

# **Only the Best for our Community**

**A Best Practices Report on Proposed New Shelter  
and Housing Supports for People in  
Cambridge and North Dumfries**

**October 2001**

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Prepared in collaboration with Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group with reflections from Cambridge Shelter Corporation Board of Directors as well as Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing Board of Directors who participated in the field trips.

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The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the perspective of the Social Planning Council of Cambridge & North Dumfries Board of Directors; these views are reflective of those who were involved in the community-based process.

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- Dan Bucar, Chair, Cambridge Kiwanis Board of Directors, Village Non-Profit Homes
- Beth Ann Ferguson, Student Board Member, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries
- Steve Garrison, Facilities Manager, Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Homes
- Lee Henderson, Vineyard Compassionate Action and Chair of Cambridge Shelter Corporation Board of Directors
- Mark Kelland, Board Member, Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Homes
- Jim Kirchin, City of Cambridge Planner, and Cambridge Shelter Corporation Board Member
- Kim Sanderson, Board Member, Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Homes
- Anne Tinker, Executive Director, Cambridge Shelter Corporation
- Gary Warren, Co-ordinator, Welcome Aboard Drop-In Centre
- Marilyn Curry, MSW Student, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries
- Gloria DeSantis, Executive Director, Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries

We would also like to thank Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group members who have been very active over the past two years in trying to identify, define and resolve issues related to homelessness in Cambridge. The following is a list of organizations that meet regularly: Cambridge Shelter Corporation, John Howard Youth Housing Registry, City of Cambridge Elected Officials, Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing, Argus Residence for Young People, Vineyard Compassionate Action, Region of Waterloo Planning, Housing and Community Services, City of Cambridge Planning Services Department, Cambridge Active Self Help, Cambridge Housing Acting Together, Waterloo Region Housing, Trinity Community Table, Federal Member of Parliament for Cambridge, Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank, and Welcome Aboard

Marilyn Curry

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

*Only the Best for our Community: A Best Practices Report on Proposed New Shelter and Housing Supports for People in Cambridge and North Dumfries* is a report that has been generated out of the collaborative efforts of many concerned service providers and citizens who are endeavoring to address a range of housing issues in Cambridge and surrounding area. What follows here is information about the philosophical, physical, programming and funding strategies for the formation of a shelter/drop-in centre and a housing-that-supports-transition facility in our community.

This report is intended for use by non-profit organizations, policy makers, and interested community residents. It is our hope that this document will serve to inform those working in the field of housing in this and our larger community of Canada.

The information contained herein is based on the lessons learned from those who have gone before and is the compilation of their successes and lessons, customized to reflect the unique characteristics of our own community. It is our hope that this report will help pave the way for the creation of a shelter/drop-in centre and a housing-that-supports-transition facility that will successfully serve people in the Cambridge area.

This report has been funded by The Trillium Foundation and is the result of the vision and the drive of the Cambridge Shelter Corporation in collaboration with Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing. Commonly known as the Making Room Partnerships, this collaborative group is an integral part of the Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group: services providers, representatives from non-profit organizations, and interested citizens who come together monthly to address the continuum of housing issues within our community. It is noteworthy that people involved in the Cambridge Out of the Cold program since 1998 have done many field trips before now; they began with shelters in Kitchener and then expanded to a variety of communities in southern Ontario.

### 1.1 Objectives

Since the recession of the early 1990's, homelessness in Cambridge has become a pressing and persistent issue. The report *Understanding Homelessness In Waterloo Region: A Backgrounder*<sup>1</sup> stated that Cambridge was an under-serviced area regarding the provision of supports for people who are homeless and further highlighted the fact that those homeless people in Cambridge were travelling nightly to find shelter at facilities in Kitchener. The *Homelessness in Cambridge* report of August 1999, further stated that "while there are some local groups that do provide services to people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, in Cambridge, many of these programs are insufficiently funded or supported to fully provide the level of emergency service that is needed."<sup>2</sup>

During the summer of 1999, the idea to form the Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group (CAHG) was born because of a collective desire for local action on homelessness. It is a group of service providers, governments and volunteers that come together monthly to work

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<sup>1</sup> *Understanding Homelessness in Waterloo Region: A Backgrounder*, (June 1999) published by the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo, the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, and the Waterloo Region – Wellington-Dufferin District Health Council

<sup>2</sup> *Homelessness in Cambridge* (August 1999). Published by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, p. 1.

collectively to address the broad range of housing issues within our community.<sup>3</sup> The *Terms of Reference* for this group can be found in Appendix A, and a list of its members can be found in Appendix B.

This report represents one step on Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group's road toward creating a local, long-range plan for everyone regardless of age, ethnicity, ability, or economic status. The objectives that were involved in the development of this Best Practices Report were:

- to organize field trips to other communities to gather information from people regarding their best ideas/practices as well as the practices we should guard against;
- to gather critical reflections from our Cambridge field trip participants regarding the philosophical, physical/structural, supportive services, and funding ideas of housing and support services found in other communities;
- to collectively test the relevance of our June 2000 "dream session" in light of our learnings from these other communities;
- to analyse, integrate and write a report that includes what is best to enhance/develop in Cambridge.

In creating this report, we are presenting a collaboratively developed body of information that will potentially serve to help set the tone for the creation of a shelter/drop-in center and a housing-that-supports-transition facility. Further, it is our hope that this report will also assist in the healthy evolution of the support services already being offered to people who are homeless, or who are at risk of homelessness in Cambridge and North Dumfries.<sup>4</sup>

This document is intended to be used by non-profit organizations, service providers, government workers, policy makers, politicians, funders, and interested citizens. It is a tool to better understand local needs and solutions as well as a critical analysis and reflections for finding local solutions based in our collective vision.

