugs in or that people would steal” (#16SP)

Strengths and Challenges of Motel

“I could lock the door and **I could sleep**. And I did, I slept for sometimes for days.” (#13)

"being housed...even for 2 or 3 or 6 weeks, you know, we really saw the **stability** that that brought to people. We could get them back on, or start them, on certain medications...**chronic health problems**, ongoing wounds that wouldn't heal, we were able to address those.” (#1SP)

“they would take already **depressed people and lock them in a room** and tell them they had to stay there by themselves all the time...that just doesn't work.” (#5)

Strengths and Challenges of Motel

“we want to have guests in our room, we **should be allowed to have guests**, we should be allowed to stand outside and **smoke without being judged...**” (#6)

“it actually had this pretty **negative impact on the community**...now the motel owners want a \$500.00 deposit” (#10SP)

“being part of a community where resources are scarce, and if someone who's unhoused had resources, **they were used to just sharing** them amongst themselves. So how to not, you know, share your place or your shower was something to navigate.” (#1SP)

Strengths and Challenges of Warming Centre

“everybody was just using it as a drop-in centre ... there was no way to get sleep there hardly, because **people just coming and going**, coming and going...” (#4)

“I don't think I ever really slept there. But now some people did, I guess. Well, they had no choice, right? ... I didn't like it. **You're on the cement floor ... no blankets, no nothing.**” (#5)

“I explained over and over that this is a warm room. This is not a shelter. It's not an emergency shelter. It's **not a homeless shelter.** It's a warm room.” (#2SP)

Strengths and Challenges of Warming Centre

“...crackers with little packs of peanut butter and jam and oatmeal and drinks or whatever. And a couple of times they (security) got pizza for us...but **it wasn't stuff all the time** either. So that kinda sucked” (#7)

“I ended up having like **belongings stolen** and stuff there so. But I mean it was still a place to sleep...It's **better than in the snowbank**, so I didn't mind it.” (#14)

“Just if you're desperate for a place to sleep right, it wasn't, it wasn't bad, **it was warm**, right?” (#11)

Shelter Models

Church

- No costs
- Donations & volunteers
- Up to 20 people

Motel

- \$38,637 for 6 weeks
- \$920/night
- Up to 17 people

Warming Centre

- \$76,735 for 64 nights
- \$1200/night
- Up to 13 people (average 4.4)

Comparison of Rural Models



CARING



CAPACITY
BUILDING



SECURITY AND
STRUCTURE



HEALTH
PROMOTION



How are the needs and experiences in rural shelters unique?

“There was a lot of idiots that **wrecked it for us all**. ... they were going in the daycare and cooking up crack and shit in the daycare where kids are going...” (#13)

“...in each situation, **we all got thrown out from what a couple individuals do**, and I don't think that's fair. ... that's happening in every one of those situations.” (#5)

Actions of a Few Impact All

Bathroom door must stay open

Showers cancelled

Shelters closed



How are the needs and experiences in rural shelters unique?

“They even started **locking the banks** in town because of us being in there ... There's only so many places to go, and they keep **kicking us out of the bandstand**, so they'll charge you with trespassing...and like, **locking the bathrooms**, that is so fucking stupid.” (#7)

“If it only opens at 9 and the drop-in is closed at 3, **what are you expected to do between 3:00 and 9:00 in a small town?** ... at 8:00 or 8:30 at night, you're going to say, hey, I'm going to go leave here and go there, especially knowing that you can't sleep, that there's no food, there's no showers...” (#1SP)

Few Local Supports

Nowhere to go outside of shelter hours

General feeling of being pushed out



How are the needs and experiences in rural shelters unique?

“Well, **our house is pretty much a warming centre** anyway. Like for 3 years we were, here in town we used to take everybody in. Yeah, and that's why we got kicked out...” (#11)

“We all have spats I guess, but pretty much **we're all friends.**” (#7)

“I knew there was a lot of people that **had our backs**, that knew us, that were there (shelter). If someone started crap with us, they would be at our, our back in no time.” (#8)

Small Community

Core group of chronically homeless

Support one another

Lessons Learned



Integrate caring with structure



Build community



Offer lockers, food, showers



Tailor hours to local services or infrastructure

References

Buck-McFadyen, E. (2022). Rural homelessness: How the structural and social context of small-town living influences the experience of homelessness. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 113, 407-416. <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-022-00625-9>

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