It is important to note that while this document is the result of a specific request made by the Making Room Partnerships, Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group has identified the need for a shelter and housing-that-supports-transition facility as one of the central areas of attention in its workplan to address the continuum of housing issues within our city.

## **1.2 Brief History – our local housing/homelessness struggle**

Our community has a long and rich history of working together to resolve our issues. The following list offers some of the highlights.

- The earliest attempt to deal with shelter issues in Cambridge began with Argus Residence for Young People when it opened an eight-bed facility for young women in 1985.
- A comprehensive study released in 1992 entitled, *Emergency Housing for Male Youth in Cambridge* showed that there was enough demand to fill an 11-bed facility with homeless young men.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cambridge Shelter Corporation and Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing are two groups that have decided to create a formal partnership known as Making Room Partnerships to work specifically on the creation of a combined shelter/drop-in centre and housing-that-supports-transition facility.

<sup>4</sup> Although Cambridge Shelter Corporation funds this work, the analysis and suggestions herein were generated by a diverse group of people listed in the acknowledgements.

<sup>5</sup> Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, 1992.

- In 1995, the report *Addressing Community Needs into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* was released in Cambridge. It identified, “many unmet needs for emergency shelter in Cambridge.”
- In 1997, a proposal titled, *Cambridge House: Shelter for Homeless Men*, was submitted to Homegrown Solutions of the Federal Government of Canada. The immediate goal was to establish a temporary, low-cost shelter using existing community resources.
- The June 1999 report titled, *Understanding Homelessness in Waterloo Region: A Background*,<sup>6</sup> showed the best estimates of the number of people who are literally homeless in Waterloo Region to be between 1,500 and 2,000 people per year. This translated to a prevalence rate of 0.35% to 0.48%. This report showed that a large number of people leave Cambridge to find emergency shelter in Kitchener.

Based on the data collected for the Waterloo Region study, the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries proceeded to estimate the number of people who may be literally homeless in Cambridge. *Homelessness in Cambridge* (August 1999) showed that between 180 and 375 people could be homeless in Cambridge at any one time throughout the year.

On June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2000 the Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group held a dream session to talk about the goals people envisioned for Cambridge and the surrounding area by the year 2005. They also investigated the road that would take them to 2005 and what bumps and detours might be taken. Facilitated by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, the participants were encouraged to not only discuss these issues, but also to draw their ideas (and ideals) for emergency shelters, service circles, etc. The “Dream Session” as it has come to be known, produced several pictures and a fairly comprehensive discussion about emergency shelters, transitional and permanent housing, and the associated support services.<sup>7</sup>

After the Dream Session members of the Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group continued throughout the year to work diligently on moving the visions toward concrete reality. Along the road to the development of a long-range plan for a continuum of housing solutions for the communities of Cambridge there have been many important milestones. Within the past year, the following major events have occurred:

### **Fall 2000**

- Argus Residence for Young People, in collaboration with the regional government and other shelter providers throughout Waterloo Region, examined the current per diem rates structure.
- Vineyard Church expanded its meal and clothing services.
- The Cambridge Self-Help Foodbank intensified efforts toward renovating a larger facility in order to provide better food and other support services.
- Cambridge Out of the Cold and Welcome Aboard agreed to merge. They incorporated and received non-profit and charitable status as Cambridge Shelter Corporation.
- The Boards of Directors of Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing and the Board of Directors of Cambridge Shelter Corporation agreed to collaborate in a joint effort to aggressively work toward the development of a combined shelter/drop-in centre and housing-that-supports-transition facility and became Making Room Partnerships.

<sup>6</sup> *Understanding Homelessness in Waterloo Region: A Background*, (June 1999) published by the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo, the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries, and the Waterloo Region – Wellington-Dufferin District Health Council.

<sup>7</sup> A complete discussion of the “Dream Session” is presented in Section 2 of this report.

### **Winter 2000-2001**

- On December 19, 2000, Mr. Janko Peric, our elected Member of Parliament for Cambridge, met with the Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group to offer support and finalize arrangements for a meeting with Honourable Claudette Bradshaw that he arranged for January 22, 2001.
- *So, what's in the middle?* report was finalized and released by the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries which confirmed our community's thoughts about who were the vulnerable populations living in rooming houses, low cost hotel rooms, etc. in the three core areas of Cambridge.
- In January 2001, Cambridge Shelter Corporation received \$40,000 funding from The Ontario Trillium Foundation to further facilitate the planning and development of a shelter/drop-in centre in Cambridge.
- January 22, 2001, Mr. Janko Peric MP, Honourable Claudette Bradshaw, and numerous Human Resources Development Canada officials met with the Cambridge Action on Homelessness Group to clarify funding opportunities, and avenues of support, for the development of a continuum of housing services within our community. Also in attendance were Waterloo Region Chairperson Ken Seiling and Cambridge Mayor Doug Craig.
- Argus Residence for Young People statistics (May 1, 2000 to April 30, 2001) showed total units of service, meaning one bed for one person for one night, was 5,894. This was an increase of 25 % over the previous year.
- Cambridge Shelter Corporation statistics (for winter 2000-2001) showed the average number of people sleeping on mattresses on the floors is between 20 and 25 people depending on the month. The highest number of people in one night was 39.
- Cambridge Kiwanis Village Non-Profit Housing received funding approval to build 20 new rental housing units from Waterloo Region Affordable Housing Partnerships Program.

### **Spring 2001**

- Argus Residence for Young People identified and continues to deal with serious issues regarding the physical structure of their young men's residence.
- April 2001, the first Best Practices research field trips were undertaken to Hamilton and Toronto.
- Women's Crisis Services of Cambridge merged with Anselma House in Kitchener and became known as Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region.
- The Cambridge Self Help Food Bank opened their newly renovated facility.